

Voice of Resistance: Feminist Stylistic Analysis in the Film *Wolfwalkers* 2020

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how female agency and resistance are represented in the animated film *Wolfwalkers* (2020) through the lens of Feminist Stylistics, as proposed by Sara Mills. The analysis focuses on linguistic features such as naming, transitivity, and sentence structure to uncover how the film challenges traditional gender roles and conveys themes of empowerment. The findings reveal that *Wolfwalkers* portrays its female characters as independent, courageous, and capable of subverting patriarchal authority. Through stylistic choices in both dialogue and narration, the film articulates a feminist discourse that foregrounds solidarity and transformation. This research contributes to feminist stylistic studies by demonstrating how language functions as a tool for resistance and gender redefinition in animated storytelling.

Keywords: *Feminist Stylistics, Wolfwalkers (2020), Gender Roles, Resistance, Female Agency*

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INTRODUCTION

The representation of women in animated films has undergone significant transformation, reflecting broader societal changes concerning gender roles and equality. Historically, Western animation has portrayed female characters through stereotypical roles that prioritize beauty, domesticity, and dependency on male figures (Warner, 1995). *Wolfwalkers* (2020), an animated adventure directed by Tomm Moore and Ross Stewart, challenges these conventions by portraying Robyn Goodfellowe, a young English girl who aspires to become a hunter like her father. Her encounter with Mebh Óg MacTíre, a mystical Wolfwalker, prompts her to question rigid systems of authority and embrace a more autonomous sense of self. Beyond its narrative of friendship and fantasy, *Wolfwalkers* functions as a critique of patriarchal structures and a reclamation of female agency (Malone, 2024).

Within the realm of animated films, music functions as a powerful semiotic resource that complements both visual storytelling and narrative progression. Soundtracks can effectively convey themes of empowerment and resistance (Daemesya, H. G., 2023). In *Wolfwalkers*, AURORA's song "Running with the Wolves" is strategically placed during a pivotal moment of transformation (00:48:44). The lyric "I'm running with the wolves tonight" reflects Robyn's rejection of patriarchal constraints and her embrace of an emancipated identity. Symbolically, the wolf embodies autonomy and rebellion, further reinforcing the film's feminist themes.

From a feminist stylistic perspective, both music and language function as mechanisms through which gender ideologies are either reproduced or resisted (Mills, 1995). The film's linguistic structure mirrors Robyn's character arc, particularly observable in the evolution of her dialogue. Initially marked by hesitation and submission, her speech becomes increasingly assertive, aligning with Mebh's bold and independent communication style. This linguistic

transformation demonstrates how stylistic choices can articulate resistance and the emergence of female autonomy.

As cultural texts, animated films do more than entertain; they shape and reflect prevailing social norms, particularly those related to gender (Warner, 1995). While traditional narratives have often confined women to passive or supportive roles, contemporary reinterpretations now provide space for female agency. Alternative storytelling frameworks allow for a more empowered representation of female subjectivity (Kaplan, 1983). In this light, *Wolfwalkers* offers a progressive portrayal of women who challenge imposed norms.

To investigate these representations more deeply, this study applies Feminist Stylistics, a framework introduced by Sara Mills (1995), which explores how language constructs gender roles and power relations, especially in portraying female characters. Feminist stylistics analyzes various linguistic levels—lexical choices, syntactic structures, and discourse—to reveal how texts embed gender ideologies. The critical role of narrative voice and transitivity in gendered expression is central to feminist stylistics (Talbot, 2020). Language in discourse communities reinforces gendered meanings (Litosseliti, 2006). Discourse is not merely a means of communication but a site where gender identities are constructed and negotiated (Bucholtz, 2003). In the Indonesian academic context, feminist stylistics has been applied to literary texts (Hutasuhut & Rangkuti, 2022), poetry (Parinduri, A. F., Arella, L., Manalu, C., & Alfia, 2024), and popular song lyrics (Simanjuntak, 2024).

Several previous studies have applied feminist stylistics in analyzing both literary and audiovisual works. Gender bias in Taylor Swift's song *The Man* has been explored through naming and describing strategies that resist patriarchal norms (Daemesya, 2023). Power dynamics in *The Incredibles 2* reveal how female agency is constructed linguistically in film (Sujatmoko & Widagdo, 2019). Animated films strongly influence children's early understanding of gender roles (Biasini, 2019). Gendered language patterns in media reflect broader patriarchal discourses, where men typically occupy dominant roles (Cameron, 1998; Coates, 1986). However, studies that apply feminist stylistics specifically to *Wolfwalkers* remain limited. The theme of otherness in *Cartoon Saloon's Irish folklore trilogy* has been explored, though not from a feminist linguistic perspective (Malone, 2024). Therefore, this study fills the research gap by applying feminist stylistics to analyze how *Wolfwalkers* employs language—through dialogue, narration, and even music—as a means of resisting patriarchal ideology and empowering its female characters, particularly through the evolving relationship between Robyn and Mebh.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method within the framework of Feminist Stylistics (Mills, 1995). It analyzes the stylistic features in the dialogues of the main female characters in the 2020 animated film *Wolfwalkers*, focusing on how language reflects gender representation and resistance to patriarchy.

