

A Feminist Discourse Analysis of the Film *Anatomy of a Fall* (2023)

Feminist Söylem Analizi Bağlamında Bir Düşüşün Anatomisi (2023) Filmi

Res. Asst. Sinem ÜNAL GERDAN*

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Abstract

The film *Anatomy of a Fall* offers a profound feminist analysis of gender roles, dynamics within marital relationships, and power relations. Focusing on the experiences of the female protagonist, Sandra, the film critically examines gender representations and the power structures they reflect. Through a feminist lens, it opens a discussion on gender relations and societal norms while also shedding light on gender discrimination within the framework of discourse analysis. Sandra is portrayed in a manner that differs from the traditional female figure, challenging entrenched gender stereotypes. The film delves deeply into her internal struggles and interactions with the outside world, using her personal experiences as a lens to offer broader social critique. Discourse analysis of the roles played by other characters in Sandra's life further reveals how societal gender norms are reproduced and sustained. This study aims to analyze female representation and power dynamics in *Anatomy of a Fall* within the context of feminist critique and gender politics. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to contemporary feminist debates by offering a broader perspective on how societal gender norms are shaped and maintained.

Keywords: *Film, Anatomy of a Fall, Feminism, Discourse Analysis, Film Analysis*

Öz

Bir Düşüşün Anatomisi filmi, toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri, evlilik ilişkilerindeki dinamikler ve güç ilişkileri üzerine derinlikli bir feminist analiz sunar. Kadın başkarakter Sandra'nın deneyimlerine odaklanan film, toplumsal cinsiyet temsillerini ve bu temsiller aracılığıyla işleyen güç ilişkilerini sorgular. Feminist bir bakış açısıyla ele alınan yapı, toplumsal cinsiyet ilişkilerini ve normlarını tartışmaya açarken, söylem analizi çerçevesinde cinsiyet ayrımcılığına da ışık tutar. Sandra karakteri, geleneksel kadın figüründen farklı bir biçimde temsil edilerek toplumsal cinsiyet kalıplarını sorgular. Film, onun içsel çatışmalarını ve dış dünyayla olan ilişkilerini detaylı bir şekilde yansıtırken, bireysel deneyimleri üzerinden daha genel bir toplumsal eleştiri sunar. Sandra'nın hayatındaki diğer karakterlerin rollerine dair gerçekleştirilen söylem analizi ise, toplumsal cinsiyet normlarının nasıl yeniden üretildiğini ve sürdürüldüğünü ortaya koyar. Bu çalışma, *Bir Düşüşün Anatomisi* filmi üzerinden kadın temsilleri ve güç ilişkilerini feminist eleştiri ve toplumsal cinsiyet politikaları bağlamında incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Böylece, toplumsal cinsiyet normlarının nasıl şekillendiğine dair daha geniş bir perspektif sunularak çağdaş feminist tartışmalara katkı sağlanması hedeflenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Sinema, Bir Düşüşün Anatomisi, Feminizm, Söylem Analizi, Film Analizi*

* Yıldız Technical University, Faculty of Art and Design, sinem.unal@yildiz.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-8599-6753

Introduction

When a woman aspires to freedom, she must relinquish the privileges of a man.
(Time.com, 2020)

Cinema has long served as a powerful medium for representing social structures, cultural norms, and interpersonal dynamics. Particularly about gender roles, the functioning of the family institution, and individual subjectivities, cinematic narratives frequently interrogate and reconstruct dominant social discourses (Smelik, 2007; Yanat Bağcı, 2021). Feminist film theory seeks to deconstruct these representations by foregrounding how women are portrayed, how patriarchal structures are maintained, and how power relations are visualized and sustained (de Lauretis, 1985; Petro, 2004). A foundational concept in this regard is Laura Mulvey's "male gaze" theory, which argues that mainstream cinema traditionally frames women as passive objects of visual pleasure for a presumed heterosexual male viewer (Mulvey, 1975). This theory has shaped decades of feminist critique by revealing how cinematic language reproduces gendered power asymmetries. Within this framework, feminist discourse analysis provides a methodological lens not only for examining gendered representations but also for revealing the ideological, cultural, and linguistic mechanisms that underpin them (Lazar, 2007; Cameron, 2003).

