

## BATAK OPERA TRACKS OF MOTHER'S LOVE : REINTERPRETATION OF THE LEGEND OF THE CITY OF TANJUNG BALAI SI MARDAN

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**ABSTRACT :** The creation of the Batak Opera Traces of Mother's Love is an effort to transfer the vehicle for the legendary Tanjung Balai folklore: Si Mardan. The formal object of this creation is the theory of vehicle transfer and dramatic vision as the basis for analysis. This creation process uses the staging concept of Batak Opera combined with modern theater conventions, namely Stanislavski's acting theory and Bertolt Brecht's multiple sets. The creation methods used include: producing a dramatic vision, script writing, acting training, creating a spectacle and creating a unified performance. The achievement of this creation process is a Batak Opera performance which offers the characters Mardan and Mamak from a different perspective from the legend of Si Mardan.

**KEYWORDS:** *Si Mardan, Changing Forms, Batak Opera, Modern Theater*

### I. INTRODUCTION

The legend of the people of Tanjung Balai City, Si Mardan, is one of the many Indonesian legends which tells the story of a child who disobeys his parents. Si Mardan is said to have been cursed by his mother to become land surrounded by water which is now known as Simardan Island. In fact, this legend passed down from generation to generation, which is believed by the Tapanuli people, has left behind evidence which is considered history of the legend of Si Mardan, namely in the form of the Ibu Si Mardan Monument which is inscribed with a short story about Si Mardan's mother. This monument is located in Hau Napitu Hamlet, Buntu Maraja Village, Bandar Pulai District, Asahan Regency, North Sumatra Province.

The legend of Si Mardan tells about the life of Si Mardan, an orphan who was raised by his mother. Then Si Mardan went abroad. Before going abroad he dreamed about where treasure was in his village. Mardan, who believed in this dream, went looking for the place where the treasure was. There he actually found objects inherited from his ancestors. Mardan intended to migrate and sell these objects until finally he migrated to Malaysia. Before Mardan left to migrate, his mother was very reluctant to let Mardan go, but Mardan promised that one day he would return to his hometown. Mardan didn't come home for a long time, it turned out that he had married the daughter of a king in Malaysia and lived a life full of luxury. One time Mardan went sailing to South Tapanuli, specifically to Tanjung Balai, his hometown. In fact, Mardan was very reluctant to go, but because of his wife's insistence he finally arrived at Tanjung Balai. When they arrived at Tanjung Balai, people flocked to see Mardan and his wife arriving on a very luxurious boat. The village people who still recognized Mardan then ran to tell his mother that Mardan had returned. Knowing this, Mardan's mother was very happy to meet her son. However, everything did not go as his mother expected. Mardan disowned his mother because he felt ashamed of his wife and the King. He didn't want them to know that in the past Mardan was just someone from a poor family. Mardan didn't recognize his mother and was even rude to her. After receiving bad treatment from Mardan, his mother said, "If he is my son, show me your greatness." Immediately after Mardan's mother prayed, strong winds and big waves came towards Mardan's ship. The Mardan ship was destroyed, the ship sank and then reappeared as land which is now believed to be the origin of Si Mardan Island. Through this legend, the people of Tanjung Balai believe that Si Mardan Island was once a body of water. After this legend occurred, Si Mardan Island appeared.

The legend of Si Mardan is believed by the people of Tanjung Balai City to be a legend that actually happened in the past. They even erected a monument to Mrs. Si Mardan at the place believed to be the place where Mrs. Si Mardan breathed her last breath. On the monument is also written the story of Mardan briefly. Even though this legend leaves evidence that is considered historical in society, for today's young generation who prioritize rationality, legends are considered fictional stories which sometimes have a weak weight of

rationality, this is because the achievements of the legend are more targeted at the realm of imagination than the realm of logic. Anthi Max (2020: 20) in his book entitled *Sawerigading*, argues that folklore has a prelogical nature, namely stories that do not have logic, but are dominated by feelings. Thus, folk tales tend to offer stories that are illogical but have strong emotional elements. Unfortunately, the power of imagination and emotion from legendary stories is starting to lose its appeal in this increasingly technological era. Modern children tend to like things that are logical and rational. Even people in the modern era consider legends as a tool for society to convey or limit certain behaviors. So, it is necessary to carry out a process of transferring the vehicle from the legendary story so that it can still be preserved, but is able to offer a story that makes sense for today's society.

