

# A Study on Feminist Perspectives and Gender Role Inverted in Film and Television Works: A Case Study of *Anatomy of a Fall*

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## **Abstract:**

This article focuses on the film *Anatomy of a Fall* directed by French director Justine Triet, exploring the feminist perspective and the phenomenon of traditional gender role inversion presented in the film. The film takes a feminist perspective as its core, revealing through a seemingly simple family tragedy how women break through traditional gender stereotypes and gain self-identity and liberation when facing challenges in contemporary society and families. This article first analyzes how the female protagonist Sandra takes the initiative and appears as an independent and resilient figure from a feminist perspective. Furthermore, from the perspective of the presentation of gender role inversion, the traditional gender role setting of “male leads outside, female leads inside” was explored. Subsequently, the profound theme of the film was further analyzed from the perspective of narrative techniques. Finally, this article emphasizes the positive contribution of *Anatomy of a Fall* in promoting the development of contemporary feminist films and facilitating the diversification of gender roles in society.

**Keywords:** Feminist perspective; Gender role inversion; *Anatomy of a Fall*.

## **1. Introduction**

In today’s society, the feminist perspective has become an important topic in academic research and cultural value discussions. With the continuous improvement of women’s status and the increasing diversity of social roles, traditional gender role division is facing unprecedented challenges. As a medium that

reflects social reality and disseminates ideas, movies are particularly noteworthy for their exploration and expression of feminist issues. The film *Anatomy of a Fall* directed by French director Justine Triet, which won multiple awards such as the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival and the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay in 2023, is a masterpiece that deeply explores feminism. The film is set against

the backdrop of a seemingly ordinary murder case where a husband falls to his death and conducts a trial about female subjectivity, marital relationships, and social biases. Through the tense scene of the trial, the film presents a complex and diverse female image, as well as a marriage relationship that is different from traditional concepts.

This article aims to take *Anatomy of a Fall* as an example to deeply discuss the social significance and cultural value of feminist perspectives and gender role inversion in film and television works, enrich the theoretical system of feminist film research, promote the development of contemporary feminist films, provide new perspectives and ideas for understanding contemporary gender relations, and promote the diversification of gender roles in society. This article mainly adopts text analysis and case analysis methods. Firstly, the portrayal of feminist perspectives in *Anatomy of a Fall* was discussed, where female characters no longer appear as passive victims or dependents but exist independently as the dominant force in both career and family, greatly breaking through gender stereotypes deeply rooted in social consciousness. Subsequently, this article conducted a study on the presentation of gender role inversion and delved into the complexity of marital relationships. Seemingly a final judgment, it is actually a scrutiny of women from multiple dimensions such as law and morality, reflecting different views of society on the diversified development of gender roles. However, while acknowledging the achievements of feminist film and television works, the urgent difficulties that need to be addressed cannot be ignored. At the end of this article, the existing challenges of feminist film and television works are analyzed, and some future development suggestions are proposed.

*Anatomy of a Fall* is not only a successful film, but also a model for exploring gender issues from a feminist perspective, providing new perspectives and ideas for people to understand contemporary gender roles, and contributing to the diversified development of gender roles in society.

## 2. Introduction and Narrative Theme of *Anatomy of a Fall*

In 2023, the film *Anatomy of a Fall* directed by French director Justine Triet was released. The film tells the story of her husband Samuel's sudden death from a fall, her wife Sandra becoming the first suspect, and their visually impaired son Daniel becoming a key witness. No one wants to believe that Samuel, as a male, would choose suicide. They start searching for various clues to prove that Sandra is the murderer. The film revolves around Sandra's trial process, delving into the complexity of marital

relationships and the multifaceted nature of human nature. As the trial progresses, the emotional and economic conflicts between this seemingly harmonious couple are fully revealed. Finally, with the testimony of her son Daniel, Sandra was acquitted and released [1]. The film uses the truth of the case to reflect the truth of marriage, no matter how perfect life may seem, it cannot withstand the judgment under colored glasses, and encourages all women to break free from the shackles of traditional gender roles and bravely pursue their own value.

