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of Portrayal of Women in Two Short Stories**



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## The Intertextuality of SiSwati Literature Texts; a Review of Portrayal of Women in Two Short Stories

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** Emaswati literature texts, like other written works of art are cyclical, they resemble each other in different ways. This study is a qualitative analysis of the intertextuality of Emaswati literature texts, it analyses how Emaswati texts permeate each other. The main aim of this study was to analyse the interrelatedness of the portrayal of women in two short stories from Khulumani Sive by Zodwa Motsa, a collection of stories depicting Emaswati cultural values. It synthesizes mainly the social, cultural and political issues depicted in the short stories.

**Methodology:** It is a qualitative analysis of the interrelatedness of Emaswati literature texts. Document analysis was used as a data collection tool. The inclusion criteria were stories prescribed to be taught in the senior secondary school in Eswatini during the period 2021-2024. Purposive sampling was used to select prose fiction; the short story genre, a sample of two stories for the study. These were “*Phumani Nelikhambi*” and “*Sewesitsafu Lomnyaka*” both authored by Thembekile Msibi. Content analysis was used to analyse data. The analysis of the content for the two stories was based on the ideas of the new historicism literary theory which regards that ideologies depicted in literature texts are situated within the surrounding context.

**Findings:** The findings revealed that the two short stories share the same social, cultural and political issues. Amongst others were that most of the responsibility in the home is assigned or expected to be done by women. Also, all the female characters in the stories are expected to adhere to societal conventions that they are to work harder above their husbands and see to it that things are in order.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy, and Practice:** The conclusions drawn from the synthesis of the ideas portrayed in the two short stories were that the two women portrayed as protagonists shared the same fate. They were overburdened with family responsibilities while men were relaxed. Also, their progress and development were confined by societal conventions. The two stories are therefore intertextual. Another conclusion was that Emaswati culture, socialization and political environment greatly influenced the expectations from the two women in the stories. Therefore, the synthesis of the two short stories showed that siSwati literature texts are not only products but producers of culture as well. The pedagogical recommendations are that during the analysis of literature texts, the ideas depicted should be taught and synthesized alongside other works of art available in the society in different forms. Lastly, learners should be taught how to evaluate the ideas depicted in siSwati literature texts as opposed to mastering them.

**Key words:** *Intertextuality, Works of art, Portrayal*

## INTRODUCTION

Emaswati literature texts are a depiction of the social, cultural and political conditions of the lives of Emaswati. This definition makes literature texts similar to history in that the texts are cyclical; each is formed from the other such that no one can claim original authorship. As a result themes appear and reappear. The intertextuality idea is that literary and non-literary texts depict the same discourse of the people but in different ways (Zekiye, 2005; Bhatti, Afzaal, Shahzadi & Hu, 2019). The main purpose of this paper was to explore the intertextuality of siSwati literature texts prescribed for the senior secondary school curriculum, the short story genre, the case of two short stories.

Intertextuality is a term that refers to the way literature texts are formed from each other. Emaswati literature is social discourse of Emaswati, discourse is the social use of language and it comes in different forms, oral, written, in symbols and through societal presentations. Literature therefore, is the written form, it depicts the social, cultural, political and economic issues of Emaswati. Culture and society are products of the historical circumstances behind the writing of the texts. In this regard, history is the premise behind interpretation, analysis and understanding of literature (Zekiye, 2005; Lyu, 2021). This means that understanding the social practices, institutions and discourses formed from the culture of Emaswati is important for one to understand Emaswati literature texts. Just as history and literature are not separated, a literature text and its context cannot be separated. The main of this paper was to explore the intertextuality of siSwati literature texts prescribed for the senior secondary school curriculum, the short story genre, the case of two short stories.

## Background

Literature are expressions of human thoughts, emotions and activities which are contextualized-designed by the social, political, economic and cultural surroundings (Hoover, 1992). Literature comes in two forms, as literary and as non-literary. However, all works of literature whether literary (modern literature and religious writings) or non-literary (art, dance, drama, beliefs and practices, speeches, letters, history, pamphlets, diaries, newspapers and others) are allusions of the culture, events and issues of a given society (Rahman, 2016; Bhatti et al., 2019).

