

Bertukar Mimpi: A Short Film Screenplay Adapted from Eka Kurniawan's Short Story About Betrayal Trauma and Depression

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ABSTRACT

This creative work, a short film screenplay adapted from Eka Kurniawan's (2017) short story *Perempuan Patah Hati yang Kembali Menemukan Cinta Melalui Mimpi*, explores the experience of profound betrayal and its destructive impact on an individual's life, the clinical escalation into major depression, and the psychological process of overcoming trauma toward social reconnection. These elements are elaborated through a short film screenplay grounded in Judith Herman's (2015) theory of trauma and recovery, as well as the social simulation theory proposed by Antti Revonsuo et al. (2015). The screenplay is also developed using the adaptation principles outlined by Edgar and Marland (2019) and Hutcheon (2012). The narrative centers on Maya, a severely depressed librarian mourning the destruction of her future due to interpersonal betrayal, who escapes to Pangandaran in search of a mysterious man from her recurring dreams. Her eventual encounter with a man, Rana, gradually enables her to accept her reality and cease her maladaptive escapism. This story illustrates that interpersonal betrayal can erode an individual's fundamental sense of safety, that dreams can serve as a biological defense mechanism to simulate social recovery, and that physical reconnection plays a crucial role in the healing process.

Keywords: adaptation, betrayal trauma, depression, short film screenplay, social simulation theory

INTRODUCTION

Literary works possess enduring vitality because they consistently create space for interpretation across multiple media. One medium that is particularly effective in both preserving and expanding the meaning of literary works is film, achieved through the process of adaptation. Linda Hutcheon (2012) defines adaptation as an explicitly acknowledged form of transposition from one work into another medium, which may involve shifts in medium, genre, point of view, or narrative context. Through adaptation, literature is not only preserved in its existence but also undergoes a transformation of meaning, allowing it to remain relevant to changing times while fostering intermedial dialogue between text and film.

One prominent Indonesian author whose works often feature unique psychological and surrealist approaches is Eka Kurniawan. An interest in Eka Kurniawan's (2017) work motivated us to adapt his short story into a short film screenplay. The original text portrays a unique intersection of magical realism and the profound reality of emotional wounds. However, the adaptation shifts the narrative focus to clinically map the psychological progression of the protagonist from betrayal trauma to Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), and eventually to recovery.

The adaptation of this story is grounded in the urgency of mental health issues in urban Indonesia. The World Health Organization (2023) recorded over 700,000 suicides globally, and *Pusat Informasi Kriminal Nasional (Pusiknas) Polri* (2023) noted a surge to 1,350 cases in 2023. These conditions are exacerbated by social stigmatization, which Corrigan (2004) explains creates

structural discrimination and triggers self-stigma. The short film format is selected for its effectiveness in conveying personal conflict, character transformation, and strong symbolism (Cowgill, 2005). This screenplay serves as an academic inquiry into how literary texts can be translated into cinematic language without losing their essence, how symbolic elements (such as bandages, color palettes, and a dog) can be communicated effectively, and how film can function as a universal space for contemplation on humanity and the experience of trauma.

BETRAYAL TRAUMA AND DEPRESSION

Judith Herman (2015) defines psychological trauma as a state of extreme helplessness that occurs when the human response system to danger fails to function normally. She emphasizes that the impact of interpersonal betrayal is particularly devastating because it directly destroys the human attachment system, the biological need to seek proximity to a figure for safety. This betrayal shatters three fundamental aspects of the victim: trust, safety, and self-concept. The destruction of safety triggers hyperarousal, while the collapse of self-concept leads to identity fragmentation and toxic shame.

Herman (2015) further explains that the failure of the defense system due to trauma often escalates into clinical depression. Major Depressive Disorder, according to the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), is characterized by a persistent low mood and a total loss of interest in life (anhedonia). In the context of trauma, Herman argues that this loss of interest correlates directly with a loss of personal agency, causing the victim to feel entirely powerless over their life.

This theoretical framework of trauma is applied to examine the experiences of Maya, the protagonist in the short film screenplay *Bertukar Mimpi*. Maya endures the traumatic cancellation of her marriage due to the betrayal of her fiancé and best friend. This unprocessed grief leaves Maya emotionally vulnerable. This vulnerability manifests in sleep disturbances, withdrawal from daily routines, dissociation, and suicidal ideation at her most desperate stage. Accordingly, trauma theory serves as a conceptual foundation for understanding Maya's internal conflict and her emotional journey toward acceptance.

SOCIAL SIMULATION THEORY

Antti Revonsuo et al. (2015), through the Social Simulation Theory (SST), posit that dreaming is a biological defense system rather than a passive replay of memories. Dreams function as an active simulation space specifically created by the brain to practice social interactions, particularly during REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep. The core aspect of this mechanism is the creation of a safe simulation space, allowing traumatized individuals to test social scenarios without the risk of physical retraumatization.

Revonsuo et al. explain the persistence of social capabilities in socially withdrawn individuals through the Social Tracking System, which maintains human interaction skills even in isolation. Additionally, the Social Prototypes mechanism explains the emergence of an ideal figure in dreams. When the brain detects extreme loneliness or attachment failure, it automatically simulates an ideal protective figure to fulfill the missing emotional needs. Furthermore, the Pre-cognitive Social Mapping function allows the brain to prepare the individual for future social encounters by practicing the recognition of specific physical details (target stimuli) before the actual physical meeting occurs.

