THE SYMBOLISM OF SACRIFICIAL RITUAL IN DREW GODDARD’S FILM

THE CABIN IN THE WOODS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis entitled The Symbolism of Sacrificial Ritual in Drew Goddard’s Film The Cabin in the Woods is aimed at finding symbolism of sacrificial ritual through plot, conflict and semiotic aspect. In conducting the research, descriptive qualitative method used to find semiotic aspect of the sacrificial ritual. Two approaches are applied to analyze the data, they are structural approach and semiotic approach. Structural approach is used to analyze structural elements such as plot, general description of the main character, conflict experiences by the main character, and setting described in the story of the film. Then the semiotic approach is used to describe the symbolism that consist of icon, index and symbol to gain the main topic of this film which is a sacrificial ritual. The result of research shows that the main character of Drew Goddard's film The Cabin in The Woods is Dana Polk. She is described as smart, curious, honest and brave. She also experiences both internal and external conflict. Setting in this film is divided into setting of place and setting of time. Icon in this film are old diary book and mini camera. While the index are Mordecai words, Dana pronounce Latin words, the whore's death, the gas, the fool's death, failure, the athletics’ death and the scholar’s death. Then the last symbol in this film are bird and invincible wall, the cabin, the painting of lambs being slaughter, zombie, blood fingerprint, red telephone, altar (pentagram) and a gigantic hand. Finally, the symbolism of sacrificial ritual is the result of the correlation between those analysis, whether structural and semiotic approach. Keywords: semiotic, symbolism, sacrificial ritual.

INTRODUCTION

According to Klaler (2004:57) films and particularly video tapes, are like novels, which in theory can be repeatedly read, or viewed. Based on the oxford dictionary, Film is a story or event recorded by a camera as a set of moving images and shown in a cinema or on television. Literature shares with film to produce the aspects and structures of narrative. The narrative structures on the film is the series of images that tells a story. So, film as part of literary work can be inspired from the social situation, politic, documentary, human life, historical event and culture. The Film “The Cabin in the Woods” is American horror film directed by Drew Goddard is released in April 13, 2012. The screenplay is written by Joss Whedon and Drew Goddard. The actors are Kristen Connolly, Chris Hemsworth, Anna Hutchison, Franz Kranz, Jesse Williams, Richard Jenkins, Bradley Whitford and Sigourney Weaver. According to www.imdb.com this film won 18 awards and 33 nominations such as: Best Horror/Thriller Film in Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, USA 2012 and nominate as Best Writing by Drew Goddard and Joss Whedon. Since the film released, many viewers
admit that this film was controversy. This film became cult for the people who are interested in implicit message and symbolism.

This film tells about Dana Polk and four friends who plan to holiday in the cabin. Unfortunately, the cabin remotes by the unnamed organization who has a plan to hold sacrificial ritual in order to protect the world from destruction of the ancient Gods. The sacrificial ritual has been remote by the unnamed organization, it requires the death of five specific archetype such as: the whore, the athlete, the fool, the scholar and the virgin. Despite the purpose of sacrificial ritual is to protect the world, but the way and the creatures that “offered” to Gods is totally wrong. The sacrificial ritual in the film leads to satanic activity which is out of the path. In the film, the victims decided themself how to be killed. They were guide by the unnamed organization to choose items in the cellar of cabin such as: the old dairy book, weedong dress, puzzle sphere, music box, necklace, old movie reel and et cetera. Curiously, Dana Polk as the main character pronounce the Latin words on the old dairy book that leads to their death.

This thesis discusses about a symbolism of the sacrificial ritual in the movie. The sacrificial ritual itself grow in the every culture and society in human being. Based on Theophrastus the Greek philosopher, the sacrificial ritual is the compensation to the Gods for three reasons: to honor them, to thank them, or to request a favor from them. Sheep, goats, pigs, and cattle, as well as fish and birds, were offered to the gods. In addition, the Islamic Festival of the Sacrifice or in Arabic term is “Eid al-Adha”. The Eid al-Adha is a sacred and important ceremony because to memorialize Abraham’s trials, by slaughtering an animal such as a sheep, camel, or goat. The symbolism is the attitude of a willingness to make sacrifices in our lives in order to stay on the straight path. So, the sacrifice of an animal was carried out according to strict guidelines. As explanation above, the sacrificial ritual must be hold properly with the right steps and the right animals.

