



Kinds of Characters in SiSwati Folktales

Jabulani Jarreth Sabelo Pato; Zilibele Mtumane

Department of African Languages, University of Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa

E-mail: Jabulani.pato@gmail.com; zmtumane@uj.ac.za

<http://dx.doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v7i8.2290>

Abstract

This article explores the kinds of characters found in siSwati folktales. The kinds to be discussed are the hero, villain, and foil characters. The folktales to be considered are ‘Mpompo’, ‘Khabonina’ and ‘Lonkombose NaDemthelele’, in Dlamini’s Sinkayinkayi, and ‘Imphisi’, ‘Ingcavulele’ and ‘Lokuthula NaLochalachala’, in Dlamini and Garb’s Bekukhona. The concepts of character and folktale are defined as part of the introductory section of the study. The subtopics of this discourse are introduction, the hero, the villain, foil characters and conclusion.

Keywords: *Folktales; Characters; Hero; Villain; Foil Characters*

Introduction

While siSwati folktales include various kinds of characters in their content, so far, very little attempt has been done by scholars to discuss this aspect in the folktales of the language. Pato (2023), on whose doctoral thesis this study is based, is probably the only one who has done so. This article discusses three kinds of characters: the hero or heroine, villain, and foil characters, as employed by different narrators of siSwati folktales.

Characters are people in literary works, especially prose and drama. These people are endowed with qualities of living persons, as they can speak, perform actions, think, and have physical qualities of human beings (Mtumane, 1995: 51 – 52). Roberts (1999: 53) defines a character as a verbal representation of a human being, and Hendry (2013: 106) says that it is “the persons who act out the plot, and who interact with other persons within the spelt-out setting”. Ebewo (1997: 13) defines: “A character is an imaginary creation of a person by an author to carry out roles which are typical of the individualized personality he represents. Plots are created around characters.”

Abrams and Harpham (2009: 42) view characters as:

... the persons represented in a dramatic or narrative work, who are interpreted by the reader as possessing particular moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities by inferences from what the

persons say and their distinctive ways of saying it – the dialogue – and from what they do – the action.

From the above quotes, it is evident that characters represent the common personalities in society and their portrayal depicts how they (characters) conduct themselves. Characters can be displayed in a variety of aspects, depending on the standpoint taken by the author in narrating the story and what he wants to achieve through them. These aspects could be physical appearance, thoughts, or actions.

Folktale is what is called ‘insumansumane’ and ‘insimuzilwane’ in isiZulu and siSwati respectively. A summative definition of a folktale is that it is a short narrative in prose of unknown origin which has been transmitted verbally, though many of these tales end up being written (Abrams and Harpham, 2009: 124). This is a broader definition which, in this study, shall be considered as referring to ‘oral narrative’ and, in a narrower sense, folktale is a branch under oral narrative.

Nkosi and Zama (1990: 6) define folktales as:

... ziyizingxoxo zakudala. Ezinye izinsumansumane zinezifundo ezithile eziphathelene nokuziphatha komuntu noma isilwane. Kwezinye izinsumansumane kuxoxwa ngezilwane nabantu abebaphila endulo ... Ezinye izinsumansumane zixoxa ngokudalwa kwesintu kanye nokufika kokufa.

(... are stories of the past. Some folktales have certain moral lessons about the conduct of human beings or animals. Other folktales are about animals and human beings that lived in the past ... Other folktales are about the creation of traditions and the coming of death.)

The above quote shows that folktales are ancient tales that have moral lessons. More to that, they display relationships that existed between human beings and animals. The present traditions evident in the lives of amaZulu and emaSwati were introduced or were first experienced through folktales. Vilakati and Msibi (2006: 31) add by stating that apart from folktales providing moral lessons, they also entertain and pass time. They further state that this kind of oral narrative has traces of untruth and that they depict no religion. This is evident in having animal characters given human traits and human beings interacting with animals with ease. Vilakati and Msibi (Op cit.) say that human characters have the power to do supernatural acts. They go on to state that most folktales have certain themes which involve unfaithfulness (Ibid.). Examples of folktales in these two languages are: ‘Chakijane’ and ‘Mshayindlela’ in siSwati, and ‘UNanana Nendlovu’ and ‘KwaNtunjambili’ in isiZulu.

The Hero

In literature, the hero is the central figure with positive qualities in a story, who commits acts of recognizable bravery or courage, strength, or admirable quality (Mtumane, 2018: 99 – 108). Alternatively, a hero or heroine is called a protagonist. He is the most prominent character in prose work. Ebewo (1997: 83) refers to a hero as a protagonist who functions as a leading character. A hero is the chief figure, both in terms of importance in the story and the ability to elicit interest, pity, and sympathy from the reader (Ebewo, 1997: 31). Hendry (2013: 118 – 119) defines a hero as the main character who is the centre of the reader’s interest. Roberts (1999: 57) says that a hero or heroine is usually a round character. The major role the character plays is centred around the action of the narrative and exhibits the ability to adapt to new circumstances posed by the opposite character.

