PATHOS, DISGUISE AND MISCHIEF: A CELEBRATION OF THE UNDERDOG IN TRADITIONAL SHONA LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Traditional Shona literature, which in the context of this article encompasses folktales, myths, and legends, as well as other oral art forms deploys devices such as pathos, disguise, and mischief, among others. Through these devices, preliterate Shona literature celebrates the struggle of the underdog to transcend the limitations imposed by their circumstances. Underdogs comprise such people as the sick, the old and the disabled, among others. This article seeks to describe the fantastic accomplishments of underdogs and demonstrate how they are delivered through the midwifery of pathos, disguise and mischief, which is carefully designed to offset the underdogs' impoverishment in terms of wealth, health, looks, social influence and other attributes. *Inter alia*, the article demonstrates that the Shona worldview as expressed in traditional Shona literature is a democratic, facilitative space in which special laws of justice and retribution are deployed to catapult the underprivileged in their quest to reclaim their abused humanity.

Keywords: disguise; folktales; mischief; pathos; underdog

INTRODUCTION

This article is an analytical description of how pathos, disguise, and mischief are used as effective devices in Shona folk literature. In this analysis, folklore or folk literature refers to traditional, preliterate narratives that reside in the collective memory of the Shona

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people as part of their intangible cultural and creative heritage, and they are a special, inalienable artefact of culture which Muzyamba (1998, 67) refers to as "mentifact." Such literary genres comprise proverbs, legends, myths, riddles, anecdotes and folktales (*ngano*). Without necessarily limiting itself to *ngano* only, this analysis chiefly draws its illustrative and analytical material from the *ngano* genre. It is also instructive to indicate that in the vast majority of cases traditional narratives in general and *ngano were* designed in particular to educate as well as entertain (Chitando 2008; Matambirofa 2013; Mkanganwi 1973; Shumba 2013). For this reason, the narratives are sometimes referred to as edutainment (Matambirofa 2013; Shumba 2013). Matambirofa (2013) has placed the said elements of folk literature according to their hierarchal importance; and has argued that education is relatively more significant vis-à-vis entertainment. He further argues that from a pedagogical point of view, entertainment was methodologically only an ingenious and unique manner of imparting the basics of Shona cultural and/or moral values to children, who were the primary consumers of folk narratives. This is quite unlike the view advanced by Mapara (2013, 99) that holds that "it is ... important to embrace both education and entertainment as two equal sides of the same coin."

However, before the actual justification for picking on pathos, disguise, and mischief as chief devices is given, it is instructive to first throw some light on the meaning of the concepts that make up the sheet anchor of this prognosis. Pathos has often been defined more authoritatively in Aristotelian classical terms. Rees (1972, 2) exemplifies and describes the term as follows:

> For an action to be complete, there should be a pathos, which is a scene of suffering, a destructive or painful action; Aristotle evidently thinks of instances like the agonizing Heracles in Sophocles' Trachiniae, the wounds and pain of Oedipus in Oedipus Tyrannus, the sad plight of Euripides' Trojan Women, or the imminent fratricide in the latter's IT.

Different authors (cf. Christopher 2015; Lutzke and Henggler 2009)—perhaps owing to the fact that they all make Aristotle their first port of call, are in unanimous agreement that *pathos* appeals to emotions in order to invoke sympathy in the context of the tapestry of the audience's or readers' belief and value system—perhaps even more broadly then, pathos feeds on the cultural sensitivity and environment of the audience. With specific reference to language, pathos is invoked through the use of vivid and appropriate images that are crafted and grafted in lucid descriptions of pathetic scenes and heart-rending events, which are related by the narrator, who in Shona, is called *sarungano* (literally meaning owner of the folktale).

The second concept that equally begs an explanation is *disguise*. Uppermost in the mind, when one encounters and examines disguise is the notion of *concealment* associated with it. The idea of camouflage is also regarded as one of the finest attributes of disguise and operationally, the need to secretively accomplish something by someone, either unnoticed or altogether unsuspected, is attached to it. Wikipedia (https://en.wikidedia.

org/wiki/Mischief) notes that "in comic book and super hero stories, disguises are used to hide secret identities and keep special powers secret from ordinary people"

The last among the tripartite of key concepts is *mischief*. From a global perspective, mischief naturally invokes the image of a character misalignment that is associated with a child who plays pranks, embarrassing other children and even adults. Mischief, therefore, is an unidirectional source of illegitimate amusement and entertainment from the view point of the perpetrator(s) and never to those it is directed at.

