

***Dian-Tara: A Final Project of Gothic and Tragedy Novelette***

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**Abstract**

This paper explains the process of creating a novelette entitled *Dian-Tara*. The novelette was written in one linear plot with external narration using narrative theory or narratology. Tragedy and gothic fiction were chosen as the genres since they could create a sense of eeriness in the audience. The issues and phenomena raised in the novelette were the impact of a broken family on children and also what society can do to help the victims. This undergraduate final work adapted Aristotle's *Poetics* by having the three-act structure and catharsis for the resolution. The theory of narrative by Tzvetan Todorov was applied for the plot development. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory was also used for the characters' design in terms of creating their past and how it influenced their decision-making in the story. For the character types, this novelette used a protagonist and an antagonist. The characters' design was separated into three aspects of life (professional, personal, and private). The result of the final work showed that the past life of each protagonist and antagonist character contributed to their decision-making and helped to drive the plot forward as a tragedy was chosen to end the story. Their bad childhood memories and the tragic ending were meant to raise the awareness of the readers, as the impact of this phenomenon cannot be denied.

*Keywords:* gothic fiction, narratology, tragedy

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Out of all child protection legal cases in Indonesia in the last ten years, cases related to children of divorced parents ranked second highest in number (Maradewa, 2020). Out of 963 cases, almost 30% of the cases were children as the victim of problematic parental behavior (277 cases). These cases were usually associated with domestic violence and even the death of the victim. Further data (Maradewa, 2020) also showed that the biological father has the highest percentage of being the perpetrator.

On the other hand, the role of the neighborhood includes the potential to reduce domestic violence as some factors could be considered effective preventive interventions, such as great solidarity, communication, and cohesion in the neighborhood (Kim et al., 2012). In the context of literary study, a piece of literary work could mirror society and real phenomena. A literary work could also reflect the norms and values of a culture in society (Albrecht, 1954). In this study, a novelette was chosen as the medium because it could share a great story in a brief plot and concise words (Masterclass, 2020), which also fit the timeline of this study. Using metaphors and symbols in the novelette could also be culture-specific to certain audiences (Chattah, 2006) to make the message more powerful and impactful. This work was written to portray the impact of a broken family on children and how society reacts to the issue of domestic abuse.

**Literature Review**

This final work adapted Aristotle's Poetics by having the three-act structure (*hamartia*, *peripeteia*, *anagnorisis*) and catharsis as the resolution. *Hamartia* refers to the time when the characters face an error judgment or tragic flaw. This situation leads to *peripeteia*, which refers to the sudden change or fall of fortune of the characters. *Anagnorisis* refers to recognition, or sudden recall, and can be a moment when the characters find new friends or enemies (Burke, 2014). All of these three elements are driven by the plot of the entire story.

These elements of tragedy can be seen in previous works, including Shakespeare's famous tragedies. Doko and Doko (2017) analyzed the characters of Shakespeare tragedies, such as King Lear, Hamlet, Othello, and Macbeth, who fell into their flaws (*hamartia*) that affected their surroundings and made a sudden change as the plot moved (*peripeteia*). In the end, they realized something went wrong (*anagnorisis*) yet it was too late as they had shattered their own lives and their story ended up as a tragedy.

Todorov (1960), as cited in Adepati and Samanik's (2018), also built the plot development by including the five stages faced by the characters (equilibrium, disruption, recognition, repair of the damage, and return to a new equilibrium). A state of equilibrium is the first stage when characters face their normal life. As the story progresses, the characters will encounter disturbances or problems, which is the stage of a disruption to the equilibrium. After they have experienced the problems, they will recognize that the problem has affected their normal situation, and they come to the stage of recognition. Afterward, the characters will seek ways to escape or fix the problem in the stage of repairing the damage. All these stages lead to equilibrium again if the characters get their normal life back, or it can even lead to a new equilibrium when they have to adjust themselves to a new condition in the story (Todorov, 1960, as cited in Adepati & Samanik, 2018). In this novelette, the characters were separated into the protagonists and antagonists. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory was used to design protagonist and antagonist characters as they were driven by their past in making their decision.