Abrams and Harpham (2009: 265) concur that a hero or heroine is the chief character in a plot, on whom the reader’s interest centres. S/he is the prime character whom readers are likely to identify with. This is the main character whom the author uses to develop the plot. She also has the conflict and tension mainly experienced by him/her and must untangle, untie, and unknot. The hero is used mainly to project the theme of the prose work.

The character by the name of Mpompo is the hero in the folktale 'Mpompo', in Dlamini's Sinkayinkayi (1988), as he displays various heroism traits. The narrative is about an old woman who has been killing men in her country. Mpompo, who is from another country, decides to go where the manslayer is experienced, to save all the troubled men: 'Leva lelijaha ngalenhlupeko yalesalukati' (The young man heard of the adversity of the old woman) (Dlamini, 1988: 54). This shows that he is aware of his surroundings, and resolves to go and help, which is a trait making the readers take interest in him. His introduction shows that he is the protagonist in the narrative.

Mpompo also draws the other characters' attention:

Nalifika lelijaha lapha kalesalukati, lakhandza kunebafati bodvwa. Watsi wakhulekela, bakhuta imihlolo, batsi, "Hawu, uphumaphi wena ungati kutsi akunamadvodza kulelive?"

(When the young man arrived at the old woman's place, he found women only. When he greeted them announcing his arrival, they were shocked and questioned, "What, where are you from, not knowing that there are no men in this country?")

(Dlamini, 1988: 54)

Other characters pity Mpompo when he arrives because it is an open secret that he won't see the next day, judging from the wicked works of the old woman who kills only men. The fact that Mpompo draws the attention of the other nameless characters in the folktale shows that he must assume heroic status. It again captures the interest of the readers on how he will survive, as there are no men in the society.

Mpompo starts showing heroism as he unexpectedly wakes up in the morning and surprises everyone on how he has survived the claws of the old woman. The other characters are shocked:

Ekuseni bamangala bonkhe balapha ekhaya, kutsi lisindze njani lelijaha kugogo.

(They were all surprised the following morning in the homestead, as to how the young man survived from the old woman).

(Dlamini, 1988: 54-55)

This is evidence that the characters are shocked on how Mpompo can escape the men-devouring old woman, and it qualifies him to be a hero as focus is still on him, as he saves men from the manslayer.

Propp's hero must be rewarded. The last sphere of Propp's approach says that the hero who has saved people from the villains is rewarded as he returns home (Pato, 2023: 47).

Abese ayahlangana emadvodza alelo live atsi lelijaha afuna libe inkhosi yabo.

(The men of that country came together and said that they wanted this young man to be their king.)

(Dlamini, 1988: 55)

The above citation shows that the men who have been retrieved from the old woman's long tooth are honouring Mpompo for freeing them, as he is rewarded of being crowned as a king.

Adhering to Propp's approach, the ending presents the attention and interest given to the hero by other characters in 'Mpompo'. This happens as Mpompo is honoured by the masses for saving them from the claws of the villain, the old woman.

Mpompo, the hero, can adapt to new circumstances posed by the villain. The circumstances come in the different struggles he encounters. This is evident when Mpompo is visited by the manslayer:

Lavuka lelijaha latsi, "Yini gogo? Kwente njani?" Watsi gogo, "Bengifuna kuphuma, lenja iyangijubela." Latsi lijaha, "Gogo ungabota ngala ngakimi, phuma ucondze emnyango."

(The young man woke up and said, "What is it grandmother? What is happening?" The old woman responded, "I wanted to go out, the dog is blocking my way." The young man said, "You must not come towards me, go straight to the door grandma.")

(Dlamini, 1988: 54)

The quotation above shows Mpompo evading the first trick of the old woman in attacking him, as he can prevent her from doing so. Again, the old woman never tires in her tricks and Mpompo is equal to the task, as pointed out in the narration below:

Balalalala, sekutakusa, gogo wafuna kwetama futsi. Kwabanjengekucala wehluleka.

(They slept a bit, just before dawn, the old woman wanted to try again. It was like the first attempt, she failed.)

(Ibid.)

The citation depicts the hero in Mpompo as the old woman fails. A hero is said to be able to adapt to different challenges, as is evident with these extracts. Even after these 'night' tries, the old woman never stops, as she opts to attack in broad daylight:

Lelijaha naselisetulu ligeca lukhuni, gogo abeme ngaphansi kwesihlahla ageca lesihlahla afuna siwe atodla lelijaha. Lacala lijaha lahlabelela ingoma lemnandzi ... Nasephuka lesihlahla lesilandzelako lesi wazubela kulesilandzelako. Salukati sasigawula ngelitinyo.

(When the young man was up chopping firewood, the old woman was underneath the tree chopping it to fall, so she could devour the young man. The boy started singing a beautiful song ... When the tree close to this one broke, he jumped to the next one. The old woman was chopping with the tooth.)

(Dlamini, 1988: 55)

The quotations above show that Mpompo can fight all ploy by the old woman. He adapts to her different tricks until his dog provides help and kills the old woman, and he saves the number of people who have been swallowed by the old woman previously.

