

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background of the Study

Literature is a form of artistic expression that reflects life and human experiences through words. In literary works, authors capture various aspects of life from emotions to social conflicts through characters, plot, and setting. Literature serves not only as entertainment but also as a mirror that reflects reality. Through writing, readers are invited to contemplate the deeper meanings behind each element, making literature a rich medium for understanding the complexities of human experience. As an artistic and imaginative expression, literature provides a profound understanding of human life and society. To effectively analyze or study literary works, one must have a deep understanding of the themes or subjects involved, with symbolism being one useful technique for this purpose (Khasan, 2024).

Similarly, film has long been a powerful medium for storytelling, capable of conveying complex themes and emotions through visual and auditory elements. As a form of art that combines visual and audio components, film uses moving images, sound, and sometimes words to tell a story that can profoundly affect the thoughts and emotions of the audience (Naufalia, 2019). Film is a powerful medium for conveying messages to the audience, where various elements such as story, characters, setting, and visual symbols work together to create deeper meanings (Elvina Juniatri, Sururuddin, & Mila Wahyuni, 2022). Each of these elements is interconnected in shaping a particular interpretation of a work.

Film serves as a medium of visual communication that effectively delivers messages through the use of imagery, dialogue, audio, and symbolic representations. *A Little Princess*, a film adaptation of Frances Hodgson Burnett's renowned novel, exemplifies a work abundant in symbolism. The narrative follows Sara Crewe, a young girl who endures hardship and clings to hope, while the film incorporates various symbolic motifs—including dolls, dreams, windows, and enclosed spaces—that convey profound underlying significance.

The movie *A Little Princess* premiered in the United States on May 10, 1995. It was directed by Alfonso Cuarón, a filmmaker from Mexico who is recognized for his artistic visual storytelling and emotionally resonant narratives. The screenplay was crafted by Richard LaGravenese alongside Elizabeth Chandler, adapting the story from the original novel *A Little Princess* written by Frances Hodgson Burnett. LaGravenese, who is also known for writing scripts such as *The Fisher King* and *P.S. I Love You*, played a pivotal role in shaping the screenplay. His contribution helped to portray the central character's imagination and emotional resilience through a script that is both poetic and deeply moving.

*A Little Princess* (1995) follows the story of Sara Crewe, a young girl whose life is dramatically altered after the death of her father. Once wealthy and privileged, Sara is sent to a strict boarding school, where she faces poverty and mistreatment by the headmistress, Miss Minchin. Despite her hardships, Sara retains her strength, kindness, and imagination, believing in the power of inner beauty and compassion.

Previous studies on *A Little Princess* mostly concentrate on ideological themes such as feminism and social class, leaving visual symbolism in the film less examined. While researchers like Wardani et al. (2021) highlight the presence of

feminist and American values, and others such as Byachkova (2020) explore symbolic space and imagination as psychological tools, few have delved into how visual elements—like color, objects, and nature—communicate emotional and thematic meaning. This gap offers an opportunity to reexamine the film through a symbolic lens, allowing for a more focused analysis of how visual symbolism supports character development and enhances narrative depth (Kurniawati & Anwari, 2023).

Although previous studies have offered valuable insights into ideological and narrative symbolism in *A Little Princess*, few have provided a focused analysis of the film's use of visual symbolism—such as colors, objects, and natural elements—and their roles in expressing emotional development and thematic depth. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the types and meanings of symbolic elements used in Alfonso Cuarón's adaptation. The findings are expected to provide new perspectives for literary and cinematic analysis, especially within the field of English literature and visual storytelling.

This film was selected for analysis due to its rich use of visual and narrative symbolism that enhances the storytelling beyond mere dialogue and plot. *A Little Princess* (1995), directed by Alfonso Cuarón, combines cinematic artistry with emotional depth, making it a compelling subject for symbolic and semiotic study. The film's layered narrative, use of color, objects, and natural elements serve not only as aesthetic choices but also as symbolic expressions of the protagonist's emotional and psychological journey.

Moreover, compared to other literary adaptations, *A Little Princess* stands out for its ability to convey complex themes such as loss, imagination, identity, and

resilience through subtle symbolic cues. The symbolism embedded in everyday objects (such as the doll and locket), natural settings, and visual contrasts offers a unique opportunity to analyze how meaning is constructed and conveyed visually. This makes the film particularly suitable for a semiotic analysis using Peirce's theory.

In addition, while many previous studies have focused on the film's ideological or feminist dimensions, fewer have explored the depth of its visual symbolism in relation to narrative structure and character development. Thus, this study aims to contribute a new perspective by investigating the film's symbolic elements as a central narrative device.