In the past century literature texts were viewed as products of culture that have nothing to do with either the authors' biography nor his/her cultural, social and political background. Therefore close reading of literature texts, which focuses on just the text and not the context was used by readers to extrapolate the ideas in the text. Contrary, the 21<sup>st</sup> century literary analysis views literature texts as both producers and products of culture (Lyu, 2021). Thus, both the text and the context greatly affect its interpretation. The meaning of a text for the 21<sup>st</sup> century is open to all discourse whether literary or non-literary. Thus, an effective analysis is one that relates the text to other texts of the same production, themes related to the one under discussion as well as other works produced by different authors. This is what forms the rationale behind the move from the term "analysis" to



“critical analysis”. This study explored the similarities in the portrayal of social, cultural and political female issues in siSwati literature texts prescribed for the senior secondary school curriculum, the short story genre, the case of two short stories.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Literature for this study is reviewed under four subtopics. Firstly, is the theoretical framework that underpins the concept under study. Secondly, is the discussion of the perspectives that guide interpretation of literature texts. The third topic is history as the basis for interpretation of literature texts. The last one is the empirical studies, which is a review of available scholarship on the major variables of the study topic. It also outlines the research gap that forms the rationale for this study.

### **Theoretical review**

The ideas in this study are framed within those of the new historicism literary theory. New historicism considers siSwati literature texts as a combination of the cultural matrix (literary and non-literary texts) of the society’s past, present and future presented through art (Zekiye, 2005; Bhatti et al., 2019). Tenets of the theory view that texts depict the social, cultural and political ideas of the Emaswati people of both the past and present. Therefore, the main argument of the new historicists is that there is no “the text”, all texts (literary or non-literary) are products of each other and they permeate each other in different ways. Some share popular themes, similar gender characteristics, strange beliefs so forth and so on. The new historicists therefore maintain that literature is not only the written form but other societal representations are literature too. This implies that there is no totally new literature, all literature is formed from other works of art. In this regard, proponents of the theory postulate that a literature text should be analyzed alongside other existing works of art whether literary or non-literary. In this study assumptions of the theory were used to understand the interrelatedness of two siSwati short stories prescribed for the senior secondary school curriculum, “*Phumani Nelikhambi*” and “*Sewesitsatfu Lomnyaka*” by Thembekile Msibi.

### **Perspectives that guide interpretation of literature texts**

Literature reveals that there are four different angles that guide analysis of literature texts. They are the ideas found in the text itself, those from the context, those of the reader and the author (Gessesse, 2011; Schrijvers, Janssen, Fialho & Rijlaarsdam, 2016). Regardless of the above, extrapolation of cultural values and tradition remains the pillar behind the writing and analysis of literature texts. Eswatini senior secondary school learners are the readers of the siSwati literature texts. Their understanding and interpretation of the texts is influenced by their social formations and ideological upbringings (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2020). The same thing applies to the author, his or her socialization greatly influences the works of art produced. This therefore implies that interpretation should not rely on the authors’ intentions per se but the ideologies that were prevailing during his/her age and now. Analysis of the work must look into how the text

reflects on the author's times and how the authors' times affect the work. Thus, during the analysis of literature texts, the historicity of both the author and the reader comes to play. This therefore implies that during analysis of siSwati literature texts, the major focus must be evaluation of the social, cultural, political ideas explored. Intertextuality therefore argues that the social, cultural and political ideas explored in siSwati literature texts prescribed for the senior secondary school are related in one way or the other. Given the other genres of literature texts taught to learners in the senior secondary school, the major focus for this paper is the short story genre.

### **History as the basis for analysis of literature texts**

Emaswati history is a crucial element of Emaswati literature in that it forms the bedrock for its analysis. All work of art is a product of the historic moment that created it (Brizee, Tompkins, Chernouski & Boyle, 2012; Anderson, 2022). The definition of history attached to this idea is that history is the circumstances evolving between men according to age. Literature texts are therefore, a storage of the power relations of a given society. Critical analysis of the texts must unpack those influences (Rahman 2016; Bhatti et al., 2019). Also, these power controls are not found only in one text but from other various literature of the same context. However, the significance of literature texts is not bounded (Bertens, 2020; Mambrol, 2016). This implies that though history is the foundation behind analysis, the ideas of the present situation are also part of the storyline. Therefore, the ideologies-the societal beliefs, practices, norms, values and events depicted in siSwati literature should be analyzed across. That is as they make sense in the past, today and tomorrow. This makes the texts permeate each other, become interrelated in different ways. This paper explores how siSwati literature texts prescribed for the senior secondary school curriculum, the short story genre depicts the same issues helpful to both the young and the old.

### **Empirical review**

There are some studies done on literature. Mkhonta and Dlamini (2023) studied the author's use of pathetic fallacy in siSwati literature prose using textual data analysis. The findings showed that there is a decline in authors' use of pathetic fallacy to depict emotions in siSwati literature texts. The recommendation was that, to produce scientific works of literature, authors must use pathetic fallacy in their works. Teachers too should teach learners how to identify instances of pathetic fallacy and relate them to their use to create effect.

Romano and Cuenca (2024) conducted a case study on use of similes and metaphors by the Spanish media. The study compared the cognitive and discourse functions of similes and metaphors. The findings showed that though psycholinguistics and cognitive theories consider the two as discourse tools, their cognitive use differ.