This work was also written as gothic fiction. The terror and horror appeared in the form of spirits or ghosts as scary creatures. Bennett and Royle (2016) describe ghosts as creatures who are neither completely dead nor alive at the same time. The reason is that they have untold secrets and take the secrets with them when they die, before they can reveal the truth. This can be seen in a classic work, *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, by William Shakespeare. It is when the ghost

of Hamlet's late father appears to his son, telling Hamlet that he was murdered by Claudius, Hamlet's uncle, and demanding that Hamlet seek revenge on Claudius. For this reason, the gothic part does not simply come as a ghost story to scare people. As cited in Bennett and Royle (2016), ghosts do not come and appear from nowhere. They are described in a *context* and with a certain *purpose*.

### **Methods**

The novelette *Dian-Tara* raises the issue of a broken family's impact on children, specifically sexual abuse by the parents, and the death of the children. The story revolves around one linear plot and the setting takes place in the urban city of Jakarta. There are five characters in the novelette: Diana Hadiwidjaya (Dian), Mutiara Hadiwidjaya (Tara), Diandra Susanto (Diandra), Simson Hadiwidjaya (Simson) and Nathan. Diandra is the protagonist and Simson is the antagonist.

Dian and Tara are Simson's daughters, and they are abused by their father. Diandra is the neighbor living next to the Hadiwidjayas' house. She faces her life's lowest point which leads to her death in a car crash. The car crash happens at the same time as Dian's suicide attempt. While Dian dies and her soul leaves her body, Diandra's soul become trapped inside Dian's body. Diandra seeks help to reveal the truth and save herself and Tara from Simson. On her way to escape, Diandra gets help from Nathan, her colleague, who secretly loves her.

### **Designing the Plot**

As this work adapted the Aristotelian theory of tragedies, Diandra's failed career and love relationship, her death in a car crash, and Dian's suicide attempt are the *hamartia*. These events lead these characters to the *peripeteia* when both of them face their sudden changes and fall of fortune (Diandra loses her normal life and Dian dies). The *anagnorisis* is when Diandra notices something strange and fishy about her neighbor after her soul is trapped inside Dian's body. Furthermore, her failure to escape, and then her death when Simson murders her, is the

catharsis or resolution. How Simson finally ends Diandra and Tara's lives is the catharsis or resolution, a tragic ending chosen for this novelette.

This novelette also applied the narrative structure theory by Tzvetan Todorov and has five stages in the plot. At the end of the story, the characters would face a new equilibrium as they could not go back to their normal lives because of the tragic ending. For the gothic part, the idea of the spirit's appearance was also to reveal the unspoken truth. Although Dian's spirit leaves her body and is replaced by Diandra, she still comes to Diandra in the woman's dream to help her understand what is happening inside the house.

### **Creating the Characters**

Both the protagonist and antagonist have their professional, personal, and private lives that drive their decisions and characterization in the story. Diandra's behavior and decisions are influenced by her past experiences. She chooses to forget her traumatic childhood and live her life as normally as she can. Diandra tends to have repression as her defense mechanism (Freud, 1965). Simson is also influenced by his past lives. His childhood memory seems to be "darker" than Diandra's as he murdered someone in his youth. It makes him unable to differentiate right and wrong, as the only thing he understands is to protect himself. As a result, Simson tends to have denial and displacement as his defense mechanisms (Freud, 1965).