Drew Goddard's film The Cabin in the Woods gives the viewers an example that relates to the object of study about the sacrificial ritual. In this film, the sacrificial ritual goes wrongly. The creatures that offered to Gods is totally wrong and the ceremony it must be sacred. There is also a secret organization who holds the sacrificial ritual secretly in the real life named Illuminati. The purpose of holding sacrificial ritual is to gain a black magic. The black magic is a strength where the followers must praise Satan, Devil or another creatures as their Gods. Kevork Djansezian on The Week article argued the original Illuminati group was founded in Bavaria in the 18th century by Adam Weishaupt, an anti-clerical professor. The Illuminati was stamped out by a government crackdown on secret societies in the late 1780s, but rumors that it continued to survive as an underground organization have persisted into the modern day. One of Illuminati branch is Flat Earth Society. “The Flat Earth Conspiracy Theory” is the latest rage in the conspiracy research community, the ultimate insult to our intelligence. One of specific purposes of illuminati is “New World Order”. Kevork Djansezian on The Week article continued, “New World Order” is in post-war America, right-wing agitators claimed clandestine groups were planning a communist world government but the idea of a powerful modern Illuminati conspiring to rule the world. Meanwhile, in this film the organization that held the sacrificial ritual has purposes to prevent and protect the earth from destruction which is caused by the rage of the ancient gods, if the gods aren’t feed and nourish. However, the victims quite same with the Illuminati because they make conspiracy, despite the unnamed organizations’ fault used them as the “animals” to be sacrificed and feed.
Since film The Cabin in The Woods visualizing series of images and containing film code, such as: camera movement, script dialogue, properties, and story event in the film dealing with sings, the researcher analyzed using Semiotic approach. According to pierce in Floyd Merrell (2005:31), a sign may be simple or complex. Pierce develops a typology of signs which is called three trichotomies. There are iconic, indexical, and symbolic. Iconic means the sign which resembles what it stands for. Indexical means the sign which associates with what it is a sign of. Meanwhile, symbolic means the sign which is conventionally link with its referent.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher decides to discuss the symbolism of sacrificial ritual that goes wrongly, because the researcher wants to explain scientifically that sacrificial ritual can’t be hold arbitrarily and it must be sacred. Finally the researcher chooses The Cabin in the Woods by Drew Goddard film under the theme “the symbolism of sacrificial ritual”, entitled The Symbolism of Sacrificial Ritual in Drew Goddard’s Film The Cabin in the Woods.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

**Research Design**

The researcher used descriptive qualitative method, the method is done descriptively. It means that explanation in the form of words or picture if needed, and not numeral form. (Endraswara 2003:7)

In addition, it means that the researcher analyzed the plot, general description, setting, icon, index and symbol by using explanation in the form of words and pictures.

**Unit of Analysis**

1. **Intrinsic Element**
   - Intrinsic element consist of plot, the general descriptions of the main character, conflicts experienced by the main character, and setting described in the film.

2. **Extrinsic Element**
   - Extrinsic element is the application of semiotic approach through the film which is contain of semiotic aspect such as icon, index and symbol and resulting the main topic which is the symbolism of sacrificial ritual.

**Source of Data**

The researcher uses Drew Goddard's “The Cabin in the Woods” film as the primary source of data. The Film “The Cabin in the Woods” is American horror film directed by Drew Goddard released on April 13, 2012. The screenplay is written by Joss Whedon and Drew Goddard. The actors are Kristen Connolly, Chris Hemsworth, Anna Hutchison, Franz Kranz, Jesse Williams, Richard Jenkins, Bradley Whiford and Sigourney Weaver. According to www.imdb.com this film won 18 awards and 33 nominations such as: Best Horror/Thriller Film in Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, USA 2012 and nominate as Best Writing by Drew Goddard and Joss Whedon. The film is used as the data for collecting the cinematic code which can be used for semiotic film analysis. This film can be downloaded in the site http://www.indoshares.com/14tO (need to login). For the secondary data, the researcher also uses other references that related to the sacrificial ritual ceremony and theory of semiotic, especially film semiotic. In addition, as the supported data, the researcher uses other articles and journals taken from internet.
Technique of Data Collection

1. Watching film and sort the data dealing with the object of analysis.
2. Classifying appendices consisting of quotation, classification, context, figure and duration.
3. Searching the references from library and internet.
4. Presenting the data on the analysis/discussion.

