

Folktale as a Performance Art is a Mirror of Siswati Culture

Dr J.J Thwala

School of Development Studies, University of Mpumalanga Private Bag 11283 Mbombela South Africa 1200.

Abstract: *The focus of this article is to explicate and highlight the semantic analysis of Harold Scheub's research. The emphasis is on the performer, performance, setting, audience, thematic images and structural balance. In Siswati folktales, the refrains, core-images and repetitions are identified as units of meaning and linking techniques. It is, however, explained that the folktale is the meeting point of two parallel words: the sensory experience and the fantasy or ideal words. When the representatives of the ideal world enter the realm of human experience, they act as supporters and mediators of human endeavors or as destroyers of human harmony and social relationships. The meaningful content in folktale is brought about by core-images, co-refrains or co-songs. The multiplex relationship of spatial, temporal, figurative settings, performer, performance and audience, as well as the structural linkages are evident from the expository to the structural and semantic units.*

Key Words: *core-images, multiplex relationship, structural linkages, semantic analysis.*

I. Introduction

Siswati societies of southern African are proud of their well-developed oratorical skills. Their oral art has developed into the complex and sophisticated art form. These oratorical skills are usually channeled into artistic forms. Every homestead has its performer in the rural countryside. Indeed, everyone is a potential performer and he or she does attempt to meet the standards of the art, sometimes with unfortunate results, more often with acceptable skills. It is with these folklore performances that this study is focused, including the artists who create them, the audiences and the tradition which shapes them. Thwala and Lusenga (2017:5) postulate that:

Folktales may be set in any time and any place and in this sense; they are almost timeless and placeless. A variety of sub-types of folktales are distinguished including human tales, animal tales, trickster tales, tall tales, dilemma tales, formulistic tales and moral tales or fable.

Canonici (1987:31) views folktales as valuable educational tools in the context of educational trends when he states these objectives:

- To help the child appreciate and understand a valuable culture into which encompasses a particular world view and value system.
- To equip the child to deal effectively with his or her environment.

Bascom (1965) suggests as the following characteristics applicable to myths worldwide:

Sacred tales told as truth, believed as fact, which happened long ago, in a world which was different, or other, than the present one. The principal characters are mostly non-human; the attitude of both teller and listener is sacred.

Guma (1967:22) defines folktale as:

A popular story handed down by tradition from generation to generation and which was told for the sake of telling a story.

Cope (1978: 191) proposes modes and levels:

The feature mode determines the emic units namely: function, sequence and combination. The manifestation mode describes their etic. Representations term realization in term of function and sequences. The distribution mode, their contextual sequence

Folktales are complex productions, that the artists do not merely relate stories, rather they perform dramatic works of art before an audience. The terms, “dramatic art” and “performing art” seem more relevant and useful. New perspectives are necessary in approaching this rich and developed art-form. Analysis encompasses all elements of production and performance. They would not be based on written texts but the shadow of the verbal aspects of a complex form. It is essential to contemplate the *inganekwane* (folktale) in performance the purpose for which it was created.

II. Research methodology and theoretical underpinnings

The research method that is used for this study includes the use of source materials and selected theories. Source material refers to the types of references used in research. This is an explanatory and descriptive study that employs both oral and text-orientated dimensions in an interpretative and rhetoric approaches. An interpretative approach is vital in intercultural communication because it aims to understand and describe human behavior within specific cultural set-up. It is complemented by rhetorical approach which interpret the meanings or persuasion used in oral discourses or texts. (Martin and Nakayama 2013)

III. The performer

Kaschula (1993:201) expresses his views on the subject:

The performer is to be regarded as a creator of the art form than as a repertor. Tales may be performed by anyone, however, even mean sometimes tell stories, and children like to tell the tale to their friends.

Finnegan (1970:377) gives an explanation about folktale performance:

The traditional performer is an actress who uses body movements, voice modulation and gestures to identify with the various characters, to become in turn a shy buck or aggressive lion and a self-satisfied jackal. The performer becomes pervaded by the character's situation and their problems, feels and suggest the changes of their fate, struggles, suffers and rejoices together with them, as it were, he steps over from his worlds in theirs. The narrator treats his or her audience with respect.