This study focuses on *Anatomy of a Fall*, directed by Justine Triet and awarded the Palme d'Or at the 2023 Cannes Film Festival, as a case study for feminist discourse analysis. The film explores complex themes, including marriage, motherhood, authorship, and the sociocultural costs of womanhood, making meaningful contributions to contemporary feminist debates. Through the character of Sandra—whose lifestyle and behavior diverge from normative gender expectations—the film critically engages with issues of female agency, societal prejudice, and institutional power, particularly within the context of legal and familial structures.

While recent feminist film scholarship has seen an increase in portrayals of so-called "strong female characters," these depictions are often criticized for adhering to masculinized traits and for failing to fully capture the nuance and complexity of women's lived experiences (cedars.cedarville.edu, 2021). *Anatomy of a Fall* challenges this tendency by presenting a protagonist whose strength emerges through intellectual autonomy, emotional ambiguity, and resistance to normative maternal roles, thereby offering a distinctive intervention into existing feminist film discourse.

The primary aim of this article is to examine the film's narrative structure and character representations through the lens of feminist discourse analysis, with particular emphasis on the linguistic and visual strategies used to depict female agency and power dynamics. By doing so, the study makes significant contributions both theoretically and methodologically to the intersection of feminist film theory and discourse analysis, providing an interdisciplinary framework for understanding gender representation in contemporary cinema.

1. Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of the research is to conduct a discourse analysis of the film *Anatomy of a Fall* within the framework of feminist theory. Additionally, it aims to gain a deeper

understanding of the film's effects on gender roles and power relationships in society. In this regard, it is essential to examine how feminist perspectives and representations of female characters in the film illuminate power dynamics.

As for the methodology, discourse analysis of the film *Anatomy of a Fall* is chosen as the focal point. This analysis involves examining the verbal and textual elements present in the film scenes to provide an in-depth analysis of gender representations and power dynamics, drawing on feminist theory, with a particular focus on the female character and power dynamics.

Questions:

- Representation of the female character: How is the main female character portrayed? Is she depicted as strong, weak, independent, or dependent?
- Representation of male characters: How are male characters portrayed? Are they depicted as strong, weak, dominant, or passive?
- Gender roles: How are gender roles depicted in the film? Are they traditional or modern?
- Gender equality: Is there gender equality in the film? Or is there gender discrimination?
- Female perspective: Is the film presented from a female perspective? Or from a male perspective?

Plot of "Anatomy of a Fall"

Anatomy of a Fall is a psychological thriller that examines the dynamics of a marriage. It became one of the most talked-about films of 2023 due to its success. The story follows Sandra, a German writer, living an isolated life in the French Alps with her husband, Samuel, and their visually impaired son. When Samuel dies under mysterious circumstances, whether it was suicide or an accident remains unclear, Sandra is arrested on suspicion of murder. The trial depicted in the film turns into a disturbing psychological journey delving into the depths of the couple's relationship. Directed by Justine Triet and written by Triet and her husband, Arthur Harari, the film premiered on February 2, 2024, and runs for 150 minutes in the drama genre.

2. Historical and Cultural Context

The time and place setting of "Anatomy of a Fall" takes place in present-day isolation in the French Alps. The film is shot in French and English languages. Modern electronic devices and cars with contemporary designs are featured, confirming that the film is set in the present day. The film does not feature any specific scenes that indicate a particular period. The themes addressed in the film are universally relevant, making it timeless by tackling topics such as murder, grief, and justice, thereby providing viewers with a contemporary context.

The period and cultural context in which the film is set are crucial for understanding the characters' behaviors and the development of events. The isolated life in the French Alps highlights the characters' interactions with nature and the psychological effects of living in an isolated environment.

