

TRENDS AND TROPES

SOME ASPECTS OF AFRICAN INDIGENOUS LITERATURES OF SOUTH AFRICA

Edited by
E.D.M. Sibiya and Zilibele Mtumane

 UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL PRESS

 ROUTLEDGE

Trends and Tropes



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*Some Aspects of African Indigenous Literatures
of South Africa*

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E.D.M. Sibiya and Zilibele Mtumane

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About the Editors

Dumisani Sibiyi (popularly known as E.D.M. Sibiyi) is an award-winning novelist, short story writer and poet. His published novels include *Kungasa Ngifile* (2002); *Ngidedele Ngife* (2007); *Ngiyolibala Ngifile* (2010); and *Inkululeko Engakhululekile* (2020). He has written several short stories collections: *Imikhizo* (2004); *Izinyembezi* (2003); *Sidla Inqatho Nefutho* (2007); *Isiqongo* (2007); and *Izinzulu ZikaZulu* (2009), and has also co-authored the following collections of poetry: *Zibuyil' Emasisweni* (2006); *Senz' Okwethu* (2006); *Izinyosi* (2007); and *ISibusiso Nezinyembezi* (2019).

Sibiyi is a three times winner of the Sanlam Prize for Youth Literature for his novels *Kungasa Ngifile*, *Ngidedele Ngife* and *Ngiyolibala Ngifile*. The latter novel was also awarded the K Sello Duiker Memorial Literary Award during the 2011 South African Literary Awards (SALAs). He was the second prizewinner of the Muntu Xulu Award for Short Stories for his first short story collection titled *Imikhizo* in 2005, and the main prizewinner of the 2021 UJ Prize for Creative Writing for his poetry collection, *Isibusiso Nezinyembezi*.

Sibiyi has been the recipient of several academic excellence awards. He holds a Master of Arts degree in Publishing Studies from the University of the Witwatersrand, which he passed with distinction. He has more than seven years' experience as an editor and publisher at various leading publishing houses in South Africa and is currently a lecturer in the University of Johannesburg's Department of African Languages, where he is working towards a PhD.

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in Translation from the University of South Africa. He has presented a number of academic papers at various national and international conferences, where he also chaired sessions. He has authored and co-authored over twenty research articles in various accredited journals, authored three books and co-published two. He is a regular adjudicator for various accredited journals and has edited book manuscripts for a range of leading publishing houses in South Africa. Mtumane has supervised a number of postgraduate students, some of whom passed *cum laude*. He is an external examiner of both undergraduate and postgraduate students for various universities and a member of various professional and academic organisations.

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Editors' Preface

It was in 2018 that academic members of the Department of African Languages at the University of Johannesburg first had the idea to publish a book with articles that focused on topics pertaining to various aspects of African languages and literature. This idea was inspired by the growth of the department, in terms of student numbers, at postgraduate level and the production of research works by students at this level. Colleagues in the department were also motivated to produce research units for their career advancement. As one of the ways to foster research in the department, we planned to select good selections from the research essays of the postgraduate students and guide them to produce research articles. These articles would then be co-authored with the colleagues who had done the guiding. The intention was to produce students who would go on to become researchers and scholars. Their research work would then be not only for the purpose of obtaining degrees, but would benefit the public and future generations of scholars as well. It is for these reasons that most of the articles that form the chapters in this book are co-authored by a lecturer and a student. Colleagues were also encouraged to produce works of their own, hence there are some chapters that have single authors.

The University of Johannesburg's Department of African Languages further came to a realisation that the department does not exist in isolation. It exists alongside other departments of African languages in sister universities. It is for this reason that colleagues from the University of South Africa were invited to contribute towards this publication, hence articles by Mafela and Ntuli are included in the book. Mafela contributed the article, 'Translating Literature: An Alternative Tool for Teaching Foreign Culture' while Ntuli produced 'Proverbs and the Inculcation of Moral Values in the Youth: Reflections on Children's Literature'. This inclusion is important not only for the book itself, but

for the collaboration it promotes between the Departments of African Languages of the two universities. This collaboration is intended to be encouraged with other institutions as well. All the other articles here are contributions by colleagues and students of the University of Johannesburg's Department of African Languages.

It is worth noting that the articles in this book are written in two languages: some chapters have been written in English, others in isiZulu. This has been done with foresight as, due to the legacy of colonisation and apartheid, English and Afrikaans were hitherto used as the exclusive languages of research in African languages and literature in South Africa. The incorporation of isiZulu articles into this volume is intended to encourage the inclusive use of indigenous languages as languages of research, while not undermining the continuing use of more established research languages such as English. This inclusion is also aimed at promoting multilingualism in academic discourses.

