

Radical Feminism Analysis of Taylor Swift's Song Lyrics "The Albatross"

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ABSTRACT

This paper applied the theory of radical feminism (RF) to understand Taylor Swift's song "The Albatross" lyrics through qualitative content analysis and close reading techniques to uncover how she criticises the systematic system of Patriarchy and emphasises women's resistance. Swift used metaphors in the song, presenting women as threats to society, using the term "wise men" to deliver false ideas to justify men's actions of suppression. The gap in this study is obtained through the previous studies, which often move to liberal feminism (LF) without showing the process of eliminating Patriarchy, using music as a feminist movement to challenge the overlooked patriarchal ideologies. This paper is limited to only one song in the album and the researchers' subjective interpretation of the lyrics. However, the findings give an expanded analysis of lyrics for patriarchal system critiques.

Keywords: *Radical Feminism, Taylor Swift, The Albatross, Song Lyrics*

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INTRODUCTION

In "The Feminism Book," Kindersley (2019) asserted five different kinds of feminism. (1) Black feminisms as a movement of women of colour. (2) Eco-feminism with emphasis on environmental issues, women have a responsibility to save the environment and to improve the climate of the world. (3) There is a group known as liberal feminism (LF), which believes there should be equality between men and women in the eyes of the law. It aims at Gender Equality on a Personal basis and not a collective basis. (4) Marxist feminism, which philosophy uses the economic ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to support women's freedom by breaking down the capitalist system. Radical feminism (RF) bases itself on the fact that the liberation of women from oppression relies on the removal of Patriarchy. The motive of this movement is to challenge the very fundamentals of society. Social inequality is manifested in gender disparities in rights and in society's beliefs about women's supposed weakness and inability to pursue some professions, such as law, business, and politics (Qotrunnada & Hakim, 2025).

The term 'radical feminism' was first coined in the late 1960s and 1970s, and it is a separate sex class of women dominated by men (Madsen, 2000; Walby, 1991). RF can be seen as revealing the "politics of the ego" as a way to challenge the supremacy system created by men and controlling women's sexuality (Geetha, 2007; Madsen, 2000; Miller, 2017). Madsen (2000) and Kindersley (2019) also suggest that RF is different from other feminisms, since the ultimate aim of RF is to achieve a social revolution, thereby eliminating the root cause of women's oppression, and full autonomy over their rights and bodies, meaning that RF is proposing the elimination of the patriarchal system as a means for attaining true human freedom. The aim is to have a completely new social environment which is anti-patriarchal (Hammad, 2023; Soleha et al., 2024). From these studies, the status of women is considered as

second-class citizens (Yamada, 2021), lacking autonomy in making decisions and not being empowered in society (Yastanti & Susilawati, 2020).

Patriarchy, based on Miller (2017), is a socio-political system in which men possess the main power, dominating the role in political leadership, oppressing and exploiting women. The term patriarchy itself signifies the absolute rule of the father. RF marked the ideas that a male-dominated social system causes disadvantageous consequences (Millett, 1970). It is a belief and values that run societal and political actions for women's fair (Fiss, 1994), changing some discriminatory laws is not enough because it does not change the unfair control men have over women's sexuality (Madsen, 2000). RF's aim to eliminate the sex-class system through politics, recognizing that men caused the challenges in society, and female oppression is men themselves, as the supremacy privileges of the male role are identified with and carried out by them.

RF is commonly studied in novels. Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Perawan Remaja dalam Cengkraman Militer* shows that RF appears as the mistreatment of women's bodies (Panggabean et al., 2022), Nawal El Sadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* found that women are seen as commodities, which depicts RF's critique that women are frequently considered as wealth by men (Nurfatimah Az-Zahra & Mustikawati, 2024) Click or tap here to enter text., Cho Nam Joo's *Kim Ji Young, Born 1982*, indicates resistance by dismantling the patriarchal structure to shape an equal societal system (Hastuti et al., 2024). Another study by Widya & Asnani (2020) on Eka Kurniawan's *Beauty Is a Wound* shows RF is evident, including physical and psychological oppression, sexuality, humiliation, social issues, and the commodification of women's bodies, all integrated by a theme of violence. Ncumisa Vapi's novel *Litshona Liphume*, studied by Macabela (2024), found that men appear as distractions, while women are depicted as bringing positive events in the story. These previous studies proved that in society, patriarchal culture is structured, pervasive, and not unintentionally reproduced. They describe women's resistance through the narrative, solidarity, and voices, showing independent problems of body and sexual autonomy, and also cultural problems, such as domestic violence, commodification of women's bodies, and blaming the victims of patriarchal ideological practices.