The Siswati women often works all day in the fields, spends hours preparing food and constructing the walls of her home. She is the single and most important influence in the lives of her young children and she oversees most of the work that is done in her homestead. The name women can also be a highly talented artist. The women is capable of creating a work of the imagination within a short time that is original and colorful, often complex and always rhythmic. Her stage is the center of a *rondavel* – type home, her audience the immediate members of her family or intimate friends. With her own body and voice, she brings into tension and balance every stylistic device she commands: music, mime, vocal dramatics with a combination of imagination, intellectual insight and a quest for creativity and originality. She transmutes ancient core-images into vigorous work of art. The performance of *inganekwane* (folktale) at a certain time and place is a unique and evanescent phenomenon that cannot be exactly repeated and recaptured. The artist will never again create that particular image in that particular way. One can make the script of the performance but it is a shadow of the real production.

A series of images, original, creative and often improvisatorial use of performance details, stylistic effects, the temperament of the artist join briefly in time and space and only a memory remains.

The creation of *inganekwane* (folktale) is existentially a solo performance. The focus is the performer who has not memorized lines. She has a repertoire of core- clichés in the arrangement of the parts and the whole. She is in effect writing her own script. She is her own director. She is an actress, singer, dancer, mime and the only guide that she has is a thematic-image sanctioned by the culture tradition and her own experience. She has unlimited freedom to extemporize. She is called upon, usually without prior notice to display her intellect and imagination to the task of transforming the core-images into completely fresh and original production. Most folktales performers are woman. The finest artists are generally grandmothers. This generalization is not entirely true. Girls in their teens are also found to be polished performers. Men also do know the core-clichés and they have special effective stylistic resources. If the conditions are proper and the audience are responsive, their efforts become the creative productions. Men for example, relate historical events and sing praises, but women are not barred from doing so. The *tinganekwane* (folktales) images is performed by most members of the Swati societies, the most practiced participants being children and old people of all sexes. The artists are however, for the most part cultivators, though some of the most brilliant performers are those who knew everyone in the

vicinity and therefore do not have difficulties in establishing immediate rapport with their audiences. They are often quite uninhibited in their actions and this contributed to the vitality of their folktales productions.

The styles of performers vary from area to area. Scheub (1975:22) says that he met various performers. The first one, appears to be a splendid performer of Xhosa dramatic art and arrogantly aware of her special abilities to create atmospheres in which the bare core-images become works of extra-ordinary depth and colour. The second one, her techniques and methods are hardly so subdued. She achieves her subtlety in other directions. Her performances are marked by sustained animation. She incorporates such devices as a stream of consciousness narration into the production. She develops her central character fully and colorfully. During the folktale performance, there is a rhythmic movement of the body, exaggerated gesture and a considerable range of vocal dramatics.

The character gives courage and vividness to one of her creations. Her creative method is characterized by unrestrained action as episodes and details erupting with staccato rapidity from a deep, bellowing voice. Narration is uninterrupted, gestures are bold and the world that she creates in her folktale images is stormed by a direct humour. Others perform with a quiet skill, lacking the arrogance. Her performance is a calm, assured competence often concealing by its very smoothness of the complex strands. When conditions about her are more serene, this activity is funneled wholly into the performance and it is then that one sees all the stylistic elements of this art-form in active combination. The use of the body: face, hands, wrists, arms, feet, thighs and head. If the audience is initially reticent, inevitably it cannot escape her spell, as she weaves it into her imaginative world with a torrent of words and action. She creates and recreates the fantastic world of the folktales. With an audience to completely involved in what she is doing and saying it is likely that when the narrative blends into long, members of the action audience will join in with voices hands and

IV. Setting and audience

Pretorius and Swart (1982:8) give this idea on setting:

This is the physical background against which the story takes place. The story can unfold against an idyllic background.

Linforth (2013:389) defines milieu as follows:

Setting is the place in which the action occurs. A setting is not a neutral space, but becomes a meaning, or of the atmosphere. It is often a symbolic. Stories can shift in setting.

Performance of *inganekwane* image occur during leisure hours, particularly at dusk when a grandmother or mother performs inside the home before the children go to sleep. The children gather around the fire, the performer or artist as usual in the centre. This is an agreeable environment for the production of *inganekwane*. There is no light except that cast by the fire, the performer through a skillful use of repetition and rhythm gesture and long almost hypnotizes the children weaving the imagination of the children into her creation becomes easy the spell of the performance assisted by the physical milieu. It is at that time too that the children, having completed their tasks for the day are most receptive to the production of *inganekwane* images. Boys perform for each other during the long hours that they spend in the field herding cattle. Girls develop narrative of astonishing complexity early in their lives. In the corn-fields when the women take a break from their labour performances are sometimes presented. Beside the cattle by when women or girls gather for a social affair, it is possible that *tinganekwane* will be created but songs and dances are more likely to be the activities indulged in at such times. Performances may take place at any time and any place, if leisure time is available and audience is receptive.