The publication of this volume is expected to inspire more works of this nature to be produced by colleagues in the Department of African Languages at the University of Johannesburg and other institutions. The editors of this book would like to express words of gratitude to all the contributors of chapters to this book.

E.D.M. SIBIYA and Z. MTUMANE
University of Johannesburg
December 2021

Actions as a Means of Characterisation in E.D.M. Sibiya's *Ngiyolibala Ngifile*

Zilibele Mtumane

Martha Hadebe

Introduction

Edward Dumisani Sibiya uses the actions of characters to present their personality traits, physical appearance and the relationships they have among themselves, in the novel *Ngiyolibala Ngifile* (2010). Thus far, however, no study has been conducted that analyses this aspect of his novel. Hadebe (2018), on whose BA Honours essay this chapter is based, seems to be the only scholar who has attempted to write on this topic. The scarcity of analysis material on the subject illustrates the role of this chapter in filling the lacuna that exists in the study of Sibiya's novel.

Action generally refers to what one does. Pearsall (2001: 13) views action as 'the process of doing something to achieve an aim' and as 'a thing done'. According to Abrams and Harpham (2009: 42), in literature, action refers to what characters do. In the words of Rimmon-Kenan (1983: 61) action is a trait that may be implied by both one-time actions and habitual ones. One-time actions tend to evoke the dynamic aspect of the character, often playing a part in a turning point in the narrative. By contrast, habitual actions reveal the character's unchanging or static nature, often having a comic or ironic effect, such as when a character clings to old habits in a situation which renders them inadequate.

Surmelian (1968: 149) says that when characters reveal themselves through a developing action, they require little or no clarification by the author, for plot proves character. In addition, Surmelian states that to be a doer, a character must have plenty to do. The writer has to keep him or her busy. Bad men and women are more active than good men

and women. For most readers, characters are better understood and remembered through their vices. Ndebele (2007: 42) concurs with Surmelian when he says that actions speak louder than words. The most memorable fictional characters are the ones that are remembered for what they do and say. One does not often remember them for the things we are *told* about them.

According to Nweba (2004: 13) action is the life and force of a play. It is also an effective way of showing a character. Plays are not realities, but artificial devices. Just as the heart and other vital organs make living and breathing possible in human beings, so dramatic action provides the same, giving impact to a play. These statements apply to fictional narratives like the novel as well, where the dramatic method of characterisation is employed.

The importance of actions in a work of art is revealed by Perrine (in Nguna, 1997: 123) when he states: 'Characters must act, if there is to be a story; when they do not act, the story approaches the conditions of an essay.' It is through actions that the readers can make their own assumptions about the type of person a character is; therefore, characters must be given plenty to do. In that way the reader will remember mostly the actions rather than the words of the character.

Through actions, one does not only discover the personality traits of characters but also their physical outlook and the type of relationships they have with each other. Actions, as a method of character portrayal, play a vital role in creating a vivid picture in the minds of readers about a particular character, and the readers then have the opportunity to analyse for themselves the type of people the characters are. The role of actions in revealing the personality traits, physical appearance and relationships of characters is analysed in this chapter as employed in E.D.M. Sibiya's *Ngqiyolibala Ngqifile*.

Actions that reveal personality traits

This section discusses the personality traits of Khanyisile and MaKhoza as revealed through their actions in Sibiya's novel.

Khanyisile

In the novel, Khanyisile is the daughter of MaKhoza (the mother) and Madonsela (the father), who rapes his daughter. Khanyisile is revealed

through her actions as a young girl who is respectful, shy and introverted. Although she notices the strange behaviour of her father towards her, how he looks at her, the inappropriate words he says to her, she shows respect to him by not answering back, especially when her father tells her how lonely he feels as her mother is always busy. Khanyisile does not comment and looks down, which is a sign of respect in African culture. This is reflected in the following words:

Akukho akayengakuphawula kulokho okushiwo uyise. Wamane amehlo wawambela phansi nje, wathunga nomlomo wakhe uKhanyisile. (Sibiya 2010: 13)

(There was nothing she could comment on what her father was saying. Khanyisile just stared down and kept quiet.)

Khanyisile's downcast stare is suggested by the phrase, *Wamane amehlo wawambela phansi nje* (She just stared down). The idiom *ukumbela phansi amehlo* literally means to dig one's eyes down. Digging one's eyes down would naturally bar one from seeing anything else around. Khanyisile's 'digging her eyes down' is a symbolic idiom that emphasises how she stares down so as not to look her father in the eyes.