Transfer of art is a change from one type of art to another type of art. Vehicle transfer activities include translation, adaptation and transfer. *Wahana* means vehicle, so transfer of vehicle is the process of transferring from one type of 'vehicle' to another type of 'vehicle'. As a 'vehicle', a work of art is a tool that can transfer something from one place to another (Damono, 2018: 9). Referring to this statement, so that legendary stories have strong relevance to today's conditions, the vehicle was transferred from legendary stories to theatrical performance art which departed from the script that made legends into base and developed into a more contemporary story. The achievement of this stage of transferring the vehicle from a legendary story to a theater script is the composition of a drama script that presents a new point of view through theatrical performances, but also has dramatic conflict, dialectical dialogue and a neat and logical dramatic structure. The next stage is to make the theater script *Traces of Mother's Love* into the starting point in working on the Batak Opera theater.

The transfer of the vehicle from the legend of *Si Mardan* to the manuscript *Traces of Mother's Love* focuses on the complicated romance of the characters *Mardan* and *Tiur*, then focuses on how *Mamak* took part in the problematic love story of *Mardan* and *Tiur* as an expression of *Mother's* deep love for *Mardan*. The choice of a major theme about romantic relationships is intended to make the script for *Traces of Mother's Love* fresher and in line with the spirit of the times. Even though this creation is a novelty, it is hoped that the foundation of this work, namely the legend of *Si Mardan* and the staging concept of Batak opera, can be published and continue to be preserved.

In terms of production, Batak Opera is used as the concept and basis for the performance. Batak Opera is a traditional performing art typical of the Batak tribe which combines drama, dance, music and singing in one performance. The stories based on Batak Opera depart from legends or folklore of the Batak people (Thompson Hs Interview, 2021). The choice of this form was based on the spirit of introducing and developing traditional art from North Sumatra. However, in accordance with the initial vision, namely targeting audience segmentation from young people, the creation of this work also took into account modern aesthetics that are in line with the spirit of the times. This means that, in terms of packaging, this work still firmly maintains the conventions and idioms typical of Batak Opera, but in terms of exploration, the work also adopts concepts from modern theater.

### **Transfer of Vehicles (Ecranization) of the Folklore Legend of Si Mardan**

Legend is folklore that is a story passed down from generation to generation in a society. Even though it is often a story that local people believe to be true, legends often have a fairly weak weight of rationality so that the story and the characters driving the story in it are considered fiction that only lives in the imagination. However, legends always convey messages that are noble values that should be passed down to future generations. However, the inheritance of stories with a weak level of rationality will certainly be difficult to accept in the modern era because in this era people believe more and like things that are considered logical. Therefore, a new vehicle is needed to convey the noble message implied in the legend so that it continues to reach and can be preserved in the current generation, one of which is through the stage. Theatrical communication certainly offers a more intense and direct relationship and tries to express a different point of view in telling the story even though it leads to the same message in the legend. Therefore, it is hoped that the change from legend to theater will be able to offer a wider aesthetic experience.

Transfer of art is a change from one type of art to another type of art. Vehicle transfer activities include translation, adaptation and transfer. *Wahana* means vehicle, so transfer of vehicle is the process of transferring from one type of 'vehicle' to another type of 'vehicle'. As a 'vehicle', a work of art is a tool that can transfer something from one place to another (Damono, 2018: 9). The vehicle transfer theory was used as the basis for the creative process in the creation of the Batak Opera theater *Traces of Mother's Love*.

### **Concept of Work**

The work *Traces of Mother's Love* was created based on the conventions of Batak Opera. Batak Opera is a performance that combines elements of music, song, dance and story (Siahaan in Sulaiman, 2019: 161). Based on the Batak Opera convention above, the work *Traces of Mother's Love* will be created by combining musical, gestural, acting and story strengths. However, the Batak Opera convention was not realized in its entirety, but became the starting point for its development. This means that this production also takes into account various aesthetic concepts from Western theater.