A king's interdiction in the folktale 'Ingcavulele', in Dlamini and Garb (2008), reveals the hero. The folktale is about a king who needs a mysterious animal's hide. No one knows the animal. The senior citizens and middle-aged men and women know nothing about the animal. This makes the king angry, as he needs the hide of the mysterious animal, ingcavulele and, as expected, when the leader of the society needs, the society must provide. There is a boy who becomes the hero, as he saves the society from the king's fury. This is after people of different age groups have showed a lack of knowledge of the said animal. For starters, the senior citizens:

Inkhosi yaya emachegwini netalukati yabuta umbuto yatsi: "Kukhona yini lapha emkhatsini wenu loyatiko ingcavulele?"

“Cha, wena waPhakatsi asiyati,” kuphendvula libandla.

(The king went to the old men and women and said: “Is there anyone who knows ingcavulele amongst you?”)

“No, your Royal Highness, we do not know it,” the group responded.)

(Dlamini and Garb, 2008: 49)

The citation above shows that elderly people have no knowledge of the animal, yet they are supposed to be the symbol of knowledge and wisdom. Their failure to know the animal makes the king to be ‘naked’ in the sense that he is supposed to be gaining support from them (the elderly people) but they fail him. Their failure signifies that the king is ruling alone, without the expected support from his people.

As the old crew has no pleasurable news for the king, he goes on to ask another age group: ‘Yendlula inkhosi yaya emadvodzeni nebfati babo yababuta lowo mbuto leyawubuta emachegwini netalukati’ (He went onto men and women to ask the very question he had asked the old men and women) (Ibid.). The hero surfaces when the king’s fury is evident and, at this point, the plot is tightening:

Lapho inkhosi yase igucuke seyimnyama seyifikelwa kutfukutsela ngobe bantfu bayo abanamphendvulo ... Kwabindza kwatsi dvu, babukana bodvwa bafana nemantfombatana. Kwabonakala kutsi tinkhwa timinywe ebhodweni. Kusenjalo kwasukuma lomunye umfana waphendvula inkhosi ... “Wena waPhakatsi, wena lowakhula silibele, wena wekunene, wena longangetintsaba, mine ngiyayati ingcavulele.”

(At that time the king was furious because his people had no response ... There was silence, the boys and girls looked at each other. It was clear that the moment was tense. At that moment, one boy rose and answered the king ... “Your Royal Highness, you who grew up whilst we were foolish, you the righteous one, the one equal to mountains, I know ingcavulele.”)

(Dlamini and Garb, 2008: 50)

‘Seyimnyama’ (he was black) is an idiomatic expression indicating that the king is very angry, and tinkhwa timinyene ebhodweni’ (breads squeezing themselves in the pot) also shows the reaction of the people now as tense, not knowing how the king would react because of his fury. The boy then saves the society from the king’s anger and unknown punishment, for not proving what he desires. The boy saves them hence the happiness:

Watsi kube umfana awuphendvule umbuto wakhe bonkhe bantfu bajabula ngobe bese babona kutsi balingenwe ngumphini.

(After the boy had responded to his question, all the people became happy because they had realized that they were deserving punishment.)

(Ibid.)

Balingenwe ngumphini’ (They deserved to be punished) is another idiomatic expression showing that the king’s subjects are ready for a punishment, only for them to be saved by the unnamed boy. The boy again proves to be the hero as he devises a strategy of getting ingcavulele’s hide. He is brave: ‘Yonkhe lendlela uhamba yedvwa kute nalompheketalako’ (He walks the whole journey alone as he had no one accompanying him) (Ibid.).

It is ironic that the elderly people know nothing about the animal, but a young boy knows it and is prepared to walk miles alone to please the king. This is a trait of being a hero, as it is said that he walks a long distance alone, even though he is a young boy. Again, he is portrayed as clever, as he becomes the readers' interest, as the audience follows the plot structure.

Folktales are about people and animals, and, in this tale, it comes to 'reality' that small animals are wiser than big animals, as the young man shows wisdom not only in knowing the mysterious animal but, also in finding a strategy of getting its hide:

Watsi etfuka wayibona seyisedvute manje wase ujika phansi sigubhu setintfwala. Tintfwala tatsi nyakanyaka phansi yefika ingcavulele yalibala kutikhotsa.

(When he saw that it was close, he threw one container of lice to the ground. The lice started moving on the ground and ingcavulele came and licked them.)

(Dlamini and Garb, 2008: 51)

The hero is delaying the Ingcavulele by throwing small insects (first the lice) at different stages. He repeats the same trick with ants:

Kwatsi lapho asayiva seyilapha emva kwakhe waphonsa phansi sigubhu setintfuntfwane. Tintfuntfwane tincane kantsi ungatitsela phansi tiyaphetfuka. Ayiwukhohlwanga umsebenti wayo yaphindze yamhoshela kangako futsi umfana ijake kumudla sibili kunalokudla tintfwala netintfuntfwane, letisuke timbangela buyanga.

(When he felt that it was behind him, he threw a container full of ants down. Ants are small and once thrown down, they traffic. It never forgot its task, and it followed the boy again, wanting to gulp him because the lice and ants triggered hunger.)

(Ibid.)