Khanyisile's keeping quiet is confirmed by the use of the idiom *wathunga umlomo* (she kept quiet). *Ukuthunga umlomo* literally means to sew one's mouth. Sewing involves putting together two pieces of cloth with a thread using a needle. This idiom emphasises how the two lips of the mouth are pressed together as if they will not separate, as they normally separate when one is talking. All of this further stresses how Khanyisile closes her mouth as she does not want to respond to her father's comments.

Before she gets raped Khanyisile focuses on her studies, she is clear about what she wants out of her life, but, subsequent to this bad experience, she fails all her subjects. Whenever Khanyisile studies she has flashbacks of her father sexually assaulting her and it is as if she sees him on the pages of the book; this is something that disturbs her from continuing to study. Although she has a boyfriend, she was a virgin until this incident, and prepared to keep herself pure until she got married. It was something that she had been proud of and was very special to

her. That's why, when it is forcefully taken away from her, she falls apart emotionally and mentally. Thereafter, throughout the novel, she is very unhappy because of the bad experience that she has gone through. She loses hope and her world falls apart. She stresses a lot and cries almost every day. The passage below reveals how Khanyisile's inability to study is presented in the novel:

Kwakuthi nje lapho ethi uyayibeka incwadi phambi kwakhe, afunde libe linye igama, noma umusho ube munye, kube sengathi noyise usembona khona ekhasini lencwadi. (Sibiya 2010: 16)

(When she had decided to study, she would read only one word or sentence and it would seem as if she saw her father on the page of the book.)

Khanyisile is also revealed here as a brave young woman. She runs away from home because she no longer feels safe there and goes to Johannesburg, where she does not know anyone, without her mother knowing. She almost gets raped by a gang from the streets but gets help from an old man named Khanyile. She then spends the night on the streets. She is not afraid to leave the comfort of her home and sleep on the streets. And when she gets to Johannesburg she begs for food and money from people she does not know. That shows that she is not ashamed to live this life, uncaring what people will think of her. This is how the author presents this:

Wagijima njalo ehamba evikwa izimoto zicishe zimthuhlaza. Wawungafunga ukuthi ngumuntu odudulwa ngamandla edlozi elifuna ayongena ephelweni noma emanzini lingakashayi ihora leshumi nambili kwamabili. Kwathi kushaya eleshumi nambili wayesecothoza phakathi edolobheni eGoli elokhu elibhadula phansi ngezinyawo. (Sibiya 2010: 45)

(She ran continuously and was avoided by cars that almost hit her. One could swear that she was pushed by the power of an ancestral spirit that wanted her in the waters before twelve o'clock midnight. By twelve o'clock she was walking slowly, bare-footed, in the streets of Johannesburg.)

The idiom *ukududulwa ngamandla edlozi* (being pushed by the power of an ancestral spirit) emphasises the high speed with which Khanyisile is running. It also implies that she runs as if she cannot control herself.

Khanyisile does not only show courage by running away from home but also by going to the police station alone to report the rape crime, even after her mother has suggested that the matter should be solved without involving the police. This shows that she is an independent thinker. She does what she thinks is right and, as much as she listens to advice, she is able to take her own major decisions. She is a risk-taker, not scared of what she might lose and what other people might think or say about her. This is reflected in the following words:

Nebala uKhanyisile anikele emaphoyiseni. Alubike udaba lunjengoba lunjalo. Afakwe egunjini elithile ukuze abonane nomunye usayitsheni okunguyena ophenya ngamacala abucayi njengakho ukunukubezeka ngokocansi. Abhalise isitatimende sakhe. Aqede. Ezwe sengathi kunetshe elikhulu elisukayo emahlombe akhe. (Sibiya 2010: 79)

(Khanyisile goes to the police. She tells them the story as it is. She is taken to another room to meet a sergeant who is responsible for investigating sensitive cases such as the one of rape. She gives him her statement. She gets it done. She feels like a big rock has been taken away from her shoulders.)

Note should be taken of the simile, *sengathi kunetshe elikhulu elisukayo emahlombe akhe* (like a big rock is removed from her shoulders). Carrying a heavy rock on one's shoulders is a burdensome experience. It would make one unable to do anything as the body feels the load. The figurative meaning of this situation is that one feels depressed. The expression of the feeling of a heavy stone being removed from one's shoulders points to the relief one feels after the burden is removed. This emphasises the relief Khanyisile experiences after reporting the rape case to the police. It also suggests that before reporting it, it felt like a heavy burden that depressed her.

