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A bizarre fever dream of a film in 'Mother!'

In writer-director Darren Aronofsky's film "Mother!," the marriage between a celebrated poet (Javier Bardem) referred to only as "Him" and his beautiful young wife (Jennifer Lawrence), the titular Mother, is a metaphor for the relationship between artist and muse.

The poet is suffering a creative block and, to provide an environment where he will be inspired to create, she remodels, with her own hands, the isolated Victorian mansion where they live together surrounded by waves of high grasses in a perimeter of trees.

The house isn't isolated enough, apparently, because soon admirers of the poet — a sickly surgeon and his wife (Ed Harris and Michelle Pfeiffer) — arrive to insinuate themselves into the household, monopolizing His attention, pilfering His possessions and contemptuously dismissing Mother's efforts to protect any portion of privacy. The surgeon's sons, who are engaged in a conflict of biblical proportions, show up in short order.

As the intruders brush Mother aside and escalate His distraction, the poet, exhilarated by the commotion, won't break himself away.



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He is addicted to the adulation and is drawn to the siren song of his rapacious fans.

His appetite for attention summons more acolytes, who emerge from the trees, multiplying like the broomsticks in "Fantasia" into invading hordes. And he is willing to sacrifice everything — everything — in exchange for their veneration.

In a recent interview Aronofsky, compelled to give some rationalization for this inexplicable concoction, told The New York Times that "Mother!" is an allegory for the relationship of God and moth-

er earth.

From the creation to the Eucharist, and maybe Armageddon, "Mother!" is full of biblical symbolism, tapping into a current national mood of fear and helplessness.

Even so, the relationship between the inattentive husband and his ingénue wife resonates with far more familiar movie tropes — "Gaslight," "Rebecca," "Rosemary's Baby" — in which an earnest bride discovers, to her horror, that the man of her dreams has no intention of delivering on her happily ever-after.

"Mother!" is the kind of star-studded, beautifully photographed, eerily soundscaped, hot mess that will inspire undergraduate papers on cinema semiotics for decades to come.

Aronofsky has said that he wrote the screenplay for "Mother!" in five days; that it poured out of him like a fever dream.

That sounds about right. It is certainly feverish.

And, to the extent that is it a glimpse into the director's mind, you may rest assured that such a grandiose, pessimistic and self-indulgent place is nowhere that you want to go.