## 3. The Shaping of Feminist Perspectives

### 3.1 The Power of Female Discourse

As a writer, Sandra possesses keen insight, excellent communication skills, and meticulous logical reasoning abilities, conveying the power of female discourse through her works. Her literary works focus on social issues and the situation of women, calling for society to pay attention to women's rights and status. In her conversation with her husband, Sandra faced the problem head-on, neither avoiding nor compromising. She insists on her own views and positions and refutes her husband's accusations and complaints with reason and evidence. When her husband loses control of his emotions, Sandra still expresses love and care for him, maintains rationality and empathy in arguments, and tries to solve problems through communication. This gentle yet firm expression makes her words more persuasive.

The film adopts a meta-narrative strategy, interweaving multiple levels of narration such as court trials and character memories, with a tight pace [2]. The male prosecutor and husband Samuel's accusing words are pressing on Sandra step by step, and even her lawyer Vincent has doubts about her, which has dealt a series of blows to Sandra. But in court, Sandra remained steadfast in expressing her views and positions in public, skillfully using language strategies, and even when faced with preconceived biases, she calmly refuted them with facts. Her logically rigorous arguments and infectious expressions successfully influenced the judgments of judges and juries and also aroused strong emotional resonance among the audience. Her words are not only a defense of her own innocence, but also a defense of women's rights and dignity.

### 3.2 Independent and Resilient Female Lead Image

In the film, Sandra, under the dual blow of her husband's sudden death and becoming a suspect herself, did not

evade or surrender. Instead, she calmly responded, sought a lawyer, clarified her thoughts, and stood up in court to defend herself. In court, Sandra is not afraid of power or public pressure, always insisting on proving her innocence and defending her rights, demonstrating strong psychological resilience and a stable core. Even if the suspicion increases and she is overwhelmed, she will patiently take care of her visually impaired son's emotions, handle household chores with ease, and coexist rationality and emotion.

Her image breaks the traditional stereotype of women being weak and dependent on their husbands, showcasing the independence, courage, and resilience of women in the face of adversity. This independence is not only reflected in economic independence but also in spiritual self-fulfillment. Ueno Chizuko once said, "Women are a situation." Although gender is innate, women can still choose to achieve gender freedom. Not only do they need their own room in reality, but they also need their own fortress in spirit [3].

### 3.3 Female Subjectivity in Marriage

The film delves into the subjectivity of women in marriage through Sandra's perspective. In traditional marriage concepts, women are often seen as accessories to men, and their value and significance are usually limited to family and childbirth. However, *Anatomy of a Fall* breaks this tradition by swapping traditional male and female identities, showcasing women's independence and autonomy in marriage [4].

Sandra has made compromises for her family. In order to alleviate her husband's self-blame for indirectly causing her son's car accident and visual impairment, she left her hometown and settled in France, silently enduring the strange scrutiny and pointing of her husband and friends due to her outsider status. These compromises and sacrifices reflect her love and sense of responsibility towards her family. But Sandra has never forgotten that she is a writer, with her own independent career. She has never given up on pursuing herself due to marriage and family but has persisted and successfully achieved her writing dream. While actively taking on the financial pressure of the family, Sandra did not shift all the household responsibilities onto her husband. Instead, she shared household chores and childcare with him, never missing out on her son's growth.

The subjectivity in marriage and career is an important reason for Sandra to remain calm and rational when facing difficulties. Faced with her husband's accusations and doubts, Sandra always maintained a clear mind and a firm stance. This female subjectivity is not only reflected in her

active choice and maintenance of marital relationships but also in her adherence and pursuit of self-worth, always maintaining independence and autonomy in marriage.

## 4. The Presentation of Gender Role Inversion

### 4.1 Gender Role Inversion Within the Family

Traditional marriage relationships rely on men as the economic backbone and decision-makers, while women are responsible for having children, doing household chores, and providing emotional value. However, in *Anatomy of a Fall*, this traditional model was completely overturned. As the economic and spiritual pillar of the family, Sandra not only shoulders the responsibility of taking care of the family, but also achieves significant success in her career. As a writer, Sandra's literary achievements far surpass those of her husband Samuel. Her husband Samuel, on the other hand, fell into a difficult situation due to career setbacks and the pressure of taking care of children, suffering from severe depression. Sandra's success in her career has broken the traditional gender division of labor in the family, where men lead the outside world and women lead the inside world, demonstrating that women can achieve greater success in their careers than their husbands [5].