Lyrics are also a form of ideas that allow musicians to express their feelings, messages, opinions, and also ideas (Yastanti & Susilawati, 2020) Click or tap here to enter text., where RF is often overlooked. The music video of Ariana Grande's "God is a Woman" highlights the RF ideas by the depiction of women's superiority over men through its visual use (Rahmawati & Suyudi, 2023). The song lyrics of "Tomboy" by Destiny Rogers, studied by Nuriana & Ikrarini (2022), also found the ideas of RF, where women can have both masculine and feminine traits. Moreover, a study by Soleha et al. (2024) on Kesha's "Woman" found the elements of RF through the semiotic perspective of Ferdinand De Saussure's theory, highlighting women's individual power and independence. However, these studies do not indicate the process of how women achieve the goal of RF.

One artist who often speaks about women's rights and norms is Taylor Swift (Eklund, 2024). Swift's song titled "The Man" explores what might happen if she were a man, emphasizing gender discrimination and societal double standards (Maulia, 2024). Swift highlights the different treatment society gives to men and women, as well as how they face existing double standards (Caroline et al., 2023). Later, on the album *The Tortured Poets Department: The Anthology*, Swift put a song entitled "The Albatross", where Swift frequently uses figurative devices like metaphors, personification, and similes to deliver her ideas (Amalia, 2024; Nabella et al., 2024; Santika & Syafryadin, 2023). The example of Swift's movement in feminism is in her song "The Albatross", where it stands for the process of a woman accepting her power. Thereby, it is expected that this study can give deeper insights into the theory of RF, specifically that related to the perception of women who are seen as disastrous and how they defy and defend themselves in a patriarchal society.

As Barwell (2019) noted in his book, the Albatross is a seabird with a wingspan that reaches 3.5 meters, weighing up to 11 kilograms. The bird also featured in the poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in around 1797-1798 as a symbol of disaster,

bad luck, and misfortune (Shailer, 2018), where Swift took the idea of the Albatross as her persona in the song.

Previous studies have mainly discussed women's empowerment in popular songs through liberal feminism. However, limited attention has been given to how women move from being labelled by the Patriarchy to redefining their own identities. This study addresses this gap through a radical feminist analysis of "The Albatross."

RF is often overlooked in songs, whose goal is to emphasize women's action by underlining their resistance by speaking out, courage to act, and liberation by the complete dismantling of the patriarchal system. This study infers that RF is still a relevant and important idea to analyze song lyrics, specifically in unveiling the idea of Patriarchy, which is often unnoticed in LF. It also suggests that song lyrics can act as an effective tool to study systematic oppression, feminist awareness, and societal resistance.

This study aims to examine how the lyrics of "The Albatross" represent patriarchal power, women's resistance, and self-definition through a radical feminist perspective. As Pham (2005) mentioned, RF is often overlooked in song lyrics analysis, which has not been truly emphasized in previous studies. We aim to understand the metaphor of the Albatross to explore beyond the LF concept. While the song "The Albatross" itself says that women are also meant to be seen and belong to society, the old patriarchal myths state that women are dangerous or tend to cause trouble, through the narrative. Swift warns against "wise men" who want to control women who do not follow the old idea of Patriarchy. This study is limited by the focus on a single song that ties the generalization of the findings into a wider cultural or musical context; the interpretation of the song remains subjective as the researchers are the instruments used in this study.

METHOD

A qualitative content analysis with close reading is applied in this study to understand Taylor Swift's song "The Albatross" from the Radical Feminism (RF) ideology. The analysis centred on each verse of the lyrics to recognize signs of women's oppression, resistance, and patriarchal power as stated within RF theory. The close reading technique is used due to its ability to point out specific detail interpretation of figurative language, metaphor, and cultural message (Kier-Byfield, 2022). Each lyrical line of "The Albatross" was the unit of analysis. The first stage identified lyrical lines relating to Patriarchy, oppression of women and resistance; the second stage involved assigning initial codes to the identified lyrics, the third stage entailed categorizing the codes into themes, and the fourth involved the interpretation of the themes using the radical feminist concepts (Miles et al., 2015).