The hero repeats the same trick, which presents Scheub's core-image (Scheub, 2015: 122) as, in what happens, each time the boy throws different buckets at different times during the 'escaping' from the ingcavulele. The throwing of containers full of small insects disturbs and delays the ingcavulele and develops the plot as the hero adapts to the attack of the mysterious animal. Wisdom and trickery are the hero's traits depicted with Scheub's core cliché (Op cit.) (the repetition of the action of throwing containers full of insects) at this phase of the narration, as the narrative is about to reach its peak:

Manje bese kusele sigubhu sekugcina lesasinemakululu. Pho-ke emakululu akazubi atsi buya lapha. Wase uphonsa sona sigubhu semakululu. Yefika ingcavulele yacobonga ngalinye ngalinye azuba angemi. Yalibala mbamba kulesigubhu sekugcina semakululu.

(Now there was the last container full of fleas. Fleas jump quite a lot. He threw the container full of fleas. Ingcavulele came and picked them one by one as the fleas were endlessly jumping. This last container delayed the ingcavulele.)

(Dlamini and Garb, 2008: 51)

The core-cliché presents the trickery of the hero as he has planned to throw containers with different kinds of insects strategically, in accordance with the ability of the insects, to cause great frustration, starting with those posing minor annoyance and finishing with those giving major annoyance.

Again, the astute nature of the hero is evident when he approaches his home to people who are ready to ambush the *ingcavulele*. For his great pleasing work to the leader of the society, he is greatly honoured for proving the gallantry in him:

Bamuva bonkhe bantfu amemeta. "Hlomani tinsungulo! Hlomani tinsungulo esibayeni." Baphuma bantfu bahloma tinsungulo taye tayakungena esibayeni. Yefika ingcavulele yahlatjwa ... Emajaha ahlindza kahle kuze kungonakali sikhumba sayo ... Inkhosi yajabula impela, umfana yamnika tinkhomo ibonga buchawe bakhe.

(All the people heard him shouting. "Pin stabs! Pin stabs inside the kraal." People came out and pinned traps on the ground leading to the kraal. *ingcavulele* came and was trapped ... Young men skinned it well, avoiding damaging its hide ... The king was happy, and he gifted the boy with cattle, appreciating his bravery.)

(Dlamini and Garb, 2008: 52)

The core-cliché, as the drive of the plot, displays the hero as he never succumbs to the pressure posed by the animal. Instead, he helps the society in presenting the *ingcavulele* to be killed, so the king gets the hide he has been demanding from the society. The society has been saved from the anger of the king. This hints to Levi-Strauss' (1967), Scheub's (1996) and Dundes' (1964) views that folktales present the life of the society where the narrative is told. For instance, the *emaSwati* society has a king leading the nation and the subjects must pay allegiance to him, which is a cultural expectation in the society. It is society's duty to see to it that all the needs of their king are met, just like the boy has made it a point that the *ingcavulele*'s hide is obtained.

The Villain

Ebewo (1997: 10) defines a villain, also referred to the antagonist, as a major character who is in opposition to the main character in a story. The character is said to be the rival of the hero and is often regarded as evil, as s/he frustrates the efforts of the hero. Roberts (1999: 57) calls the villain "an opposing actor as the character exhibits strength to oppose the hero or the protagonist." Abrams and Harpham (2009: 265) say that a villain is the character who is portrayed to be against the hero or heroine, depicts wickedness as he/she is capable of cruel and criminal actions.

Msimang (1986: 105) says that the villain is second only to the hero and is also a primary character:

The villain is usually more bad than good. He features in the story with the purpose of thwarting the very interests that the hero is trying to promote. He consistently puts obstacles in the way of the hero. This helps to intensify conflict and generate suspense and tension, and the plot becomes more dynamic.

(Ibid.)

A villain is the character who poses opposition to the works of the hero. He is the opponent who provides tension. 'Conflict master; and 'peace-killer' are what the villain is and is very essential in prose for mounting tension and proving conflict, as the character allows the plot to develop and tighten, as it moves the conflict to the peak. In the folktale 'Imphisi', in Dlamini and Garb's *Bekukhona* (2008), *imphisi* (hyena) is the villain as it comes to disrupt peace in the goats' lives. The hyena plays trickery as it imitates the mother-goat's voice in a ploy to make the goat's kids open the door for it. It wins as the kids open the door, and it swallows two of them. The mother-goat then searches for it as it is given the lead by the remaining kid. It is the conflict master:

Yanela kuhamba imbutikati, watsleka umhoyihoyi, wafike wanconcotsa utsi: "Bantfwabami ngivuleleni. Nginiphatsese kudla."

(Immediately after the goat left, the hyena came and knocked saying: “My children, open the door. I have brought you food.”)

(Dlamini and Garb, 2008: 32)

The hyena is the peace-killer. It causes disequilibrium, as it presents the conflict and further enhances plot development, as it tries all over again to get into the house where the goat’s children are:

Wo, sesuka sililo lesinematsambo. Imphisi yangena yagwinya konkhe loku kwemazinyane nekuhlakanipha kwako ... Kwatsi lapho imbutikati ifika yakhandza indlu yomile, kukhala libhungane.