The Western theater concept used in the production of *Traces of Mother's Love* is the concept of opera (musical drama). The Western opera concepts used are moving, blocking and grouping patterns. Even though the work's approach uses the concept of opera, the work *Traces of Mother's Love* is not directed at singing theater, meaning that the strength of this work is more in the acting aspect (acting and dialogue) which is the main medium for creating dramatic events, atmosphere and situations.

### Creation Theory

The theatrical work *Traces of Mother's Love* relies on dialogue between characters as the main medium for conveying meaning. So, the strength of the role becomes a vital thing to work on. So that the actors were able to convey meaning and create an atmosphere, the acting method proposed by Konstantin Stanislavski was chosen. Stanislavski developed an acting method that produced natural acting and was able to convince the audience. Every behavior that is performed must naturally come from within oneself (inner act), not artificial acting (made up). The achievement of Stanislavski's acting is when an actor who initially acts as "if I were" becomes "I am", Stanislavski calls the magic if method (Mitter, 2002: 12).

The next theory of creation is the multiple set theory of Bertolt Brecht. This staging theory offers a stage concept that is capable of displaying rapid shifts in space and time, known as the montage concept. The creation of the work *Traces of Mother's Love* uses montage theory (Yudiaryani, 2000:143). This staging concept is in accordance with the script which has many settings in different spatial and temporal conditions.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

### 1. Dramatic Vision Productions

The initial stage of writing the script for *Traces of Mother's Love* was to explore the dramatic vision of the Legend of Si Mardan. This search process is carried out by carrying out textual and contextual analysis. After the analysis process, the next step is to interpret the text to find various possibilities that are lost or neglected. The interpretive data is then processed into material to produce a new dramatic vision. The dramatic vision produced is the result of the development or rejection of the dramatic vision of the Legend of Si Mardan. The main focus of the production process of a new dramatic vision emphasizes the elements of novelty and originality of the previous text.

### 2. Script Writing

The next stage is to make the dramatic vision the basis for the playwright. The script is written using an episodic plot by selecting several fragments that become the focus of the story. This scene selection is done so that the whole story can be depicted, but with an ideal performance duration (not too long and not too short). The language style used is everyday diction combined with poetic diction. The choice of everyday diction is intended to make the performance more communicative, while poetic diction is chosen to maintain its aesthetic level.

### 3. Acting Training

The Batak Opera production *Traces of Mother's Love* uses dialogue and relationships between characters as the main media in conveying meaning, so acting training becomes a vital stage. The acting training process begins with interpreting and understanding the script to find the right character. The next process is creating the character through acting. The aspects built in this process are developing cognitive aspects into psychomotor aspects.

### 4. Preparation of Spectacles

The supporting elements of the performance (spectacle) are worked on by several stylists, such as artistic directors, lighting stylists, props stylists, make-up and costume stylists, music stylists and movement stylists. So that the coordination process runs smoothly, each stylist first holds a meeting (briefing) to unify the artistic vision. The next stage is for the stylists to work according to their respective areas. So that every detail can be worked out, the exercises are done separately. The director will monitor every progress made in each division.

### 5. Embodiment of Performance Unity

The realization stage focuses on combining various artistic elements in an ensemble. The focus of this stage is more on the details of the performance, starting from aspects of rhythm, tempo and dynamics. At this stage, actors are accustomed to responding to space, starting from the playing area, atmosphere and response to musical illustrations. Hold the embodiment has also presented stage sets and props, this is done so that actors are able to get used to and are able to adapt various acting businesses that have been discovered in the previous process.