Therefore, this study is conducted because the film *A Little Princess* (1995) presents rich visual symbolism that effectively portrays emotions and character development. Furthermore, there has been limited academic focus on analyzing visual symbolism in this film. By applying Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, this research aims to provide a new perspective on the study of symbolism in film.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The statement of the problem in this study focuses on the symbols present in the film *A Little Princess* (1995), directed by Alfonso Cuarón. The film uses various visual and narrative elements that carry deeper meanings.

The research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are types of symbolism found in the film *A little princess*?
2. How are the representation of the symbolism meaning found in the film *A little princess*?

### 1.3 Objective of the Study

Based on the statement of the problems, the objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the types of symbolism found in the film *A little princess*.
2. To analyze the representation of the symbolism meaning found in the film *A little princess*.

### 1.4 Scope of the Study

This study is focused on identifying the types of symbolism and the representation of meaning present in the film script *A little princess*. It is important to note that the interpretations of symbolism may not encompass all the meanings perceived by different viewers. Consequently, the results of this study may only be applicable to certain individuals with varying backgrounds and experiences. This study specifically examines the use of natural, conventional, and singular symbols as found in the film script.

### 1.5 Significance of the Study

The practical significance of this study lies in its contribution to literary and film script analysis, especially for the students and educators who are interested in exploring symbolic meaning in narratives.

Theoretically, it expands the application of Peirce's semiotic theory by examining natural, conventional, and singular symbols in a film script, offering new insights for future research in symbolism, literature, and screenwriting studies.

Furthermore, this study is anticipated to serve as a useful reference for future research and for anyone interested in conducting a more in depth analysis of this topic.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Symbolism

The term "symbol" is derived from the Greek word "sym-ballein," which means to throw something (an object or action) that is related to a concept. Symbols typically originate from metonymy, which involves using the name of one thing to refer to another that is associated with it or is one of its attributes. According to the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* by WJS Poerwadarminta, a symbol or emblem is a type of sign, image, word, badge, or similar item that represents something or conveys a particular meaning. For instance, the color white is often considered a symbol of purity, rice is regarded as a symbol of prosperity, and the cap (kopiah) is recognized as a distinctive marker of Indonesian identity.

According to the Oxford Dictionaries, the term 'symbolism' has two meanings. The first, and most straightforward, refers to 'the use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities' or the symbolic significance assigned to natural objects or facts. Conversely, the second definition is more general, describing it as 'an artistic and poetic movement that employs symbolic imagery and indirect expression to convey ideas, emotions, and states of mind.'

Symbolism is the use of certain objects, colors, visual elements, or concepts that represent something deeper than their literal meaning. In art, including film, symbolism serves to convey certain themes, emotions, or messages that are not always explicitly expressed (Guatri, 2023). Symbolism acts as a bridge between

literature and film, allowing both forms of art to convey deeper meanings. In literature, symbols such as characters or objects can represent specific ideas or themes, encouraging readers to delve into hidden meanings (Yahya, 2022). Similarly, in film, visual symbols—such as colors, objects, or motifs—add layers to the narrative, creating a more profound experience for viewers. This symbolism enriches our understanding of stories and characters, leading to more subjective and varied interpretations.

According to Carl Jung (1978), symbolism is fundamental to the discourse surrounding his proposed study of aesthetics. Jung posits that the exploration of symbols provides critical insights into the human psyche and cultural expressions. His psychological analysis, coupled with a methodological approach to the study of symbolism in 'primitive' societies, reveals how these symbols served as a means of communication and understanding within those cultures. Carl Jung views symbols as essential to understanding the human psyche. He argues that symbols often emerge in dreams and myths as expressions of the unconscious mind. Jung explains that symbols bridge conscious and unconscious experiences, helping individuals process psychological conflicts and gain self-awareness. In this sense, symbols act as tools of transformation and self-integration.

Symbolism in literary works typically differs based on the meaning the author intends to communicate to the reader. Symbolism can represent an object, a character within a narrative, or any other element associated with the story. According to Perrine in *Fadee*, a literary symbol is something that carries a deeper meaning than its surface interpretation. For instance, a character, situation, action, or other

components in the narrative may serve as symbols, reflecting or representing additional meanings (Fadaee, 2011, p. 20).

Charles Sanders Peirce, a foundational figure in semiotics, provides a detailed and systematic framework for understanding signs and symbols. He divides signs into three categories: icons, indexes, and symbols. Symbols, in Peirce's view, are signs that relate to their objects through a rule or learned convention, rather than resemblance (as in icons) or physical connection (as in indexes) (Peirce, 1931).