(Oh, there was lamentation. The hyena entered and swallowed all the clever kids ... When the mother-goat arrived, there was nothing but silence.)

(Dlamini and Garb, 2008: 33)

This proves that the villain in the character of the hyena allows the plot to tighten, as the tale moves to its climax with the mother-goat opting to seek revenge. The emphasis is made clearly with the use of the idiomatic expression, ‘kukhala libhungane’ (there was only the sound of a beetle). The idiom means that there is no sound of the kids, which shows that they (kids) have been stolen or eaten, and this mounts the tension. Levi-Strauss’ (1967) use of figurative language is evident in this instance.

Imphisi disturbs the happiness of the goats as it exhibits strength to oppose the hero. Imbutikati (mother-goat) plots to retrieve the kids from the hyena’s tummy to prove that the latter is the villain, as Propp’s theory advocates that the villain be punished (Propp, 1968: 63):

Yayibona imphisi ihuma ihamba ibhembhesile icondze emfuleni ... Lapho itsi bona igobondzele yakhubatela yagcumkela esitibeni yafa khona lapho.

(She saw the hyena walking strangely to the river ... When it tried to drink it tripped and fell into the water and died there.)

(Dlamini and Garb, 2008: 34)

Propp’s theory of the villain receiving punishment is evident in this tale. Imphisi dies and no longer shall it present obstacles in the way of the hero. The tension it has created has come to an end. The folktale ‘Khabonina’, in Dlamini’s Sinkayinkayi (1988), is about a girl who must give her hand in marriage. All her life she has been hidden in an ape’s hide to prevent her mother’s co-wives from bewitching her. When the ‘wedding party’ is set to go to her in-laws, she is thrown down a cliff by her half-sister. The half-sister decides to take Khabonina’s role and be the one to give her hand in marriage. Khabonina is the main character, and she has an opposing character, who is nameless, as she is addressed as ‘lomunye kulabo dzadze’ (one amongst her sisters). This sister is the villain who causes havoc in Khabonina’s life. She pushes the bride, Khabonina, down a cliff: ‘Lomunye kulabo dzadze wabo lobekamenyanya loKhabonina wamchilitela lapha esiweni’ (One of the sisters, who hated Khabonina, pushed her down a cliff) (Dlamini (1988: 1). This part presents the villain who opposes the main character and is regarded as evil for frustrating the bride, as they have travelled to her in-laws for her traditional wedding.

The sister is perceived as the ‘hero’ at some point of the narration for her evil tactics:

Nabatsi sitakwenta njani, yatsi lentfombatana lemchilitile, asambeni sichubeke, umtsimba awubuyeli emuva lichilo lelo. Yatsi, “Mine sengitawutsatsa sikhundla sakhe ngigidze ngibe ngumfati walo Mkhwenye wetfu.”

(When they asked what they would do, the girl who had shoved her urged them to go on, saying that the bridal party never stops because that is bad omen. She said, “I’ll take her position, dance and be the wife to the brother-in-law.”)

(Ibid.)

The nameless character takes the leading role, as she does not only push Khabonina down the cliff but takes her place and assures the ‘wedding party’ that she shall be the one marrying the groom.

This shows that she is truly opposing Khabonina as she sees to it that she (Khabonina) loses everything (the marriage) she has hoped for. The sister in question is not even guilty for her acts of pushing Khabonina down the cliff. She even gets support from the members of the ‘wedding party’, as it is narrated:

Noma bahambe nje, bajabulile, labanye basho nekusho kutsi, “Siphose sahlazeka kuyogidzisa silwane wente kona wena kusichilitela eweni lesilwane,” bahleke kubemmandzi.

(As they walked, they were happy, others were even saying, “We were nearly shamed to accompany an animal, you did well by pushing that animal down the cliff,” they all laughed joyfully.)

(Dlamini, 1988: 3)

The above words clearly portray the sister presenting obstacles and thwarting Khabonina’s interest, who the main character is. She takes Khabonina’s position as she says that she (the sister) shall be the bride. This is very unfair and unfortunate to Khabonina. More so, the umtsimba (bridal party) makes fun of Khabonina, and the sister appears to be the (fake) ‘hero’ for saving them from being the laughingstock from Khabonina’s in-laws and possible well-wishers.

As expected, the villain must be punished. As the plot reaches its climax, Khabonina is pulled off the slope, and prepared for her traditional wedding ceremony. The villain, posing as Khabonina, is shocked and shamed:

Batsi bayabuka labodzadze wakhe bamangala, bonkhe bewuka batsi, “Maye dzadze wetfu umuhle.” Bahlabela wakhuphuka umtsimba. Wadliwa tinhloni lolomchilitele esiweni.

(When the other sisters looked, they were shocked, they all went down and said, “You are cute our sister.” They sang and the bridal party walked to the home. The one who had pushed her (down the cliff) was ashamed.)

(Ibid.)