RF theory is the basis of this analysis, in which the Patriarchy acts as the fundamental system of power, suppressing women in society, culture, and their fields. RF suggests the dysfunctional male-dominated system, gender control, and ignoring women's rights and voices. This theory can be examined through Swift's figurative language in the song "The Albatross," which allows us to unveil the lyrics, challenge, and deal with the ideology of Patriarchy.

The data in this analysis consist of the official lyrics of Taylor Swift's "The Albatross" in the album *The Tortured Poets Department: The Anthology*. The primary data consisted of the official lyrics of Taylor Swift's "The Albatross." The lyrics were obtained from an authorized source and cross-checked with the album version to ensure accuracy.

Each line will be analysed to highlight Swift's RF concept for eliminating Patriarchy through the narrative. The secondary data comprises peer-reviewed studies and literary works on RF, literary criticism, and qualitative content analysis. The purpose of including these is to support the analytical process and theoretical grounding.

The official lyrics were verified from the album version, so as to ensure that they are accurate. The researchers analyzed the selected lines independently and then compared the analysis results by using the method of investigator triangulation to eliminate the results of subjective analysis. By applying the close reading technique to analyze each line in each verse

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to unveil the lyrics, it is effective for content analysis (Kier-Byfield, 2022). The analysis centred around a woman who is depicted as an albatross, analyzing behind the figurative language and proverbs to unveil the duality of the Albatross, which is depicted as a symbol of bad luck and also freedom by Swift. We do not categorize the figurative language to unveil a clearer narrative in the lyrics.

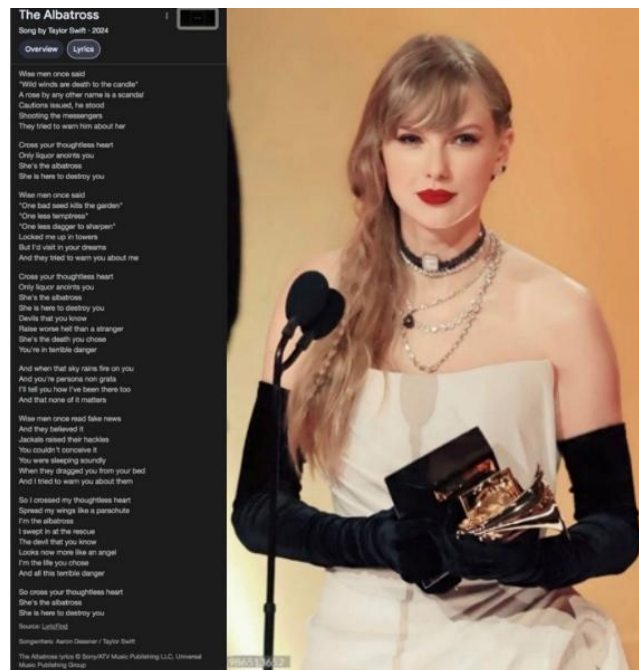


Figure 1. The Albatross Lyrics & Taylor Swift

To reduce subjective interpretation, the researchers used investigator triangulation by comparing and discussing their analyses of the selected lyrical lines.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from the analysis of Taylor Swift's "The Albatross". It organizes them into four thematic categories: (1) Patriarchal Construction and the Labelling of Women as Threats, (2) Women's Oppression, Confinement, and Social Control, (3) Female Resistance and Solidarity against Patriarchal Power, and (4) Radical Self-Definition and the Reversal of Patriarchal Narratives. These categories demonstrate the progression from patriarchal construction and oppression toward resistance and women's self-definition. A final section discusses critical perspectives on radical feminism to provide a balanced interpretation of the findings.

Patriarchal Construction and the Labelling of Women as Threats

*Wise men once said
"One bad seed kills the garden"
"One less temptress, one less dagger to sharpen"
Locked me up in towers
But I'd visit in your dreams
And they tried to warn you about me*

Figure 4. The Albatross lyrics, verse 2, lines 11–16

The second verse indicates the way women are made dangerous to the social order of men through the discourse of Patriarchy. The phrase "Wise men once said" implies that the conceptions of Patriarchy are passed down through time, and are not the result of singular acts. This is a reflection of [D'Eaubonne \(1974\)](#) notion of "phallocratism" that male authority was the natural and legitimate basis of social structuration. The term "wise men" in this context refers to social authority which establishes women before they can build and express their identities for themselves.

