

Reinterpretation of the Folk Tale: Siboru Naitang in the Batak Opera "Jiwa yang Terbelah"

Ita Khairani¹, Russel Akbar Fauzi², Agustina Helena Samosir³, Sri Mustika Aulia⁴, Tifan Muhammad Amirulloh⁵

{fattah@unimed.ac.id¹, ruselceza@yahoo.com², tinasamosir@unimed.ac.id³, iieaulia@unimed.ac.id⁴, tifan@unimed.ac.id⁵}

Prodi Seni Pertunjukan, Fakultas Bahasa Dan Seni, Universitas Negeri Medan, Medan, Indonesia

Abstract. The creation of the Batak Opera Jiwa Terbelah is an effort to transfer the vehicle for the Siboru Naitang folklore. 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, writing scripts, acting training, creating spectacles and realizing the unity of the performance. The achievement of this creation process is the Batak Opera performance which offers a presentation of the Siboru Naitang folklore in the form of a Batak Opera performance.

Keywords: Siboru Naitang, Rather Wahana, Batak Opera.

1 Introduction

The folk tale of *Siboru Naitang* is one of the many folk stories from North Sumatra. This tale tells the story of a pair of siblings who violated customs and religion by falling in love with each other. The story is deeply tragic, as it centers around shame and ends in catastrophe. To this day, the people of Samosir believe that a marriage between the Sihombing Lumbatoruan clan and the Naibaho clan should never take place in Samosir. It is believed that if these two clans were to marry, a disaster would occur, as it is thought that both clans originate from the same ancestor.

The story of *Siboru Naitang* tells of a beautiful sister, Siboru Naitang, and her brother, Datu Galapang, who fall in love with each other. Since childhood, the two had always been together. As they grew older, their closeness became increasingly unusual and concerning. Fearing the consequences, their parents decided to find spouses for them. Siboru Naitang, who was aware of this arrangement, confided in Datu Galapang, expressing that she wished to refuse the marriage proposal because she loved him. Datu Galapang also declared his love for Siboru Naitang, and thus, they both committed an act that violated their customs and religion. Their parents were furious and drove Datu Galapang away.

After Datu Galapang left, Siboru Naitang was married off to a wealthy and respected relative. However, despite the marriage, she could never love her husband and always thought of Datu Galapang. One day, as Siboru Naitang sank into deep thought, her mother-in-law suggested that she visit her family, thinking that perhaps she missed her parents. Siboru Naitang agreed to return to her village with her husband, Sinaga Bohor. Along the way, they passed

through a long forest, and due to exhaustion, they decided to rest. While her husband, Sinaga Bohor, was sound asleep, Siboru Naitang slit his throat, decapitating him. She wrapped his severed head in cloth and carried it back to the village. Sinaga Bohor's dog, which had been following them, continued to howl along the journey.

When they arrived at the house, Siboru Naitang's parents asked where Sinaga Bohor was. She told them that her husband would follow soon. However, her parents became suspicious because of the dog's continuous howling. Siboru Naitang's father followed the dog, and he discovered the severed head of Sinaga Bohor. Siboru Naitang was then found guilty of her husband's murder and was sentenced to death by drowning in Lake Toba.

Legends are part of folklore, often containing elements that are far from logical. However, the essence of the stories in Indonesian legends always carries messages that are relevant to present-day realities. These messages remain relevant even though the events in the stories may not align with reality. This is one of the reasons why it is important to preserve these tales, including legends. The non-logical aspects of these stories may distance the younger generation from Indonesia's folklore, which is why efforts should continue to bring legends closer to the younger generation. This is the foundation upon which the creator decided to adapt the folk tale of *Siboru Naitang* into a Batak opera performance.

2 Literature Review

In this creation, the following theories are used:

A. Alih Wahana

Alih wahana refers to the transformation of one form of art into another. This process encompasses translation, adaptation, and transfer. The term *wahana* means "vehicle," so *alih wahana* is the process of shifting from one type of "vehicle" to another. As a "vehicle," a work of art serves as a means to convey something from one place to another (Damono, 2018: 9).

Referring to this statement, in order for a folk tale to maintain strong relevance with contemporary times, a transformation is made from a legend into a theater performance. This begins with the script, using the folk tale as its foundation and then developing it into a story that feels more modern. The result of this transformation from folk tale to theater script is the creation of a drama script that presents the story of *Siboru Naitang* in a theatrical performance, while also incorporating dramatic conflicts, dialectic dialogues, and a well-structured dramatic framework.