The villain is left on her own, as the bridal party leaves her to join Khabonina and, together with her (Khabonina), leave the river, going to her in-laws’ homestead to give her hand in marriage. The villain is ashamed, and no one is paying attention to her, and the narrator no longer says anything about her, to show her loss. Dundes’ take on a humanistic element in folktales is evident in this narrative, as the tale presents characters in a cultural setting practicing traditional ceremonies (Msimang, 1986: 10-11). This shows that Dundes’ perception is true that folktales reflect personal values as the characters are portrayed in this traditional narrative.

Foil Characters

A foil character is a “secondary or minor character which exists primarily to illuminate or bring out some trait or aspect of a major character, through contrast or complement” (Mtumane, 1995: 108). Abrams and Harpham (2009: 265) term a foil character as: “A character in a work who, by sharp contrast,

serves to stress and highlight the distinctive temperament of the protagonist.” Ebewo (1997: 75) concurs and explains that a foil character is a minor character in a short story, who contrasts with another character, displaying a contrasting quality which may clarify or enhance the personality of the major character. In contrast to what is said by the above scholars, Msimang (1986: 109) says that a foil character is minor, or secondary and such a character is said to be a supporter of either the hero or villain. This could be an individual character or a group of characters.

From the definitions above, a conclusion is made that a foil character is the much-needed supporting character who has the role of putting bare the works of either the hero or villain. The portrayal of the two chief characters (hero and villain) would have gaps if the presence of the foil character was not afforded. The author uses foil characters to support the chief characters in projecting the thematic concerns of the story. The tale ‘Lonkombose NaDemthelele’, in Dlamini’s Sinkayinkayi (1988), has Demthelele as the foil character, as she supports the protagonist Lonkombose, who is troubled by her parents for breaking her mother’s favourite calabash. Lonkombose and Demthelele are siblings. They run girls’ chores like fetching water from the river. One day, Lonkombose decides to take her mother’s bigger calabash, which they had been warned against using. Unfortunately for her, she breaks the calabash, and is heavily punished at home. She is chased away and starts living in the river. Every time her sibling, Demthelele comes to fetch water, she helps her carry her calabash until their parents suspect that someone is helping her lift it. Demthelele is torn in-between the hero (Lonkombose) and the villains (father and mother), as she must lie to her parents about someone helping her lift her water calabash. She provides the platform for her parents to be villains, and Lonkombose to be the hero. The narrative begins with an interdiction:

Lapha ekhaya unina abebayalile kutsi emkhatsini wetimbata takhe, ikhona lebekangatsandzi kutsi bahle bayetfwale, noma bayokha emanti ngayo ... Ngalelinye lilanga watsi Lonkombose kuDemthelele, “Namhla ngifuna sikhe emanti, abemanyenti. Mine ngitakwetfwala lembita lenkhulu yamake.

(Here at home, there was one calabash which their mother had warned them against using, for even fetching water ... One day, Lonkombose said to Demthelele, “Today, I want us to fetch a lot of water. I will carry our mother’s big calabash.)

(Dlamini, 1988: 14)

The interdiction presents a warning by the mother to her girls that they should not use a certain calabash of hers. The protagonist decides to take it with good intentions of fetching more water this year. ‘... Lonkombose watsi kuDemthelele akametfwese lembita ... (Lonkombose asked Demthelele to help her lift the calabash ...) (Ibid.). This shows the physical support the foil character is giving to the protagonist who has violated the interdiction with good intentions. When the calabash falls and breaks, ‘... yawa lembita yabhibika phansi yaba tincetu ...’ (... the calabash fell and broke into pieces ...) (Ibid.). Lonkombose asks Demthelele, the foil character, to report the matter: Wakhala Lonkombose, watsi kuDemthelele akahambe ayombika ekhaya (Lonkombose cried and asked Demthelele to go and report her at home (Ibid.). Demthelele emotionally supports the portrayal of the main character who is her sister.

Scheub’s core-cliché (Scheub, 2015: 122), which is the song Demthelele sings everytime she needs help, also presents the foil character. Every time Demthelele sings, Lonkombose comes out to help the troubled sister, which is the core-image (what happens each time the core-cliché is sung).

Lonkombose is allowed to develop her portrayal in the narrative by Lonkombose who, several times, seeks help from the discarded sister who now lives in the river after the expulsion from home:

Watsi angacedza kuhlabelela Lonkombose wase uyaphuma uyametfwesa Demthelele. Waphindze wabuyela esitibeni. Onkhe malanga abefika nalembita yakhe, atsi angayikhelela igcwale bese uyahlabelela ubita Lonkombose.

(The minute she finished singing, Lonkombose came out to help her lift the water-load. She went back to the river. Every day she would come with her calabash and, after filling it with water, she would then sing calling Lonkombose.)

(Ibid.)

This shows that Demthelele highlights the distinctive temperament of Lonkombose. Lonkombose never harbours grudges but repeatedly gives help as the core-cliché is implied in the above citation. In fact, the importance of the foil character in this tale is huge, as it seems as if she plays a huger role than the protagonist but, when considering the description of the latter, it is clear who is who between the two roles: ‘Abe muhle Lonkombose kubonakala kutsi uphatshe kahle lapha esitibeni’ (Lonkombose was beautiful and it was clear that she was living a blissful life in the dam) (Dlamini, 1988: 15). This description fits that of the main character, and it should be noted that Demthelele is not described in the narrative. Moreover, the readers’ attention is on Lonkombose, on how she survives as she is protected by water animals in the dam, and not on Demthelele. This also brings the demarcating evidence between the protagonist and foil character.