According to Semi (1988:35), structural approach is the basic assumption that literary work as a creative work has full autonomy, which has to be seen as a figure, which part from the outside of intrinsic element. Intrinsic element is the outside elements of literary work and gives influence for the literary work itself. The researcher used the structural approach to analyze the structural elements for narrative schemes/Plot, the general descriptions of the main character, internal and external conflicts experienced by the main character, setting of time, places and social used in this film.

Technique of data analysis related to structural approach is described as follows:

1. Describing the plot to get the information about plot of the film.
2. Describing the main character according to the frequencies of the appearance in the film.
3. Analyzing the general descriptions of the main character based on the story in the film.
4. Analyzing internal and external conflicts experienced by the main character based on the story in the film.
5. Analyzing setting of time and places used in the film.

In this thesis the researcher used semiotic approach to analyze the symbolism of sacrificial ritual, used the general descriptions of the main character and setting of place in the film.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

The Symbolism of Sacrificial Ritual in Drew Goddard’s Film The Cabin in the Woods

Peter Wollen (1969) states in Signs and Meaning in the Cinema that cinema deploys all the three categories of sign: icon (through resembling images and sound); index (through the photo-chemical registering of the "real"); and symbol (in the deployment of speech and writing). It can be inferred that Peter Wollen used Piercean trichotomy as which is the second or the relation with the object.

In this part, the researcher explains how the symbolism of sacrificial ritual are described. The symbolism in this film analyses by semiotic aspects such as; icon, index and symbol that associated with the sacrificial ritual itself.

Icon Described in Drew Goddard’s Film The Cabin in the Woods

1. Old diary book

The old diary book become iconic in this film because this old diary book leads to activity of the sacrificial ritual. The sacrificial ritual is set by the unnamed organization. They guide the victims to pick one of the item in the cellar. In the cellar Jules, Marty, Holden and Curt are busy overlook the cellar which has a lot of item. Meanwhile Dana finds the old diary book. The camera shoot is toward Dana, which means that something important in this scenery will happen. Afterward she reads it and Marty tells her to stop, because something bad will happen. However she didn’t do that. The following figure supports the analysis of the above, it is described as follow:
2. Mini camera

According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, Camera is a device that consists of a lightproof chamber with an aperture fitted with a lens and a shutter through which the image of an object is projected onto a surface for recording (as on film) or for translation into electrical impulses (as for television broadcast). The mini camera become iconic in this film because it is implied that the victims were being observed by the unnamed organization. Marty is the person who finds the mini camera which can be seen from figure 4.5.1.2. The camera movement of the film is shooting from the mini camera which can be inferred as a blunder of the unnamed organization this is one factor which shows the failure of the sacrificial ritual.

The following figure supports the analysis of the above, it is described below:

![Figure 4.5.1.2 – Marty finds Mini Camera](image)

**Index Described in Drew Goddard’s Film The Cabin in the Woods**

1. Mordecai words

Words can mean anything, it can be literal or metaphor depends on the occasion. Before Dana and four friends reach in the cabin, they stop at an old station gas to fill in. Curt overlooked the station but seems no one lived in there. Suddenly, an old and mysterious man showed up. The man’s name is Mordecai. He is described as a person who is unfriendly, arrogant and he is not cooperative too. Meanwhile Holden is still filling the gas, Mordecai comes up and insult Jules. Mordecai warned them by saying “You got enough to get you there. Getting back……” What Mordecai said about can be included into index, since the words in the sentence contain or indicated something danger will happened. The situation was also was also shown by the camera movement which is framing the Mordecai’s words.