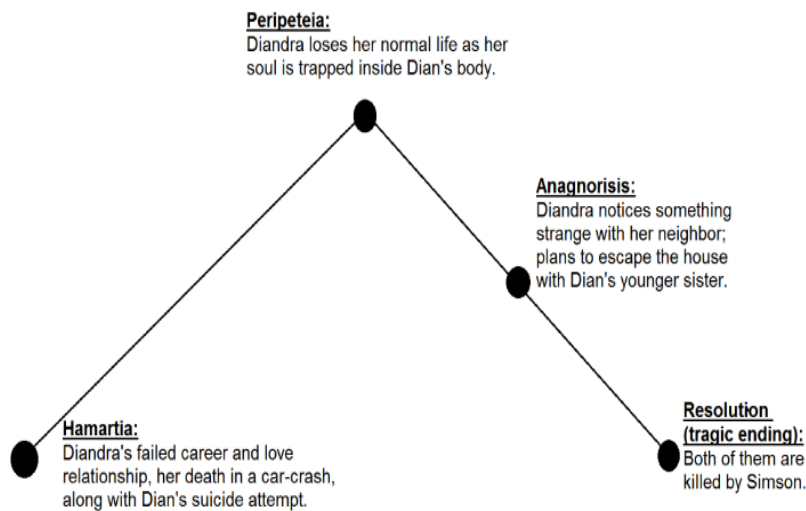
### **Reflections**

*Dian-Tara* was chosen as the title of this novelette because it tells the whole story. *Diantara* means "in the midst" or "between." The concept of in the middle and between can be seen from different perspectives of each character: Diandra who is trapped in another family's life, and Simson's problematic parental behavior that creates distance between he and his daughters. *Dian-tara* was also formed from the name of the children's characters: Dian and Tara.

The tragic plot can be seen in the following figure.

**Figure 1**

*The Novelette's Tragedy Diagram*

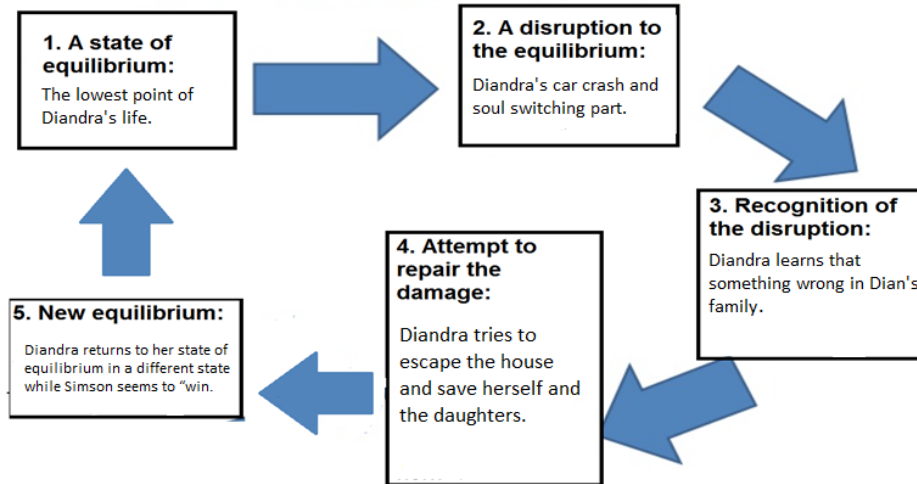


*Note:* Each chapter of the novelette was also titled by each part of the plot development (Chapter I - *Hamartia*, Chapter II - *Peripeteia*, Chapter III - *Anagnorisis*).

For the plot development, this novelette adapted Tzvetan Todorov's narrative theory. According to Todorov, there are five stages that a character will face in the whole story: a state of equilibrium, a disruption of the equilibrium, recognition of the disruption, an attempt to repair the damage, and a new equilibrium (Todorov, 1960, as cited in Adepati & Samanik, 2018).

**Figure 2**

*The Novelette's Narrative Structure*



Diandra's tragic condition, as she dies with an untold secret about her real situation and Simson's mysterious decision, becomes the new equilibrium of this story. Diandra tragically goes back to her first equilibrium, being at the lowest point of life but in the form of a spirit, while Simson seems to succeed in controlling his world to work as he wishes. The new equilibrium is an open ending that allows the reader to interpret or continue the story with their imagination. It does not talk explicitly about what the spirit would do after it has been killed or whether Simson would repeat the same thing to another victim.

