

SIGNIFIER AND SIGNIFIED ANALYSIS OF DON'T WORRY DARLING (2022) MOVIE POSTER

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ABSTRACT

This study analyze the meaning behind the poster for the movie Don't Worry Darling (2022) by using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory, which explains how signs consist of two parts: the signifier (what we see) and the signified (the meaning behind it). The aim of this research is to understand how the poster uses visual signs to share the movie's themes, like control, illusion, and hidden truths. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method and analyzes the poster's elements, such as a falling plane, smoke trail, scenery, text, and a couple with a car. The results show that there are 5 signs in the movie poster and these signs are not random, they are carefully chosen to send deeper messages. In conclusion, the poster uses symbolic elements to reflect the movie's mysterious and disturbing storyline, showing how posters can tell a plot for a movie.

Keywords: Signifier, Signified, Movie Poster.

INTRODUCTION

Semiotics, as introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure, focuses on how signs and symbols convey meaning. According to Saussure (1916), every sign has two parts: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the physical form of the sign, such as a word, image, or sound. For example, the word "apple" is a signifier, it's just letters or sounds. The signified, on the other hand, is the meaning or idea associated with the signifier. So, when we hear the word "apple", we think of the fruit we eat. Saussure argued that the connection between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, meaning there's no natural reason why a particular word or symbol means something specific. For instance, different languages use different words to refer to the same thing, like "dog" in English, "perro" in Spanish, or "anjing" in Indonesian. These connections are learned through culture and language. Eco (1976) expanded on semiotic theory by applying it to a broad range of cultural phenomena. He explored how signs are part of a larger system of communication, whether in literature, advertising, or art. In line with Saussure's theory of signs, film posters function as visual and verbal signifiers, conveying the film's message, tone, and themes to the audience even before they watch the movie.

Movie posters are an important part of promoting films. They are not just for decoration, they work as a mix of art and advertisement. Monaco (2009) explained that every part of a film poster is carefully chosen to create a strong first impression and influence how people feel about the movie. Chandler (2017) said that movie posters are designed carefully using signs and symbols to send messages about the story, the mood, and the main ideas of the movie. This makes movie posters interesting to study, especially when using semiotics, the study of signs and how they create meaning. Fiske (2011) agreed posters use many visual tools to share meaning, like images, colors, fonts, layout, and symbols. All of these things are called signifiers, they are the parts we see, which help us guess what the movie might be about. The pictures or symbols in the poster can give hints about who the characters are or what the movie's setting and genre might be. Because of this, film posters are not just advertisements, but also mini-stories that prepare the audience for the film experience.

One movie that is good to study using semiotics is *Don't Worry Darling*, because its poster and story use clear pictures and messages to show its strange and mysterious themes. *Don't Worry Darling* is a psychological thriller directed by Olivia Wilde, released in U.S. theaters on September 23, 2022. It won several awards, including the Graffetta d'Oro for Best Film at the Venice Film Festival and the Ivor Novello Award for Best Original Film Score. The film is about Alice, a young housewife living with her husband Jack in a seemingly perfect 1950s-style town called Victory. Life appears perfect, but Alice begins to notice strange events and disturbing visions that make her question her reality. As she digs deeper, she discover a truth; Victory is not real. It is a simulated world created using advanced technology, where women are unknowingly trapped while the men, including Jack, willingly participate to maintain control and live out a fantasy of traditional gender roles. Alice must decide whether to escape or stay in the illusion.

In research, analysis means looking closely at the information you've collected to find patterns, meanings, or important points. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) agreed that it helps us understand what the data is really saying. Analysis is not just about describing what we found but it's about making sense of it and explaining what it means in relation to our research question. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), analysis often involves organizing the data, coding it (labeling pieces of information), and then developing themes that help explain the results clearly.

This study analyzes the posters of the film *Don't Worry Darling* (1999) using a qualitative descriptive approach. The goal is to identify and interpret the visual and verbal signs on the posters through the lens of Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory. This film was chosen because its visual elements are widely recognized and leave a strong impression on audiences. The posters aim to communicate the film's identity, storyline, and characters even before viewers watch the movie. Therefore, examining these signs can give a deeper understanding of the meaning and purpose behind the film's promotional materials.