The following figure and dialogue support the analysis of the above, it is described below:
Curt: What'd you say?
Holden: I think we got enough gas.
Mordecai: You got enough to get you there.
Getting back...
That's your concern.
(Figure 4.5.2.1, The Cabin in The Woods: 11:39’ - 11:51’)

2. Dana’s Latin Words Pronunciation

Latin words typically relate to something magic and sacred. It means when you pronounce the Latin words, it is equally you cast the spell out. Dana’s Latin words pronunciation is the result from correlation between the icon of 'old diary book' and the general description of the main character 'curious' so Dana's Latin words pronunciation becomes the index of this film. Dana who described as curious character finds the old diary book. The camera shoot is toward Dana, which means that something important in this scenery will happen. Then she reads it and pronounce Latin words. Afterward, the camera movement are faded into black which indicate something will happen in the next scene.

The following figure and dialogue support the analysis of the above, it is described below:

Dana: "April fourth. Father was cross with me and said I lacked the true faith. I wish I could prove my devotion...as Judah and Matthew proved on those travelers."
Marty: Jesus. Can we not?
Curt: No. Go on. Marty: Why?
Curt: I want to know.
Dana: "I have found it... in the oldest books, the way of saving our family. My good arm is hacked up... and et, so I hope this will be readable. That a believer will come and speak this to our spirits. Then we will be restored and the great pain will return." And then there's something in Latin.
Marty: Okay, I'm drawing a line in the f*cking sand, here. Do not read the Latin.
Dana: Dolor...
Marty: No...No...
Dana: It doesn't mean anything
Dana: "Dolor supervivo caro. Dolor sublimis caro. Dolor ignio annivos."
(Figure 4.5.2.2C, The Cabin in The Woods: 30:44' - 32:34')

3. The Gas

The gas become index in this film. After the whore's death they all panics. So firstly, Curt suggest to stay together and locked up in one room. But, when the gas engaged Curt changes his mind he says the reversion. The camera movement also shoot the gas comes out from the small ventilation. So this scene proves that the victim are being manipulated by the unnamed organization. Which is lead to the death of every victim.

The following figure supports the analysis of the above, it is described below:

Figure 4.5.2.4 – The Gas

Symbol Described in Drew Goddard’s Film The Cabin in the Woods

1. The Cabin (The Curt cousin’s Cabin)
   According to Cambridge dictionary, Cabin is a small, simple house made of wood. The cabin is symbolize the place where the sacrificial ritual are held. The symbol of the cabin is the key for the sacrificial ritual despite the victims. Which means there will be no sacrificial ritual if the cabin doesn't exist. The cabin also become one of the setting of place where the unnamed organization execute and terrorize the victim from the control room. The camera movement also shoot the cabin from the bottom and frame it at the center of the scene. The cabin also become the title of the film, it can be derive that the cabin is one of the important aspect in the film.
   The following figure supports the analysis of the above, it is described below:
2. The Painting of Lambs being Slaughter
   The painting of lambs being slaughter is one of the symbolism of the sacrificial ritual. In the painting pictures that all the lambs are being slaughtered by a group of people. The painting is in the Holden's room. Holden has a role as the scholar, which means the person who smart. The painting can be represent as a warning for them or the next thing that will be happen to them. Or it can be inferred that the lambs are the victims and the people are the unnamed organization. The camera movement also shows the detail of the painting. Which means the painting can be a warn sign message. The following figure supports the analysis of the above, it is described below:

   Figure 4.5.3.2 – The Cabin

3. Zombie
   The zombie become symbolic because this creature represent of death. Because this creature are the walking dead or the corpse which literary death. The zombie rises because there is relation between icon and index, firstly Dana finds the old diary book which the icon of the story, then she read it until there is a paragraph which contains the Latin words and she also reads the Latin words which is the index of the story, after that the zombie rises from beneath the ground. The zombie also represent one of the tool of the sacrificial ritual. Mostly all the victims are death by zombie. The following figures support the analysis of the above, it is described below:

   Figure 4.5.3.3 – The Painting of lambs being slaughter
4. Altar (Pentagram)

According to Online Merriam Webster Dictionary, Altar is a usually raised structure or place on which sacrifices are offered or incense is burned in worship - often used figuratively to describe a thing given great or undue precedence or value especially at the cost of something else. In this film Altar is the symbolism of the five specific archetype such as; the whore, the fool, the athletic, the scholar and the virgin. The altar can be referred as the pentagram. The pentagram for some other culture is represent the Satanism activity. The camera shot the altar from the top it can be inferred that the altar (pentagram) is the place where the sacrificial ritual are performed. The altar is the place where the ancient gods are feed and nourish from the victim's blood.