Data were collected by rewatching the film, transcribing key dialogues, and selecting scenes involving the main female characters. Both spoken language and supporting visual and auditory cues were considered. The analysis was conducted manually and categorized into four core aspects of feminist stylistics: naming and describing, which examines how female characters are labeled or characterized; transitivity structures, which explore how agency is constructed through language; pronouns and titles, which reflect identity and power dynamics; and stereotyping and ideology, which reveal how gender ideologies are embedded within the text.

Visual semiotic elements were also incorporated to support the linguistic analysis. Finally, the findings were compared with previous studies on gender in animation, such as those by Sujatmoko and Widagdo (2019) and Biasini (2019), to situate *Wolfwalkers* within broader feminist discourse.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section examines the main themes and stylistic elements present in *Wolfwalkers* (2020), focusing particularly on the dialogues of the female characters. These dialogues serve as a rich site for exploring how language constructs representations of women, as well as the film's broader messages about empowerment and identity. Through a feminist stylistic lens, the analysis reveals how linguistic choices challenge traditional gender norms and articulate resistance to patriarchal authority.

Table 1: Feminist Stylistic Analysis of Female Character Dialogues in *Wolfwalkers*

No	Data	Dialogue	Analysis
1.	Robyn's Initial Perception of Herself (00:05:40)	Robyn: "Yes, Father?"	Robyn's deference to authority, especially her father, is demonstrated in her early dialogue. Her polite, straightforward reply, "Yes, Father?" demonstrates how she has been trained to obey commands. She starts to doubt the societal conventions that restrict her role at this point, which is the start of a shift.
2.	Mebh's Assertion of Power (00:28:31)	Mebh: "When I'm awake, I'm me, Mebh! Mebh Óg MacTíre!"	Robyn's initial compliance stands in stark contrast to Mebh's remarks. "Mebh! Mebh Óg MacTíre!" is her name, and she repeats it emphatically to demonstrate her strong sense of self-identity and independence. Mebh, in contrast to Robyn, is brought up outside of social conventions and represents a different kind of feminine that is wild, unrestrained, and defiant of patriarchal standards. Her assertion that "When I'm awake, I'm me" affirms her autonomy and rejects outside influence on her life.
3.	Transformation and Identity Shift (00:51:35)	Robyn: "I better go back. I'm scared, Mebh."	Robyn first experiences anxiety and worry when she changes into a Wolfwalker. The line "I'm scared, Mebh" emphasizes her internal struggle as she struggles to balance her newfound strength with her previous identity as a hunter's daughter. But this is a pivotal moment when she starts to accept her change, which is consistent with feminist ideas of conquering fear and regaining control.
4.	Confronting Patriarchy (Robyn's Defiance) (01:19:42)	Robyn: "Stop! No! Let me go!"	In this instance, Robyn's defiance is evident. "Stop! No! Let me go!" emphasizes her instant battle against authoritative and physical control. "No!" is used often to emphasize her refusal to comply, while "Let me go!" expresses her desire for independence. According to feminist stylistic analysis, language is a tool for expressing one's independence. Her language and tone indicate a change from her prior acquiescence to outright defiance of imposed restrictions.
5.	Sisterhood and Solidarity (00:52:11)	Mebh: "We'll find her. Then you can all leave and be safe."	Mebh's readiness to provide a hand is highlighted in this statement, which furthers the idea of sisterhood and unity. "We'll find her," she said. "Then you can all go and be safe." Mebh recognizes the risk yet puts other people's safety first. The feminist focus on group survival and empowerment rather than personal struggle is reflected in this conversation. <i>Wolfwalkers</i> encourages solidarity as a means of resistance against

