



Literary Semiotics Study of Trauma in Film *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis*

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the semiotics of trauma signs in the film *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis* by Reka Wijaya. The research method used is to use qualitative data with primary data in the form of sentences resulting from dialogue between characters that reflect the elements of anxiety and trauma from the film script and secondary data obtained through articles related to trauma. The data collection and analysis technique of this study uses content analysis through five Rolan Barthes semiotic codes. The result of this research is that this film is able to combine cinematography and narrative that is able to represent the signs of trauma through symbols and the five semiotic codes of Barthes so that it is able to convey a moral message about the importance of a sense of security for the recognition and healing of inner wounds.

INTRODUCTION

Literary works, including films, have an important function as a mirror of life and a medium of conveying messages that combine elements of aesthetics and meaning (Aisyah, 2022). Movies not only offer entertainment, but also record the social and psychological realities of society. As an audio-visual medium, films are able to build strong emotional experiences through visuals, dialogue, and symbols (Sofiani, 2016). Along with the development of the creative industry, films also play a role as an educational tool that can raise important issues, including mental health, so that it has the potential to reduce stigma and increase public understanding (Smith, 2023).

In the context of scientific studies, semiotics offers an effective analytical framework for tracing signs and meanings in film works. The semiotic theory developed by Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes allows for the disclosure of the hidden messages behind visual elements, narratives, and symbols (Johnson, 2024). This approach is relevant to understanding how trauma—as a profound psychological experience that affects the emotional and social aspects of an individual—is represented in film.

The film *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis* by Reka Wijaya is a unique sample that is worth studying because it presents a strong emotional narrative, depicting the inner struggles of its characters with deep trauma. The uniqueness of this film lies in its ability to combine visual power and story structure to create an authentic psychological representation. This research is expected to enrich the study of literary semiotics by focusing on the signs of trauma in film, making theoretical contributions to the analysis of mental health representations, and opening up space for academic discussion on the role of film in shaping public understanding of psychological issues.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Literary Structural Analysis

Structural analysis views literary works as an arrangement of elements that are interconnected and form a complete unity (Teeuw, 2003). These elements are divided into intrinsic—theme, plot, character/characterization, setting, and mandate—and extrinsic which include ideology, moral, sociocultural, psychological, and religious. The structural approach aims to dismantle the intertwining between these elements to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of literary works. In the context of film, its building elements have similarities with novels and dramas, but they are presented audio-visually, so that the delivery of themes, plots, characters, and settings is strengthened by visuals, dialogue, and cinematic effects (Pradopo, 2007).

Themes become the main idea that directs the plot, characters, and setting. The plot can be progressive, back-to-back, or mixed, with stages of exposure, conflict, complication, crisis, resolution, and decision (Wijayanto in Kartika, 2012). Characters or characterizations are representations of characters that can be in the form of humans, animals, objects, or entities, which act as central and supporting figures (Waluyo in Wicaksono, 2017). The setting includes the dimensions of place, time, and social that give the impression of reality to the

story, while the mandate is a moral message that the author or director wants to convey through a series of events.

In this study, structural analysis is focused on intrinsic elements – theme, plot, characters/characterization, setting, and mandate – to dissect the structure of the film *Bolehkah Lang Lang Kumenangis* by Reka Wijaya. This approach is used to identify how the building elements interact with each other to form an integral narrative, while also revealing the meaning contained in it.

Movie

Film, or moving images, is a visual mass communication medium that is able to combine elements of living images, sounds, and stories into entertainment, documentation, and educational means that are easy for the public to understand (Elvinaro, 2007; Arsyad, 2011). Since its initial appearance in black and white form until now with three-dimensional technology, film has continued to grow rapidly (Arif Budi, 2019). Based on media, films are divided into feature films and screens, while based on their type, they are divided into fiction—including experimental and genre—and nonfiction which includes documentary, documentary, and scientific (Oktavianus, 2015). Film genres are also diverse, ranging from primary parent genres such as action, drama, horror, to secondary genres such as biography and disaster films (Pratista, 2008). As a work of art, films not only convey stories, but also contain meanings formed by the systems that build them, although often these meanings are not fully realized by the audience.