When a person performs *inganekwane* in the daytime, she puts a little twig on the head, so that when she performs the *tinganekwane* during the day she should not grow horns. According to the custom, *tinganekwane* should be performed in the evening after the people have finished eating. Before you start the *inganekwane*, you should say, which sitting down and referring to the ground:

Horn. Horn, do not grow on me!

Grow here on the ground

Because here (on the head) it is hard

And here (on the ground) it is soft

One the same subject, it is a version.

Horn, horn, and don't grow here

This place is a hard rock,

This place is a hard rock.

This is how a person starts relating *tinganekwane* when it is daylight. The composition of the audience has a significant effect on the on the performance. If the audience is composed primarily of children, the artist will concentrate on techniques and devices which will give the image a vividness and an animation that will delight the children. The production of *inganekwane* is eventually a private matter. Performances usually occur in the home before members of the family. If the audience is composed of the highly critical people, the artists are encouraged to display all their talents, thereby revealing some of the finest elements of the tradition.

Setting and audience are as informal as the tradition itself. A performer does not belong to profession. She does not perform publicly, but her audience usually made up of members of the family may be broadened to include her neighbors and friends, the artist usually does not prepare for a performance in advance in the sense that she rehearses.

V. The performance

Bascom (1965) defines folktales as follows:

A form of prose narrative regarded as fiction. The events could have happened at any time and in any place. The principal characters are either human or non-human. The attitude towards a folktale is secular.

Scheub (1975:75) explains as follows:

A folktale performance is the meeting point of two parallel worlds: the real and the fantastic. When representatives of the fantastic world enter the world of human experience they may act either as helpers in re-establishing the disrupted harmony (a disorder which was the origin of the tale), or as destroyers of this social harmony and breakers of human relationships.

A work of art is a combination of tensions and resolutions, balance and unbalance, rhythmic coherence and continuous unity. Life is a natural process of such tensions, balances and rhythm such a combination characterizes the performance.

Browne (1968:46) contends that:

A folktale is usually traditional narrated in the evening, after the daily chores have been completed, when the family relaxes and children are gradually getting ready to go to sleep. The time of delivery is an important cultural factors.

Canonici (1987:63) postulates the following on the genre:

An African folktale presents a complex amalgam of functions, formula and new sequences as episode is built upon episode and motif added to motif.

The sources which are passed down from generation to generation include the basic core-images centered on clinches, songs chants and sayings which are expanded to create the conflict resolution of folktale image. The performer does not memorise the narratives and not undergo a rigid and formal apprenticeship to learn plots and techniques. The basic element of the inherited tradition and the centre of the folklore core-image. The core-image includes the elements that are necessary to the memory of the performer. They enable her to call up and to externalize the full folktale image. It is only in performance that the shape narrative plot and form becomes apparent. The saying is a statement which is rarely omitted from relevant performance, which is often sufficiently flexible to allow its introduction into a variety of narratives. Chants and songs are among the most important of the core clichés. Characters seem large and bold in the core-images. Characterization is achieved primarily through gestures, vocal dramatics and body movement. This is not to suggest that the characters are flat, for the performer herself gives them form and credibility. It is her body allied with her voice which creates various characters.

Setting forms, the framework in which the actions involved in the core-image takes place in a realistic manner. The *inganekwane* productions are objectifications of ideas. The most pervasive of which is the quest for order within the human society, cultural activities and material known to the audience help to construct the natural frame for the unusual operations of the grotesque characters. This movement of the strange and unworldly on the natural surface creates its own tension. The audience is a part of the performer's material because of the role that it plays during the performance. The audience responds to the words of the artist vocally and by the clapping of hands.

The strictly verbal component of performance should not be over-emphasized. Dramatically and rhythmically, the sound of language is very important in *inganekwane* performances, body movements and gestures. Language is used in performances analytically and evocatively more accurately. Language does verbally what the body does physically. It embodies or expresses the image that the artist seeks to objectify. It assists in the transformation of the inner idea and emotion into a core-image. Ideophones are commonly used in *inganekwane* performances, sound-words capturing the movements and actions are expressed.

Images thus spring from a combination of language and gestures. The artist, like the poet, exploit the sound pattern of the language, controlling its natural rhythm. Language poetically binds form and content assisted in this by the performer's hands, face and body. The poetic use of language and body are developed, expressed and bound together by the imagination of the artist.