In French society depicted in the film, women are generally not equal to men in the professional field, often working in areas labeled as "jobs for women." Although France is perceived as a country where social freedom is achieved, women still earn less than men, have higher unemployment rates than men, and are underrepresented in politics (Gönenç, 2006). Even today, many women worldwide face inequality in their professional lives. For example, only 26.5% of parliamentarians in unicameral or lower chambers are women. At the current rate of progress, achieving gender equality in national legislatures is unlikely before 2063 (UN Women, 2024). These quotes address gender inequality in French society and the position of women in the professional field. The figures obtained highlight the current state of gender equality, from past to present, and expectations for future developments.

When examined in terms of location, the film delves into the inequalities and stereotypes faced by women in French society through the main character, Sandra. Considering that such inequality persists worldwide, the film explores universal issues that transcend geographical location.

3. Feminist Discourse Analysis

This analysis involves examining verbal and textual elements present in the film scenes to provide an in-depth analysis of gender representations and power dynamics based on feminist theory. Discourse analysis, as conceptualized and involves identifying patterns of meaning, ideological constructs, and discursive strategies embedded in narratives (Sallan Gül, S., & Kâhya Nizam, Ö. 2021, p. 181-198). In this study, selected scenes were analyzed with attention to verbal cues, symbolic visuals, and courtroom dialogue to expose how power and gender ideologies are linguistically and visually constructed. Language and gender ideologies, regardless of their content, are generally part of a societal apparatus aimed at preserving gender distinctions—naturalizing the idea that genders are inherently "opposite" with different abilities and societal roles (Cameron, 2023, s. 452). Within the context of feminist discourse analysis, this notion underscores how language and gender ideologies perpetuate discourses that reinforce the notion of gender as biologically determined and naturally distinct. Feminist discourse analysis examines the use of language and societal gender norms to interrogate and expose such ideological constructs.

The purpose of feminist critical discourse analysis is to understand and uncover the complex structures between hidden power and ideology that support gender arrangements within discourse. In other words, the aim is to critique discourses that perpetuate systematic power relations upholding patriarchal social order, which excludes and disempowers women while granting privileges to men (Çimen, 2021, cited from Lazar). This critical perspective further underscores the significance of cinema as a medium for conveying gender roles. According to Yanat Bağcı, gender roles have been communicated and reinforced through tools such as tales, epics, and rituals for thousands of years, with cinema being one of the most potent tools in contemporary times. He argues that while gender roles were conveyed through tales, epics, and rituals in the past, cinema is undoubtedly one of the most powerful tools for conveying this teaching in modern times. The necessity for women to behave like women and men to behave like men is consistently emphasized in the films we watch (Bağcı, Yanat, 2021, p. 55). This observation underscores how cinema can leave profound subconscious

impacts on viewers regarding gender roles by providing a powerful platform for them to be embraced and reinforced.

However, according to Biryıldız, women in films are often presented solely as objects of the male gaze and are objectified as sources of sexual pleasure (Biryıldız, 1994, s. 63-66). Historically, the portrayal of female characters in films has been influenced by the male gaze, leading to objectification and violence against women on screen (Sexton-Finck, 2020). Women are often portrayed as secondary and superficial characters in films, with male characters taking more prominent and influential roles in the narrative. Nevertheless, filmmakers like Agnès Varda have endeavored to challenge these norms by creating alternative cinema that defies traditional exploitation rules and male-dominated mindsets (Midilli, 2016, p. 216). The rise of modern mainstream feminism in the early 2010s has led to an increase in the representation of women in lead roles. However, there remains a concern that many women-focused stories are still primarily told from a male perspective. The emergence of the "strong female character" archetype has been both praised for breaking stereotypes and criticized for potentially limiting the portrayal of complex femininity (cedars.cedarville.edu, 2021).

According to Smelik, there is a strong relationship between the diversity of contemporary feminist film theory and the extensive production of women's cinema in the 1990s. This theory aligns with the increasing success of women filmmakers in Hollywood and the struggle for diverse voices, perspectives, and cinematic styles to be represented on the silver screen (Smelik, 2007). Smelik's quotation can provide a framework for the direction and film of Justine Triet, the female director of "Anatomy of a Fall." Triet presents a perspective in her film that reflects the complexity and diversity of the female experience.