The meaning contained in film can be seen from the systems of the filmmaker, as described by Thompson and Bordwell as follows.

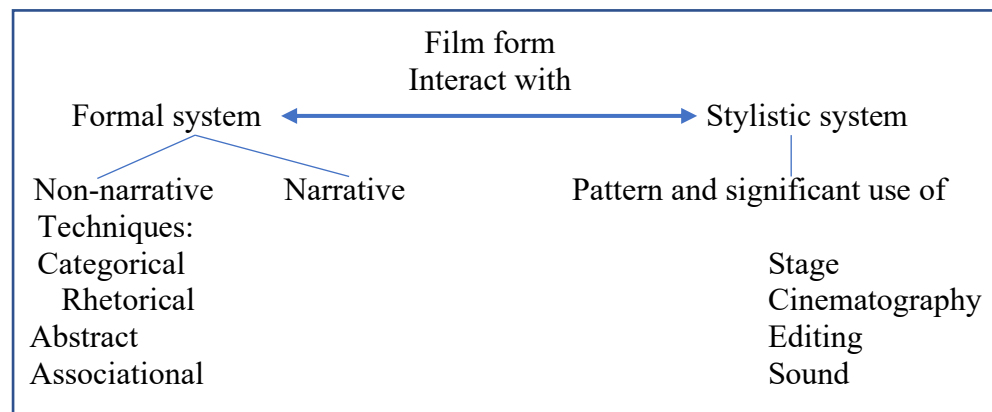


Figure 1. : Systems in the film
(Source: Thompson and Bordwell, 2006)

The image explains that the film-forming elements are divided into formal systems and stylistic systems, where this research only uses narrative film systems that have a cause-and-effect plot. The style system includes mise en scène, cinematography, editing, and sound as visual and audio elements that support the story.

Films are built by two main elements, namely narrative and cinematic, which interact with each other to form a complete story (Pratista, 2009). Narrative

elements are related to aspects of the story or theme that include characters, problems, conflicts, locations, and time. The protagonists and antagonists trigger the dynamics of the conflict, while location and time support the mood of the story. This narrative element is in line with the study of narrativeology, which is a set of concepts about stories and storytelling that develops in three phases: pre-structuralism, structuralism, and post-structuralism (Asep, 2007). Meanwhile, the cinematic element is related to technical aspects such as mise en scène (setting/setting, lighting, costumes and make-up, as well as acting), cinematography, editing, and sound (Pratista, 2009). Films also have intrinsic elements, such as plot and themes, as well as extrinsic elements, such as the background of the creator and the socio-cultural context, which affect the content of the story (Hafsah, 2019).

In the production process, the success of the film involves the role of various parties. The screenwriter creates the script by prioritizing the visualization of reality through clear scenes (Misbach, 2010), while the director holds artistic and technical control from the beginning to the end of production (Hafsah, 2019). The actor/actress brings the characters to life with professionalism (Muchlisin, 2016), the cameraman captures the images with techniques that are in harmony with the storyline, and the editor arranges the footage into a cohesive series. Producers ensure the availability of funds and production needs (Siscaandtian, 2016), while artistic stylists manage visual aspects such as clothing, makeup, and background (Aritama, 2008). Technical structures such as shots, scenes, and sequences (Pratista, 2009), camera distance (Umbara, 2010), and shooting angles are important elements in creating aesthetics and meaning. All of these elements work harmoniously to present a film that is captivating and meaningful for the audience.