### Creation Cycle



### III. FINDING

The script for *Traces of Mother's Love* is the result of the process of transferring the legend of Si Mardan into a drama script. This manuscript was written based on research in Tanjung Balai City and from books and interviews with local community figures in Tanjung Balai City. Si Mardan is one of the legends from Tanjung Balai City which tells the story of a mother's love for her child which is reciprocated by the child's (Si Mardan) disobedient attitude. Not only that, through this story it turns out that there are many meanings contained in the legend of Si Mardan. Through joint discussions held in Tanjung Balai City, various interpretations of the legend of Si Mardan were found.



Image 1. Opening Discussion about the legend of Si Mardan by the Moderator  
(Photo by Nahrul, Moderator: Agustino, S.Pd, April 8 2023, Tanjung Balai City)

The text *Traces of Mother's Love* focuses on the values of a mother's never-ending love. A mother is someone who always accompanies her child's life journey from the time the child is born until the mother herself dies. In terms of dramatic plot, the values to be conveyed in this script are not based on the original plot of the Si Mardan legend due to a reinterpretation by the script writer. Even though the conflict presented refers to a legendary story, the dramatic arrangement was changed to suit the needs of the dramatic dynamics of the performance and the attraction that was to be created with a contemporary touch. Apart from that, the script for *Traces of Mother's Love* was written based on the conventions of Batak Opera, so it uses poetic language.

The script for *Traces of Mother's Love* uses the four-wall concept of a realism style, this concept will be able to provide communication that is close to everyday life, strengthen communication channels with the audience, and the attraction of the show uses a new, contemporary nuance using the background of the Mardan love story. It is hoped that the selection of this storytelling concept will present a performance that is interesting, familiar to the audience, and able to convey the meaning of the story.



Image 2. Presentation and discussion about the Legend of Si Mardan with art observers, art enthusiasts, historians, cultural figures from Tanjung Balai City and writers of the Legend of Si Mardan.  
(Photo by Nahrul, speaking: DjalautHutabarat, Zainal Arifin, BA, Syamsul Rizal, SH, April 8 2023, Tanjung Balai City)

#### Manuscript Structure

Structure is the element that forms a drama script from within. Structure can also be said to be a dramatic framework that allows a drama script to be staged. Kernodle (in Soeryana, 2019: 103) says that structure is a depiction of space and time contained in drama, so that drama has elements of staging. Structure has three

dramatic values, namely theme, plot and characterization. Based on the explanation above, the structure of the script *Traces of Mother's Love* is explained through three dramatic values, namely theme, plot and characterization.

#### a. Theme

Theme is the formulation of the essence of the story as an ideal basis for determining the direction of the story (Harymawan, 1984:26). The theme of the script *Traces of Mother's Love* is the love of a mother who always plays a role and accompanies her child's journey. Thematically, the script *Traces of Mother's Love* takes a different focus from the legend of Si Mardan. El Saptaria (2006: 2006) says that the theme or thought is the basis of the story from the idea itself. Themes are divided into two types, namely major themes and minor themes. The major theme is the main idea/discussion in a story. Usually themes are presented based on the conflict that occurs. This conflict can occur between humans and God, human conflict with the environment and human conflict with humans themselves. Minor themes, namely, small points of discussion that are arranged into a central or major theme, usually minor themes are present in the text of a play in chapters.

In the legend of Si Mardan, the major theme is Si Mardan's disobedient attitude towards his mother who loved him so much, while in the text *Traces of Mother's Love*, the focus is on a theme that has a new perspective from the legend of Si Mardan, namely about a mother's love which has no limits and always accompanies her child's journey in life. This manuscript explores the legendary story of Si Mardan through the love story of Mardan and Tiur to make it more interesting.

#### b. Plots

Plot is the course of events in a play that continues until the play is finished. So the plot is the arrangement of the events of the play that occur on stage. PanutiSudjiman defines plot as a chain of events in literary works (including drama literature) which aims to achieve certain effects, related to: temporal relationships (time) and causal relationships or causes and effects (Sudjiman, 1984: 14). The plot of the script *Traces of Mother's Love* moves linearly.

##### 1). Exposition

The exposition section is the initial part that delivers a story. The exposition in the *Traces of Mother's Love* manuscript is described through a scene where Mardan and Tiur are together. They promised to always be together. In this section, through the dialogues between Mardan and Tiur, it is described how they both love each other. Mardan, who intends to go abroad and leave Tiur, causes sadness and fear in Tiur's heart to wait.