"I wanted to overturn gender norms (...) As a viewer, I hadn't seen too many films where a woman didn't feel regretful about having her own space or didn't have to ask permission from her partner in this way." - Justine Triet (France, 2024).

Triet's words challenge a common theme in films where female characters are often portrayed as needing permission from their male partners or feeling regretful. This approach supports the idea that female characters should have a strong stance on independence and maintain their own space. Thus, the film suggests that the art of cinema can contribute to social change by challenging gender norms. Feminist film theory is a discipline within film theory that examines the representation of women in films, the portrayal of gender roles, and how cinema shapes views on gender. This theory analyzes the representation of women, stereotypes, and power dynamics in the film industry. Experts in feminist film theory discuss whether films can challenge or reinforce gender norms. (Petro, 2004). Building on Petro's work, Justine Triet is a French filmmaker who explores women's experiences and gender roles in her films. When analyzed within the frameworks presented by feminist film theory, her works offer complex and provocative perspectives that align with this theory.

In the film *Anatomy of a Fall*, co-written by Triet and Arthur Harari, the character of Sandra, created by Triet, must confront the challenges she faces as a woman writer and mother in society. Through Sandra's story, Triet also emphasizes the struggle for women's voices to be heard and their stories to be told.

With a special consciousness developed to analyze women's socio-historical realities, feminism has not only invented new strategies or created new texts but, more importantly, it has conceptualized new social subjects: women who speak, write, read, watch, use,

and produce cultural forms, and shape cultural processes (de Lauretis, T. 1985, p. 154-175). Sandra's profession as a writer further highlights the impact and productivity of women in cultural processes as part of this new social subject.

4. A Fall's Anatomy and Feminism

When considering the importance of feminism in the context of contemporary society, it is closely tied to its central role in the struggle for equality, justice, and human rights. Feminism questions societal gender norms, brings to light the discrimination and oppression women have faced throughout history, and advocates for change. In contemporary society, feminism advocates for the empowerment of women in economic, political, and social roles, as well as the provision of equal opportunities. Feminism serves as a significant guide and driving force in issues such as women's access to leadership positions, addressing wage inequality, and ending violence against women. Additionally, feminism creates awareness of gender identity and expression, contributing to the creation of a more inclusive and just environment in all sectors of society. Therefore, feminism plays a vital role in advancing gender equality, justice, and human rights as a fundamental element of contemporary society.

The film's themes incorporate numerous elements from a feminist perspective. The director aims to amplify the voices of women through the film. In the narrative centered on the main character, Sandra, and the events surrounding her, the film portrays Sandra in a very different light from her conventional appearance, ultimately shaping the perception of the woman through a stereotypical lens.

On October 27, 2023, an interview was published on YouTube. In one part of the conversation with the film's director, Justine Triet, Tom Power mentioned the dynamics between social norms in the film, stating that a dynamic existed between the male and female writers, with the man taking care of childcare and a fragility was present. Triet responded as follows regarding this scenario during the interview:

"I can say that writing about this was quite natural for me. I was aware that gender norms were somewhat reversed in the dynamic you mentioned. And for me, I think I wrote something quite close to my own way of being. As an audience member, I was aware that I hadn't seen this woman character who didn't regret her way of life and success in films as much. So, it was important for me to reverse this norm (Triet, Q with Tom Power, 2023)."



Figure 1. Justine Triet on winning the Palme d'Or with *Anatomy of a Fall* and the future of French cinema (Q with Tom Power, 2023).

Triet's acknowledgment of the reversal of gender norms and the portrayal of the female character as leading a successful life in line with her own existence highlights a dynamic that challenges traditional gender roles and perceptions of success. Emphasizing the woman's achievement and the centrality of her success perception conveys a message about the necessity of questioning and changing societal gender norms. Triet's conscious decision to write about this dynamic and her expression of valuing the female character's successful lifestyle underscore the feminist perspective in the film. The director's decision to center the story around the female character's lifestyle and success supports the idea that women can break free from traditional roles and expectations to define their own identities and set their own goals.