Burty (2013) analyzed the posters of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory and Chandler's theory of connotative meaning. The results showed that the signs on the posters, including symbolic elements like colors and character positioning, effectively represented the battle between good and evil, as well as themes of death and mystery. The use of dark and red color schemes emphasized danger and conflict, while the inclusion of iconic symbols like wands and character expressions added emotional depth. This research highlights how visual and textual elements on movie posters can convey narrative and emotional meaning, which is related to my research on analyzing film posters using a semiotic approach. From the introduction above, the research question can be found:

1. What are the visual elements (signifiers) used in the *Don't Worry Darling* poster, and what meanings (signifieds) do they suggest to the viewer?
2. Why is the relationship between the signifier and signified in the poster considered arbitrary according to Saussure's theory?.

METHOD

This study use a descriptive qualitative method combined with a semiotic approach to analyze the signs found in movie posters. Qualitative methods, as explained by Creswell (2014), are used to explore and understand the meaning that people or groups give to a social or human problem. Instead of testing a theory, qualitative research often builds one based on what is found. The analysis is based on Ferdinand de Saussure's

theory of semiotics, which introduces the concepts of signifier and signified. These concepts are applied to identify and interpret the meanings conveyed by the visual and textual elements in the movie poster.

The data for this research comes from the movie posters of *Don't Worry Darling* (2022), obtained from the Pinterest platform. These posters were chosen not only because *Don't Worry Darling* is an excellent movie, but also because its posters are excellent examples of how strong signs are used to capture the audience's attention and represent the movie's genre effectively. The data collection was conducted through an observation technique. The process of analysis involved several steps: (1) identifying the signifier signs present in poster, (2) interpreting these signs using Saussure's semiotic theory, and (3) documenting the findings to support the research objectives. This systematic approach ensures a thorough examination of the movie posters and their role in attracting and engaging the audience.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the discussion revolves around the signifier and signified signs identified in the *Don't Worry Darling* movie posters. Then, explain the signifier and signified significance of this posters.



Figure 1. Don't Worry Darling Movie Poster

In the *Don't Worry Darling* poster has 4 visual signs and 1 verbal signs. Next, it will be the purpose of Saussure's semiotic theory which is divided into two parts, there the signifier and signified. Saussure proposed that a sign consists of two elements: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the physical form (what is seen), while the signified is the concept or meaning associated with the signifier.



Figure 2. The Falling Plane

The most eye-catching part of the poster is the small plane diving down from the sky or through water, leaving a long trail of bubbles or smoke. As a signifier, it shows motion, speed, and something out of control. The trail behind it is white and cloudy, drawing the eye directly to the plane. This visual is placed at the top, giving it a sense of falling from the sky. The background is blue, which at first glance feels calm, but the falling plane adds a sense of urgency and tension. As a signified, the falling plane might symbolize danger, collapse, or an unexpected truth crashing down. In the film, the moment Alice sees a plane crash marks the beginning of her realization that the world she lives in isn't real. So, the plane can represent her discovery, the break in the illusion. It also contrasts with the calm and controlled environment below, warning the audience that not everything is as perfect as it seems. The plane's fall might reflect Alice's mental and emotional journey as she dives into the hidden reality behind Victory.



Figure 3. A Trail of Smoke From the Falling Plane

The trail of smoke is a long, soft, white line that follows the path of the falling plane. It stretches from the top of the poster all the way down to the center. It contrasts with the deep blue background, which resembles either the sky or water. The shape of the trail is not straight but slightly curved and broken in some places, which gives a sense of chaos, motion, and turbulence. The way it slices through the calm blue space creates a vision as if something violent or dramatic is cutting through serenity.

Symbolically, the smoke trail represents disruption and exposure. It marks the exact line where the illusion of a "perfect" world is being disturbed. In the story of the film, this smoke could be read as a trace of truth breaking through the simulation, a moment when something from the real world leaks into the fake one. It also gives the idea of collapse, like how the seemingly ideal life in Victory is falling apart. The way the smoke lingers suggests that something is being revealed or uncovered, leaving behind a visible path. It may also represent Alice's emotion which is her confusion, her realization, and her slow fall into the truth. The trail becomes a symbolic that something is wrong.



Figure 4. Mountain and Palm Trees

In the lower part of the poster, there are palm trees and set against a backdrop of mountains. As a signifier, the scene looks like paradise, sunny, warm, and peaceful. The mountains create a calm and stable feeling. Everything looks like the American Dream, especially with bright daylight. The signified meaning, however, is more about illusion and control. The mountain reflects the fake world Alice is trapped in, a simulation that looks like the 1950s but hides something wrong underneath. The neatness and order symbolize the controlled, traditional roles forced on women in this town. It's a symbol of the prison she doesn't know she's living in. The palm trees and peaceful mountains make it look like a vacation or dream, but this dream is a carefully built lie.