The next step involves taking the theater script, *Jiwa yang Terbelah* ("The Soul that Was Torn Apart"), as the starting point for the development of the Batak Opera theater production.

B. Dramatic Vision

When a playwright writes a script based on an existing legend or story, the writer faces two choices: to stay faithful to the original author's vision or to introduce a new vision. If the writer falls into the trap of adhering strictly to the original vision, the scriptwriting process becomes a mere reproduction, which is unproductive. Therefore, the playwright is expected to deconstruct the original vision and then produce a new one, so that the resulting work offers something fresh. To produce a new vision, it is necessary to explore the dramatic vision of the original author, identify alternative perspectives, and create a new dramatic vision.

Dramatic vision refers to the idealized worldview that the playwright seeks to portray through their drama. The presence of a dramatic vision serves as a guide that inspires and

underpins the playwright's writing. The formulation of a dramatic vision is shaped by the social conditions and the time period the playwright experiences. Dramatic vision is subjective because it is influenced by both emotional and intellectual aspects (Irianto, 2021: 158). This theory is used to produce a new dramatic vision.

The work *Jiwa yang Terbelah* ("The Soul That Was Torn Apart") is created based on the conventions of Batak Opera. Batak Opera is a performance that combines music, song, dance, and storytelling (Siahaan in Sulaiman, 2019: 161). Based on the conventions of Batak Opera, *Jiwa yang Terbelah* will be developed by integrating musical, gestural, acting, and narrative elements. However, the Batak Opera conventions will not be implemented in their entirety; rather, they will serve as a starting point for the production. This means that the production will also take into account various aesthetic concepts from Western theater.

C. Multiple set Theory Bertold Brecht's

The next creation theory is Bertolt Brecht's *multiple set theory*. This performance theory introduces the concept of a stage that can quickly transition between different spaces and times, commonly known as the *montage* concept. The creation of *Jiwa yang Terbelah* utilizes the montage theory (Yudiaryani, 2000: 143). This staging concept aligns with the script, which features multiple settings with varying spaces and time conditions.

By using montage, the production can shift rapidly between different scenes, locations, and temporal settings, effectively supporting the dynamic nature of the story. This technique allows the audience to perceive the passage of time and space in a fragmented way, enhancing the narrative's emotional and intellectual impact while remaining true to the script's complex structure and thematic layers.

3 Methodology

3.1 Production of a Dramatic Vision

The initial stage of writing the script *Jiwa yang Terbelah* (The Divided Soul) involves exploring the dramatic vision of the folk tale *Siboru Naitang*. This exploration is carried out through both textual and contextual analysis. After the analysis, the next step is to interpret the text in order to uncover possibilities that may have been lost or overlooked. The interpretive data is then processed into material for producing a new dramatic vision. The produced dramatic vision is the result of developing or rejecting the dramatic vision of the *Siboru Naitang* folk tale. The primary focus of this new dramatic vision production is on innovation and originality in relation to the original text.

3.2 The Scriptwriting

The next stage involves using the dramatic vision as the foundation for the scriptwriting. The script is written using an episodic structure, focusing on selected fragments that serve as key moments in the story. These scenes are chosen carefully to ensure that the overall narrative is conveyed, while maintaining an ideal performance duration (neither too long nor too short).

The language style used combines everyday diction with poetic diction. The everyday language is chosen to make the performance more communicative and relatable to the audience, while the poetic diction is selected to preserve the aesthetic and emotional depth of the story. This balance between the two types of diction allows for a script that is both accessible and artistically rich.

3.3 Acting Training

The creation of *Opera Batak Jiwa yang Terbelah* relies heavily on dialogue and the relationships between characters as the primary medium for conveying meaning. As such, acting training becomes a vital step in the production process. The acting training process begins with the interpretation and understanding of the script in order to identify the right characterizations. This step ensures that the actors grasp the emotional depth and motivations of their roles.

The next step involves the creation of character roles through acting. During this stage, the focus is on developing the character's personality, behavior, and emotional responses. One of the key aspects built during this process is the transformation of cognitive understanding (the intellectual comprehension of the character's traits, motivations, and backstory) into psychomotor actions (the physical embodiment of these traits through movement, gesture, and expression).

