

The Role of Kiswahili Children's Literature in formulating their World view

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Abstract

This Paper will examine how characters in Children's Literature are portrayed by different authors with the probable ramifications. Children's literature in Kiswahili Language has grown tremendously in the recent past. For sure many publishing houses have started to view this kind of literature seriously. Likely this is because of the perception that this kind of literature can help young readers to understand their environment and to expand their worldview. Children's Literature can also help them to understand language and their society. It is important to realize that Children can construct their worldview from what they read. It is notable however that some writers have written children's stories with certain biases in regard to certain genders without realizing that such attitudes can have negative outcomes in their readers. This paper will analyse character portrayal in Children's Literature and interrogate the probable influence to the target audience.

Important Terminologies: Children's Literature, Worldview & Sociology of Literature

1.0 Introduction

Literature has many important functions one of which is to socialize readers. This role is carried out by all genres of Literature. This means that both written and Oral Literature and their various sub genres are useful in this regard.

Any communication definitely targets a given audience. This is what lends credence to the fact that Children's Literature is a special kind of Literature. It therefore follows that Children's Literature can be said to have special attributes that have attracted the attention of many critics. For instance Matundura (2007) elaborates them as follows:

Such works are usually written by adults with the aim of having them read by children. They have characters that are mainly children. Nevertheless some of them have adult characters, animals and even giants or ogres. Other attributes are:

- i The stories are usually short and simple
- ii They are written in simple Language and have simple plots

- iii They try to educate readers about social issues and involve adventures, fantasy and discovery
- iv In most cases the stories have a happy ending with good triumphing over evil.
- v) The aim is to provide a given lesson (pg37-38)

This views expressed by Matundura are realistic and clearly elaborate in a simple way the attributes of childrens stories. It is clear from this explanations childrens Literature opens to them a world view allowing them to learn new things. Among other things they learn about the adventures of their peers, the behavior of children of both genders and the outcomes of their choices. This then leads to the question does their reading experience help formulate their world view. Haviland(1973) is an agreement with this view. She explains:

Storytelling is a creative process, for the story teller creates
Another world into which the hearer, if the story teller has
skill and sincerity can enter with all his beliefs (pg 212)

Different authors have created different images of the world that surround their young readers. This begs the question: in writing childrens Literature are their images that are suitable and others that are not? This paper will attempt to answer these questions

Children's stories in Kiswahili are very many therefore I shall try as much as possible to analyse different view points as portrayed by different authors. This paper will limit itself to the following books written by different authors:

- i. Kabaji E.(2013) *Mwanasayansi*(The Scientist) Nairobi:Oxford University Press
- ii. Kimutai R(2003)*Ndoto ya Riziki* (A dream about self sustainance): Nairobi:Oxford University
- iii. Manji A.(2013) *Ndoto ya Mwanafunzi*(A students' Dream) :Nairobi Th Jomo Kenyatta
Foundation
- iv. Mpesha N(2007) *Sungura na Binti Mfalme* (The hare and the King's Daughter)
Nairobi:Phoenix Publishers
- v. Musembi N.(2009)*Nipe Sababu* (Give me a reason): Nairobi:Oxford University Press
- vi. Nandwa R.(2015)*Ngamia Mpole* (The polite Camel)Nairobi:Phoenix Publishers

2.0 Literature Review

Childrens Literature has been critiqued by many people. In Kenya many masters students have delved in this area. Some of the notable researchers in this area are: Ngugi (1997) and (2009), Mpesha (1996), and Matundura (2007) amongst others.

Mpesha(1996)researched on Childrens Literature in Tanzania. She traced the growth and development of Childrens Literature in Tanzania by analysing childrens stories published in Tanzania. She established the role of childrens literature in the society. Of interest in her findings is that Childrens' Literature is about real situations in the society and therefore the stories she focused on were not just stories but were representative of real situations in her society. Her work

differs from ours because whereas she focused on the growth of Children's Literature albeit in a neighbouring Country our work will focus on the portrayal of children and the probable effect.