Pager-McClymont (2022) conducted a survey of English teachers' stylistic model of using pathetic fallacy. The findings showed that pathetic fallacy is defined and used differently by authors. Some authors employ it as repetition, others as negation and as imagery. The findings also showed that

there are authors who used it to achieve different effects in literature texts, to express emotions, as foreshadowing and to mould characters inter alia.

All the studies reviewed are aligned to this one in that they were on literature. The difference is that the studies were on the use of the literary art; pathetic fallacy, the simile and metaphor in literature texts. Contrary, this one explored the literary concept of intertextuality- the similarities between siSwati literature texts. It compared the ideas projected in two short stories.

## METHODOLOGY

The paper used the qualitative research methodology and document analysis as a data collection tool. Document analysis is a research instrument used to interpret written material (Creswell, Erbersohn, Eloff., Ferreira, Ivankova,, Jansen, Nieuwenhuis, Pietersen & Clark, 2016).The inclusion criteria for the material analysed in this study were siSwati literature texts prescribed to be taught in the senior secondary school in Eswatini during the years 2021-2024. Given the three genres of literature taught to learners, purposive sampling was used to select one literature genre; prose fiction, which is subdivided into the novel and short story. Convenient sampling was used to choose the short story genre. The short story genre taught to learners in the senior secondary school during the period 2021-2024 was entitled “*Khulumani Sive*” edited by Zodwa Motsa. While the curriculum identified ten stories to be taught in the school system, I picked two of those. They are “*Phumani Nelikhambi*” and “*Sewesitsatfu Lomnyaka*” authored by Thembekile Msibi.

Content analysis was used to analyse data and trace instances of sameness in the portrayal of women in the two short stories. Content analysis is a tool that allows researchers to analyse already available data in text format (Patton, 2002). I regard it as the most reliable tool in that it is easy to depend on. My idea is influenced by the definition of dependability as the level at which data generation and analysis tools can give out the same results if the same study can be redone (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 as cited in Creswell et al., 2016). The tool used to generate data for this study is a text, a short story collection that is readily available in schools and bookshops. Interested readers of the study can easily access it and verify the authenticity of the results.

## PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### **The intertextuality of siSwati short stories prescribed for the senior secondary school curriculum; “*Phumani Nelikhambi*” and “*Sewesitsatfu Lomnyaka*” by Thembekile Msibi**

The two short stories; “*Phumani Nelikhambi*” and “*Sewesitsatfu Lomnyaka*” by Thembekile Msibi are intertextual in that they share the theme of portrayal of women in the Emaswati culture. The two women who are protagonists are portrayed as being overburdened, caretakers and engines that sustain the whole family. These findings resemble the undertakings of the new historicism literary theory that the cultural and historical ideas found literature texts are similar in one way or the other (Zekiye, 2005; Bhatti et al., 2019). In the short story “*Phumani nelikhambi*”, the author has used tragedy unto tragedy as a literary technique. The woman, laMphondvo happened to find herself

engulfed with troubles created by the late husband who borrowed money to buy a car. Now that he is late, she is expected to pay. The bone of contention therefore is that the woman is confined by societal conventions that a widow is not expected to be busy, cannot be seen moving up and down. She is to sit at home and mourn for the lost husband. The question that arises therefore is, how is she going to make money? As readers we feel pity for the widow who now has a double blow.

This woman shared the same fate with the one in the short story “*Sewesitsatfu lomnyaka*”. Such is the same with the surmise of the new historicists that there shall never be any new literature. The only difference is that in this story, the overburdening of the woman is portrayed indirectly under the theme of “education”. The author depicted it through the behavior of the husband who is failing to live life alone while the woman is abroad to further her studies. Though there is a slight adjustment to the Emaswati societal conventions of confining the woman at home, the author has used “chaos” as a literary tactic to project the theme of ‘woman being the pillar’ of the homestead. This depicts the imbalance in terms of gender roles in the Emaswati society. In the short story “*Sewesitsatfu lomnyaka*”, the man, Dvuba is confused and does not even know where to start in terms of bringing order in the house. Dvuba has spilled tea over the carpet and the whole house is smelling bad. In the kitchen besides that there is no bread; the kitchenware was not washed yesterday. To paint a vivid picture of the ill-kept house and disorder, the author has used olfactory imagery to portray that because of the absence of the woman, the kitchen is full of all kinds of disorder.

To further humiliate the irresponsibility of men or the African socialization that men’s place is not in the kitchen, the author explained that the very same day Dvuba’s wife flew to school, Dvuba took a paper in which he wrote down the duties to do. To mount the tension and escalate the male irresponsibility, the author told us that even that paper got lost. Both stories share the idea that in Emaswati culture much responsibility is expected from the woman such that when the woman is away there is disorder. This aligns with the hypothesis of the new historicism literary theory that literature texts depict the political and economic situations.