In this study, the SST model is applied to explain the healing journey of Maya. Maya's brain constructs a dream space to conjure Rana as a social prototype, providing the safety she lost in reality. Maya experiences pre-cognitive social mapping by recording specific details, such as

Rana's face and his dog, Bruno. Accordingly, recovery is understood as a process that unfolds alongside the biological resilience of the nervous system, which actively seeks healing through subconscious mechanisms before achieving conscious physical reconnection.

CONCEPT OF CREATIVE WORK

This creative work is an adaptation that may be regarded as a secondary work without being subordinate, as it involves reinterpretation, evaluation, revision, improvisation, innovation, initiative, and reconstruction. This approach is consistent with Hutcheon's (2012) view of adaptation as a creative process that inherently involves re-interpretation and re-creation. As a result, this adaptation functions as a creative transformation that stands independently as an autonomous work. In developing the short film screenplay, we adopt structural strategies based on Edgar and Marland (2019), including identifying key scenes, utilizing visual metaphors (such as the bandage motif and the color palette), and continuously evaluating the screenplay to preserve the thematic essence of the source material.

The short film adopts the 8-Sequence Structure proposed by Paul Gulino (2004) to maintain narrative causality and dramatic tension. It is primarily situated within the psychological drama genre, supported by elements of magical realism, characterized by the blending of reality and fantasy, as reflected through the synchronicity of collective dreams. Employing visual storytelling, the film is well-suited for distribution via digital platforms and film festivals, enabling a broader audience reach.

Premise

The premise of the short film screenplay *Bertukar Mimpi* centers on Maya, a severely depressed librarian who, after a devastating interpersonal betrayal, escapes her suffocating urban life in Jakarta to search for a mysterious man who constantly appears in her dreams in Pangandaran. Through this journey, she must choose between surrendering to her suicidal ideation or confronting her reality to eventually find that her subconscious simulation is intricately connected to a real person.

Theme

The central theme revolves around the psychological journey through trauma, encompassing betrayal, severe depression, and the courageous steps toward social reconnection. The film seeks to convey a profound message: recovery is not an instant miracle but an active emotional regulation process. By allowing oneself to confront reality and stepping out of maladaptive escapism, individuals can begin the process of healing and recovery.

Synopsis

Following a betrayal that cancels her wedding, Maya is trapped in a major depressive episode and relies on dissociation mechanisms in Jakarta. Amid social isolation, her nervous system consistently simulates a recurring dream of a foreign man (Rana) and a dog (Bruno) on the coast of Pangandaran. Driven by the belief that this simulation is a destined instruction to heal her wounds, Maya impulsively escapes to the southern coast to track down this protective figure in reality.

Upon arriving in Pangandaran, objective reality clashes violently with Maya's expectations. Her days of fruitless searching escalate her depression and trigger panic attacks. Feeling she has lost her sanity and her last reason to live, Maya's despair peaks. At dawn, she stands on a breakwater, intending to end her life. However, she is physically rescued by Sayuri, a local elder, who pulls Maya to safety.

Inside Sayuri's home, Maya faces a reality that validates her sanity. Sayuri reveals that her grandson, Rana, recently left for Jakarta to search for a woman who also persistently appeared in his dreams. The physical arrival of Rana's dog, Bruno, confirms Maya's visual recordings during her sleep phase. Realizing this synchronicity, Maya abandons her escapism. She chooses to survive, making peace with her pain on the coast. The narrative concludes with Rana's return to Pangandaran and their direct physical meeting on the East Coast, marking Maya's psychological readiness to begin social reconnection.

Characters

The main character is Maya (31), a librarian working in Jakarta. She functions as the protagonist of the film. Her immediate desire (want) is to find the physical manifestation of the man in her dreams. Her deeper need, however, is to regain her personal agency and face her traumatic memories consciously. Maya is characterized by a major flaw: escapism. Her comfort zone lies in the isolation she creates to cut off social contact. Over the course of the narrative, Maya undergoes a dynamic character arc, transforming from a passive, dissociative victim into an empowered individual willing to reconnect with reality.

The supporting characters include Rana, Sayuri, and Bruno. Rana functions as a social prototype, an ideal protective entity for Maya's nervous system. Sayuri acts as the Mentor archetype, providing practical wisdom and creating the first real safe space for Maya when she reaches peak despair. Meanwhile, Bruno, the dog, serves as a highly specific target stimulus, validating Maya's pre-cognitive social mapping and anchoring her back to objective reality.

Conflict

The narrative centers on the protagonist's internal conflict, focusing on the healing of Maya's emotional wounds. The primary internal conflict (Man vs. Self) occurs between Maya's suicidal ideation driven by anhedonia and her biological instinct to survive. This internal struggle intersects with external conflicts (Man vs. Man and Man vs. Society). The memory of her betrayers acts as a constant psychological trigger, while the societal pressure from her family to instantly act normal exacerbates her hyperarousal, ultimately forcing her to escape to Pangandaran. Through this confrontation, Maya is ultimately forced to reengage with life, positioning trauma recovery not as an escape into fantasy but as a process that must be faced in order to heal.

CONCLUSION

Within this creative project, we highlight several additional insights presented in the short film screenplay *Bertukar Mimpi*, which also serve as the concluding findings of the creative and research process. First, trauma recovery requires the precise conversion of subjective internal pain into objective cinematic actions. Second, healing does not originate from a complete reliance on subconscious fantasies, but rather from the total acceptance of reality and the courage to open up to external support. Third, once an individual reaches the stage of acceptance, they are able to

coexist with their emotional wounds rather than be dominated by them. In the end, Rana's return to Pangandaran and their physical meeting serve as tangible proof that Maya has successfully reconstructed her personal agency and is ready to establish genuine human connections in objective reality.

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