This discourse illustrates how the characters in the film address significant themes, including gender roles and perceptions of success, and how these themes are shaped by the director's own life experiences and worldview. When examined within the framework of feminist discourse analysis, this discourse advocates for questioning traditional gender roles, empowering women, and highlighting their achievements. Triet's portrayal of her own existence and worldview in her work as a co-writer and director of the film sheds light on the creation process from a feminist perspective. Such an approach can be considered a crucial step in challenging and transforming societal gender inequalities and norms.

5. Interpretation

Characterization of Sandra: Sandra is portrayed as a woman who does not conform to traditional feminine norms; she is depicted as a free-spirited individual who openly expresses her sexuality. This highlights the pressures that women face in a patriarchal society and breaks down traditional gender roles. While modern gender roles are observed, deviations from tradition can create problems between the couple.

Male Characters: The male characters in the film are generally not portrayed as powerful and dominant figures. This challenges the privileges that men have in a patriarchal society and the inequalities these privileges create for women. Sandra's husband prioritizes childcare over his own career success and feels guilty about the accident that occurred. The guilt and sense of responsibility imposed on women are examined through the male character in a different way.

Change in Gender Roles: The film demonstrates that societal gender roles are not rigid and immutable. Sandra, as a character who does not adhere to traditional femininity norms, serves as an example of questioning and openness to change in these roles.

Prejudices and Inequalities Faced by Women: Through the character of Sandra, the film highlights the prejudices and inequalities women face in society. Despite being a successful writer, Sandra is accused of murder after her husband Samuel's death and is constantly viewed with suspicion by society.

Handling Complex Themes: The film boldly addresses complex themes, including societal gender roles, family dynamics, death, grief, and authorship.

Questioning Gender Roles in Modern Society: Through the character of Sandra and other elements, the film challenges traditional gender roles in modern society and encourages viewers to reflect on this issue.

Music: The song "P.I.M.P." that plays continuously at the beginning of the film plays an important role from a feminist discourse analysis perspective. Although the lyrics of the song are not included in the film, they focus on themes such as sex, violence, and money.

6. Structuring

Sandra's "Masculine" Style: The main character of the film, Sandra, is portrayed as a woman who freely expresses her sexuality and values her career. This breaks down traditional gender roles and draws attention to the pressures women face in a patriarchal society. The film includes elements such as Sandra not wearing makeup, her stern demeanor, and her choice of clothing (See Figure 4). These elements indicate that Sandra does not conform to traditional femininity norms and exhibits some characteristics that are labeled as "masculine."



Figure 2. *Anatomy of a Fall* Trailer #1 (Rotten Tomatoes Trailers, 2023).

Difference from the Traditional Mother Image: Sandra is depicted as a self-assertive and free-spirited character rather than a warm and compassionate mother figure. This breaks stereotypes surrounding the traditional maternal role. The male characters in the film are generally not powerful and dominant figures. This conflicts with the idea of the privileges men have in a patriarchal society and the inequalities these privileges create for women.

Homosexuality and Bisexuality: Sandra's bisexuality is implied in the film. This deepens the feminist discourse of the film and demonstrates that sexual orientations are also linked to societal gender roles.

Courtroom Scene: The courtroom scene where Sandra is accused of murder (See Figure 2) illustrates the prejudices and inequalities women face in a patriarchal society.



Figure 3. Sandra in Court - *Anatomy of a Fall* Trailer #1 (Rotten Tomatoes Trailers, 2023).

Authorship and Plagiarism: Sandra's adaptation of a sentence from her husband Samuel's writing into her own book leads to accusations of plagiarism. This serves as an example of questioning women's intellectual capacities and originality.

Sandra Not Speaking French: Despite Sandra's native language being German, her preference for speaking English instead of French, the spoken language of the place she lives, demonstrates that Sandra does not conform to expectations and has developed a unique identity.

