

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance) is a unique and incredible film which won four Academy Awards for Best Director, Best Original Screenplay, Best Cinematography and most importantly Best Motion Picture of the Year in 2014. It also received more than 200 other nominations and featured on over 168 Top Ten Lists (BWW). *Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)* was made to look like it was unusually shot in one continuous sequence almost for the whole film. This film not only has an extraordinary storytelling, but also gives a remarkable breakthrough in editing process.

Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance) was directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu who is one of the most well-known Mexican directors in film industry. He has made six feature films so far in his career. Each of his films earns many awards and nominations. In 2007, he became the first Mexican director to be nominated for the Academy Award in Best Director category for his film *Babel*. Later on, he won the Academy Awards in the same

category for two of his films which are *Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)* (2014) and *The Revenant* (2015). He is also the first Mexican director to be nominated for Directors Guild of America Award for Outstanding Directing (“Alejandro G. Inarritu”).

Iñárritu along with two other Mexican filmmakers have been known as The Three Amigos. They are considered as the pioneers of introducing the New Mexican Cinema to Hollywood. “They stood out by bringing new ideas to the silver screen . . . adds a new flavor to the American movie potpourri . . . They also push the limits of technology, the limits of photography, and the limits of storytelling” (Grillo and Hecht). Looking at his achievements in filmmaking and contributions to the world of cinema, it shows that Iñárritu’s works are exceptional. His films are not only for entertainment but also interesting to be analyzed more deeply.

Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance) has its own uniqueness which makes it stand out more than Iñárritu’s other films. It was a big leap in Iñárritu’s career as he made a left-turn into comedy (Papish). Although this film is unlike his other films which have more serious tone, this film still brings an interesting and powerful story. The story deals with the struggle of finding one’s meaning of life. Iñárritu stated that this film is not only made to entertain the masses, but also a tool of personal expression (Papish).

The story in *Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)* focuses on the struggle of the protagonist to have a meaningful life. Riggan Thomson, the protagonist in the film, has to deal with a lot of difficulties in order to achieve the meaningful life that he wants. In most of the scenes, the film shows the

protagonist who tries to convince people that making a Broadway play is the right decision, but people around him seem to have different ideas and convince him to do the opposite. As a result, many conflicts happen throughout the film.

The protagonist faces an inner conflict and also social conflicts between him and other characters (his daughter, Sam; an actor in his play, Mike Shiner; and a theater critic, Tabitha). The definition of conflict is “the struggle which grows out of the interplay of opposing forces (ideas, interest, wills) in a plot. There are three types of conflicts: physical conflict, social conflict, and inner conflict. Physical conflict is a struggle between man and the physical world. Social conflict is between man and man, and inner conflict is between desires within a person” (Shaw).

Two types of conflicts are apparent in *Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)*. It is obvious that the most suitable aspect to be analyzed in this film is the conflict. It is also supported by a statement from a film critic from plotandtheme.com that states, “At its core, *Birdman* is a story about inner conflict and artistic expression. The true strength of *Birdman* lay in its exploration of self-doubt, inner conflict, and need of appreciation” (Jacobs).

Yet, in discussing the conflicts, the causes of conflicts cannot be explained by only analyzing the story and the visual elements of the film. The reason is because the film carries a strong philosophical aspect. Thus, an extrinsic approach is required. As it relates to philosophical issue, an existentialism theory by a French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre is chosen as an instrument to analyze the conflicts.

Statement of the Problems

The problems that are going to be discussed in the analysis are:

1. What kind of conflict happens in the film?
2. What is the cause of the conflict?
3. What is the resolution to the conflict?
4. How does the film visually show the conflict?
5. How does the existentialism theory help in understanding the conflicts?

Purpose of the Study

The purposes of the analysis are:

1. To show what kind of conflict happens in the film.
2. To show the cause of the conflict.
3. To show whether the conflicts is solved or unsolved.
4. To show how the film visually shows the conflict.
5. To show how the existentialism theory help in understanding the conflicts.

Method of Research

The method used in writing this thesis is library research. First, I watched the *Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)* film for several times. Second, I collected some supporting data from the Internet and other references which include the existentialism theory by Jean-Paul Sartre. Third, I performed the film analysis based on the theory and data that I collected. Lastly, I wrote the analysis of the film.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis consists of four chapters. The first chapter contains Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, Method of Research and Organization of the Thesis. The second chapter contains the Theoretical Framework which contains the existentialism theory by Jean-Paul Sartre. The third chapter contains the analysis of the protagonist's conflicts in Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)* using Jean-Paul Sartre's theory of Existentialism. The fourth chapter contains the conclusion of the analysis from the previous chapter. This thesis ends with Bibliography, which contains the list of sources that are used in the analysis; and Appendices, which consist of Summary of the Film and Biography of the Director.