The following figure and dialogue support the analysis of the above, it is described below:

5. A gigantic hand

The last symbolism is the gigantic hand rises from beneath the earth. Which means that the effort of the unnamed organization to hold sacrificial ritual is failed. Because the gigantic hand represent the ancient gods that lived beneath earth. It can be
inferred that the world is changed and collapse. The camera is also framing the hand in the center and faded black.

The following figure supports the analysis of the above, it is described below:

![Figure 4.5.3.8 – A Gigantic Hand](image)

The following icon, index and symbol which is based on the sacrificial ritual, are relate to the topic of research "the symbolism of sacrificial ritual described in Drew Goddard's film The cabin in The Woods". There are two icons in the film, old diary book and mini camera. The old diary book holds important role for the sacrificial ritual. In the film, Dana reads the old ancient book and it leads to the (index) Dana’s Latin words pronunciation with the result the rises of the zombie, and it becomes a symbol. The mini camera, in this film directly become the clue that the sacrificial ritual has been set by the unnamed organization.

There are eight indexes in this film which hold the key of the main topic. Mordecai words, Dana’s Latin words pronunciation, The whore’s death (Jules), The gas, The fool’s death (Marty), Failure, The athletics” death (Curt) and the scholar’s death. The Mordecai words index are relate to the words "getting back... that’s your concern" that word are truly apply in this film. The five victims can’t get back from the cabin. Dana’s Latin words pronunciation (index) is the correlation between the old diary book (icon) and zombie (symbol) it caused chain reaction. The systematic of that, when Dana hold the old diary book, she pronounce the Latin words with the result the rises of the zombie. It brings to the sacrificial ritual. The whore’s death (index) is also caused by the zombie. Then the gas (index) results irrational thinking to Curt. The fool’s death (index) is relate to the failures of the sacrificial ritual. The fool’s actually doesn’t death. It can be proof from the ground shaking while the fool’s death. Actually the blood that flown into the fool’s altar is zombie. Failure (index) is clarity of the film about the failures of the sacrificial ritual. The athletics' death which is the index of the film correlates with the bird and invincible wall (symbol). Then, the scholar’s death which is the index of the film correlates with the symbol’s blood fingerprint.

There are eight symbols in this film. Bird and invincible walls relates to the death of athletic. The cabin symbolize the place where the sacrificial ritual has been held. The painting of lambs being slaughter are the symbolism of all the death in the film, some of them are death by zombie’s slaughtered. Zombie is the symbolism key of the film. It refers to the death, and death relate with blood. Blood fingerprint is the symbol death of the scholar. Red Telephone is the symbolism where the sacrificial ritual has chance to failure. Altar is the symbolism of five specific archetype in this film. And the last symbol is a gigantic hand which symbolize as the sacrificial ritual are totally failed and the world will destroy.
The explanation above about the correlation between icon, index and symbol in this film relate to each other as the representation of the symbolism of the sacrificial ritual. In addition, the correlation between icon, index and symbol from this film can be describe through this analogy. The sacrificial ritual also happens in real life (the Islamic festival of the sacrifice or known as “Eid – Al Adha”) as mentioned in background of study. The Eid – Al Adha is the process of sacrifice animal (goat, camel or cow) and the purpose of the Eid – Al Adha to memorialize Abraham’s trials. In this film, the sacrificial ritual that held by the unnamed organization has purpose to prevent the rage of ancient gods that caused the destruction of earth. So, the icon from the film, there is old diary book which can be described in the real life as the slaughter. Then index from the film, Dana’s Latin words pronunciation, meanwhile in the real life the slaughter will pray before he kill the animal. Next, the symbol from the film is the zombie. In the real life zombie can be described as the knife or the tool for kill the animal. The last are Dana and four friends can be described in the real life as the animals who were killed and offered to the god.