This process helps actors internalize their roles, ensuring that the characters come to life not only in terms of thought and dialogue but also in physical presence and behavior, making the performance more authentic and impactful.

3.4 Construction of the Spectacle

The supporting elements of the performance (spectacle) are handled by several designers, including the artistic director, lighting designer, prop master, makeup and costume designer, music director, and movement director. To ensure smooth coordination, each designer first holds a meeting (briefing) to align their artistic vision.

The next step involves each designer working within their respective areas of expertise. To focus on every detail, rehearsals are conducted separately for each department. The director monitors the progress of each division to ensure that all aspects are coming together cohesively and that the overall vision is being realized. This collaborative process ensures that all elements visual, auditory, and performative are synchronized and work in harmony to create a unified performance.

3.5 Realization of the Unity of the Performance

The realization stage emphasizes the integration of various artistic elements into a cohesive ensemble. The focus of this stage is on the finer details of the performance, including aspects of rhythm, tempo, and dynamics.

During this phase, actors are trained to respond to the space starting from their playing area, the atmosphere, and their reactions to the music and its illustrations. This helps actors adapt to the physical environment and attune themselves to the rhythm and energy of the performance.

The realization stage also involves the presentation of the set and props, which allows the actors to familiarize themselves with their surroundings. This integration ensures that the actors can adjust their performances and synchronize their acting techniques with the elements they have explored in earlier stages of rehearsals. By doing so, the actors become more comfortable and confident in performing within the constructed space and with the technical components that support their acting.

4 Result and Discussion

A legend is a form of folklore passed down from generation to generation within a community. Although it is often believed to be true by the local people, legends generally lack strong rationality, which makes the story and its characters seem fictional—existing only in the imagination. Nevertheless, legends always carry underlying messages that hold moral values, which should be passed down to future generations. However, stories with weak rationality are often hard to accept in the modern era, as contemporary society tends to favor what is considered logical and plausible. Therefore, a new medium is needed to convey the noble messages embedded within legends so that they can still reach and be preserved by today's generation—one such medium being the stage. Theater communication, with its direct and more intimate connection with the audience, offers an opportunity to present the story from a different perspective, all while conveying the same messages that the legend holds. The transformation of a legend into a theatrical performance is expected to provide a broader aesthetic experience.

Alih wahana refers to the process of transforming one form of art into another. This process includes translation, adaptation, and transference. The term *wahana* means "vehicle," so *alih wahana* is the process of shifting from one type of "vehicle" to another. As a "vehicle," an artwork is a means to convey something from one place to another (Damono, 2018: 9). This theory of *alih wahana* serves as the foundation for the creative process in the creation of the Batak Opera *Jiwa yang Terbelah*.

Although *Jiwa yang Terbelah* is based on a legend and presented through the visual concept of Batak Opera, the production of this Batak Opera uses modern theater acting methods and the concept of opera (musical drama). The Western opera concepts used include patterns of movement, blocking, and grouping. While the approach draws on opera conventions, the work *Jiwa yang Terbelah* is not a "singing theater" performance. Instead, the strength of the piece lies in its acting (performance and dialogue), which serves as the primary medium to create dramatic events, moods, and situations.

The *Jiwa yang Terbelah* theater piece relies on dialogue between characters as the main medium for conveying meaning. Therefore, strong performances are vital for the success of the piece. To ensure the actors effectively communicate the meaning and create the right atmosphere, the acting method chosen is based on the system developed by Konstantin Stanislavski. Stanislavski's method of acting focuses on producing natural performances that convince the audience. Every action performed must come naturally from within the actor (inner action), not be artificial or contrived. The goal of Stanislavski's method is for the actor to evolve from playing the role of "as if I were" to truly becoming "I am," which Stanislavski referred to as the "magic if" (Mitter, 2002: 12).

Through the transformation of a legend into Batak Opera, combined with the opera format and modern theater acting methods influenced by Stanislavski, this production is expected to emerge as a performance blending traditional idioms with modern theatrical idioms. It aims to

preserve the culture while also engaging and appealing to contemporary audiences. The realization of these ideas will be carried out through the processes outlined below:

A. Production of a Dramatic Vision

In this creation, the playwright does not simply remain faithful to writing the Legend as it is in the original story. Instead, a process of re-conceptualization takes place, highlighting the essential aspects intended to serve as guidance in the performance. The production of the new dramatic vision undertaken by the writer is also a form of creative process.