Karuga (2005) analysed thematically and stylistically various children's story books studied in Kenyan Schools. He analysed the primacy of style in enabling the author to reach his audience. His research is in tandem with ours because he stressed the important role of characters in conveying the message to the readers in Children's stories. His research was broader than ours as he focused on more structural issues while our focus is on portrayal of characters

Mwanzi (2006) in her article: 'Children's Literature the concept of Socialising the young' is of the opinion that the need to socialize the young is a recurring theme worldwide. She adds that the need to socialise the young is the most important motivating factor amongst the writers of Children's Literature.

Matundura (2007) researched on the lasting images of gender in children's Literature. He was of the opinion that writers can create undesirable situations when they portray a certain gender in negative light. Our argument is in agreement with Matundura's standpoint.

Miricho (2014) on the other hand focused on the negative portrayal of the boy child in Children's Literature and the possible ramifications such as creating a scenario where boys will lack confidence and fail to achieve their goals in adulthood.

Miricho's position seems to echo Matundura's argument though they each focus on different genders this paper takes a wholistic argument that whichever gender a writer focuses on they must be cognizant of the negative or positive effects on their readers.

3.0 Theoretical Background

This work will be premised on the theory sociology of Literature because it examines the socialization of children by way of Literature. Wellek and Warren (1978) contended that: 'Literature has usually arisen in close connection with particular social institutions; and in primitive society we may even be unable to distinguish poetry from ritual, magic, work or play' (pg 11) They further add that most issues that emanate from literature are social issues.

It is a truism that human beings are social animals they do not exist in a vacuum. This means that whatever experience human beings undergo must be viewed from a social perspective. This position is strengthened by Witte's position (1978): 'Social Institutions are like a mould that ultimately shapes the individual.' (pg 211)

It therefore follows that Children's Literature apart from entertaining them it also has a lasting effect on them and it can also influence their worldview. This comes about because the readers associate themselves with the characters they are reading about imitating their conduct and sharing their aspirations. This therefore means that the readers formulate a world view based on what they are reading from the stories. Jill (1995) elaborates this position thus:

All societies use narratives to create traditions. Stories become a vital part of a group's daily world. As individuals tell each other about day-to-day happenings, they suggest what they believe should happen and their stories become allegorical narratives. Stories hold a structure that reflect heroic journeys traditional holidays and acceptable cultural practices. This structure helps a group understand their interpretation of the world and their place in it. It is the structure that each culture places in its stories for children (pg 38-39)

World view has to do with how humans interface with various issues in their lives. It has to do with how humans relate with others. It involves traditions and beliefs systems and how humans counter the challenges they face in their society be they cultural, economic or political.

It is clear that an individual's world view is developed by social interactions amongst other factors. It therefore follows that children get to develop their world view from interacting with their parents and the society at large.

In addition because of the media and various modes of communication the world view of children can be grown and shaped. In addition Children's Literature also play a key role in shaping and developing their world view. Authors of Children's Literature can therefore be said to influence the thinking and world view of their readers either negatively or positively.

This paper will examine how the boy child and the girl child are portrayed in different stories and the possible ramifications on the world view of the readers. It is notable that different writers present their characters with different attributes both negative and positive and this may teach a lesson to readers either negative or positive

4.0 Debate and Results

In this section general remarks on the selected children's stories have been made so as to give the debate direction. Each of the selected stories has been summarized and the worldview of the characters focused upon.