Trauma

Trauma in literary studies is understood as an emotional experience that is painful, difficult to express logically, and often present through non-linear narratives, intense flashbacks, and symbols that depict hidden inner wounds (Juidah et al., 2022). These experiences can be personal or collective, reflecting suffering due to oppression, violence, or extreme loss (Serli Rosida & Ahmad Ilzamul Hikam, 2025). The term trauma, which originally meant "wound" in Greek, now more often refers to psychological injury, as Caruth understands it as a response to extraordinary events that give rise to recurring hallucinations, flashbacks, or nightmares, which have the potential to interfere with emotional and behavioral development, especially if experienced from childhood (Caruth in Conscience, 2023). The causes of trauma are very diverse, ranging from natural disasters, accidents, bullying, rape, to the loss of loved ones (Irwanto & Kumala in Conscience, 2023), with psychological impacts that can last a long time such as helplessness, depression, or post-traumatic disorders.

This type of trauma can arise due to domestic violence, natural disasters, transportation accidents, mass conflicts, torture, and exposure to high-risk jobs (Nurani, 2023). Based on its duration, trauma is divided into acute trauma that occurs suddenly with high but brief intensity, and chronic trauma that lasts a long and repetitive period such as in war or prolonged violence. In general,

trauma is grouped into three main categories: physical trauma that includes bodily injuries both translucent and blunt; post-cult trauma that gives rise to deep inner conflict after joining a particular sect; and psychological trauma that attacks the mental aspect due to terrible or life-threatening events, which are the main focus of mental health treatment (Mendanto in Liyyah, 2020). Each form of trauma brings unique wounds, but they all require a safe space and an adequate recovery process for individuals to regain their balance.

Semiotics

In general, semiotics is the science that studies signs, symbols, and the process of meaning that are an important part of human communication. This term comes from the Greek *semeion* which means "sign", which is understood as something that represents or symbolizes other things based on social agreement (Bungin in Nur Indah, 2021). Figures such as Saussure, Peirce, and Barthes provide different but complementary theoretical foundations: Saussure emphasizes the structure of language as a system of signs through the concepts of signifiers and signified, Peirce develops a theory of the triangle of meaning involving signs, objects, and interpretations, while Barthes expands the study by associating signs to layers of denotative, connotative, and mythical meaning (Morrison, 2014; Vera, 2014; Sobur, 2014). In the context of communication, signs not only convey information, but also form a structured system that contains messages, values, and ideologies that are influenced by culture, history, and social context (Teeuw in Kurniawan, 2001). Therefore, semiotics serves as an analytical tool to uncover meanings, both explicit and implied, in a variety of media, including texts, literature, advertising, and film.

In the world of film, semiotics is an important method for understanding symbols and signs that represent social reality and shape certain perceptions. Roland Barthes, for example, formulated five coding codes—hermeneutical, semicical, symbolic, proaretic, and cultural—that help unravel meaning in film narratives (Sobur, 2003). Meaning in film does not only stop at the denotative meaning that seems obvious, but also includes the connotative meaning and myth that develops in society, forming a layered interpretation (Arif Budi, 2019). Jean Baudrillard adds a dimension of hyperreality, where representations in films can seem more real than reality itself, influencing the way audiences perceive social, cultural, and political issues. Thus, the study of semiotics in film opens up a wide range of analytical spaces to understand how messages, ideologies, and values are shaped and communicated through visual and narrative signs, making them relevant in uncovering the reality and cultural construction behind the scenes.

Semiotics by Roland Barthes

In the study of Roland Barthes's semiotics, signs are understood not only at the level of clear and explicit denotative meanings, but also at the level of more complex and implicit connotative meanings. Barthes introduced the concept of myth as a second-level sign system that developed in society and influenced the way people understood culture and social values (Sobur, 2014; Arif Budi, 2019).