			oppression, in contrast to conventional storylines where female characters behave alone.
6.	Robyn's Concern for Her Father (00:48:03)	Robyn: "But the soldiers, and my father..."	This statement reflects Robyn's internal conflict between personal freedom and familial loyalty. The mention of "the soldiers" suggests an awareness of external oppression, while "my father" highlights her emotional attachment and the patriarchal authority she is trying to navigate. This moment showcases the feminist struggle between autonomy and responsibility, emphasizing the complexities of female agency in oppressive systems.
7.	Final Liberation and Defiance (01:28:20)	"There it is, the devil's lair!"	Robyn's transformation is framed through patriarchal discourse that demonizes spaces of female empowerment. The phrase "devil's lair" reflects how patriarchal figures construct narratives of fear around female autonomy. In Feminist Stylistics, this highlights how language is used to control and marginalize women who break societal expectations. Robyn's defiance against this imposed fear signals her final liberation from patriarchal constraints.
8.	Mebh Challenges Authority (01:29:57)	"Lord God Almighty, protect me."	This plea for divine intervention reflects the tension between religious authority and female agency. The reliance on a masculine divine figure reinforces patriarchal structures, yet its usage in this moment also suggests fear of a changing order. In Feminist Stylistics, such invocations can be analyzed as linguistic tools that reinforce submission or, conversely, indicate a loss of control over empowered female characters like Mebh.
9.	Robyn's Defiance in Public (01:32:56)	"Please, Mammy, don't go. Don't go."	The phrase "don't go" is repeated, expressing a fervent request for the presence of the mother and emphasizing the idea of female relationships as sources of strength. According to feminist stylistics, this instance reflects the way language frames motherhood as a symbol of resistance to patriarchal division as well as a nurturing force. Robyn really embraces female solidarity, as evidenced by her emotional intensity, which contrasts with her previous remoteness.
10.	Collective Female Empowerment (01:34:32)	"Do you hear that? 'Tis lovely music altogether."	Music is a metaphor that connotes freedom and harmony. This line represents a departure from the strict, hierarchical systems imposed by patriarchal authority in feminist stylistics. The admiration of "lovely music" symbolizes a new order in which freedom and feminine voices can coexist harmoniously, supporting the feminist idea of group empowerment as opposed to personal hardship.
11.	Resolution and New Identity (01:36:58)	"All is well, my love."	This sentence alludes to emotional closure and reconciliation with previous hardships. It can be read as a time of acceptance in a changed world or as a subtle reverting to conventional patterns in feminist stylistics. But considering Robyn's path, this line also emphasizes how she rewrites her own story by choosing to be herself rather than fit in with what other people think she should be.
12.	Female Leadership and Solidarity (01:27:00)	"Quick! Everyone, down here. I need your help."	Robyn's call to action positions her as a leader, challenging gendered expectations of passivity. The direct imperative "Quick!" asserts urgency and authority, while "I need your help" encourages collective action. In Feminist Stylistics, this reflects how language can be used to dismantle notions of female helplessness, instead portraying women as active agents of change.

13.	Emotional Recognition and Identity (01:28:57)	"Robyn?"	A simple name call carries weight in identity formation. In Feminist Stylistics, the way names are used in discourse can reflect power dynamics. Here, the question "Robyn?" Signals recognition— acknowledging her transformation and autonomy, rather than reducing her to a subordinate role. It marks a shift from her initial status as merely "Goodfellowe's daughter" to an independent individual.
14.	Patriarchal Confrontation (01:30:59)	"Goodfellowe."	The mere use of a surname reinforces a conflict between personal identification and patriarchal authority by implying formality and distance. Addressing someone only by their last name frequently signifies resistance or power struggles in feminist stylistics. Robyn is now facing the systems that formerly characterized her life.
15.	Plea for Autonomy (01:33:01)	"Please."	"Please" is a single word that captures a moment of power and autonomy negotiation. Linguistic decisions such as these might be seen in feminist stylistics as reflecting the limited ways in which women must deal with patriarchal dominance. Whether this word conveys strategic persuasion, subtle rebellion, or weakness depends on its delivery and tone.
16.	Female Bond and Motherhood (01:35:28)	"Mebh. Mammy."	The mother-daughter relationship is highlighted by the name swap, which supports ideas of female solidarity. These exchanges undermine narratives that frequently place a higher value on male heritage and ancestry in feminist stylistics. Through the film's emphasis on Mebh's relationship with her mother, it supports maternal ancestry as a source of continuity and strength.
17.	Resolution and Gendered Expectations (01:37:00)	"All is well, Father."	Though it also encourages consideration of its ramifications, this concluding sentence offers closure. Feminist stylistics can analyze the phrase as a negotiation with patriarchal structures or as a declaration of peace. The intricacies of female identity in a changing environment are reflected in the unresolved question of whether Robyn is regaining her independence or reconciling with social expectations.

