

# Urban Image and Female Expression: The Symbolic Narrative Style of The Female Devil in Prada

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**Abstract:** With the promotion of women's status and the awakening of female consciousness of independence, American chick flicks as a kind of commercial film with extremely large box office revenue, it is still unable to get rid of the shackles of the patriarchal in narrative and structure, but is getting close to the feminist film in terms of character shaping and film spiritual construction. This paper takes film semiotics and feminism as the analysis point of The Devil in Prada.

**Keywords:** Paternity ; Movie Symbols ; Feminism

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## 1. The narrative technique of symbolic symbol

Structuralist linguists put forward the distinction between signifier and signified, extension and connotation. Drawing on the theory of structuralist linguistics, Film Semiotics holds that the film itself is not a response to reality, but a product created by artists. It is a restructured and agreed symbol system, and the meaning of the film is created by this symbol system. The basic constituent element of ordinary language is words, while the basic constituent element of film symbols is the lens.

### 1.1 Carefully shaped character symbols

Shen Guofang<sup>1</sup> said in *Film Aesthetics* that "Visual element is the central element for film art to convey film content. Film art is the art of making full use of visual image elements to describe life." In the opening cross montage, there are a series of quick clips of beauties dressing up and going to work. There are a lot of close-up shots: full red lips, curled eyelashes and slender legs with thin high heels. The original signifier and signified in the symbol system are often replaced by their demonstrative and extended meanings in the film, and the new extended meanings produced in the process of multi-dimensional integration of audio-visual symbols will further produce new concepts. In the narrative context of the film, women themselves are the symbol of desire under the examination of patriarchy.

In the film "The Devil in Prada", the character setting of the double heroine is very representative, and the shaping of character symbols is very inclusive. Miranda, editor in chief of *Overpass*, is a decisive career woman, but this character symbol is endowed with strong masculine color: sharp makeup, capable short hair and simple neutral clothes. It is not difficult to see that the setting of this character symbol is very consistent with the patriarchal social system's cognition of strong women. Andy is an opposite character symbol to Miranda. She is smart, capable and positive. Unlike Miranda's shelving of love and neglect of family affection in the process of pursuing her career, she was at a loss because of the contradiction between work and love. Finally, she gave up the work of *Overpass*, returned to her original heart and found love, which can be proved to a certain extent, the value ranking of her boyfriend in her heart is quite high. In today's society, women's degree of freedom is lower than that of men. Women internalize the patriarchal system into their own code of conducts under a generally recognized social regulation. Women's status and value depend on men to a certain extent. The creation of these two character symbols enriches the sense of hierarchy of the film.

### 1.2 Symbol connotation of unequal setting

In Saussure's concept, the signifier and signified of symbols are arbitrary in the process of construction, and anyone can participate in the construction equally. But in the film, we can intuitively feel the inequality of "the construction of signifier and signified" in reality. In Bart's view, this inequality is the result of the influence of hidden ideological values. Miranda, editor in chief of the magazine, enjoys the priority of "construction", so that she can label Andy's dress on the label of "rural taste" and "no value". The clothes of the editorial staff mostly cater to Miranda's interpretation of the meaning of "value". As Miranda said, "don't think you have nothing to do with fashion. Every choice you make is a product of fashion. In fact, all your choices are based on the choices provided by others." Therefore, our cognition of fashion is actually a given interval exploration after many industry pioneers subjectively construct the signifier and signified connotation of the symbol "fashion".

Saussure's concept is only the first level of symbolic meaning in Bart's eyes. When the symbols of this level are transformed into the signifier of the next level, new signified will be generated in the ideographic system of this symbol and new connotation will be derived.<sup>2</sup> LV's perfume and Chanel's clothing are regarded as the pronoun of status. In the transformation of ideographic second levels, it can generate more references, such as Hermes bags and Cartier bracelets. Finally, the connotation of luxury is closely bound with identity, status and money. Just as Andy gradually completed her identity transformation in the editorial department after realizing the transformation of clothing, she became an upper class member in the fashion industry, because dress gave her more connotation of

being a successful person. However, the construction of this connotation still succumbs to patriarchy. It first constructs a certain trend, such as using a large number of size 0 models in shows or magazines to construct the fashion symbols of “thin for beauty”, giving these symbols other meanings, and make the inevitability of this popular trend increasingly prominent in the promotion, so that the majority of women believe that this is the result of free choice, and link the choice with the connotation of self-discipline, delicacy, beauty and so on.

## 2. Feminist aesthetic thought

Feminism originated at the end of the 18th century. The feminist view holds that modern society is based on a patriarchal system in which men are given more privileges than women. The devil in Prada portrays an independent female role from a unique female perspective and is sought after by female audiences. However, it is undeniable that the film is based on the discourse system of the patriarchal society.<sup>[1]</sup>

### 2.1 The dissolution of the male gaze

Laura Mulvey put forward the “gaze theory” in the *Visual pleasure and narrative film* published in *Screen*. Women in the film are mostly under the “gaze” of men and become the desire object of the audience, which leads to the visual pleasure of “voyeurism”, and the object of “voyeurism” is women under “gaze”, which also lose their autonomy and independence as women.

For a long time, in the male perspective, female characters have always been the embodiment of desire, pleasure and beauty. As symbols, it is obvious that men have priority in the construction of signifier and signified of female symbols, which leads to the inevitable materialization of female characters by patriarchy in the film. However, in the *Devil in Prada*, the number of male characters is quite small, and the director rarely makes some subjective shots through the male characters. Even in the scene where Nigel was sacrificed by the company because of his interests, the director still did not give Nigel a subjective shot, but examined several parties involved in the interest exchange from Andy’s subjective perspective. The elimination of male gaze provides more space for the expression of female consciousness. We can examine women’s hearts more objectively from the perspective of women, and we can also experience the awakening and struggle, independence and pursuit contained in it through the self-examination from the subjective perspective of women’s roles.<sup>[2]</sup>

### 2.2 The manifestation of female desire

For a long time, men have been regarded as the basic subject, while women often appear in the form of men’s vassal, and are forced to take the moral shackles of a good wife and mother. Miranda in the film tells Andy that if she is a man, people will only focus on her successful career rather than her failed marriage. Female desire is the sum of women’s natural desire and social desire. It is an unrecognized and unexpressed existence hidden in the depths of unconsciousness. After thousands of years of restraint and submission to the awakening, resistance and self positioning of modern feminism, Miranda did not hide her ambition to “open up territory” in the fashion industry. When the internal crisis of the company came, Miranda decisively traded with the top management, sacrificed Nigel, an old employee of the company, kept his position, realized his desire step by step into money, and even awakened himself. Although it gets rid of a series of female images created under the guidance of “patriarchy” to a certain extent and gives women a broader channel for self pursuit, the profit seeking nature of commercial films determines that the film must cater to the current mainstream consumers, that is, the social groups dominated by patriarchy, in the process of outputting feminist ideas.

“Chick flick” creates a space for women’s discourse power from a female perspective, presents the independent personality and independent consciousness of female characters, emphasizes women’s value, and provides a reference for women to examine themselves while meeting the psychological demands of young female audiences. In the narrative technique, the popular commercial and fashion elements are used to cultivate the aesthetic style of characterization, theme and environmental background in the connotation of narrative symbols, and the symbolic aesthetics is used to symbolically express the ideology and power value conveyed by the film.

## Annotation:

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