According to Barthes, myth is not just a traditional or superstitious story, but a way of communicating that connects denotations (basic meanings) with connotations (additional meanings) to form hidden cultural messages. In his semiotic analysis, Barthes also introduces five coding codes—hermeneutic (puzzle), semic (connotative), symbolic (binary opposition), proairetic (action), and cultural—that help decompose and understand meaning in narratives, including film (Sobur, 2003). With this approach, Barthes's semiotics becomes an important tool for reading visual and narrative signs as a reflection of the underlying ideologies and social values of a work of art or media, thus enriching the understanding of the message conveyed behind the outward appearance of a film.

METHODOLOGY

Approaches and Types of Research

This study uses a qualitative approach that produces descriptive data in the form of words, discourses, and images to understand the phenomena experienced by the subject (Moleong, 2007). The main purpose of data collection in this approach is to uncover facts or phenomena related to human life in depth. The type of research used is qualitative descriptive, with a focus on the semiotics of trauma and anxiety in the film *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis* by Reka Wijaya.

Research Instruments

The research instrument serves as the main tool for collecting data, and in qualitative research, the researcher himself becomes the most important instrument because of the characteristics of this study that focus on the analysis of the content of the film, rather than on interaction with a specific group of individuals. In addition, supporting instruments such as written data from articles and other relevant sources are also used to enrich and simplify the data collection process so that research can run more comprehensively (Agustina, 2023).

The following table of data collection instruments used in this study is as follows.

Table 1. Research Instruments

No.	Scene	Semiotic Coding Roland Barthes				
		Hermeneutics	Proairetic	Symbolic	Squirt	References

Data and Data Sources

The data collected is qualitative descriptive, namely data in the form of words, images and not numbers. The data and data sources in this study are primary data and secondary data. The primary data in this study is in the form of words, sentences resulting from dialogues between characters that reflect the elements of anxiety and trauma obtained from the film *"Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis"* by Reka Wijaya. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained through articles related to the focus of the research.

Technical Data Collection

Data collection techniques are an important step in research because they facilitate the process of obtaining the information needed (Malau, 2014). In this study, the Content Analysis technique or content analysis is used, which is a method that aims to identify the characteristics of messages from various forms of documentation such as films, by listening carefully and repeatedly to find relevant data (Sugiyono, 2015). The process includes determining the unit of analysis, sampling scenes from the film “Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis”, and selective data recording to ensure that only information is in accordance with the purpose of the research being analyzed.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study was carried out by organizing, selecting, and grouping data to find relevant and in-depth information using content analysis techniques (Agustina, 2023). The process includes the identification of data related to the five semiotic coding in the film “Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis”, classification based on hermeneutical, semicical, symbolic, proairetic, and gnomonic codes, followed by interpretation, description of results, and drawing conclusions as the final stage of analysis.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Structural Analysis

Theme

The film's main theme is the struggle to cope with emotional trauma and the search for self-healing. The narrative centers on the main character who harbors deep inner wounds from past experiences of loss and violence. This theme is expressed through emotionally charged dialogue, repetitive flashback visualizations, and symbols such as rain, mirrors, and crying that represent psychic burden.

Flow

The plot of the film is mixed (progressive and back-highlighted). The story opens with an exposition stage that shows the main character's life in the present, followed by a conflict when his past begins to disturb through flashbacks of traumatic memories. Complications occur when the character experiences an inner clash between the desire to forget and the deep-rooted guilt. The climax appears in the moment of emotional confrontation with another character that triggers the trauma. The film ends with an open resolution, in which the characters begin to accept reality and try the first step of recovery, but without the final certainty.

Character/Characterization

The characterization in this study is divided into three, namely the central figure and the subordinate figure. The explanation of the two figures is as follows.

- Central Figures

The central characters in the film “Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis” are Tari and Baskara. Tari has a cheerful, fragile, helpful, attentive, and emotionally charged character. Meanwhile, Baskara has a quiet, irritable, and temperamental character.

