

## **Angels Wear White: The Expression of Social Symptoms in Feminist Perspective**

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**Abstract:** *Angels Wear White* starts with a child sexual abuse case, presenting the real social situations of females with different identities as the plot unfolds. Female characters in the film, the heroine, Mia, Wen, and Lily, Wen's mother, Xin, and the allegorical figure of Monroe with rich connotations shed light on women's lowliness and helplessness in patriarchy. This article will analyze this movie from critical feminist theory, revealing the tough situation that women face under discipline, oppression, and the rise of rebel consciousness after being hurt.

**Keywords:** *Angels Wear White; Critical Feminists; Metaphor; Patriarchy; Feminist Consciousness*

### **1. Difficulties Faced by Women under the Oppression of Patriarchy**

*Angels Wear White* mainly tells the story from the perspectives of the teenage victim, Wen, and the bystander Mia. The victim Wen loses her voice under the rapist's power while Mia, an undocumented migrant worker, only wants to keep her job and keep her mouth shut about the facts she saw. In addition, almost all characters are oppressed under the power of the rapist Chairman Liu, from lawyers trying to get the truth for the victims to Wen's parents, Xin, and Xin's parents.

In the movie, Chairman Liu is the godfather of Xin, whose good friend is Wen. Once when Liu took Wen and Xin out, he brought them to a hotel and raped them, which happened to be witnessed by the teenage maid of the hotel Mia, who recorded it by phone as a piece of evidence. When things get out of hand, to avoid getting in trouble, the hotel owner tells Mia and Lily not to mention anything when police and lawyers investigate. Mia is afraid of losing her job, so she doesn't tell the truth. Xin's parents agree to quell this event since the

rapist promised to pay Xin's school fees. Unable to fight back, Wen's mother blames it all on Wen, believing it's her feminine features that led to her tragedy, so she tears all Wen's dress and cuts her long hair, scolding and abusing Wen to release her anger. "She hopes to compensate for her inferiority by making a superior creature out of one whom she regards as her double, and she also tends to inflict upon her the disadvantages from which she has suffered. Sometimes she tries to impose on the child exactly her own fate." [1] In a fit of rage, Wen runs to her father's home. Knowing the truth, Wen's father wants to argue with the rapist, only to be threatened by the superior with the cost of losing his job. He asks: "Where is fairness?", but it won't change anything even under the public authority. As an undocumented migrant worker whose parents do not live here, Mia plans to blackmail the rapist for 10,000 RMB to get herself a fake ID card, only to end up with being retaliated. Even when Mia decides to give the evidence to the lawyer, things don't become better. Lawyers and policemen still shield the rapist. Under the rapist's power, official organizations including the police station, hospital, and media have become perpetrators. The hospital goes from "confirmed sexual assault" to "no sexual assault" after the evidence is handed over to the police. This whole process completely shows the bullying of the patriarchal society on women with Chairman Liu as an example, forcing them to be trapped in the real plight under such power.

The director Vivian Qu (Wen Yan) uses calm and restrained lens language and narrative mode to tell the audience a story of sexual assault. Instead of focusing on the cruel sexual abuse process, it swings the spotlight on the secondary damage to the main character and the victim Wen from society and family. Under the power structure with President Liu as the

main body, surrounded by hospitals, police, and the media, Wen, Wen's parents, Xin, Xin's parents, and Mia are unable to escape from the predicament they find themselves in, and after resisting, they can only accept the reality in silence.

## **2. The Extremely Metaphorical "Monroe Image" Reveals the Fate of Women**

Monroe is an important image, appearing six times in the film, among which five are highly metaphorical. As a symbol of female objectification, Marilyn Monroe herself once publicly talked about the sexual assault in her early days and her famous tragic childhood as a "luggage child". [2] Besides, the image of Monroe is delivered as a giant sculpture with blonde hair, a sexy white short dress, red lips, and white high heels. Marilyn Monroe's sexy body, glossy blonde hair, white skirt blowing up in the air vent, and seductive sexy poses have become the symbols of the patriarchy's "gaze" and "the other" regulated by the patriarchal society. [3]

The movie begins with the red nails of Monroe's statue on the beach, presented by Mia's subjective perspective. Then, Mia uses her phone to take photos of Monroe's private parts, which implies Mia's voyeuristic desires for the female body as a girl whose sexuality is just emerging. Laura Mulvey says in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*: "The cinema offers a number of possible pleasures. One is scopophilia." [3] Mia takes a photo under Monroe's skirt, indicating a peek at women's privacy; this lens gives a hint that under the culture where women are gazed at and regulated for a long time, women have grown the same habits and attitude as men, the snooping to women privacy. Though Mia is a little girl, she gets used to the gaze of women through the imperceptible influence of her surroundings. [4] Such voyeuristic desire is not only derived from Mia's curiosity about the female body in the budding stage of sex awareness as a girl but also from the disciplined culture in the patriarchal society in which women's voyeuristic desire is cultivated to be equal to men. Monroe was sexually abused in her childhood, so the statue implies the start of sexual assault in the movie.