The legend of *Si Boru Naitang* is a tale that falls under the genre of tragedy. The tragedy in this legend is the central element emphasized by the creator in the *Opera Batak Jiwa yang Terbelah* (The Divided Soul). However, this tragedy is not presented in the everyday language of dialogue; rather, it is conveyed through a more poetic and ambiguously meaningful language. Metaphors are created in every sentence, offering various philosophical reflections and profound meanings related to the essential aspects of the tragedy embedded in the legend of *Si Boru Naitang*. These themes include misguided love, sacrifice, pretense, dishonesty, and punishment for all sins committed.

Below is one of the dialogues in the script that demonstrates the type of expression used by the playwright to convey the essence of the *Si Boru Naitang* Legend:

Si boru Naitang : "Your eternal enemy is yourself, Situnggarnaduk Sitindaon!
The shadow that is part of your body and soul!
Look around you! Every chest is filled with turmoil. Not
because of resistance, but because of servitude. A servitude
that never ends, to everything the eyes can reach! To
everything that shines brightly and is full of allure!
Fight, Situnggarnaduk! Fight yourself! End this servitude!
Give what is due! Fight! For that is the only way to distinguish
yourself from an animal!"

From the dialogue excerpt above, we can see the form of expression used by the playwright in writing the script of *Si Boru Naitang*. The language is rich in metaphor and symbolism, conveying deep philosophical messages. The use of self-reflection and confrontation is central to the dialogue, as the character is urged to battle their inner self, symbolizing internal struggles and moral dilemmas.

The poetic and ambiguous language employed here is not straightforward or colloquial; instead, it is dense with meaning, evoking emotional intensity and existential questioning. The dialogue highlights themes of servitude, resistance, and self-liberation, while also reflecting on the human condition and the blurred boundaries between human and animalistic behaviors. The playwright uses rhetorical urgency ("Fight yourself!") and a commanding tone to push the character, and by extension, the audience, toward a deeper understanding of these existential themes. This approach allows the writer to transcend the original folk tale and reframe its message with more universal and philosophical dimensions, elevating the tragic elements of the story.

B. The scriptwriting

The scriptwriting process takes place after the playwright has developed a new dramatic vision. Once the new dramatic vision is found, the writer then defines the central character, characterization, plot, and setting of the events. This is followed by creating an outline

for the script, a synopsis, and then the actual scriptwriting process. After the script is completed, a quality test is conducted through a dramatic reading to assess its effectiveness.

C. Acting Training

The completion of the script marks the starting point of the visual creation process. This process begins with casting to select the actors. The casting is done using a casting by ability approach, where actors are chosen based on their acting skills. After the casting stage, the creative process of bringing the Batak Opera *Jiwa yang Terbelah* to life begins through script reading and interpretation.



Fig. 1. Reading Process

The next process is the creation of character roles through acting. The aspects developed in this stage involve transforming cognitive elements into psychomotor skills. During this training phase, blocking begins to be explored.



Fig. 2. Blocking Process

In the blocking exploration stage, exercises are created to motivate the actors in every movement, ensuring that their actions are driven by intention and appear natural.

This process helps to establish movements with gestures that have clear motivation behind them.

D. Construction of the Spectacle

The supporting elements of the performance (spectacle) are managed by several designers, such as the artistic director, lighting designer, prop master, makeup and costume designer, music director, and movement director. To ensure smooth coordination, each designer first holds a meeting (briefing) to align their artistic vision. The next step involves the designers working within their respective areas. In order to focus on every detail, rehearsals are conducted separately for each division. The director will monitor the progress made by each department.



Fig. 3. The Music Arrangement Process



Fig. 4. The Movement and Dance Choreography Process

E. Realization of the Unity of the Performance

This process involves the integration of various artistic elements into an ensemble. The focus of this stage is on the details of the performance, including aspects of rhythm, tempo, and dynamics. At this stage, actors are trained to respond to the space, which includes the playing

area, atmosphere, and responses to musical illustrations. This realization phase also presents the stage set and props, allowing actors to acclimate and adjust to the various acting techniques developed in previous processes.