- Subordinate Figures

The subordinate characters in the film “Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis” are Tari’s Father (Pras), Tari’s Mother (Devi), Nina, and Agoy. Tari's father (Pras) has a rude, temperamental, irritable, and self-winning disposition. Mrs. Tari (Devi) has a patient, meek, and willing to give in. Nina has a gentle, understanding, tolerant, and firm disposition. Agoy has a caring character, an empathetic spirit, and a leadership spirit.

Background

The setting of the film in this study is to use the setting, the setting, the time, and the social setting. The setting in this study is located in a psychological clinic in the form of a support group called Life Mates, at Tari's house, at Tari and Baskara's office, and at the station; the time setting occurs during the day and at night; and the social background in this study is in the form of describing authoritarian family conditions and attitudes in solving life problems.

Order

The film conveys the message that trauma needs recognition and acceptance before the healing process can take place. There is a moral impulse for the audience to be more sensitive to the inner suffering of others, as well as an invitation to provide a safe space for trauma victims.

Semiotics A Sign of Trauma on Film “Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis”

The semiotic analysis of trauma signs in the film *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis* based on Rolan Barthes' theory is as follows.

Aspects	Denotation (Literal Meaning)	Connotations (Additional/Implicit Meanings)	Barthes' Code and Explanation
Crying Expression	The face and tears of the Cobra character when crying.	Crying is a symbol of releasing psychological burdens and resistance to societal norms that suppress emotional expression.	<u>Proairetic (Action)</u> : Crying as an action that dismantles the inner burden, marking the moment of emotional climax.

Aspects	Denotation (Literal Meaning)	Connotations (Additional/Implicit Meanings)	Barthes' Code and Explanation
Dialogue on Grievance	Words that express suffering and trauma.	Indicates a social situation in which trauma is a pent-up burden due to a negative stigma against weakness.	<u>Hermeneutics</u> (Riddles): Dialogue that arouses the audience's curiosity for the sake of trauma.
Dark Atmosphere	Scenes with gloomy lighting and dominant shadows.	Visualization of hidden suffering and the complexity of inner wounds that are not directly visible.	<u>Semiotic</u> (Connotative): Color and lighting support the connotations of deep suffering and inner gloom.
The Inner Tension of the Characters	Behaviors and expressions that describe conflict within oneself.	A reflection of the opposition between the social forces that must be shown and the inner weaknesses that want to be acknowledged.	<u>Symbolic</u> (Binary Opposition): The conflict between strong and weak, expression and restraint of emotions.
Silence and Silence	A moment without dialogue and sound, full of hidden sadness.	Silence is a sign of restraint and emotional isolation due to trauma, as well as cultural pressure to hold back feelings.	<u>Cultural</u> (Cultural Code): Marking social norms that suppress expression and encourage silence against inner wounds.

DISCUSSION

Structural Analysis

Based on the theory of literary structural analysis (Pradopo, 2007; Teeuw, 2003), intrinsic elements such as themes, plots, characters, settings, and mandates interact with each other to form a complete narrative. In this film, the trauma theme that is at the heart of the story is tightly tied together by a mixed plot that utilizes flashbacks as the main technique of building emotional tension. According to Wijayanto's theory in Kartika (2012), the flow structure that combines time progression and flashback effectively gives rise to traumatic experiences that often appear randomly in the victim's memory.

The characterization of the main character shows the characteristics of a representation of trauma called Caruth (in Conscience, 2023), namely emotional disconnection, withdrawn behavior, and flashes of painful memories. The existence of the supporting characters serves as an emotional counterpoint, helping the audience understand the struggle to survive in the midst of suffering. The background that accentuates the atmosphere of rain and closed space reinforces the visual signs of trauma as described in Barthes' study of semiotics, where visual symbols (rain, mirror, isolation) contain connotative meanings such as sadness, self-reflection, and alienation.

The mandate of the film is in line with Smith's (2023) view that audio-visual media can play a role as a means of public education to raise mental health issues, reduce stigma, and invite audiences to be empathetic. Thus, structurally and semiotically the film manages to combine emotional personal narratives with strong representations of trauma signs, making it relevant as a material for academic study and social discussion.