Again, Demthelele is displayed to be supporting the villain. She presents the role of the villain and, in a way, brings peace within the family members:

Nembala waya uyise wabhaca khona lapho unina abebhace khona. Nembala wehla Demthelele ngaleso sikhatsi lehla ngaso waya esitibeni, wefike wakhelela imbata yakhe wenta lowo mkhuba wakhe wekuhlabelela, baphendvulane nadzadze wabo.

(Indeed, the father hid where the mother had hidden before. Then Demthelele descended at the usual time to the river, she filled the calabash with water then performed her singing habit, and the sister responded.)

(Ibid.)

The implied core-cliché presents the foil character giving the villain a platform to correct their wrong doings of chasing their daughter for just mistakenly breaking a calabash. The action and characters of both Lonkombose (hero) and her parents (villain) are enhanced by Demthelele (the foil character).

The tale ‘Lokuthula NaLochalachala’, in Dlamini and Garb’s *Bekukhona* (2008), has multiple foil characters and, what is typical with them is that they are old people, and their role is either blessing or cursing the hero and/or villain, respectively. The narrative is about two siblings, Lokuthula and Lochalachala who, in their journeys, meet two old women separately and their conduct towards them determines their fate in life. The use of Lokuthula and Lochalachala shows Olrik’s Law of Twins in which a traditional tale has two characters having the same role. It could be real twins, siblings or merely two characters who appear together in one similar role (Dundes, 1965: 136).

The old people also have the same role which draws a line between the hero and villain. The actions of the foil characters separate the hero and the villain between the two key characters, Lokuthula and Lochalachala, who are siblings but have almost similar roles:

Endleleni wahlangana nesalukati lesasigugile, sesingakwati kubona. Lesalukati sambingelela satsi, “Mntfwanemntfwanami, ase umane ungesule nati tintfongo kumbe ngingabona kahle.” Lokuthula wagobondzela, waguca phansi wasesula lesalukati letintfongo letatenta kutsi lomunfu lomdzala

avaleke emehlo. Emva kwesikhatsi lesidze solo asesula lesalukati, sabese siyabonga sesiyambusisa.

(Along the way she met an old woman who was unable to see. The old woman greeted her, saying, “My granddaughter, please wipe my logs maybe I can see clearly.” Lokuthula knelt and wiped the log which made the old woman not see properly. After some time, having wiped the old woman, she (the old woman) appreciated and blessed her.)

(Dlamini and Garb, 2008: 56)

The old woman presents a virtuous character. This shows the role the foil character, the first old woman, plays in providing a platform for the hero, Lokuthula, to develop as she is portrayed full of respect. It should be noted that the hero is flat and static as another old woman seeks her help and she willingly gives it:

Wahamba, wahamba waphindze wahlangana nalesalukati lesihamba ngenhloko lakhuluma ngaso logogo. Vele, lesalukati sasihamba ngenhloko. Satsi nasibona Lokuthula satsi: “Mntfwanemntfwanami, ngicela ungetfwese.” Lentfombatana yasetfwesa lesalukati ngenhlonipho lenkhulu, yawubeka lomtfwalo etinyaweni talesalukati. Sabonga sase siyambusisa satsi, “Uyabona-ke mntfwanemntfwanami, njengoba uchubeke naloluhambo lwakho, utawukhandza tintfo letimbili letitakwetfusa. Ungacali uhleke nome wesabe, tsatsa leseluleko salesalukati lohlangene naso kucala.”

(She walked and walked and met an old woman walking on her head as the other old woman she met earlier had warned. Indeed, this old woman was walking on her head. When she saw Lokuthula, she said: “My grandchild, please help me carry this load.” The girl, respectfully, helped this old woman carry her load with her feet. She appreciated then blessed her, saying, “You see my grandchild, as you continue with your journey, you will find two things which will frighten you. Never laugh or be frightened, heed the advice given by the first old woman you met.”)

(Dlamini and Garb, 2008: 56)

The portrayal of the second foil character emphasizes the upright character of the hero and proves traces of Olrik’s approach as the Laws of Twins (Pato, 2023: 61) is evident with the second foil character playing the same role as the first foil character. This foil character presents the static character of the hero. She emphasizes the predictability of the reaction of the character, as she (the hero) reacts, as she is expected to respond by the audience. The foil characters, the two old women, also support the villain, Lochalachala. They give her the platform to be herself and all they do is curse her for being rude towards them. The activities which the foil characters present to the villain are identical to those presented to Lokuthula, what is different are the responses. The first old woman, as a foil character, presents Lochalachala’s rude character:

Wahamba-ke Lochalachala. Kwatsi asahamba wahlangana nalesalukati lesabonwa nguLokuthula lesasinetintfongo. “Mntfwanami mane ungisite wesule nati tintfongo nemafinyila lapha emehlweni ami bo khona ngitawubona kahle futsi bese ngiyakubusisa. Lochalachala watsi, “Klibhi klololo, nawungibuka wena salukati ucabanga kutsi mine ngiwekuhamba ngikhotsana nemehlo etalukati?”