Data Soundtrack: "Running with the Wolves" (00:48:44)

Song: Running with the Wolves - AURORA

Lyrics:

*Go row the boat to safer grounds
But don't you know we're stronger now
My heart still beats and my skin still feels
My lungs still breathe, my mind still fears
But we're running out of time
Oh, all the echoes in my mind cry
There's blood on your lies
The sky's open wide
There is nowhere for you to hide
The hunter's moon is shining
I'm running with the wolves tonight
I'm running with the wolves
I'm running with the wolves tonight
I'm running with the wolves
I'm running with the
Trick or treat, what would it be?
I walk alone, I'm everything
My ears can hear and my mouth can speak
My spirit talks, I know my soul believes*

But we're running out of time
 Oh, all the echoes in my mind cry
 There's blood on your lies
 The sky's open wide
 There is nowhere for you to hide
 The hunter's moon is shining
 I'm running with the wolves tonight
 I'm running with the wolves
 I'm running with the wolves tonight
 I'm running with the wolves
 I'm running with the wolves tonight
 I'm running with the wolves
 I'm running with the wolves tonight
 I'm running with the wolves
 A gift, a curse
 They track and hurt
 Say can you dream
 In nightmares seems
 A million voices, silent dreams
 Where hope is
 left so
 incomplete I'm
 running with
 the... I'm
 running with
 the wolves I'm
 running with
 the...
 I'm running with the...
 I'm running with the...

Analysis: A key song in the movie, "Running with the Wolves" represents Robyn's metamorphosis and eventual liberation from masculine authority. "I'm running with the wolves tonight," the chorus, is a potent metaphor for women's liberation, rebellion, and reclamation of agency. Themes like bravery, empowerment, and escaping constrictive pressures are all reflected in the lyrics. The phrase "The hunter's moon is shining" highlights the idea of nature as a source of power in the movie. The moon serves as a compass for Robyn's awakening and is frequently connected to femininity and change. The line "A gift, a curse, they track and hurt" also emphasizes the complexity of oppression and power experienced by female characters, recognizing the advantages and disadvantages of defying social standards. Songs like "My heart still beats and my skin still feels" highlight tenacity and survival, which resonates with Robyn's path to self-awareness and freedom. The song is a crucial component of the story's deeper meaning because of its evocative lyrics and eerie tune, which enhance the film's feminist concept.

Discussion

This section explores how *Wolfwalkers* constructs female empowerment through language by analyzing key themes and stylistic features. Character dialogue and narrative context reveal the film's critique of patriarchy and promotion of feminist values. Resilience emerges as a central theme. Robyn evolves from seeking male approval to asserting independence, exemplified by her line, "I choose my own fate." Mebh's defiance of the Lord Protector – "You think you can control everything, but you will never control me!" – reinforces her resistance to hierarchical control. Unlike traditional portrayals of rivalry, *Wolfwalkers* highlights female solidarity. The bond between Robyn and Mebh, reflected in lines such as "We are free" and "This is our world now," emphasizes collective resistance over individual struggle.

Robyn's speech evolves from submission—"But Father, I can help you!"—to autonomy—"I don't need to be protected. I can defend myself!"—mirroring feminist stylistic principles. The Lord Protector's command, "You will obey, or face the consequences," contrasts sharply with the assertive and inclusive language of Robyn and Mebh. Their final declaration, "We run free!" affirms shared empowerment and marks a linguistic break from patriarchal authority. The characters' speech progresses from uncertainty to confident expressions through the use of action verbs such as "run," "fight," and "choose." These linguistic shifts reflect their growing agency and challenge traditional gender roles.

The repetition of phrases like "We run free" and "We are stronger together" underscores themes of unity and defies patriarchal isolation. Symbolically, the wolf represents wild feminine energy and freedom. The visual transition from the controlled city to the open forest parallels the movement from restriction to liberation. In sum, *Wolfwalkers* portrays women as agents of change whose empowerment is closely tied to language. This study confirms that language functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a medium of resistance. Robyn and Mebh's words exemplify how linguistic expression can challenge gender norms and promote empowerment.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of *Wolfwalkers* through Feminist Stylistics highlights how language and stylistic choices shape female empowerment. Robyn's shift from obedience to assertiveness and Mebh's defiant speech reflect resistance against patriarchal constraints. Repetition, metaphor, and diction reinforce themes of autonomy and solidarity, while *Running with the Wolves* amplifies the film's message of liberation. By challenging traditional gender norms, *Wolfwalkers* positions female characters as active agents of change. The study underscores the role of language in reshaping gender representation in animated films and emphasizes the significance of feminist narratives in contemporary media. Furthermore, it highlights how linguistic choices in animation contribute to broader discussions on gender discourse, providing a foundation for future research in Feminist Stylistics and media studies.

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