Semiotics A Sign of Trauma on Film "Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis"

The semiotic analysis of trauma signs in film "Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis" shows the integration of narrative and cinematic elements as explained by Pradopo (2007), Teeuw (2003), and Pratista (2009). Through the five codes of Roland Barthes, the film constructs trauma not only as personal suffering, but also as a reflection of social reality. The crying expression of the Kobra character (proaretic code) marks the release of the inner burden and resistance to cultural norms that limit the expression of emotions, in line with Caruth's (in Conscience, 2023) concept of trauma that is difficult to articulate verbally. The dialogue about grief (hermeneutic code) becomes a narrative puzzle that builds the audience's curiosity about the trauma setting, while the dark atmosphere (semik code) presents a visual metaphor of hidden suffering through *mise en scène*.

The inner tension of the character (symbolic code) depicts the binary opposition of strong-weakness and expression-restraint, which is in harmony with the depiction of chronic trauma in the victim. Silence and silence (cultural code) are subtle criticisms of silent cultures that suppress the expression of emotions, as Smith (2023) affirms about the role of media in combating mental health stigma. Thus, the signs of trauma in this film not only reinforce the mixed themes and plots, but also bring the moral message to life to open up a safe space for the recognition and healing of inner wounds.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Literary works, including films, function as a mirror of life and a medium of conveying messages that combine aesthetics and meaning, not only entertaining but also recording the social and psychological reality of society (Aisyah, 2022; Sofiani, 2016). In the development of the creative industry, films play a role as an educational tool that raises important issues such as mental health, so that it can reduce stigma and increase public understanding (Smith, 2023). The study of semiotics based on the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes became an effective analytical tool for uncovering implicit messages, including representations of trauma. The film *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis* by Reka Wijaya was chosen for its ability to combine visuals and narrative to portray trauma authentically, so this research is expected to enrich the study of literary semiotics while expanding academic discussions about the role of film in shaping the understanding of psychological issues.

The structural analysis of the film is in the form of themes, plots, characters, settings, and mandates that are interrelated in it. The film has a trauma theme that is at the heart of the story tightly tied together by a mixed plot that utilizes flashbacks as the main technique of building emotional tension. The characters discussed in the film are divided into central characters and subordinate characters, featuring the main characters, namely Tari and Baskara, as well as their subordinates, namely Tari Ayah (Pras), Tari Mother (Devi), Nina, and Agoy. Almost all of these characters have past events that leave a mark that causes trauma in their lives. The setting in the film is located in a psychological clinic in the form of a support group called Life Mates, at Tari's house, at Tari's office and Baskara, and at the station; the time setting occurs during the day and at night; and the social background in this study is in the form of describing authoritarian family conditions and attitudes in solving life problems. The film implies the message that the first step towards healing trauma is recognition and acceptance of the wounds experienced. Behind the plot, there is a moral impulse to make the audience more sensitive to the inner suffering of others, as well as an invitation to create a safe and empathetic space for those who are struggling with trauma.

The semiotic analysis of the signs of trauma in film *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis* shows that through Roland Barthes' five codes, this film manages to combine narrative and cinematography to represent trauma as a personal suffering as well as a social reality. The various symbols, expressions, and atmospheres presented not only reinforce the theme and plot, but also convey a moral message about the importance of safe spaces for the recognition and healing of inner wounds.

FURTHER STUDY

This study was limited to one object of study, namely the film *Bolehkah Sekali Saja Kumenangis*, so the results do not represent the representation of trauma in film in general. The analysis also used only five Roland Barthes codes without relating them in depth to the perspective of clinical psychology or audience reception.

Subsequent research is suggested to expand the object of study to different genres and cultures, combine semiotics with cross-disciplinary approaches such as trauma psychology or reception studies, and use mixed methods to explore the perception and impact of signs of trauma on audiences.

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