From the above discussion, we can see that through her actions, Khanyisile is portrayed as a character who is respectful, determined and brave, an independent thinker and a risk-taker.

MaKhoza

In the novel there is also MaKhoza, wife to Madonsela and mother to Khanyisile. She is presented through her actions as a devoted wife to Madonsela. She trusts her husband and respects him, hence it is difficult for her to believe that he can sexually abuse their daughter. She shakes her head in disbelief and scratches her ears as if she does not hear her daughter clearly when she tells her that Madonsela sexually assaulted her. This is evident in the following words:

Walinikina ikhanda wena owabona inkukhu izithintitha kade ithelwe ngamanzi inganakile. Wake wathi ukuzenwaya izindlebe zakhe ukuthi kokunye mhlawumbe yisigonogono esenza ukuthi angayizwa kahle indaba exoxwa yindodakazi yakhe. (Sibiya 2010: 2)

(She shook her head like a chicken that has had water poured onto it without warning. She scratches her ears in case they had some earwax inside that prevents her from hearing clearly the story that is being told by her daughter.)

The phrase *Walinikina ikhanda* (She shook her head) refers to a symbolic action by MaKhoza. Generally, shaking one's head signals disagreement with what is being said. In this case, MaKhoza shakes her head to show her disapproval and disbelief of what Khanyisile is telling her, that Madonsela raped her. Her disapproval of her daughter's words strengthens the idea that she is a devoted wife to her husband. She trusts him so much that she cannot believe he could commit such an evil act.

What Khanyisile tells MaKhoza surprises her a lot as the author presents it . . . *wena owabona inkukhu izithintitha kade ithelwe ngamanzi inganakile* (. . . like a chicken that has been poured with water unawares). A chicken that gets water poured over it in this manner normally shakes its head very fast for the water to fall off. This is what MaKhoza is presented to be doing, because of her disbelief at the shocking news shared by Khanyisile.

MaKhoza is also revealed through her actions as a caring mother to her daughter. She listens to her when she tells her that she has been raped by her own father. Initially it is hard for MaKhoza to believe how cruel her husband has been to their daughter. She later comforts and

sympathises with her. This is illustrated when she helps Khanyisile to go to sleep; she gently prepares her pillow and soothes her like a newborn baby. This demonstrates that she loves her daughter and is aware of what she is now going through because of MaKhoza's husband. Here is how the author presents this:

Amsukumise, bese emeseka aze amlalise embhedeni akasazi ukuthi kumele enzeni. Amshushuzele sengathi ushushuzela usana olubomvana.
(Sibiya 2010: 4)

(She helps her get up, takes her to sleep, she no longer knows what to do anymore. She comforts her as if she is a newborn baby.)

MaKhoza is portrayed as a caring mother, taking care of Khanyisile to the extent that *Amshushuzele sengathi ushushuzela usana olubomvana* (She soothes her as if she soothes a newborn baby). The use of the word *sengathi* (as though), which is a form of simile, gives a clue that Khanyisile is not a newborn baby but much older than that, and MaKhoza's treating her like an infant indicates that she is very caring to her daughter, especially in view of what the latter has just informed her, that she has been raped by Madonsela.

Actions that reveal physical appearance

This section discusses the use of actions that reveal the physical appearance of Themba, Khanyisile and Madonsela.

Themba

Themba is the boyfriend of Khanyisile who separates from her when he finds out that she is pregnant. He is revealed through his actions to be a character who is skinny. This is emphasised by the way he walks. He walks as if he gets blown away by the wind. This indicates that he is a lightweight. He often wears pants that are too big for his body size because they are handed down to him by people who are much bigger than he is. When he wears the pants, he pretends to be clowning around in the way he wears them. He ties them around his stomach with a belt that he uses to help hold the pants up. He is perceived as an amusing

character because of that but, in essence, he is not being funny, it is the only way that he can keep the pants on. This is how the author presents it:

UThemba Nxumalo kwakuwuswahla lwensizwa, emncane ngomzimba, ehamba ngathi uyaphephuka. Amabhulukwe akhe wayethanda ukuwabopha okhalo azinkamfule sengathi uyachoma, kanti ngesinye isikhathi wayenziswa ubukhulu bawo. (Sibiya 2010: 24)

(Themba Nxumalo was a tall young man, he had a skinny body, walking as if being blown away by the wind. He liked wearing his trousers by tying them around the stomach with a belt as if he was clowning, but sometimes it was because of their big size.)