##### 2). Complications

Complications are the beginning of problems. Complications are markers for the plot moving uphill from its initial scheme. The complication of the script *Traces of Mother's Love* is when Mardan conveys his intention to go abroad and leave his mother. In this part, Mardan tries to convince his mother that his going abroad will reap benefits rather than having to sit idly by in the village. Mardan's departure was also approved by the Bone Figure (Uncle) who gave Mardan a lot of advice about life and life so that Mardan wouldn't make the wrong move when he went abroad. The complications in this text continue in the events after Mardan leaves to migrate. Tiur experiences difficulties in his village so he is betrothed to Juragan and Mardan, where he migrates, is also proposed to by Ester, who is a person who has position and wealth.

##### 3). Climax

The climax stage is the stage that marks the peak of the conflict in the script. The climax is the peak of all problems. This part of the plot is the scene that has the highest emotional intensity in a drama. The climax of the script *Traces of Mother's Love* is when Mardan returns to the village to prove his loyalty to Tiur. However, his mother did not approve of Mardan's desire to return to Tiur, because his mother considered Tiur too inferior a woman for Mardan. Mother thinks Tiur is a bad woman because she left Juragan after agreeing to get engaged.

##### 4). Resolution

Resolution is solving a problem. In this section the dramatic graph starts to decline from the previous plot. The resolution in the script *Traces of Mother's Love* is when Tulang (Uncle) tries to explain to Mrs. Mardan about Tiur. He explains that Tiur cannot be considered a lowly woman who is not worthy of Mardan. In fact, Tiur is a loyal woman and loves Mardan, which is why she ran away from her engagement to Juragan due to the family difficulties she was experiencing. In this section also have a conclusion. Conclusion is the stage of creating a final conclusion from a conflict or the occurrence of an event that marks the end of a play. The conclusion in this text is that Mother finally blesses Mardan and Tiur and marries them both. The story in this script ends happily.

#### c. Characterization

Characterization is one of the structures in a manuscript that the author uses as a medium of expression in presenting story characters with their various characteristics. Characters come with various physical and psychological characteristics to become complete characters with complex traits and personalities (Gasong, 2019:48). Characterization is an explanation of a character's character which concerns the qualities, characteristics or personal traits that appear in the play (Harymawan, 1980: 25). Understanding characters in this

way does not just look at character identification but also traces character development that is obtained from their relationships with other characters. This point of view is based on the fact that the character of a character is not only based on the characteristics of the character but also the psychological characteristics and characteristics of social life inherent in him.

The characters in the script *Traces of Mother's Love* consist of the main character, namely Mardan, who drives the story and supporting characters, namely, Mamak (Mother), Tulang (Uncle), Tiur, Ester, and Juragan. The following is a description of the characters in the *Traces of Mother's Love* script based on the characters' physical characteristics (physiological), psychological and social life characteristics (sociological).

1). Mardan

Mardan as the main character is physiologically a dashing young man. Sociologically, the character Mardan is a figure who has a high social strata from a respectable family, especially after Mardan was successful when he returned from migrating. Psychologically, Mardan is a man who is loyal to his partner. This is illustrated in the scene where Ester tries to sway Mardan's heart, but Mardan firmly rejects her. Mardan has determination not only in his love story but also in his life principles, this is reflected in his desire to go abroad. Mardan has clear reasons for deciding his decision to emigrate.

2). Mamak (Mother)

Mamak is a supporting character who really determines the essence of Mardan and Tiur's love story. Physically, a mother is the same as a typical mother in general. There is no specific physical characteristic that is different from most mother figures in general. Sociologically, the character Mamak (Mother) has a high social strata from a respectable family. Psychologically, Mamak (Mother) is someone who is always worried about her child. Mamak (Mother) is someone who always watches the course of her child's life and always wants to play a role in determining what her child lives as a form of her very deep love. This is illustrated by how Mamak (Mother) responded to Mardan's desire to migrate and when Mardan wanted to propose to Tiur.