The use of the metaphor 'One bad seed kills the garden' is also indicative of the woman being a disruptive force in what appears to be a stable social system. "Bad seed" may mean the woman; "garden" might mean a patriarchal society, whose stability is thought to be threatened by the lack of conformity on the part of women. This interpretation fits well with [D'Eaubonne \(1974\)](#) concept of female malediction, which defines women as the source of disorder or as being dangerous to the established social systems.

The line, 'One less temptress, one less dagger to sharpen', also reveals another instance of being labelled in terms of sexuality by the Patriarchy. "Temptress" is a label that diminishes women to their supposed capacity to arouse male desire and, therefore, implies that their problems lie in their own behaviour. According to [Madsen \(2000\)](#) and [D'Eaubonne \(1974\)](#), the discourse about female sexuality can be a way to legitimize the domination and aggression of the male. The term "temptress" is thus an imposed identity as opposed to one given by the woman herself in the context of the song.

*Cross your thoughtless heart
Only liquor anoints you
She's the albatross
She is here to destroy you
Devils that you know
Raise worse hell than a stranger
She's the death you chose
You're in terrible danger*

Figure 5. The Albatross lyrics, chorus 2, lines 17-24

The post-chorus continues this construction of women as threats through the expression "Devils that you know raise worse hell than a stranger." The statement suggests that representations of dangerous women are produced within a patriarchal social structure and may operate even within intimate relationships. [Fraser \(2013\)](#) argues that oppression should not be understood as existing exclusively in the public sphere because gendered domination can also operate within families and interpersonal relationships.

Similarly, the line "She is the death you chose" demonstrates how patriarchal discourse attempts to influence the partner's perception of the woman. The woman is represented not simply as an undesirable figure but as a potentially destructive choice. [D'Eaubonne \(1974\)](#) argues that decisions within patriarchal structures may be influenced by social pressures designed to preserve masculine identity and male solidarity. Thus, the song portrays patriarchal construction as both the labelling of women and the manipulation of how others are expected to perceive them.

*Wise men once said
 "One bad seed kills the garden"
 "One less temptress, one less dagger to sharpen"
 Locked me up in towers
 But I'd visit in your dreams
 And they tried to warn you about me*

Figure 6. The Albatross lyrics, verse 2, lines 11–16

The idea of a patriarchal labelling is further intensified to more overt oppression and social control in the lines: Locked me up in towers / But I would visit in your dreams. The image of confinement can be understood as a way of limiting women's bodies, their freedom of movement and their social power. Radical feminists argue that this type of confinement is an expression of the way that Patriarchy controls women's bodies and presence in society. D'Eaubonne (1974) links exclusion and separation to ways in which the patriarchal system tries to eliminate women from powerful roles.

However, in 'But I would visit in your dreams', it shows that it is not possible to stop the physical restrictions from stopping the woman's psychological presence. While she is symbolically contained, she is not entirely under the control of the authority of the Patriarchy. Thus, the lyric starts to create a tension between the outside oppression and inside resistance.

Rumour and reputation are other forms of social control, as in the case of the expression, "They tried to warn you about me." The warning goes to the woman's partner and builds the woman up to be dangerous before the partner can even comprehend or define their relationship. This is a mechanism which exhibits how the Patriarchy can function not merely in a physical sense, but also in terms of social discourse, reputation and recurring stories.

*"Wise men once read fake news, and they believed it"
 "Jackals raised their hackles"
 "You were sleeping soundly / when they dragged you from your bed"*

Figure 7. The Albatross lyrics, verse 3, lines 29–35

The third verse takes the attack on Patriarchy even further with the words, "Wise men once believed fake news." This is a claim on the credibility of the father or father figure authority, that its gender discourses are not necessarily based on truth. D'Eaubonne (1974) and Fraser (2013) characterize ways of androcentric thinking with which dominant social groups perpetuate narratives that uphold male power. With the term "fake news", one can therefore read a metaphor of the gender stereotypes that are perpetuated and hammered into the population until they are accepted as reality.