Although *Shuro* (Hare), a prototypical trickster in Shona *ngano*, does not fit the description of an underdog *per se*, except perhaps for his diminutive stature—he however, often plays pranks on animals much larger in body mass than him, both for personal enjoyment (in order to prove himself) and also to derive psychological compensation for his diminutive body size (Matambirofa 2013). It is worth noting that when mischief is in turn directed at perpetrators of injustice and malice, the audience becomes greatly amused—as the audience, in sympathy with the Shona moral code, comes in full circle, pointing at the incorruptibility of both social and penal justice, which essentially is rehabilitative for the offender and therefore, not retributive.

Thus, in the analysis adopted in this article, pathos is used to draw attention to the debilitating bodily and/or social condition of the victim/underdog when the audience, through cooperative emotional blackmail, is persuaded, if not altogether commandeered to take sides with the victim. Once the audience has been drawn and led to the scene of the pathetic, disguise is revealed and the mischief of bad characters in the *ngano* is then plainly revealed and this begins to lighten the deeply troubled hearts of the audience—who realises that the prank, in an inverted manner, is in actual fact being played on the brazen and boisterous members of society who, when the chicken come home to roost, will see the ill-treated underdog laughing last. This kind of scenario is in part buttressed by the Shona saying that goes, *Chivi chinodya mwene wacho* ''Sin eats/destroys its own perpetrator." The moral espoused in this saying is that bad people eventually fry in their own fat.

THE SHONA VALUE SYSTEM IN BRIEF

It is in logical order that we sketch some keystones of the Shona *unhuism* ("humaneness") because it forms the bedrock upon which folk literature is founded, given that "being a body of verbal art, *ngano* did not occur in a social vacuum – divorced from ordinary life" (Mkanganwi 1973, i). One could perhaps also add that traditional literature couldn't have equally occurred in other "types of vacuums" that pertain to history, environment, politics, and religion. The fundamental of the moral and/or ethical philosophy is undergirded by the observance and exercise of good behaviour, called *unhu* in Shona or *ubuntu* in Ndebele/Zulu and other Nguni languages. Matambirofa (2014, 258) notes that "…*unhu/ubuntu* 'good behaviour' is a Bantu word derived from the noun of class 1, *munhu/umuntu* 'a human being."' Thus, figuratively one is regarded as fully human if,

and only if, they demonstrate evidence of good and moral observances in their day-to-day living, the details of which constitute the unwritten Shona moral code of conduct. In the same vein, Mudzanire and Gondo (2013, 62) give a similar meaning of *unhu* when they assert that "*Unhu* is essentially the cultural *logos* of the Shona people—the essence of being human."

Against the backdrop of the foregoing, I argue that Shona communal philosophy must have been wrought from the practical need for people and communities to close ranks and maintain close social cohesion as a necessary survival strategy. Naturally, caring for the weak and vulnerable members of society was done with an understanding that vulnerable members should be collectively supported by those who have the means. Underprivileged people comprise, among others; orphans, the infamy, the unjustly treated, refugees, strangers, and the bereaved. In *ngano*, it is evident that the vulnerable are sculptured in images and/or symbols of both human and non-human characters in sympathy with the genre. Characters in this category include the Tortoise, who is a prototype of an underdog, owing to his scaly shell and diminutive stature and Chinyamapezi, a boy with a hideous skin ailment. That a character is presented as human or an animal is of no significance in *ngano,* since at the end all characters are moulds into which didactically-forged human behaviour is cast. Referred to here as *underdog*s and/or *victims* are the same characters which Mkanganwi (1973, ii) has in mind when he argues that "the small and the handicapped should be the heroes—orphans, widows, the poor." Such underprivileged members of society and their triumphant exploits form the rich seam and reserve of pathos, disguise and humorous mischief that is the hallmark of the vast majority of traditional Shona folk literature in keeping with the entertainment and education aspect of the genre.

A Child Pledged as a Hyena's Food Before Birth

Shona society places a high premium on its continuance by throwing a jealousy and protective shroud around children. One is not too sure whether this is an attitude idiosyncratic to the Shona alone, or if it is perhaps a manifestation of the human instinct or the entire biologically-reproducing animal species such as primates, for instance. This comes out in a common, but slightly variable template of child victims, who are metaphorically betrothed to death, mostly by the mother, who pledges her sometimes unborn child to a hyena, a crocodile or some beast of prey in exchange for meat, fish or some petty culinary goodies.

In illustration, there is the famous narrative of the eponymous Pimbirimano ("bearer of many skills") in which an expectant mother with a notorious craving for duiker meat (Kahari 1990, 128–131), pledges her unborn child in lieu of duiker meat. While she has arguably already had a fair share of the same from the duiker caught by her husband earlier, she comes across a hyena that has just killed a duiker and, perhaps driven by her pregnancy cravings, and lacking elementary mastery of her keen appetite

for duiker meat, she enters into an unholy transaction with the hyena, by pledging her unborn child. However, when the child is eventually born, he astonishingly emerges from the womb holding a duiker's horn. Consistent with the super material abilities with which such children are often endowed, the baby miraculously starts talking and walking instantaneously. He even christens himself; Pimbirimano, taking advice from the horn he was born holding—from which he would routinely get advice, guidance, and protection. Subsequent to the child's birth, the mother and the hyena hatch one plot after another pursuant to fulfilling the mother's pledge, but to no avail, as each snare is discovered and *mischievously* countered by Pimbirimano well in advance.