4.1 General remarks on the selected stories

The selected stories have been grouped into four categories. The first group focuses on children of both genders in a balanced way albeit without presenting characters in a negative way from a gender perspective for example *Ngamia Mpole* by Nandwa), the second group comprises stories that present the female characters in a negative light though not so directly examples are *Sungura na Binti ya mfalme* by Mpesha and *Mwanasayansi* by Kabaji. The third group presents all genders in a positive light examples are; *Hongera Mwanangu* by Obura and *Ndoto ya Riziki* by Kimutai and

finally the last group presents one gender negatively examples are; *Ndoto ya Mwanafunzi* by Manji and *Nipe Sababu* by Musembi

4.1.1 Ngamia Mpole by Nandwa

In this story children are taken for a walk by their father. They have fun by having their faces painted and by riding a camel. The camel rider narrates to them about his camel. He also narrates to them about some people who mistreat animals a behaviour which he says should be discouraged.

After the tour children head home happily. Their happiness emanate from being taken to a tour and also riding a camel which was a rare opportunity. They wonder why their father does not have a camel but they learn that camels are found in dry areas of the country.

This story depicts these children in a neutral way. There is no gender that is presented more positively than the other. Bonga and his sister are both presented positively. None of them is portrayed as cleverer than the other. None of them has been portrayed as a fool. Both are portrayed as obedient children who listen to the directions provided by their parents.

4.1.2 Mpesha's *Sungura na Binti Mfalme* and Kabaji's *Mwanasayansi*

The king's daughter was a beautiful maiden. The writer explains that this beautiful girl was always cheerful. Her beauty is what attracted many suitors. These suitors came from different parts of the country. This made her worried and her parents were also concerned. In order to stop this charade he directed that whoever will marry her must be able to drink boiling water.

The writer does not give the king's daughter any other significant attribute apart from her beauty. It is her beauty that attracts famous people and others of varying natures and makes them try the dangerous feat of drinking boiling water in order to win her hand in marriage. All of them fail this test apart from the clever hare.

The message from this story has to do with the female gender attracting admiration because of beauty. Without her beauty the King's daughter would not have attracted scores of suitors all of whom wanted to marry her

Mwanasayansi has two main characters that is Tami and his father. Tami was a young school boy that aspired to be a scientist when he grew up. Because of this ambition he always studied hard when he got an opportunity. He wanted to keep birds in their homestead. His father advised him to study about them and also to seek information from experts.

After cajoling his father for a long time the father took him to a library. The librarian showed Tami many books about birds and eventually Tami borrowed one of them. Tami read that book thoroughly and came to learn many things about birds. He was confident that he had the ability to take care of birds and therefore he asked for the go ahead from his father.

In this story we do not encounter any female character who is interested in science or arts. From the beginning to the end there is only one character. Tami's mother does not feature much in this story she only appears briefly as she chases a crow that had attacked her chicks

. This interesting story features the experiences of a boy child who aspires to be a scientist. It is also the father who encourages the character to pursue his dreams. It is possible that a female child who reads this story will get the impression that sciences are the reserve of boys. The author unconsciously propagates the prevalent albeit misguided view that sciences and technological disciplines are better suited for the male gender.

4.1.2 *Hongera Mwanangu* by Obura and *Ndoto ya Riziki* by Kimutai

In *Hongera Mwanangu* the author narrates about Maizi's family that had been given sleepless nights by a thief. Maizi was a farmer who depended on the proceeds from milk obtained from his cows. To his dismay he discovered that there was a sly thief that always milked his cows secretly and disappeared with the milk.

Mafamba who was an employee in the farm was the thief. He used to sneak in the cow shade at night and carry out his evil schemes. His employer never suspected him. This problem disturbed them a lot. His son Bamba decided to bring this mischief to an end. His parents who were unable to solve this riddle were skeptical but nevertheless they gave him the opportunity to trap the thief.

His efforts to keep watch using his three dogs did not bear fruits. Therefore he decided to change tact. He secretly went to the cow shed and substituted the cow with the donkey. Bamba did not involve anyone in this activity. Therefore Mafamba did not get to know the trap that had been laid for him. As usual he entered the cow shed at night carrying his tools of trade – a pail to carry the milk. He tip toed in the darkness upto to the donkey thinking it is the cow that he was accustomed to milking! As soon as he tried to fondle the donkey looking for the teats he was suddenly given several kicks. He screamed in pain and fainted. In the morning he was found there almost unconscious he was put on a stretcher and taken to hospital.