Although Sandra has a successful career, she has not neglected her family responsibilities. She not only cares about the growth and education of children but also actively participates in family decision-making and handling daily trivial matters. The ability to balance career and family determines that independent women play a more important role in the family. This inversion of gender roles not only challenges traditional family values but also triggers profound thinking among the audience about the division of traditional gender roles.

The film also portrays the complex emotional and power relationships between spouses through their arguments and conflicts. Sandra appears as the dominant and rational party in the argument, while Samuel is more impulsive and emotional. In terms of sexual needs, Sandra, as a woman, was the one who chose to cheat during her long-term asexual life and never avoided expressing her sexual needs. The power imbalance in this emotional relationship further highlights the inverted gender roles in this family relationship. Following TerraFemina's review of *Anatomy of a Fall* as a female gaze-themed work, French film critic and scholar Iris Brey also believes that the screen revolution theory of the female gaze can be used to understand the character of Sandra [6].

### 4.2 Examining Gender Roles in Society and

## Law

The film also examines the phenomenon of gender role inversion from a social and legal perspective. When Sandra was investigated as a suspect, public opinion believed that she may be more likely to become a criminal due to certain “feminine” traits, such as strong emotions and emotional instability.

Society generally believes that women should be more gentle, submissive, and dependent on men. However, the film proves the absurdity and irrationality of these biases and doubts through Sandra’s defense and the court proceedings. The film emphasizes that everyone should be treated equally before the law and society, rather than being judged based on gender role stereotypes. This re-examination not only helps to break the shackles of traditional gender concepts but also promotes social progress and development.

During the court trial, Sandra, as a defendant, faced prejudice and questioning from male prosecutors and public opinion. They used her calm demeanor towards her husband’s death, greater success in her career, lower involvement in household chores, high sexual desire, and infidelity as evidence against Sandra. Sandra not only has to defend herself for not killing but also for her physiological needs. But Samuel’s situation is a dilemma that many women are facing in reality, and society has long been accustomed to the invisible oppression of women. If the plot changes and the husband show emotional stability after his wife’s death, the court is unlikely to suspect him of committing a crime. The fragility of women and the strength of men are both stereotypes in society, and the lack of fragility in women and the lack of strength in men are mostly not sins. As the director said, Sandra just did what every man would do.

## 5. The Current Challenges and Future Development Suggestions of Feminist Film and Television Works

### 5.1 Existing Challenges

#### 5.1.1 Low Return on Investment

Film and television works are ultimately commodities, and as commodities, commercial interests are the most important consideration in their production and distribution. Feminist film and television works are difficult to achieve explosive success due to their limited audience. The classic film *The Devil Wears Prada*, which showcased the power of women from a female perspective earlier, grossed \$187 million worldwide. *The Hunger Games*

series, which sparked a wave of female screen character reconstruction, grossed the highest box office at \$654 million. In 2023, *Anatomy of a Fall*, which won many international awards, grossed only \$39.248 million worldwide. Driven by commercial interests, some film and television work often choose popular themes that cater to market demand rather than profound social issues, which leads to insufficient funding and resources in the creation and distribution process of feminist film and television works. Without sufficient financial support, the quality of production and the scope of dissemination will be limited. If there is no original work as a basis, feminist films with original scripts, although profound in content and unique in perspective, usually can only attract attention on a small scale and it is difficult to achieve satisfactory box office results for investors.

#### 5.1.2 Limitations of Traditional Gender Concepts

Influenced by traditional social beliefs and gender stereotypes, feminist film and television works often encounter obstacles in the process of censorship and promotion, greatly limiting the market acceptance of the works. From the perspective of audience size and target customer group, the proportion of male audience is much lower than that of female audience, presenting a significant imbalance. This indicates that most men still lack interest and identification with film and television works that delve into feminism, and attracting a wider male audience is a direction that needs to be addressed. In recent years, although feminist film and television works have improved in both quantity and quality, there are still some viewers and critics who are accustomed to viewing female characters and feminist issues from a traditional perspective, making it difficult for works to gain widespread recognition and support. A small number of viewers even hold a resistant or exclusionary attitude, which undoubtedly further exacerbates the dilemma of feminist film and television works in the market.