"Jackals raised their hackles" implies that there was an attitude of hostility towards the woman and her partner as a whole. Murphy (1997) implies that there is homosociality as a way of sustaining patriarchal masculinity through a similar attitude about women. In the reading, the "jackals" represent a collective male aggression, and their "hackles" suggest an aggressive response towards those who threaten the established gender order. The lines "You were sleeping soundly / when they dragged you from your bed" carry out patriarchal oppression against individuals who support women. This imagery also seems to indicate that there could be a social punishment for those who do not accept the Patriarchy's standards. Murphy (1992) states that men who subscribe to feminist criticisms of male

supremacy could be viewed as betraying their male group. The song, therefore, proposes the Patriarchy as a system that can control women and their allies.

Female Resistance and Solidarity against Patriarchal Power

*And when that sky rains fire on you
And you're persona non grata
I'll tell you how I've been there too
And that none of it matters*

Figure 8. The Albatross lyrics, bridge, lines 25–28

The bridge is a significant transition from Patriarchal oppression to female resistance and solidarity. "And when that sky rains fire on you" visually represents the social punishment towards the partner no longer complying with the patriarchal expectations. This metaphor, that the sky can rain fire down on you, can be understood as the social repercussions faced by those who question the male structure. D'Eaubonne (1974) suggests that anyone threatening to shake the foundations of the "patriarchal" system could be subject to exclusion and punishment, as their behaviour disturbs the existing gender relations.

The woman's answer to this is "I'll tell you how I've been there too." Instead of being a passive sufferer, she sees a common cause; she joins her partner in suffering. This is an expression of a collective consciousness and solidarity that is built with shared experiences of Patriarchy. Such awareness is an important base, as Madsen (2000) and D'Eaubonne (1974) describe for challenging structures that normalize women's oppression.

The phrase "And then none of it matters" represents a step towards defiance. After knowing how to control women, the mechanism of patriarchal control to determine the self-perception of women decreases. Resistance also comes in the form of the opposite, of a denial of imposed identities and judgments by the patriarchal system.

*Wise men once read fake news
And they believed it
Jackals raised their hackles
You couldn't conceive it
You were sleeping soundly
When they dragged you from your bed
And I tried to warn you about them*

Figure 9. The Albatross lyrics, verse 3, lines 29–35

The phrase "And I tried to warn you about them" is a big shift from the former warning. In the olden days, the patriarchs tried to caution the husband regarding the girl. In this instance, however, the woman, the one who speaks, is the one who warns her partner, not the Patriarchy itself. The danger direction is thus reversed. The woman is no longer the danger; rather, the danger is from the patriarchal authority.

This turnaround is linked to D'Eaubonne (1974) assertion that one has to go beyond internalized oppression towards radical self-awareness in order to be free. The woman in the subject matter starts to notice that what appears to be a structure that is socially sanctioned or safeguarding is actually a source of oppression. The line thus marks the transition from being defined in the discourse of Patriarchy to an active exposure and resistance to that discourse.

*So I crossed my thoughtless heart
 Spread my wings like a parachute
 I'm the albatross
 I swept in at the rescue
 The devil that you know
 Looks now more like an angel
 I'm the life you chose
 And all this terrible danger
 (This terrible danger)*

Figure 10. The Albatross lyrics, chorus 3, lines 36–44

The last chorus is the culmination of the woman's shift from being an object for other people to being an independent subject. As the woman takes ownership of an oath-like formula once the domain of the "wise men," she also takes charge of her previously thoughtless heart in "So I crossed my thoughtless heart." The change in the speaking power suggests a transition from internalised oppression to radical subjectivity, with a notion of subjectivity that recognises women's potential for creating themselves outside the frame of Patriarchy, as D'Eaubonne (1974) has stressed.

However, the line "Spread my wings like a parachute" is especially noteworthy since it changes the symbolic nature of the Albatross. Once a symbol of danger, burden or misfortune, Swift's Albatross gets its wings rebuilt as an instrument of protection. So that the woman will take back the symbol which was used to describe her negatively. Instead of danger, imposed by a context of meaning, she translates this context of meaning into agency and protection.

This change is made more obvious with "I swept in at the rescue." The woman who was once called 'a threat' is now the protector. This move directly confronts the patriarchy narrative, which sets up the idea of a dangerous independence for women. In a radical feminist view, the moment is one of self-definition as the woman subject is no longer to have her identity defined by the dominant social structure.