The socialization of Emaswati men presented is the same in both stories. They are depicted as people who are too dependent on women for almost all family errands. On the other hand, the women are portrayed as pillars behind children’s development, success and prosperity of the home. These findings echo the observation made by Bhatti et al. (2019) that texts reveal power distributions. In “*Sewesitsatfu lomnyaka*” the child’s school performance has dropped because his mother is away and he is left with the father. The bedroom is left unprepared. As a warning that such socialization should come to an end, the author told us that abroad, some men are proposing love to the woman who has gone there to further her studies. This is a wake-up call to such men who are too dependent on the woman that one day it might catch up with them. Therefore the story raises awareness on the dangers of such socialization.

The severity of the situation is such that in “*Sewesitsatfu lomnyaka*”, the man, Dvuba does not even perform at work because his wife is away and his mind too. The author described his office as a disorganized environment. Almost all documents have not been dealt with, they are packed and shelved under “pending”. This shows that Dvuba lost his senses the day his wife flew to America and his normal senses are likely to be back when she arrives back home.

The consequences of such norms with men are the same as those in the story “*Phumani Nelikhambi*”. The in-laws are to bring a solution to the widowed LaMphondvo. LaMphondvo’s case is critical because her irresponsible husband borrowed thirty thousand emalangenis from a savings scheme to buy the very same car that killed him. The scheme desperately needs LaMphondvo to repay back the money owed. LaMphondvo therefore sought permission from the in-laws to continue with her business enterprise-buying and selling in order to get money to settle the debt. The author has used biblical allusion to depict the intensity of the situation. LaMphondvo’s desperate situation is likened to the biblical story of a widow whose husband left a debt and the owner of the debt wanted to kill the woman and the child. This allusion takes us back to the reality that the bible is another literature. Its use reflects the intertextuality concept that texts are made of the same discourse (Bhatti, Afzaal, Shahzadi & Hu, 2019). It worries the readers to learn that under such pressing conditions, the in-laws insist that they expect her to sit at the corner and mourn for her late husband. LaMphondvo decided to ask her brother Mkhethwa to negotiate the in-laws on her behalf. This symbolizes that regardless of the overly preached gospel of freedom of speech and women’s rights, the power dynamics in Eswatini are that Emaswati women still have no voice in the society.

The denouement of the story is used by the author to call an end to such upbringing. This makes the story applicable in today’s contexts, an idea motivated by Bertens (2020) and Mambrol (2016) that though literature contains stories of the past, it must be written in such a way that analysis of the ideas also make sense to the current situation. The author portrayed the old man in the family as an epitome of change. Amongst all the family members, it is only him, the elder in the family who had a different view. He allowed LaMphondvo to go ahead and make money to cover up her husband’s debts. On the other side, the other family members forwarded a lot of complaints against the idea of a widow engaging in buying and selling. Some complained that it is a taboo “people cannot buy goods from a bereaved woman”, others reminded her that “she failed to bring forth enough children for the family” and many other issues. This behavior of the in-laws injects pain into already existing pain with LaMphondvo. One of the reasons why the author used the voice of the old man to change the situation is because the author is a critical realist, an advocate of change. The author is making a wake-up call on the need to change such mentalities. If an old man sees the need to change Emaswati expectations from a widow, what does it imply to the new generation that is educated?



## CONCLUSION

The information from the synthesis indicated that the two stories are intertextual; the social, political, and cultural ideas raised about the condition, position, and treatment of women in the Emaswati culture are the same. Both women who are protagonists in the stories are expected to adhere to societal conventions though in different ways while men, their husbands enjoy the comfort of life. Another conclusion is that the stories depict the consequences of gender stereotypes on peace and stability in the LiSwati homestead especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century era where women are educated. Not only that, but the dangers of observing certain societal conventions like the wearing of the morning gown, a practice that closes doors for bereaved people to live a normal life and earn a living. The situation is worse for a widow as she automatically assumes the role of being the breadwinner.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers need to consider that the social, cultural, political and economic ideas presented in each text are also found in the society's discourse; other literary and non-literary texts of the same culture. Therefore, a critical and creative analysis is one that is not confined to the text only, but aided by use of information from other literary texts and the learners' experiences of life in the community. This implies that to enhance learners' understanding of the storyline and make learning more practical during the teaching of the two short stories, teachers are to use authentic or rather practical teaching strategies that connect learning to the community. Another recommendation is that siSwati literature texts are to be used not only to teach learners Emaswati cultural beliefs, customs and values but as agents of change. This means that teachers should assign the learners thought-provoking tasks that will challenge them to use the ideas presented in the stories to critically evaluate archaic cultural norms that suppress people.

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