Figure 5. The Text “Welcome to Victory”

The phrase “welcome to victory” is simple, clean, and centered. It's written in a soft white font that blends into the sky. As a signifier, it gives off a peaceful, friendly, and inviting feeling. The word “Victory” might make viewers think of success, pride, and happiness. This text seems like a welcome sign to a resort or neighborhood, calming and positive. But the signified meaning is much deeper and more ironic. “Victory” is the name of the fictional town in the film where women are unknowingly trapped in a fake reality. So, saying “welcome to victory” actually means “welcome to the lie.” It hints at false promises and the dangers hiding behind a pretty appearance. The calm and elegant design of the text hides a darker meaning about control, manipulation, and a loss of freedom. This irony becomes more powerful once the viewer knows what the film is about.



Figure 6. The Car and the Couple

There's a shiny, classic black car parked in the driveway, and a couple is kissing over the door. The woman is leaning in, wearing a white dress, while the man sits comfortably. As a signifier, this scene shows romance, love, and a picture-perfect relationship. The car is a symbol of success and luxury, and their closeness makes the moment feel happy and passionate. However, the signified meaning points to gender roles and imbalance. The woman is bending toward the man, showing that she is giving affection or service, while he stays seated, looking relaxed and in control. It silently reflects the power dynamic in the story, where women are expected to be happy housewives, while men enjoy control and comfort. The vintage car also ties into the idea

of the past being idealized, which matches the film's theme of forcing outdated gender roles onto modern women. What looks like love here might actually be control in disguise.

The relationship between the signifier and the signified in a movie poster is considered arbitrary in Saussure's semiotic theory because there is no natural or logical reason why a specific image or word must represent a specific meaning, these meanings are created and agreed upon by people within a culture or society (Saussure, 1916). In other words, we understand signs not because they inherently carry a fixed meaning, but because we have learned to interpret them in certain ways based on context, experience, and social understanding. For instance, in the *Don't Worry Darling* movie poster, the image of a falling plane is the signifier, it's just a visual object. But many viewers may understand it as a sign of danger, collapse, or the beginning of a crisis (the signified). This connection isn't automatic or universal. Someone from a different background or who hasn't seen the movie might not make that connection at all. The meaning is created by the audience, based on their shared knowledge of symbols, film conventions, or the story. Another example is the phrase "Welcome to Victory." On the surface, it seems welcoming and positive. But once you know the context of the film, that Victory is a fake world designed to control women, the signified meaning becomes ironic and dark. Again, the phrase (signifier) doesn't naturally mean "a lie" or "a trap"; we only interpret it that way because of our understanding of the story. This shows how the meaning of a sign is shaped by cultural and narrative context, not by any natural link between the word or image and its meaning.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the poster uses strong visual signifiers like a falling plane, a smoke trail, a peaceful landscape with mountains and palm trees, the phrase "Welcome to Victory," and a romantic image of a couple beside a vintage car. These elements at first seem calm, beautiful, and full of love and success, but they actually suggest deeper meanings. For example, the falling plane and smoke trail suggest that something is wrong or falling apart, reflecting the main character's discovery that her world is fake. The peaceful scenery and welcoming text hide the truth about control and illusion. The couple in a loving pose actually represents traditional gender roles where the woman gives while the man relaxes. Together, these signs reflect the themes of illusion, control, and hidden danger in the film. The poster uses these images to warn the viewer that the story is not as perfect as it first appears.

The focuses on why the relationship between the signifier and signified is considered arbitrary in Saussure's theory. According to Saussure (1916), there is no natural or fixed reason why an image or word must carry a certain meaning. Instead, we understand signs based on what we've learned in our culture, language, and experiences. For example, a falling plane doesn't naturally mean "danger" or "truth being revealed." It becomes a sign of crisis because we, as viewers, connect it with disaster through our understanding of film language and real-life associations. Similarly, the phrase "Welcome to Victory" looks positive at first, but once we understand that "Victory" is a fake world in the movie, the phrase becomes ironic and dark. This shows that meanings are not built into the signs themselves, they are created by people, depending on context. The poster of *Don't Worry Darling* is a perfect example of how visual signs get their meaning not from the image alone, but from how we interpret them through shared cultural knowledge and narrative context.

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