3). Tiur

Tiur is a girl who has a beautiful physique. Sociologically, Tiur has a social stratum of disadvantaged families. Psychologically, Tiur is a kind, gentle, loyal person, has principles, and is aware of all his shortcomings and weaknesses.

4). Esther

Physiologically, the character Ester is a young woman who sociologically has a high social strata. Psychologically, Esther is a person who thinks that her position and the possessions she has will enable her to achieve all her desires and she can even put pressure on someone through the position she has. Ester had the pride for that, but when things didn't go according to her wishes, Ester couldn't accept it.

5). Skipper

The character Juragan is physiologically a middle-aged man. Sociologically, Juragan is someone from a high social strata. Psychologically, Juragan, like the character Ester, is a person who tries to take advantage of his position and wealth. He thought that his position and wealth could give him everything he wanted.

### Staging Process

a. Actor Selection

Actor selection or what is often called casting is the process of selecting the characters in the script. At this stage, the casting carried out in realizing the script of *Traces of Mother's Love* into a performance is based on needs, not only based on seeing an actor's ability to play a character. This is because the physical needs of the characters in the script must be met. This selection process went smoothly and succeeded in finding the criteria according to what was needed.



Image 3. Actor Selection  
(Photo by Nahrul, 13 May 2023, UNIMED Studio)

b. Reading

Reading is an initial exercise to interpret the script correctly with the director. At this stage, the basic vocal tones are also searched for the needs of the role. At this stage the director will direct the actors to have accurate

diction, intonation and vocal articulation when reading the script. At this stage the director is very concerned that the actor has the right interpretation and understanding of the script. In this process, targets are also determined for the actors so that the script can be quickly implemented into appropriate actions.



Image 4. Reading  
(Photo by Nahrul, 18 May 2023, UNIMED Studio)

#### c. Blocking Arrangement

The blocking arrangement is based on the use of the proscenium stage in this performance. As a production that uses the Batak opera concept, this performance presents a suggestive stage set, the actors' movements are not limited by the props on the stage. However, the actor's blocking adjusts to the light point. The actor's emergence technique is worked on in two versions, namely entering through the wing and entering using a light code. Not only that, in preparing Blocking, appropriate actions are also taken into account in the events of the script that you want to present. The arrangement of blocking is also able to provide the right motivation for certain movements and help build the right atmosphere according to what you want to present in the script of *Traces of Mother's Love*.



Image 5. Blocking Arrangement  
(Photo by Nahrul, 20 June 2023, UNIMED Studio)

## IV. CONCLUSION

The script and performance of *Traces of Mother's Love* is a transfer of the legend of Si Mardan which is a legend from the City of Tanjung Balai. This script and performance were created through research conducted directly in Tanjung Balai City. The creator explored this legend not only through literature study but also through discussions and interviews conducted with art observers, community leaders, and the author of the Si Mardan legend in Tanjung Balai City. Through research conducted in Tanjung Balai City, many things were discovered, including how the people of Tanjung Balai City interpret the legend of Mardan as a legend that contains many important essences in being an example for life and life. Art observers in the city of Tanjung Balai really appreciate this legend and provide many interpretations that are very helpful in the creation of this manuscript. Through this research, the creator got an idea to reinterpret this legend, because behind the story of Mardan, who was known as a disobedient child, there are many other values that can be focused on as an idea for creating a story from a new perspective. This script was written using an episodic plot and Batak opera conventions. As an achievement of the process of transferring the vehicle of legend, the process of writing the

script for *Traces of Mother's Love* uses the vision of reinterpreting the legend. This text puts forward the character Mamak (Mother) which is told through the love story of Mardan and Tiur. The essence of the script is conveyed through a love story so that this production can be packaged more attractively, especially for young people to get to know the existing legends better. Reinterpretation and transfer of legends is an effort to revitalize cultural wealth that needs to be continuously intensified. It is hoped that a similar creative process will not be interrupted in the next development idea. Especially for academics and art practitioners in North Sumatra.

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