Fig. 5. Poster

Acting in Batak Opera is typically very expressive and full of emotion. However, in this performance, the acting element is combined with the "System" acting method from Stanislavsky to create a more realistic portrayal, avoiding the overly theatrical style common in traditional theatre performances. Actors are required to express deep emotions through facial expressions, body movements, and dialogue. In Batak culture, emotions such as love, anger, sadness, and happiness are often expressed very strongly. Additionally, the actors' performances include the distinct Batak dialect to enhance the authenticity of the Batak Opera. Therefore, the actors must be able to fully explore and showcase Batak culture in this performance. Through this approach to acting, the Batak Opera performance *Jiwa yang Terbelah* emerges as a show that authentically conveys the story and creates an emotional connection with the audience.



Fig. 6. Acting in Opera Batak Jiwa yang Terbelah Peformance

Batak Opera often tells folk tales, mythology, or legends from the Batak people. Like many folk tales, myths, and legends, these stories are often illogical. The Legend of Si Boru Naitang, which serves as the basis for the creation of the Batak Opera *Jiwa yang Terbelah*, also contains illogical elements in its narrative. This is the foundation for the reinterpretation of the Si Boru Naitang legend in this performance. In the script of *Jiwa yang Terbelah*, the Legend of Si Boru Naitang is restructured into a more logical storyline to make it relevant to the present day. This requires the actors to bring the characters in the story to life in a way that feels logical. The actors undergo training and exploration to develop a proper understanding of the context of the story and the cultural values embedded in the Legend of Si Boru Naitang.



Fig. 7. Acting in Opera Batak Jiwa yang Terbelah Peformance

In terms of music, similar to many forms of traditional opera, music and dance are integral parts of Batak Opera. Actors must be able to interact with the musical elements, whether through singing, movement, or dance, which adds an expressive dimension to the performance. They

need to adjust their expressions and body movements to the rhythm of traditional Batak music, such as *gondang* and *sopi*.



Fig. 8. Acting and Dance in Opera Batak Jiwa yang Terbelah Peformance

In addition to speaking and singing, body movements are crucial in Batak Opera. Actors often use hand, head, or full-body movements to express the feelings and inner conflicts of their characters. These movements are also connected to traditional Batak dances, where acting and dance complement each other. Acting in Batak Opera is a blend of deep acting techniques, mastery of language and dialect, as well as an understanding of Batak culture and traditions. Actors not only play a role in the story but also become part of a vibrant and dynamic cultural experience. Acting in the Batak Opera performance *Jiwa yang Terbelah* requires the actors to truly internalize and express the values and emotions unique to the Batak community.



Fig. 9. Dance and Costum in Opera Batak Jiwa yang Terbelah Peformance

In the Batak Opera *Jiwa yang Terbelah*, the costumes and props used by the actors also carry strong symbolic meanings. Traditional Batak clothing, such as *ulos* and head adornments, enhance the visual impact of the performance, reflecting the social status,

identity, and role of each character. Actors must master the way they wear and interact with these elements during the performance.



Fig. 10. Dance in Opera Batak Jiwa yang Terbelah Performance

This stage is the process of integrating various artistic elements into an ensemble. The focus at this point is on the finer details of the performance, such as rhythm, tempo, and dynamics. In this phase, actors are trained to respond to the space they are in—starting with their playing area, the atmosphere, and their responses to the music illustrations.

During this stage, the set and props are also introduced, so that actors can familiarize themselves with the environment and adjust to the different acting techniques and physical movements that were developed in earlier stages of the process. This helps the actors to integrate their performances more fluidly with the set, props, and the overall dramatic flow, ensuring that their movements and emotions are harmonized with the visual and auditory elements of the performance.

5 Conclusion

This creation is a creative process that begins with the interpretation of the *Legenda Si Boru Naitang*, which then gives birth to a new dramatic vision by the playwright. The *Legenda Si Boru Naitang* is transformed into a script and Batak Opera performance titled *Jiwa yang Terbelah*. The performance is created with a visual concept of Batak Opera but uses modern theater acting methods inspired by Stanislavski, presented in the form of an opera (musical drama), and incorporates Bertolt Brecht's concept of *multiple sets*.

The fusion of traditional theater idioms and modern theater techniques is employed in this creation to convey the essence of the *Legenda Si Boru Naitang*, which holds deep philosophical themes about misguided love, sacrifice, pretense, dishonesty, and the punishment for the sins committed. These philosophies are important and still relevant to be conveyed to the younger generation. However, because the narrative in the legend tends to be illogical, there is a need to transform the medium and adapt the storytelling model to make it more accessible. This creative process is well underway and is moving toward a performance that is designed to capture the appreciation of the audience, especially the younger generation.

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