While *pathos* is deployed in this *ngano*, it is however, done in a rather non-sentimental and guarded manner, to an extent that an innocent little child is being stalked by death, because of the prior arrangement and strategic planning of his own mother. However, in the tale of Pimbirimano, which celebrates sheer frustration of vice, it is the technique of *mischief* and the *humour* that it invokes, which seems to steal the thunder. To illustrate this point, at one stage Pimbirimano's mother sends him to fetch some tomatoes from the vlei garden; meanwhile, she has arranged that the hyena waits in hiding for him. Upon consulting his magical horn, Pimbirimano is advised to send a bumblebee ahead of him, which severely stings the hyena. The *mischievous* stinging of the hyena and its dramatic sprint and escaping, with the bumblebee in hot pursuit, paints quite a cinematographic and exciting scene. Hyena would humorously be described as *getting it up to here*. The fact that in the *ngano* concerned Pimbirimano manages to escape death by a whisker and in fact eventually becomes a king in a distant land serves as a clear case of victim/underdog triumphalism. Thus, what the victim/underdog does not have by dint of physical power, s/he is fully compensated for by the generosity and sympathies of *dues ex machina* ("God's timely intervention"). This decisive, magical power that tips the scales in favour of the underdog has its origin in the collective social and moral code of Shona society.

From the corpus of Shona traditional literature, narratives bearing the Pimbirimano template and its mutations can be multiplied by quite a significant factor. Sometimes the child is pledged after it is born, and this is true of the story narrated by Mushayakarere, which is recorded in Fortune (1974, 33–35) titled *Zvirehwi Nengwena* ("Zvirehwi and the Crocodile"). In this particular narrative, Zvirehwi's mother pledges her to a crocodile, which would in exchange, catch fish for her. She hatches many plans to send her daughter to the jaws of the crocodile in satisfaction of the evil transaction. Going back to the question of techniques, in this story, *disguise* is accomplished in a highly imaginative and complex manner in order to fool the crocodile. Zvirehwi routinely goes to the river to take a bath—the same river where the crocodile awaits her for its meal. The complexity of the disguise stems from the fact that when Zvirehwi goes to the stream, she goes along with her three other friends. When the crocodile emerges from the river and enquires who Zvirehwi is, she steps forward, and pointing in succession to each of the girls says, *Uyu ndiZvirehwi [*x3*]…Ini ndiri Zvirehwi. Tora wako tione*

("This one is Zvirehwi [x3] …I am Zvirehwi. Take yours, let's see''). In an unusual stroke of fairness and justice, the crocodile can only be angry but not pounce until he has satisfied himself that he is taking only what is rightfully his.

In this narrative, *mischief* and *disguise* as techniques are beautifully brought to bear on the story. The *mischief* is evidenced by the fact that the crocodile is unable to identify its quarry, who is right under his nose; because she is disguised in a manner that sows doubt and confusion in his mind. The *disguise* used here reposes in uniformity of sex, age, "name" and identical items of clothing, which all the girls are wearing. *Pathos* is also unleashed towards the end of the narrative when the mother crafts a final plan, where the crocodile would boldly come home to catch the girl who will be alone, while she and her husband are away at a village work-party (*humwe/nhimbe*). The crocodile comes home as planned. However, when the crocodile approaches the door, the girl makes good her escape, and she speeds pathetically to the work-party, crying and singing a ciphered song that exposes her mother's evil scheme. The girl's shrill cries attract the attention of all the people who silence each other thus, *Nyararai, nyararai tinzwe. Hameno mwana ari kuchema achiuya uko* ("Be silent, be silent. Let us listen. There seems to be a child who is coming"). Angry, retributive justice is meted out instantly when the crocodile arrives at the work-party. The angry mob strikes him to death. In a fit of rage, the complicit mother is in turn killed by her husband over the evil pact she has made with the crocodile. Consistent with the didactic goal of the narrative, the innocent girl survives and is consoled, while her evil mother and her accomplice, the crocodile, are didactically brought to an ignominious end.