VI. The thematic-image

Tucker and Young (2013:175) view imagery as follows:

Imagery as a word picture, often meaning figurative language in general. It may appeal to any of the sense: visual imagery (the tree is clad in green), auditory imagery (I head the hooves beating), images appealing to the sense of smell (the scent of blossoms was a wind) or the sense of touch (the rough wood was harsh on my hand) and taste (the taste of a chocolate melting in the mouth).

Orwell (2005:119) states that:

Imagery are words, phrases and sentences that create images in our minds: similes, metaphor and personification create images through comparison.

Two sets of representatives of different worlds meet in the *inganekwane* tradition. The members of the routine and familiar human world, moving within a contemporary environment that is known and real. The two worlds become understandable and related. The integration of this movement between antagonistic groups within the context of allegory, that is, the allegorical image sets of characters which makes the movement of the cannibal in the world of humans plausible. The thematic structure of *inganekwane* depends on a projected image or image-sets.

In general term, the plot of the *inganekwane* performance breaks into two actions, conflict and resolution. These are the basic structural elements of the plot conflicts, usually details the disruption of the social harmony in one of many ways, thus reflecting the thematic-image and these fall into two categories:

Human vices: disruptive of social order including obstinacy, jealousy, curiosity, arrogance, marital and familial tensions, robbery, disobedience, abandonment and kidnapping.

Human desires: seeking an equilibrium of some kind including, fortune seeking, seeking a bride and lost child seeking parents.

Resolutions reveal the restoration of social harmony or detail its continued disruption. These resolutions parallel the conflict: Human vices prevail or are diminished. Human desires are satisfied or thwarted. The resolutions are achieved in the following manners:

- Escape

The escape with the assistance of agencies, including animals, humans or magic.

- Confrontation and victory

Distraction or overcoming using outside agencies, including humans or animals.

- Confrontation and defeat

Distraction or suicide of major character; the central character is isolated; the central character is a victim of his own character.

- Satisfaction of desires

Funding of lost a child, with an assistance of a diviner or creatures; hero returns from banishment to lead his people; barrenness is resolved.

The performer fulfills fundamental functions during her performance, as a medium connecting the past to the present by externalizing the core - images past to the present by externalizing the core-images of the inherited tradition and an artist going beyond the mere communication of core - images and giving those images a fresh and vibrant form. As a medium, the performer acts as the caretaker of the tradition and as an entertainer, producing works that delight her audiences and gives shape to the core – image which she invokes. As an artist, she is also conscious of the pleasing form of her production. The finest performances among the Swati people are those which reflect both roles of artist. The relationship is multiplex and exist in modes, time, images, people and imaginations interacting among the performer audience and milieu.

VII. The creative process techniques of composition

Song and dance are irrefutably at the centre of leisure-life in Siswati societies. Through song and dance, a man shakes off the doldrums produced by the routine of life in a cultivating community. Dance and song are given a special shape and form by the performer of *inganekwane* images, but the essential functions of dance and song remain, though on a less spontaneous level in dramatic art. The folklore is an intellectual and a sensual expression developing its form and theme from the pure song and dance.

VIII. The expansible image

The focus of folktale performance is the image and at the centre of the image is the cliché. The image is objectified before an audience by means of controlled dance, namely: mime body movements and gesture. The core-image is deeply embedded in song and dance. If we look at *inganekwane* of an ox. The central images are the ox's refusal to move until the boy sings and requests in his song that it do so. It is an expansible image.

Flight and pursuit sequences are common in folktale productions, as well as action involving kidnapping and abandonment. Out of such activities emerge heroes and villains, tricksters and dupes, innocents and agents of assistance.

IX. Interlocking images

With the expansive image at the centre of each of the parts that compose the finished production, other techniques are employed to lock these core-images together both internally and externally. This is the dynamism of the plot. Its movement and development are the interlocking image embraces the expansible image and carries it forward. In the first expansible image of the *emasi-bird* (curdled-milk) narrative, the bird demands that the weeds return to the fields. As this image is repeated, there is an incremental growth in the narrative which, in turn can be used to create suspense, humour and pathos.

X. Interlocking details

The sophisticated techniques of binding the various images that compose an *inganekwane* performance into a unified whole is the use of the interlocking details: hints, clues and details planted in earlier images which realized, echoed or developed in later images. Sometimes, the interlocking details are used to achieve frightening results. Emotions too can act as interlocking details and images.