Childcare Debate: Sandra's husband, Samuel, engages in a debate with Sandra over childcare responsibilities. This sends a message about the need for men to be more involved in household responsibilities in modern society. The film also demonstrates that societal gender roles are not rigid and immutable. Sandra is portrayed as a free-spirited character who does not conform to traditional femininity norms.

Sandra's Voice Recording: During an argument with Sandra, her husband Samuel records their conversation. This situation emerges as a factor that could undermine Sandra's credibility.

Question of Trust in Sandra: Throughout the legal process in the film, Sandra's character and actions are depicted as often intertwining her professional success with her relationship with her husband. The prosecution believes that an idea for one of her books may have been stolen from her husband. Various elements, such as Daniel being the only witness to the case being visually impaired, Sandra's lack of opposition to extramarital relationships, and the career gap between Sandra and Samuel, which harbor different potentials, indicate that the story dismantles the classic female image. It boldly addresses complex issues such as the place of women in society and feminism. The film, through Sandra's character, sheds light on the prejudices and inequalities women face in society. Despite being a successful writer, Sandra is accused of murder after her husband Samuel's death and is branded as a "femme fatale" by society.

Music: The use of 50 Cent's song "P.I.M.P." in the film becomes structurally integrated into the main characters and events of the film. This song sets the atmosphere in the scene where Sandra welcomes guests to her home, capturing the audience's attention.

The sexist and violent lyrics of the song emphasize the need to approach the film with a feminist perspective.

7. Macro Structure

The Character of Sandra: Sandra, the main character of the film, is a successful writer. Throughout the film, Sandra is depicted going through the grieving process after her husband's death, dealing with the trauma of being accused of murder and seeking justice. Sandra is portrayed as a strong and independent woman, described by those around her as "tough and cold." As seen in Scene 51 of the film:

"SAMUEL (continuing the argument) You're a monster. Even Daniel said it in his own words.

SANDRA Take back what you just said, you piece of shit!

SAMUEL He's told me multiple times how harsh/cruel you can be, did you know that? (Anatomy of a Fall, 2023)".

Throughout the film, despite facing difficulties, Sandra perseveres, refusing to give up. This demonstrates Sandra's character development and resilience.

Sandra Not Speaking French: Despite Sandra's native language being German, her preference for speaking English instead of French, the spoken language of the place she lives, shows that Sandra does not conform to expectations and has developed a unique identity. In the film, Sandra's husband, Samuel, expects Sandra to speak fluent French. However, Sandra, instead of speaking German, her mother tongue, or French, the language spoken in the place where they live, prefers to speak English.

From this dialogue in the script, it is observed that Samuel accuses Sandra of not being sacrificial and not meeting expectations, but Sandra is trying to find a middle ground.

Childcare Debate: Sandra's husband, Samuel, engages in a debate with Sandra over childcare responsibilities. This situation sends a message about the need for men to be more involved in household responsibilities in modern society. The couple argues about their children's care. The tension escalates, and the moment of argument, presented to the audience as a flashback-like scene in the courtroom, has been recorded by Sandra's husband. Here, the couple is in conflict over childcare. The time constraints many women face in modern society are now being voiced by a man, Samuel. The character expresses that he deals with numerous responsibilities, such as taking care of their son, doing his homework, taking him to school, seeking support from his spouse, and expressing his desire to write his own book.

"SAMUEL Are you serious? I reduced my workload by half this year to save time but it's still not enough. I need to finish the renewal, and I handle everything else. Why do you refuse to talk about this? Why don't you admit that it's about our divide?

SANDRA I don't owe you anything for being wrong, I'm doing my part. Come on, let's not start trouble. Let's calm down. We love each other (Anatomy of a Fall, 2023)".

At the end of this conversation, it is noteworthy that the character who cannot control his anger is not a man but a woman, creating a different momentum from the norms in real life. The subsequent fight scenes are not shown to the audience; only their voices are heard. The director may expect the audience to choose whether to trust Sandra based on an unfamiliar concept of motherhood and womanhood.