In this story the problem is solved by a male child who uses his wisdom to seek a solution for a problem that had disturbed his parents for a long time. This story does not present any gender in a negative light it simply shows how even young ones regardless of gender can solve their parents problem

Ndoto ya Riziki is a story that shows that where there is a will there is a way. The main character Riziki proved to her age mates that she was also capable of doing the tasks that they did. She aspired to become a doctor. Although she missed many classes due to lack of fees she still managed to emerge as a top student. She was an obedient student who was able to carry out her house chores and school responsibilities.

When she ended up at the University she thwarted her friends efforts to get her to be involved in a luxurious lifestyle. Her determination to become a doctor was not affected by the great freedom that students enjoyed at the university.

This story has many lessons for the reader. In her childhood Riziki's best friend was Hannah who came from a rich family but despite their differences materially they were still great friends. The other thing is that Riziki aspired to be a doctor though they came from a poor family.

So the moral of this story is that friendship should not be pegged on economic ladders and secondly even the girl child from an economically challenged background can succeed academically and take up a profession that had hitherto been taken to be a preserve of the males.

4.1.2 Musembi's *Nipe sababu* and Manji's *Ndoto ya Mwanafunzi*

This two stories can be classified together since they teach that individuals breaking the law will ultimately be punished. In both stories boys break the law and the consequence is that they find themselves in problems.

In *Nipe Sababu* three primary school children namely; Katu, Safari and Chalii spent their school holidays hunting small animals such as rabbits and antelopes. They enjoy their escapades and each time they have fun they end up becoming more daring.

Their naughty behavior is aggravated when they start chasing away a monkey. The poor monkey that had carried a child on her back had to flee deeper into the forest. Eventually they come across a beehive up in the tree. Despite being warned by his friends Katu insisted that he will bring it down with his catapult so that they can enjoy the honey! Katu suddenly hits the beehive with his catapult. The disturbed bees angrily leave the beehive and attack the boys. Each one leaves the scene running and screaming.

Katu removes his shirt in a bid to chase the bees away. However they continue attacking him until he falls on the ground and faints. Eventually the bees return to their hives while Katu's father comes there and finds Katu sprawled on the ground unconscious. His efforts to wake him up are unsuccessful. He carries him home. Katu regains his composure after three days and his father warns him against spoiling the environment of the bees because most families there depend on selling honey for their upkeep. His father decides to punish him for his errant behavior but he pleads with him to forgive him because the bees had punished him enough.

In *Ndoto ya Mwanafunzi* two young boys decide to be stowaways in a ship. Juma and Hamisi who lived near a coastline had previously heard about youths who had done the same and ended up in foreign lands where they became rich. They had developed this idea after mingling with idle youth who spent their time idling in the streets and indulging in vices such as stealing and using drugs.

When their big day came they organized themselves by buying biscuits and bottled water to eat and drink while on the way. They secretly embarked on a Europe bound ship and hid in the engine room where it was not easy to be found out. They had a difficult time and their life was endangered by the fumes from the ship's engine

Eventually this ship docked in a certain coastline. They thought they had reached Europe but they were in Mauritius. They left their hiding place and decided to swim ashore. Luck was not on their side as they were spotted by the coast guards. They were arrested and taken to hospital. After being treated they were taken to court where the magistrate jailed them for storing awsay. This meant that their efforts of illegally entering a foreign country was unsuccessful and they instead got jailed in a strange land.

This story illustrates the dreamy thinking among youths in developing countries that they can only better their lives in foreign countries and therefore the need to get there even by using illegal means. It is also a warning to youngsters against mingling with idlers whose mainstay is breaking the law.