### 5.2 Suggestions for Future Development

#### 5.2.1 Improving the Quality of Works

In order to enhance the market competitiveness and influence of feminist film and television works, the production quality of the works must be improved. This includes strengthening script creation, enhancing the professional competence of directors and actors, optimizing post-production, and particularly emphasizing the cultivation of female directors and screenwriters. The participation of female creators often allows feminist film and television work to vividly and authentically showcase the status and situation of women in modern society, thereby attracting

more audience attention and resonance. Director Li Yu's films often center around women, and her creative philosophy is to delve into the inner world of women, focus on their living conditions, and construct traditional gender concepts [7]. Director Li Yu has given female characters more initiative and choicer, and her works are worthy of reference for contemporary feminist film and television creators.

In terms of content creation, it is possible to enrich the types and styles of works, use more innovative and unique narrative methods and expressive techniques to tell the stories of women from different regions and cultural backgrounds, diversify the creative styles, and enhance the artistic quality and ideological depth of the works. The Hunger Games series can be said to have opened a new era of female character screen image construction, breaking down and reshaping traditional female screen images, and creating a new perspective, image, and position of women. The film also employs unique narrative techniques, flexibly switching between first-person and omniscient perspectives, highlighting themes of anti-male gaze and female subjectification [8].

### 5.2.2 Emphasize Publicity and Promotion

Firstly, it is necessary to broaden the channels of dissemination. It is not only necessary to conduct publicity and promotion on the Internet, social media, and other new media platforms, but also to actively participate in international film festivals, film exhibitions, and other activities to improve the popularity and influence of the works. Meanwhile, it is also possible to collaborate with traditional media such as television stations to achieve multi-channel dissemination.

Secondly, it is necessary to pay attention to promotional strategies. The promotion strategy of feminist film and television works needs to be more targeted, and the theme of feminism should be clearly highlighted in both online and offline promotion processes. For example, in the promotional video of the movie *Barbie*, the female lead's choice is directly displayed, through her decision to enter the real world, arousing the audience's curiosity about her exploration and growth [9]. It should be clarified that it is usually adult women who are expanding the demand for feminist film and television works in the market. In the promotion process, attention should be paid to the needs of female audiences and they should be given sufficient voice [10]. Therefore, when conducting offline promotion, women's themed forums, seminars, and other activities can be held to invite experts, scholars, or well-known figures in the film and television industry to interpret and discuss feminist issues in depth, in order to attract targeted audiences. However, in order to avoid the situation where

excessive consumption of feminism leads to gender opposition and audience backlash, female characters should not be labeled, and their multi-faceted personalities should be displayed. At the same time, the important role of male characters in the story should also be reasonably presented.

## 6. Conclusion

This article reveals the subjectivity and complexity of women in marriage, family, and society by analyzing the shaping of feminist perspectives and the presentation of gender role inversion in *Anatomy of a Fall*. Through the role of Sandra, the film not only challenges traditional gender stereotypes, but also showcases the multifaceted nature of women in the family, workplace, and society, prompting viewers to re-examine the diversity and possibilities of gender roles. Faced with the challenges and difficulties of feminist film and television works, creators need to continuously improve the quality of their works, pay attention to publicity and promotion, and adjust their strategies in a timely manner.

In the future creation of feminist film and television works, creators should pay more attention to strengthening the female perspective and strive for more diverse and inclusive portrayal of gender roles. This article focuses on the specific case of *Anatomy of a Fall*, and the analysis is more targeted, which cannot represent all feminist film and television works and has certain limitations.

With the development of society, this study believes that feminist issues will become more in-depth and diverse, and its research results will transcend borders and benefit the world. The study of feminist film and television works will promote the shining of feminist film and television works on a broader stage, making positive contributions to promoting the diversity of gender roles in society and building a harmonious society.

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