(Lochalachala walked. Whilst on her journey, she met the old woman seen by Nokuthula with a log in her eyes. “My child, please help me remove the log and mucus from my eyes so that I can see clearly, and then I will bless you. Lochalachala responded, “Forget it, when you look at me, you, old woman, think I would go around licking old women’s eyes?”)

(Dlamini and Garb, 2008: 57)

The needs of the foil character, the old woman, make the readers observe that the villain, Lochalachala, is proud and too full of herself. The old woman allows the villain to develop her wicked character, which has been evident from the beginning. Even when she is told that she would not get the marriage she is seeking, she underestimates the power of the word of mouth, as she responds with an attitude full of pride, 'Anginenzaba' (I don't care) (Dlamini and Garb, 2008: 58). Moments later, the second foil character meets Lochalachala:

Emva kwesikhatsi ihamba yahlangana nalesalukati sesibili lesihamba ngenhloko tinyawo tibheke etulu. "Mntfwanami, ngeke ungisite yini ungetfwese nankhu umtfwalo wami." Lentfombatana yaphendvula yatsi, "Uhamba ngenhloko nje kantsi tsine labanye sihamba ngetinyawo ucabanga kutsi mine ngiwekuhamba ngetfwesa bantfu mitfwalo?" Lesalukati saphendvula satsi, "Hho ungeke uwufole umendvo lapho uya khona." Lentfombatana yaphendvula yatsi, "Anginenzaba."

(After some time, whilst walking, she met the second old woman who walks upside down, "My child, please help me carry my load." The girl responded, "As you are walking using your head, yet we are using our feet, then you think I shall go around helping people to carry their loads?" The old woman answered, "You won't get marriage where you're heading to." This girl replied, "I don't care.")

(Dlamini and Garb, 2008: 58)

The reaction of the girl is monotonous. In fact, it is a core-cliché because the core images are the same. The foil characters, the two old women, help in presenting the conflict, which is another literary device which develops, not only for the foil characters but the hero (Lokuthula) and the villain (Lochalachala) as well. Scheub's approach (Pato, 2023: 56) is used as there is repetition of 'Anginenzaba' (I don't care) by the villain, after being cornered by the foil characters, the old women, to help them. Also, Levi-Strauss' approach is evident as the foil characters display binary oppositions (Op cit.: 58) in the portrayal of Lokuthula and Lochalachala enhanced by them.

Conclusion

The kinds of characters discussed in siSwati folktales are the hero, villain, and foil characters. With the first two, there is great influence of Propp's approach, as the hero and villain go through almost all the motifs of the approach, which involves the two kinds of characters. The hero faces challenges as advocated by the approach, and the villain follows the traces of the said approach. The hero is rewarded, and the villain is punished, as it is experienced in some of the siSwati folktales discussed above. The tracing of Levi-Strauss' take on binary oppositions is evident in the folktales, as the heroes and villains are pitted against each other, and one displays good characters while the other bad characters. Foil characters also depict binary oppositions, as they are in their own struggle. The foil characters used in siSwati folktales are nameless.

Reference

- Abrams, M.H. and Harpham, G.G. 2009. A Glossary of Literary Terms (9 th Edition): Boston. Wadsworth CEGAGE Learning.
- Dlamini, G.B. and Garb, G. 2008. Bekukhona. Pietermaritzburg: Macmillan.

- Dlamini, O.S. 1986. Sinkayinkayi. Manzini: Longman.
- Ebewo, P. 1997. A Handbook of Literary and Critical Terms for African Students. Maseru: Publishing House.
- Hendry, J.O. 2013. Wordsmiths: An Approach to Short Story Study. Cape Town: CTP Printers. Msimang, C.T. 1986. Folktale Influence on the Zulu Novel. Pretoria: Acacia Books.
- Mtumane, Z. 1995. A Critical Analysis of P. T. Mtuze's Novel: UDingezweni. Master's Dissertation. Alice: University of Fort Hare.
- Mtumane, Z. 2018. 'The Hero's Journey in GB Sinxo's UNomsa'. South African Journal of African Languages. 38 (1): 99 – 108.
- Nkosi, N. and Zama, M. 1990. Kanisamili Zimpondo. Pretoria: Sigma Press.
- Nyaungwa, D. 2008. Folktale Influence on the Shona Novel. Master of Arts Dissertation. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Orlik, A. 1965. Epic Law of Folk Narrative. London: Utah State University Press.
- Okpewho, I. 1992. African Oral Literature. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Pato, J.S.J. 2023. Folktale Influence on IsiZulu and SiSwati Short Stories. Doctoral Thesis. Johannesburg: University of Johannesburg.
- Propp, V. 1968. Morphology of the Folktale. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Roberts, E.V. 1999. Writing About Literature. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Rosenberg, B.A. 1978. Olrik's Law: A Judicial Review. Providence: Brown University.
- Vilakati, T.S. and Msibi, T. 2006. Giya Sigiye. Manzini: Macmillan.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).