As stated in the previous sub-section, Diandra's behavior and decisions are influenced by her past traumatic experiences. She tends to have repression as her defense mechanism (Freud, 1965). Repression refers to an unconscious defense mechanism to keep all bad and threatening thoughts from becoming conscious (McLeod, 2020). She desperately forces her mind to forget her bitter childhood experiences, yet her repressed memories appear in their "altered forms," such as her nightmares.

Simson has bizarre behavior and a bizarre personality. In the story plot, his need is to make everything work under his control and desires. Simson will do whatever it costs to ensure everything moves as smoothly as he wants, including hurting others. This makes Simson have denial as his defense mechanism (Freud, 1965) as he cannot differentiate right

from wrong. The only right things that he knows are defending himself and making everything work according to his wants.

If he is uncontrollably mad, Simson will release his anger on Tara by abusing her physically, though the poor girl does not do anything. Simson uses this condition to threaten Dian if she tries to fight him back. This following excerpt is an example which is written on the chapter I of the novelette.

“Sorry.” Dian took cotton and a small bottle of Betadine from a small drawer beside their bed. She carefully poured the liquid on the cotton and rubbed it on Tara’s bruises.

“Being a mute girl isn't enough and now he wants to make me blind.” Tara moved her lips and hands when Dian tried to heal her bruises. “Tomorrow perhaps he will take my life.”

“Don’t move. And stop saying something bad.”

He would not be hesitant to hit Tara even if it could make the little girl die. This is his defense mechanism, which is displacement. Displacement is redirecting an impulse to another object or target (McLeod, 2020). He redirects his anger to another target, who is Tara, his younger daughter.

The gothic part of this novelette is shown when Diandra is on her way home. She tries to calm herself and fall asleep, but meanwhile the driver cannot find the right way for them to get home. When she wakes up, she realizes that they are lost. They have passed an unknown road that is really quiet and dark, not the usual direction that Diandra takes. They keep passing that road. Diandra slightly hears the sound of a train alarm. The sound becomes clearer as the taxi passes, yet they are still trapped on that strange road. Then, a young girl with black hair appears in front of their eyes with her pale face and bleeding stomach. She is Dian, who has just died after committing suicide. She shows herself as a spirit but she looks



very real in front of Diandra and the driver. Not wanting to hit her, the taxi driver quickly hits the brake, yet the girl disappears, and the brake does not work. The car slams into a train.

Dian's presence before the accident is the cue for the next event that will happen to Diandra. After the taxi has been hit by the train, Diandra loses consciousness. When she opens her eyes, Diandra sees only a void. She tries her best to remember everything that has happened to her and finally remembers the girl who might be responsible for the accident. She is Dian. Then, magically, Dian appears in the void and tells Diandra the secret. This particular part portrays the purpose of having ghosts and spirits in a gothic story as proposed by Bennett and Royle (2016). Dian takes her secret with her before she dies and plans to seek help from people who are still alive.

### **Conclusion**

Writing a tragedy novelette could bring awareness to the audience that the effects of these issues (problematic parental behavior on children and unresolved past lives) should not be denied. Society also has the responsibility to prevent future cases before the real situation ends up as a tragedy.

A literary work itself can mirror the real situation in a society. Genuine and authentic work comes from real situations and experiences. It is important to raise awareness and discomfort toward current issues.

Make sure that every element in the story has its own purpose, for instance, *Why does it use a certain color? Why does it have to be a train, not a car? Why does she always cry alone? Determining the purpose will make the readers engage and empathize with the characters and story. Do not forget to do the research behind the purpose: Is it correct that the blue color is always related to sadness?*

Having a dialect and diversity might also help to make the work as authentic as it can be. Using the local names, inserting the local language in the dialogue, and selecting correct symbols and colors could make the story more interesting and even educate the readers.

Using a detailed depiction of the object can also help the reader to imagine the situation in the work. Describing size, color, and common names or brands might help and make it more interesting.

In conclusion, the most important thing is to know what to write, how to write it, and the purpose of writing that piece of literary work.

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