The above extract shows how Themba's physical appearance is revealed through his actions. The impression of him as a skinny character is revealed by the phrase *emncane ngomzimba* (had a skinny body). It is also strengthened by the simile *ehamba ngathi uyaphephuka* (walking as if he is blown away by the wind). The wind normally blows away items that are light in weight. Themba's way of walking as if he is blown away by the wind points to his light weight due to the skinny body.

Themba's physical appearance is also revealed by the description of his attire in the story, as discussed above. His pretending to be a clown points to the author's use of humour in his portrayal of this character. The humour amuses the readers and makes them interested in reading the story.

Khanyisile

Khanyisile is depicted as a character who likes to be clean and neat. This is evident when she is on the streets and feels uncomfortable because she has not taken a bath the whole day; apparently, it is very unusual that she hasn't taken a bath by this time. She changes her clothes every day and applies perfume so that she looks clean and smells pleasant like a proud woman. This further confirms to the reader that Khanyisile is indeed a person who takes care of herself physically, and always looks clean and presentable. This is reflected in the following words:

Nelanga selithambeme manje. Okokuqala cishe empilweni yakhe ukuthi kushaye lesi sikhathi engakagezi, washintsha nezimpahla zangenzansi, waziqhola ukuze anuke kamnandi njengomuntu wesifazane. (Sibiya 2010: 71)

(The sun has set now. This is almost the first time in her life that she hasn't taken a bath by this time, changed her underwear, put on perfume so that she would smell like a woman.)

Khanyisile's beauty and cleanliness are also emphasised by Khanyile when he tells her that she is beautiful and that she must go and wash her face before she goes to the police station:

'Uma uqeda ukudla-ke, uhambe uye laphaya ngaserobhothini, kunesiteshi samanzi. Ukhe khona amanzi bese uhlamba ubuso ungaze unukele amaphoyisa umuhle kanjena mzikulu wami.' (Sibiya 2010: 78)

(When you are done eating, go there by the robot, there is a water station. Get water from there and wash your face so that you won't have a bad smell to the police, as you are so beautiful my grandchild.)

Madonsela

Madonsela is MaKhoza's husband and Khanyisile's father. From Madonsela's actions, one can tell that he has money and a good job. He loves wearing expensive clothes and knows well how valuable they are. This is observed when he is in an aeroplane coming back to South Africa from America. He is sipping a cup of coffee but is careful not to spill it on his Hugo Boss suit that cost him seven thousand rand. Judging from his outfit one can tell that he is a presentable man of high status. From the way he carries himself it is clear that he is neat and clean:

Aphunge ikhofi lakhe. Ahlale anethezeke. Nokho aqaphele ukuthi lingamtheli kule sudi yakhe yeHugo Boss embize izinkulungwane eziyisikhombisa asanda kuyithenga. (Sibiya 2010: 83)

(He drinks his coffee. He sits down and relaxes. However, he becomes careful not to tip it on his recently bought Hugo Boss suit which cost him seven thousand rand.)

Actions that reveal the relationship between characters

This section discusses how actions are used to reveal the relationship between Khanyile, Madonsela, Khanyisile and MaKhoza as characters in the novel under discussion.

Khanyile

Khanyile is a hobo who lives on the streets. It is revealed that he is Madonsela's father and Khanyisile's grandfather. The relationship between Khanyile and Khanyisile does not start off in pleasant circumstances. His actions of helping Khanyisile when she is almost gang-raped show that Khanyile is a genuinely good person. To help someone he has never seen before and doesn't know reflects that he has a good heart. This is further confirmed by him giving her a place to sleep. This kind action of his towards Khanyisile gives these two characters a good, strong foundation on which to build their relationship. Khanyisile confides in Khanyile, not knowing that he is actually her grandfather. They treat each other with kindness and are very thoughtful towards each other. Khanyile offers Khanyisile some of his food. This demonstrates that Khanyile has *ubuntu*, he doesn't need to know someone in order to show them love and treat them humanely. This is how Khanyile's saving Khanyisile from being gang-raped is presented in the novel:

Kuthi kuyazama okunye ukusondela, lisinyakazise isiheshe somkhonto ikhehla qede likhwife amathe ligade osondelayo. Kuhlehle lokhu komfana obekusondela. Bagcine benyomuka ngokudumala ngamunye, ngamunye, baphele endaweni. (Sibiya 2010: 74)

(One of them tries to come closer, the old man shakes his spear and spits saliva, looking for anyone who comes near. The boy who was approaching slowly goes back. They all end up going back, one by one, and disappear.)

Note should be taken of the symbolic action where Khanyile is presented as *likhwife amathe* (spitting saliva). Spitting saliva when one is in a fight