Peirce's triadic model of the sign includes three essential elements: the representamen (the form the sign takes), the object (what the sign refers to), and the interpretant (the meaning generated in the mind of the observer). This process forms what Peirce calls "semiosis," the dynamic interpretation of signs through mental association. This interpretative nature makes symbols particularly powerful and flexible across contexts.

Peirce's approach is particularly useful in film and literary analysis, as it accommodates both fixed and fluid meanings depending on context. Symbols are not interpreted in isolation but within systems of cultural knowledge, genre, narrative structure, and viewer experience. This model not only provides structure for identifying types of symbols but also encourages deeper exploration of how meaning is generated and evolves.

In the context of *A Little Princess*, Peirce's categories allow for a nuanced analysis of the symbolic elements in the script. Natural symbols such as weather or light may mirror characters' emotional states. Conventional symbols like color and familiar objects reflect shared cultural meanings. Singular symbols—such as Sara's

locket or her father's gift—carry unique emotional weight within the story, deepening her personal journey.

By applying Peirce's semiotic framework, this study seeks to illuminate how the film script communicates layered meanings through natural, conventional, and singular symbols, enriching the viewer's understanding of character development, emotional resonance, and thematic depth.

## **2.2 Types of Symbolism**

Symbolism serves as a profound means of conveying emotions, ideas, and abstract concepts, often expressed through complex nuances. The purpose of symbolism is to explore the intricacies of the human soul, unveil the mysteries of the universe, and examine the intricate relationship between the physical and spiritual realms. In various art forms, such as painting, literature, music, and theater, symbolism is employed to create works rich in ambiguity, provocation, and hidden meanings.

These symbolic works are deliberately designed to be ambiguous, encouraging the audience or readers to engage actively in the interpretation process. Such creations invite them to delve into the layers of meaning associated with the symbols employed by the artist. This engagement deepens the connection between the symbols within the work and the interpretative insights generated, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the creative process. Thus, symbolism functions as a vehicle for conveying complex experiences and perspectives.

According to Peirce's semiotic theory as cited in Liszka (1996), symbols can be classified into three types: natural symbols, conventional symbols, and singular symbols. Each of these types has unique characteristics that allow them to function differently within a narrative.

1. Natural symbolism

Natural symbols are symbols that people encounter in their daily lives, which can be visually observed and often appear in everyday situations. For example, smoke is directly associated with fire, or tears are directly associated with sadness.

2. Conventional symbolism

Conventional symbols are collections of words that are often used to replace other phrases with similar meanings. For example, the term "red" is often used to symbolize love or danger. For example, a red traffic light indicates an order to stop, while red roses are usually given as a sign of affection. In this context, the color red serves as a conventional symbol that has a generally recognized meaning. Some examples of conventional symbols include colors, objects, clothing, animals and nature. In this study, three aspects were identified for analysis: colors, objects, and nature.

- A. Colours symbolism

Color symbolism plays a powerful role in shaping emotional tone and narrative meaning in film. According to Peirce's theory and Liszka's classification, color functions as a conventional symbol because its meaning is not inherent but constructed through social and cultural context. For

instance, red might symbolize love, anger, or danger, while white often connotes purity, innocence, or peace.

Liszka (1996) emphasizes that color meanings are both culturally conditioned and context-sensitive. Warm colors like red, orange, or yellow often evoke passion, warmth, or energy, while cool colors such as blue or green may suggest calmness, melancholy, or growth. These meanings, though influenced by cultural convention, can be adapted by directors to suit particular narratives.

In the film *A Little Princess*, the strategic use of color enhances the viewer's emotional connection to the characters and themes. Warm hues often accompany scenes of imagination, love, or comfort, while cooler or darker tones tend to appear during scenes of hardship, oppression, or isolation. Thus, color becomes not just a visual element but a storytelling device that deepens symbolic resonance and helps shape the audience's understanding of character development and emotional shifts.

## B. Objects Symbolism

Object symbolism is a narrative approach that goes beyond simply representing specific items literally, giving them deeper and often symbolic meanings. This technique involves assigning widely acknowledged and culturally significant interpretations to objects, allowing them to function as strong symbols within the narrative.

As highlighted in Liszka's study in "The Classification of Symbols," objects, much like colors, transform into elements of a complex language that enhances the overall depth and richness of storytelling.

In the realm of the film, exploring object symbolism requires a careful analysis of how specific items enrich the narrative to evoke emotions or reflect character traits. For instance, an ordinary object within the story may not only serve a literal purpose but also act as a symbolic representation tied to a broader cultural context. A particular setting, such as a busy market, can symbolize community, diversity, or even the personal struggles of the characters.

Additionally, significant modes of transportation, like bicycles or boats, can be used to signify journeys or transitions within the narrative. Liszka's insights on symbolism illustrate how objects in film can convey layered messages, adding depth and nuance to the overall storytelling experience.