According to some critics of Children's stories the way an author writes can affect children. Kimmel's (1970) observes

Looking over the total field of research into how children's reading affects Children's values, one can conclude that books may play a significant part in shaping and reshaping an individual's thinking, yet the means by which they do this and the total significance of their roles are matters still determined largely by the observer's intuition. In many cases Children's reading might momentarily affect their responses but how lasting these effects are remains to be determined. (pg 214).

This therefore means writers have to bear in mind that their audience can easily be manipulated by their ideas and hence they should consider that as they carry out their writing activities

5.0 Conclusion

Literature clearly broadens one's worldview as it brings many social, economic, political and cultural issues to the fore. Children's Literature is especially significant in this regard because children as they grow experiment with various issues and situations and are most likely to be influenced by the world of creative fiction than adults who can easily detach themselves from what they read.

Mwanzi (2006) is of the opinion that Oral Tales where heroes fought off ogres who were terrorizing villagers can be used to teach about justice in the society.

It is important to remember that society is like a mould wherein if individuals pass through that mould they will be shaped accordingly. It is a truism that it is easier for adults to escape from negative influences as they can seize a situation and make an informed decision unlike children who may be keen to experiment with harmful matters without foreseeing the harmful consequences.

It is obvious that the experience of reading the selected stories broadens the world view of their readers. The world view that the readers interface with can be useful or it can open up influences that can not be said to be so positive.

In *Ngamia Mpole* the writer dwells on the issue of Animals rights. The camel rider Ali Dabo explained to the children that it is not proper to mistreat animals as some people are known to do. He

narrated to them about someone who habitually mistreated his donkey and camels until he was discovered by authorities. Veterinary Officers treated the animals and the owner was warned and forced by authorities to pay for the cost of treatment

In *Sungura na Binti ya Mfalme* the emphasis is on the beauty of the King's daughter. Her beauty is what attracts many suitors. From this story young readers can be made to believe that beauty is the most significant attribute in a girl. This is not the case as any gender can uplift society by their meaningful contributions.

In *Mwanasayansi Tami* the male character is fascinated by science. He begs his father to help him understand science. This story does not have a character of another gender. This story inadvertently suggests that science is a domain of the male members of the society. It is as if the author is indirectly suggesting that female members of the society should concentrate on the arts

Ndoto ya Riziki and *Hongera Mwanangu* are two stories that are well balanced in terms of opening up the world view to the young readers. In *Ndoto ya Riziki* there is a young girl who is confident and she is not discouraged by the poverty that enveloped their existence. She struggles to become a doctor and her unrelenting efforts are finally rewarded. In her struggle a young female doctor urges her to take her science studies seriously in order to achieve her goals.

In *Hongera Mwanangu* Bamba who was only twelve years proves to be a hero when he traps and leads to the arrest of a thief who had troubled his family for a long time. This story encourages young people to emulate Bamba who though was young, he did not allow to be ignored in their family's quest to catch a thief who was stealing from them. This story also opens up the world view of the old in the society that they should not ignore the young in their efforts to seek solutions to problems.

Therefore it is clear that from Children's Literature many aspects or issues in the society can be discussed such as society's obligations, education, choice of profession and even proper and improper conduct and the consequences thereof.

Writers in the selected works have presented their stories with a view of opening up the world view of their readers indicating what they should aspire for and what they should avoid if they want to stay away from trouble or even succeed in their endeavours.

Some of these stories appeared to present one gender more positively than the other. In one story the writer narrates about a male character who loved science very much. Although this story does not have a female character who displays negative attitude towards sciences, the absence of a female character seems to indicate that sciences are the reserve of one gender—the male one.

In the selected stories it is the male characters who are portrayed breaking laws and suffering the consequences. Female characters are not portrayed in a negative light. This kind of narration is not realistic as it indicates only one gender is wayward.

The writers of the selected stories have done a good job but they must be cognizant of the kind of worldview they are opening up to their readers so that their clients can benefit from a balanced presentation of the world around them and indeed get advised on how to make informed choices that will better their lives and those of their societies.

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