XI. Transitional details and images

The use of interlocking details to bind images together is a complex technique used only by the most accomplished artists. Complete images are sometimes used as transitional elements. They fulfill two functions: The main function being the continued development of the work of art, a subsidiary function and a structural one being its simultaneous use as a transitional device.

XII. Use of details

With the controlling and consequent diminishing of the physical force of the dance and its funneling into mime, body-movement and gesture, that reveals folktale as an oral art. The emphasis in such cases is not on analytical

or descriptive details but rather on details which respond to the special demands and techniques of the art-form. Details explore the consciousness of the central character. The performances become longer. The artist attempts to plant more interlocking details into the images in order to unify them and balance them with later images.

An able performer seeks to balance her performance thematically. The structure and theme become inseparable. The artist is demonstrating, revealing to the audience through the use of parallel images. Repetition seems to be the most obvious element in the narrative performance and analyses of the performances. It is the repetition in this complex sense provides much of the form of the work of art. It is a vibrant form in the sense that it is always in the process of becoming incomplete until the performance comes to an end. Slowly and poetically, the artist constructs the form of her work of art, developing the shape of the narrative, giving it colour and depth, concentrating on balance and the harmony of image relationships. Theme and structure become blended in the folktale form as the work builds slowly to its completion.

XIII. Uses of repetition

The core-image, composed of the core-cliché and allied details, is the minimum useable structural element in the artistic production of folktale performances. The basic conflict- resolution structure stands between the central character and the object. The folktale details the development of the obstacle situation, sustaining it or resolving it in one way another.

XIV. Parallel image

The expansible image is the commonly used repetition form in the *inganekwane* tradition, but another device in conjunction with the expansible image, is that of parallel images. Parallel images may involve two characters each involved in the same activity. They may involve similar activities with different results by two characters or acts of characters who then come together to work out dramatically the results of those activities.

XV. Aesthetic principles

Entertainment is one of the major aims of story-teller and performers. The story-teller seeks to entertain by producing little more than an objectification of the core-image. Tension is the key to understanding the aesthetics principles which underlies the production of *inganekwane* (Scheub 1975):

- The tension of conflict to resolution
- The tension of developing form and aesthetic suspense.
- The tension between performer and audience

The scholar portrays an idea that even though an *inganekwane* is recorded, we are at a disadvantage because we do not see the narrator. We deduce action from the narrator's voice. The audience too, is an important factor in oral tradition. Therefore, the aesthetic principles are deeply involved in the artistic tradition.

It is noted that a folktale may exist on paper but will only attain true and real fulfilment when it is performed.

XVI. Conclusion

The performer constitutes the traditional requirements of the *inganekwane*. Repetition is the key structural device in the form. Action is enveloped and shaped by a single expansible image or series of such images. There is an effective control of the audience by the performer, which in itself creates a tension that is useful and pleasing. A pleasing balance, form and a resulting harmony arise from the conscious and considerable care that has gone into the construction of the folktale which is revealed in performance.

References

- [1]. Browne, R.B. 1968. *The Wisdom of Many Proverb & Proverbial Genres*. Washington: Tristram Loffin Publishers.
- [2]. Canonici, N.N. 1987. *The Inganekwane Tradition*. Durban: University of Natal.
- [3]. Cope, T. 1978. *Izibongo Zulu Praise Poems*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press
- [4]. Dundes, A. 1967. *The Study of Folklore*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Publishers.
- [5]. Finnegan, R. 1970. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.
- [6]. Guma, S.M. 1967. *The Form, Content and Technique of Traditional Literature in Southern Sotho*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

- [7]. Kaschula, R.H. 1993. *Foundation in Southern African Oral Literature*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- [8]. Linforth, C. 2013. *The Anthem Guide to Short Fiction*. New York: Anthem Press.
- [9]. Martin, J.N and Nakayama, TK. 2013. *Intercultural Communication in Contexts*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- [10]. Orwell, G. 2005. *Animal Farm*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman.
- [11]. Pretorius, W.J, and Swart, J.H.A. 1985. *Teaching African Literature*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- [12]. Scheub, H. 1975. *The Ntsomi Xhosa Performing Art*. London: Oxford University
- [13]. Thwala, J.J, and Lusenga, N.M. 2017. **The Didactic Implications of Animals in Siswati Prose Narratives**: International Education Applied Scientific Research Journal (IEASRJ) Volume 2 Issue: 2 e-ISSN: 2456-5040.
- [14]. Tucker, B and Young, J. 2013. *English Home Language Achieve*. Cape Town: Pearson Publishers.