

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

At present one of the most favoured pastimes is watching films or motion pictures. This is reflected in how the film industry has developed rapidly within the last century, which can be clearly seen in Hollywood's success. In addition, nowadays cinemas can be found easily around the world and are often crowded. Motion pictures first appeared when films had been used as a form of art instead of a recording device to replicate reality (Hewak, 1991, p. 2). In order for a film to be considered an art, it has to feel unlike reality; it has to "manipulate reality" (Hewak, 1991, p. 3).

In addition, Bordwell and Thompson (2008) state that motion pictures have become one of the most popular forms of entertainment because they are "designed" to affect the audience (p. 2). In other words, films give the audience an experience they will probably not get in other media. Some audience also views films as a media to learn life lessons (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008, p. 62). To conclude, a film is not only a form of entertainment but it can also be the media to

convey certain messages. To understand these messages, the theory of semiotics can be applied.

According to Hewak (1991), semiotics is the study of signs (p. 8). This includes visual signs which can be found in films. Motion pictures, as the name suggests, consist of a series of moving images. Therefore, films naturally contain many visual signs. Among the many theories of semiotics, Wollen (as cited in Hewak, 1991, p. 63) considers Peirce's theory fundamental in a semiotic study of films. Wollen (as cited in Hewak, 1991, pp. 63-64) further explains that Peirce's three types of signs (icons, indexes, and symbols) are more effective in dealing with visual or natural signs; more importantly, the three types of signs are not exclusive and can overlap or co-present. The difference between icons, indexes, and symbols lie on the relationship between the sign's form and what it signifies. An icon's form bears resemblance or similarity to what it signifies, an index's form has a direct or causal connection with what it signifies, and finally a symbol's form has an abstract connection with what it signifies and the meaning has to be learned (Cobley, 2001, p. 31).

Darren Aronofsky's *mother!*, released in 2017, has gained my interest because it has an intriguing plot. The plot focuses on the female protagonist who is credited in the film as "mother". In this thesis she will be referred to as the Mother. The Mother has to suffer as a result of her husband's decision of continuously allowing strangers to fill the house, which causes inconvenience for her. The intriguing part of the movie is when the house is crowded with too many people, becoming chaotic and unrecognisable. Moreover, a lot of the scenes in the film remind me of some Biblical events. In the film credits, the husband is also

referred to as “Him”. Normally, “Him” is only used to refer to God; as a result, in my opinion, Aronofsky intends to make the husband signify God. The scenes resembling the Biblical events may also carry signs of Biblical allegories. Considering the film is heavily imbued with symbolism, I choose it so as to discover more about the signs.

In an interview about the film, Aronofsky says that he has a lot of rage and anger in regards to the condition of this planet and what happens on it, and he wants to channel it into one emotion (Vivarelli, 2017). This statement has led me to think that Aronofsky intends to convey anthropocentrism through *mother!*. In simple terms, anthropocentrism talks about mankind’s attitude towards nature, in which nature is only valued as long as it is beneficial (Barry, 2007, p. 37). Many believe that anthropocentrism is originated from the Book of Genesis, in which God gives mankind more rights or privileges over nature (Barry, 2007, p. 37). This goes in line with the fact that Aronofsky uses Biblical allegories in *mother!*.

In using Peirce’s theory of semiotics to analyse, I would like to prove that the signs found in several screenshots of *mother!* show the concept of anthropocentrism and Biblical allegories. Additionally, the analysis will also prove that films, besides being an enjoyable story to follow, may also convey a deeper meaning. The results of the analysis hopefully will broaden the readers’ minds and also raise the readers’ awareness of nature as well as the concept of anthropocentrism. I also hope that this study can be useful for further studies.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This thesis is written to answer the following problems:

1. What are the signs (icons, indexes, and symbols) and the meanings behind them in the film?
2. How are the meanings of the signs related to the Biblical allegories and anthropocentrism?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this thesis are as follows:

1. to identify the signs (icons, indexes, and symbols) in the film and find out their meanings.
2. to show how the meanings of the signs are related to the Biblical allegories and anthropocentrism.

1.4 Organisation of the Thesis

The thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter One is Introduction, which is divided into four parts: Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, and Organisation of the Thesis. Chapter Two is Literature Review, which is concerned with the theories used as well as a previous study to compare with my own thesis. Chapter Three is Methods of Research. Chapter Four is the analysis of the film. Chapter Five is Conclusion. Finally, there are References and Appendices at the end of the thesis.