Sandra's Voice Recording: During an argument with Sandra, her husband Samuel records their conversation. This situation emerges as a factor that could undermine Sandra's credibility. Unlike most films, in this film, it seems that Sandra shakes the trust in marriage by cheating. It is understood that Sandra, who explains it was "just a one-time thing" in court, is realized to have cheated on her husband multiple times, and the behavior of lying and hiding infidelity is far from femininity and imposed sanctity.

"The ability of the court's normative moral understanding to easily establish an organic connection between sexual infidelity and murder has significant potential for the discursive inclusiveness of the film (altyazi.net, 2023)". In court, the discussion of Sandra's, that is, the mother character's bisexual sexual tendencies has led the court and the audience to see Sandra as guilty.

Virginia Woolf reference: Another point we become aware of during the unfolding discussion in the story is Sandra's admiration for a sentence in her husband Samuel's writing, which she turns into a book despite Samuel's knowledge. Her husband accuses Sandra of plagiarism, while Sandra is angry at Samuel for not taking action against her. In terms of discourse analysis, the part where Sandra defends her authorship in the trial scene is crucial:

"SANDRA: My characters are a woman and her daughter. I developed the story for more than 300 pages. He acknowledged that I did something different after reading the book. Sometimes during our arguments, this issue would come up because he was upset that he couldn't write (*Anatomy of a Fall*, 2023)".

This situation in the film refers to Virginia Woolf's book "A Room of One's Own". In this context, it is used to emphasize the feminist discourse of the film and the place of women in the literary world. In Virginia Woolf's book "A Room of One's Own", published in 1929: "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction (Woolf, 2023, p. 6)".

In Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own," the disadvantaged position of women in the literary world and the difficulties of producing works in a male-dominated field are also discussed. Woolf argues that women's writing ability is not lacking, but rather, their works are treated and evaluated differently from those of men. Examining the common ground with the film, Sandra's story highlights the struggles of women in the literary world and their efforts to exist in a male-dominated field. The film emphasizes women's writing ability and their potential to create original works. It also highlights the struggle to exist in a male-dominated field and the difficulties of being accepted in this field.

Question of Trust in Sandra: In the film, Sandra's masculine style, as described by others, is harshly criticized by other characters. Unlike the traditional mother image, Sandra presents a portrait of a woman who prioritizes herself rather than being warm and compassionate towards her child and family, creating a character that is unusual for viewers. While the film challenges traditional female stereotypes, it also tests the audience's trust in Sandra and raises questions about gender roles in modern society.

When evaluated from a feminist perspective, in terms of character, Sandra contradicts the conventional female figure, creating a contrasting image for the audience. Sandra's "masculine" style, described and expressed harshly by other characters in the film, portrays a character who places herself at the center rather than the classic image of a warm and compassionate mother who prioritizes her child and family. The trial scenes in the film highlight the flaws and mistakes of the justice system. Sandra, due to her lifestyle

and outlook on life, is held responsible for Samuel's death, and this responsibility also reflects on family relationships.

The film's anathema is the loss of innocence and trust. Throughout the film, we see how Sandra's and her son's lives are turned upside down by Samuel's death and the subsequent trial process. These events traumatize Daniel and shake his trust in Sandra, his mother. The film portrays the fragility of innocence and the difficulty of regaining it. Samuel's death undermines the trust between Sandra and her son. Daniel, unable to have a healthy mourning period for his father's death, makes great efforts to behave objectively towards his mother, creating a distance between them.

The term "The law is unjust" appears as a slogan put forward by the feminist movement towards the law (...) In this case, in order to present a different voice, it is necessary to be aware of gender stereotypes and prejudices. In this regard, it is necessary to recognize that we are, to some extent, embedded in the structures of cultural imperialism and structural injustice (Uygur, 2015, p. 127). The film, which highlights the inequalities created by the patriarchal structure of culture and systemic injustice, encourages the audience to consider the challenges faced by women in modern society. While the trial scenes of the film reveal the flaws and mistakes of the justice system, they also expose the prejudices Sandra faces. Samuel's death undermines the trust between Sandra and her son, Daniel.