CONCLUSION
Based on the discussion from Chapter 4 before, the researcher concludes as follows:

The plot of Drew Goddard’s film The Cabin in The Woods consist of exposition, the exposition starts when in the middle of nowhere there is an office that operates and doing something secretly. Meanwhile, Dana Polk and four friends are going to holiday on the Curt’s cousin cabin. The rising action of the film begins from the secret facility of the nameless organization. They have a technological control in the cabin area which are operated by Siterson and Hardley in order to manipulate Dana and four friends. The climax of the film begins when the rising of the zombies. The zombies begin to kill Dana’s friend. First is the whore as Jules died by a group of zombie, then the fool as Marty. But, Marty doesn’t died yet. Then, the athletic as Curt died by hitting the invincible wall. Next, the death of the scholar as Holden, he died because zombie slashed his neck. The last is the virgin as Dana, she is alive and try to escape from the nightmare. The falling action in Drew Goddard’s film The Cabin in The Woods when Dana and Marty discover the secret facility of the unnamed organization and found the Altar and met the director. Finally the resolution of this film ends when Dana point gun at Marty. She means to kill Marty, but she didn't and they watch the ancient gods rise from beneath of the earth.

The general descriptions of Dana Polk as the main character in Drew Goddard’s film The Cabin in The woods are Smart, Curious, Honest and Brave. She is described as smart character because she wants to bring a soviet economic structure. After Curt’s death, she realized that they are being ‘puppeteers’ by the unnamed organization to be sacrificed. Dana Polk also described as curious character. Firstly, she walks alone to the cabin by herself. After that, she finds a book in the cellar then she reads curiously. Dana described as honest character because she wanted truth all along while Dana and friends played truth or dare. The last, Dana Polk described as brave character because it synchronizes with the general description curious. Sometimes people with the high rate of curiosity it brings the brawness itself like Dana does. She explores the cabin by herself and figure everything inside. After that, she stabs zombie with the knife to save Holden.

The conflicts experienced by Dana Polk as the main character in The Cabin in The Woods film by Drew Goddard are internal conflict and external conflicts. The internal conflict is Dana Polk against herself. The external conflicts are Dana against zombie, Dana against troopers and ancient creatures, and the last Dana against Marty.
The setting described in Drew Goddard's film *The Cabin in The Woods* are setting of place and setting of time. The setting of place are Dana’s apartment and the secret facility, Operation room, and The Curt's cousin cabin. The setting of time are in the morning, and at the night.

This film contains semiotic things such as icons, indexes, and symbols. The icons found in this research are Old diary book and Mini camera. The Indexes found in this research are Mordecai words, Dana pronounce Latin words, The whore’s death, The gas, The fool’s death, Failure, The athletics’ death, and The scholar’s death. The symbols found in this research are Bird and Invincible wall, The Cabin, The painting of lambs being slaughter, Zombie, Blood fingerprint, Red Telephone, Altar (Pentagram) and a gigantic hand. From all the icons, indexes and symbols above, it correlate and synchronizes each other to the main topic of the discussion sacrificial ritual. Here an example of correlation of icon, index and symbol. Firstly old diary book has found by Dana. Then, Dana reads the book it leads to the index (Dana pronounce Latin words). Afterward, the zombies rise from beneath of the earth (symbol) and it caused the death of five specific archetypes; the whore, the fool, the athletic, the scholar, and the virgin. Then it concludes to the sacrificial ritual.

**SUGGESTION**

Hopefully, this thesis is useful for the readers who need references. The researcher uses structural approach to analyze plot, Dana Polk as the main character, conflict and setting experienced by Dana Polk. Meanwhile, the researcher used semiotic approach to analyze the icons, indexes, and symbols that result to sacrificial ritual. Related with the thesis, for the next researcher may analyzes Drew Goddard’s film *The Cabin in The Woods* by another kinds of Semiotic approach or Sociology approach that can be found in Drew Goddard’s film *The Cabin in The Woods*.

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