The second show of Monroe's statue comes when Wen runs away from home after being scolded by her mother due to sexual assault.

Monroe's image is presented on the screen through Wen's subjective perspective. First, she sees Monroe's back at night, and Monroe's broad shoulders give Wen a feeling of motherly protection, so she lies beside Monroe's foot to seek some mental comfort.

The third time, Mia finds many illegal advertisements on Monroe's feet. When she gets fired and has nowhere to go without an ID card. At this time, on the press conference, Wen's sexual assault case is covered by other falsified "facts". Covered with advertisements, Monroe implies that female characters in the movie are neglected hurt, and abandoned by society.

Monroe's statue is torn down at the fourth time show-up. As the symbol of "female feature", snooped by both men and women, Monroe is not allowed to exist in public. Just as the statues in Chicago, America and Guangxi, Guangxi province in China, Monroe's statue was removed with an excuse of being destructive to morals. At this point, Wen and Mia both wear white dresses, signifying a favorable turn of their destinies, and corresponding with the movie's English name *Angels Wear White*.

The last show of the statue in the movie is when Mia decides not to be chained by real life and runs away. When she waits for her customer in the room, she hears the rapist case being publicized on the radio. Wearing a white dress, Mia breaks the chains of the electric bicycle, rides it on the broad road, and passes through Monroe's statue. She decides to fight with her fate instead of only succumbing to the oppression of the patriarchal society.

The blonde wig is also an allegorical item, appearing three times in the movie. Wig symbolizes female features and Monroe as well. Wen shows up at the hotel with a blonde wig, which is a display of the girl's beauty-loving image, later, Mia secretly takes the blonde wig, which confirms her fetish for female features. From Monroe's body, and lipstick from Lily to this blonde wig, we can see Mia wants to be a beautiful woman. Lipstick, nail polish, earrings, foundation, and others are the tools women use to please men, also tools for women to rebuild themselves because of others' desires. [4] The last time the wig appears is in Jian's hand, a gang, indicating that women are just the playthings of men, they can play as they want, as is the

case with Lily, who can't fight back but submit.

### **3. The Emergence of the Female Subject's Sense of Resistance**

In *Angels Wear White*, there is a character who always shines the glow of feminism—Haojie, Wen's lawyer. She stands with the victim from the start, putting herself in Wen's shoes, constantly digging for the truth of the matter, and unafraid to fight against the male power force centered on Chairman Liu. Other female characters in the movie, such as Lily, a hotel waitress, after being humiliated by a man says, "I don't want to be a woman again in my next life," She can only swallow her anger and continue to live a hard life; Wen's mother has long been regulated under the male power, receiving all the things life brings to her and having no intention to fight back. When learning that Wen was raped, she is able to do nothing but release all her anger on her daughter, cutting her hair, and trying to remove all female features on her; 12-year-old Wen can't escape the destiny of being manipulated by adults, has no ability to resist but to wait; undocumented migrant worker Mia has no moral standard, only money is her main focus. But after being bullied by male force, only the lawyer gives her a hand. Mia's decision to show the evidence marks the first awareness of subjective consciousness. Before that, Mia has submitted to Jian and may become another Lily. The intertextuality of female characters implies a narrative theory of "L'Image-Temps" by Deleuze. Different fates integrate here, time is concretized and virtualized, and characters are unified as an abstracted female subject. [5] When she hears the event has been publicized, she decides to run away from current situation, this marks her second awareness of subjective consciousness. However, we have no clue of Mia's future.

At the end of the movie, Mia in a white dress is just like a white angel, riding the electronic bicycle ahead in a freewheeling stance, passing the giant Monroe statue. It seems like all things are developing toward a bright future. Monroe has gone, and the evil guy has been brought to justice. Actually, women are officially endowed with rights and protection in some forms, but as the victim under male force, Mia grows more and more lost and has

no choice but to chase Monroe to reconsider her scars in the past, pondering on where the women in the patriarchal society could go, and reflect and explore herself. [6]

### **4. Conclusions**

Director Vivian Qu displays her feminism in this movie, she doesn't portray the injury party as those who commit all sorts of crimes, nor center on the process of the rape. She uses a calm and restraint lens to show various characters in the society, especially the secondary injury caused by male force centered on Chairman Liu to victims Wen and Xin. From the falsification of the hospital to the incapable parents, the 12-year-old victim could do nothing to safeguard her rights. What is left for them to do is accept the reality and bear the trauma from the surrounding world.

This movie is adapted from real events, and there are many details that characterize the real society, for example, after Wen was sexually assaulted, Wen's mother attributed the mistake to Wen's femininity rather than condemning the perpetrator. In real society, women seem to habitually attribute sexual assault or harassment to themselves, because the unique feminine characteristics make men think of committing crimes, and this attribution theory believes that women are the guilty ones, not men. Vivian Qu presents the real situation on the screen in this film, without standing on the moral high ground to criticize the victimizer, it just shows the original appearance of a sexual assault incident, which may not be comparable to commercial films in terms of attraction, but it can lead us to think, and arouse the attention and reflection of all parties in the society.

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