The phrase "The devil that you know / looks now more like an angel" reiterates the turnabout of the Patriarchy's labelling. It is not that the woman herself is necessarily in question—it is rather the interpretation that is put on her that is in question once the male-narrated version falls out of vogue. This dichotomy of "devil" and "angel" reveals, then, the fragility of the external construction of gender labels.

Lastly, "I am the life you chose" highlights the partner's own decision to spurn the patriarchal story. Staying with the woman represents nonconformity to social pressure and to male solidarity. Patriarchal systems are often based on male solidarity in order to maintain women's exclusion (Murphy, 1992; Stoltenberg, 2000). The partner's decision thus serves as a test of that expectation.

*So cross your thoughtless heart
She's the albatross
She is here to destroy you*

Figure 11. The Albatross lyrics, chorus 4, lines 45–47

The final part of the song completes the transformation of the albatross metaphor. At the beginning of the narrative, the woman is represented as dangerous, disruptive, and undesirable. By the final chorus, however, the same female figure has been reconstructed as autonomous, protective, and capable of defining her own identity. This transformation represents the radical feminist movement identified in the song: the rejection of patriarchal labels and the establishment of a self-defined female subject.

The progression across the four themes can therefore be understood as patriarchal labelling → oppression and social control → resistance and solidarity → radical self-definition. Such progression is particularly significant because the song does not merely represent women as victims of patriarchal oppression. Instead, it illustrates how a woman becomes aware of patriarchal construction, resists imposed meanings, supports others who experience similar oppression, and ultimately redefines the identity previously constructed for her.

Critical Perspectives on Radical Feminism

The results show that the radical feminist idea of the oppression of women, however, can be applied to the interpretation of "The Albatross." Still, radical feminism as a whole has also been the subject of significant criticism. Some of the radical feminist movements have been identified as overemphasizing systematic oppression at the risk of portraying women as primarily victims, according to [Paglia \(2018\)](#) and [Roiphe \(1994\)](#). They especially talk about 'rape culture' and the sexual abuse of women, pornography, and women's vulnerability.

[Roiphe \(1994\)](#) also claims that overemphasizing women's need for protection can lead to a limitation of women's social and psychological potential. From this standpoint, images of women that focus on their vulnerability can perpetuate the idea of fragility. [Paglia \(2018\)](#) also challenges explanations that are concerned with victimization and largely concern women.

The popular term also negatively portrays radical feminism, as it is often labelled "man-hating," "humorless," and "anti-sex" ([Kiraly & Tyler, 2015](#)). Such descriptions might be overly simplistic and do not show the variety of roles in radical feminism nor its general critique of institutional gender power. [Murphy \(1992\)](#) also cites some debate about how men can be a part of feminist movements, since there are some radical views that say there is a difference between women's experiences and men's potential.

[Fiss \(1994\)](#) also notes conflict between the conceptions of radical feminists and the conception of legal order rooted in individual equality. Radical feminism can doubt the idea of neutrality of the law, as the law has emerged within social institutions, which are traditionally male-controlled. However, a focus on the structural or group-based oppression can lead to strain with individualist legal regimes.

These criticisms are germane to "The Albatross," in that the song does not end up leaving the woman in a passive role. Rather, it begins with being labelled from beyond, moves to resistance, solidarity, protection and self-definition. So while radical feminist theory offers an example of how to reveal the structures by which women are portrayed as threatening or undesirable, Swift's tale also shows the power of women to change and disrupt constructions.

CONCLUSIONS

Taylor Swift's "The Albatross" reveals radical feminist concepts through four intersecting themes: the portrayal of patriarchy and women as threats, the oppression and

social control of women, resistance and solidarity, and the redefinition of female identity. The lyrics depict a male-dominated society through terms such as "wise men," "temptress," and "bad seed," presenting independent women as dangerous or disruptive. The narrative moves from oppression and stigmatization toward resistance, solidarity, and self-definition. The albatross symbolizes this transformation, shifting between perceived danger and protection, as well as vulnerability and power. The findings suggest that the song does more than portray women as victims of patriarchy. It also highlights their potential to challenge imposed identities and redefine themselves. However, the study is limited to a single song and relies on the participants' subjective interpretations. Future research could examine other songs in Taylor Swift's catalogue or compare representations of women across different feminist perspectives.

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