While not scholarly in form, mainstream cultural journalism provides critical insight into the societal reception of hyper-masculine music culture. Rap lyrics, like mafia movies, arise from a blend of reality and artistic expression.

Music: According to Cogan (2024), 50 Cent's album *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* sold 872,000 copies within its first four days of release, becoming a cultural symbol of hyper-masculinity, violence, and capitalist ambition—values often critiqued in feminist discourse. His song "P.I.M.P." is known for its lyrics dealing with sexuality, violence, and money. Moreover, the popularity and impact of the song can also be associated with gender roles and the perception of violence in society. Therefore, evaluating the film from a feminist perspective helps us understand how 50 Cent's music shapes societal gender norms and the culture of violence.

Rap lyrics, like mafia movies, arise from a blend of reality and artistic expression. They are also used to deal with violence caused by external factors such as racism and poverty in communities. Experts note that cleaning up song lyrics will not reduce violence without addressing the needs of society (www.usatoday.com, 2023). In light of this information, even though the lyrics are not used, the film will continue with the legal processes, such as Sandra's husband dying, the song accompanying the court, and the death scenes being revived.

If you believe her testimony, one of Sandra's most incomprehensible traits is her ability to fall asleep while listening to a cover of 50 Cent's "P.I.M.P." song at an ear-splitting volume, even as Samuel is dying. When interrogators said she was uncomfortable with the misogynistic lyrics of the song, her lawyer (Saadia Bentaïeb) replied, "It was an instrumental version" (www.nytimes.com, 2024).

Conclusion

This study has examined *Anatomy of a Fall* through the lens of feminist discourse analysis, focusing on how gender roles, motherhood, authorship, and institutional power are represented and contested. The film presents a narrative that diverges from conventional portrayals of femininity by centering on a female protagonist, Sandra, who defies patriarchal expectations and challenges the idealized norms of womanhood. Rather than replicating dominant gender discourses, the film foregrounds a woman's autonomy, contradictions, and intellectual agency, thereby exposing the persistent inequalities women face both in private and public spheres. Sandra's "masculine" traits and her refusal to conform to traditional maternal ideals reflect a broader feminist critique of essentialist gender norms. Furthermore, male characters are presented not as dominant and coherent figures but as emotionally complex and structurally constrained, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how gender roles operate across different axes of power.

By situating Sandra within both familial and legal institutions, the film highlights the systemic gender biases embedded in the justice system and society as a whole. The courtroom scenes, in particular, illustrate how women are scrutinized through moralistic and gendered lenses—where emotional expression, sexual history, or linguistic choice are weaponized against them. Through this framing, the film critiques not only social prejudices but also the structural failures of patriarchal systems of judgment.

This article contributes to feminist film theory and critical discourse analysis by providing an interdisciplinary and methodologically grounded reading of contemporary cinematic work. It demonstrates how feminist discourse analysis can uncover ideological tensions in narrative structure, character development, and visual language—serving as a model for future research at the intersection of gender studies, film criticism, and media theory.

However, as a single-case study focusing on a Western European context, the scope remains culturally and geographically limited. Future studies should consider comparative feminist analyses across different cultural or genre contexts, particularly in underrepresented cinematic traditions. Additionally, integrating psychoanalytic theory, audience reception analysis, and intersectional frameworks could enhance our understanding of how gendered meanings are constructed and contested in film.

This study contributes to academic discourse by providing a focused and applicable example of how feminist discourse analysis can be applied to interrogate visual narratives. It helps bridge a gap between theory and practice, inviting scholars to apply feminist critique to the analysis of character agency, narrative power structures, and institutional critique. For future researchers, this work provides both a theoretical foundation and a flexible methodological framework. It encourages further exploration of cinema as a site where feminist ideas can not only be analyzed but actively reshaped—contributing to more inclusive and transformative modes of storytelling.

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Visual References

- Figure 1. Q with Tom Power. (2023, October 27). *Justine Triet on winning the Palme d'Or with Anatomy of a Fall and the future of French cinema* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkOFTfg5b8Y>
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