Essentially, object symbolism in film serves as a visual language that communicates with the audience, enriching their comprehension of the characters' journeys and the overarching themes interwoven throughout the narrative. The deliberate selection of objects as symbols invites viewers to engage more profoundly with the storyline, understanding that each item presented carries a significance that transcends its physical appearance.

By incorporating various objects intentionally, filmmakers can layer their narratives with deeper meanings. For instance, a worn-out suitcase might symbolize a character's past and the burdens they carry, while a vibrant flower could represent hope and renewal. This multifaceted approach encourages audiences to look beyond the surface, prompting them to explore the emotional and thematic connections that tie the story together. Ultimately,

the use of object symbolism not only enhances the storytelling experience but also fosters a more immersive engagement with the film's core messages.

### C. Nature Symbolism

Nature symbolism is a storytelling technique that goes beyond the straightforward depiction of elements from the natural world, infusing them with profound and often symbolic meanings. According to Peirce's theory and Liszka's observations in "The Classification of Symbols," nature is seen as a valuable repository of symbols that carry established cultural significance. This approach entails incorporating natural elements with intention, transforming them into powerful conveyers of nuanced messages woven into the narrative.

Nature symbolism involves the use of natural elements—such as weather, seasons, plants, and animals—to convey emotional, psychological, or thematic messages. In Peirce's framework, these symbols can often be classified as either natural or conventional, depending on whether the association is universal or culturally shaped.

Weather conditions, for instance, are frequently used to mirror emotional states: rain may symbolize sadness or cleansing, sunshine may represent joy or clarity, and storms can reflect internal or external conflict. Likewise, animals can embody particular traits or messages—birds may symbolize freedom or spirit, while a caged animal may imply oppression or lost innocence.

In the film *A Little Princess*, nature symbolism is employed to express Sara's shifting emotional world. Scenes involving open skies, sunlight, or

garden settings often align with her imagination, hope, and connection to her father. In contrast, cold, dark, or enclosed natural settings tend to coincide with moments of despair, loneliness, or restriction.

### 3. Singular Symbol

If the object of the symbol is an actual individual, it indicates that the symbol or form often stands alone or possesses a unique nature. For example, "star" can be found in life without the need for another symbol because the fact that this symbol always stands alone or has an individual character is sufficient (as cited in Rizki, 2022, p. 14).

According to Pierce's classification, these symbols can be categorized into three types: natural, conventional, and singular. Each type carries distinct characteristics and functions, playing a specific role in conveying meaning in literary works. Natural symbols typically arise from the environment and possess inherent meanings, while conventional symbols are defined by societal consensus. Singular symbols, on the other hand, are unique and often carry personal significance, enriching the narrative and allowing for deeper interpretation by the audience.

## 2.3 Meaning of Symbolism

Symbolism in literature serves as a flexible and impactful tool, enabling authors to express intricate ideas and emotions through various elements. These elements may consist of objects, people, situations, or actions that possess both a literal meaning and a deeper, more abstract significance.

In literature, the meaning of a symbol can be analyzed on two levels: the surface-level interpretation, which is tied to observable traits and widely recognized representations, and a deeper understanding that goes beyond direct interpretation. For instance, a dove may symbolize peace at a surface level, while its deeper connotations can reveal the complexities and subtleties of reconciliation and hope in human relationships (Smith, 2022).

When examining symbolism in literature, it is important to explore the symbolic significance of elements that extend beyond their literal representation. This can include recurring objects, colors, or specific settings, each of which can add a deeper layer of meaning that enriches the overall theme. As Perrine notes in Fadaee, "A literary symbol has more significance than what it appears to convey; it could be an object, person, action, or another element that has a literal meaning but also suggests or represents something else" (Fadaee, 2011, p. 20). Perrine's explanation highlights how literary symbols transcend their surface meanings, enhancing the beauty of the text and adding depth to the narrative.

Moreover, symbolism acts as a nuanced and intricate form of communication, allowing authors to subtly convey complex ideas, themes, and emotions. This involves multiple layers of interpretation, including cultural and social contexts, emotional depth, and universal themes, which provide readers with a more enriched and nuanced experience (Johnson, 2023). For example, the recurring motif of water in literature can symbolize both life and death, reflecting the duality of existence and the human experience.

Symbolism not only enhances the narrative but also underscores the idea that literature extends beyond straightforward meaning, inviting readers to explore the deeper figurative elements that contribute to the text's overall significance. As noted by Lee (2023), "The use of symbols invites readers to engage actively with the text, prompting them to uncover hidden meanings and explore the complexities of the human condition."