The Trials and Triumphs of an Orphan and/or Underprivileged Person

Quoting from Deng, Matambirofa (2013, 55) notes that "traditional folklore genres are attractive empty formulas…to be filled with meaning at will.'' One such formula in traditional Shona literature pertains to the trials and triumphs of orphaned children. In most cases, all the three techniques being explored in the article are deployed in tandem with the progress of the narrative itself. In an abstract and hypothetical demonstration of this important view, the audience is first introduced to an orphan boy or such person who is abjectly poor and without the wherewithal for decent survival with the *sarungano,* relying more on pathos to make the audience pity the orphan. The Shona reserves a certain special sympathy for orphaned children, a point which is buttressed by many songs and proverbs that lament their unfortunate circumstances. The Shona would say, for instance, *Nherera inoguta musi wafa mai vayo* ("An orphan has his/her last fill at its mother's funeral"). Thus, the orphaned child's parental deprivation is a cause for great concern among them, and being an orphan, by its very nature, already evokes *pathos* among the Shona. The well-known traditional narrative of *Karikoga Gumiremiseve,* which was adopted by Chakaipa for a literate audience is one such a story of an orphan

boy Karikoga, who is ill-treated in a manner that evokes extreme *pathos* but is endowed with the most important survival skills of his times—bravery and good fighting ability. This is evident in what can be regarded as a one-man army when Karikoga daringly rescues his wife Marunjeya, who has been captured by a Nguni-raiding band, and in keeping with the architecture of the romance heroes that he exemplifies, he emerges triumphant and lives happily ever after with his wife.

Another case in point is the story of Chinyamapezi, in Fortune (1974, 52–55), which revolves around a pathetically ugly and warty Chinyamapezi, who is the laughing stock of the community. However, there is a beautiful woman nearby who turns down no proposal from any interested suitor, as dictated by custom. Notwithstanding, not a single man has been able to get her hand in marriage, as all the men would break a cardinal precondition, which is for the suitor never to look back when she starts singing a certain song while under escort to the suitor's homestead, in keeping with the Shona patrilocal system. The song that she sings is so enthralling that the groom-to-be would impulsively look back, thus breaking the precondition for marrying her, whereupon she suddenly disappears back to her home. Determined not to fall for the trick, Chinyamapezi steels himself and sets out to try his luck as well. Many are quick to pour scorn on him as they think that he is going on a wild goose chase. Even the beautiful woman accepts Chinyamapezi's proposal only because this is in line with custom, not because she has any faint flicker of love for him; as she banks on the fact that many, and much more eligible suitors had in the past failed the critical test. However, when the moment has arrives for the beautiful woman to start singing, Chinyamapezi stoically soldiers on and passes the test. However, back in the comfort of his home, Chinyamapezi heats up some water and takes a bath, after which he is completely cleansed of the ugly warts. As a bonus, his body takes on a new and normal form and he becomes the much-loved husband of his beautiful wife.

In the story discussed above, *pathos* is evoked by Chinyamapezi's ugly looks and his sheer determination to also want to try his luck with an extremely beautiful woman, who is at the opposite end of physical appearance. Considering that many eligible bachelors have had to come back with their tails tucked between their legs, in comparison, one feels that Chinyamapezi is indeed wasting his time going on an adventure that will yield absolutely nothing for all his efforts. A kind of *mischief* is visited on the girl when she fails to attract Chinyamapezi's gaze, the magical power that would make her shrug off the ugly stalwart. The humour stems from the fact that she tries every trick in the book—such as jumping in front of the suitor or walking on his side, tricks which Chinyamapezi successfully shakes off as he turns to the other side in order to avoid eye-contact with her. She ends up crying and the audience feels that she has been given a good dose of her own medicine. *Disguise* is also used to an extent that Chinyamapezi, as the end of the story suggests, is in essence, nothing like how he looks physically because after taking a magical bath, he is cleansed of the ugly warts and he becomes a normal man. Disguise is, in this case, is used as a powerful searchlight directed at the

inner recesses of the human heart in order to exorcise it of its insincerity, which often lurks behind a façade of genuineness. The moral is clear cross-culturally; that looks can be deceiving. This same observation is also encapsulated in the saying that one must not judge a book by its cover.

The Triumphs of the Poor/Unfortunate Persons

One common stencil into which *ngano* often fits is that of poor people or some materially-depraved people who triumph over the odds and end up healed, wealthy or kingly. In the story of Kamutatari (Fortune 1974, 45–51), a severe drought invokes sympathy towards a family without the wherewithal to ward off starvation. The narrative commences with a scene of a very poor but responsible man who gives free course to his lamentations as he struggles to come up with ways to ensure the survival of his family. Abject poverty and hunger invoke sympathy for this man and his entire family. The man finally settles on going out to fish. After a number of trials in vain, he eventually catches a magical goat, and after he has voiced an incantation, the goat produces *sadza* ("stewy pap") meat and water for them to eat and drink. The family is thus saved from starvation, but only temporarily, because robbers come and pounce on the miracle goat while it was left in the custody of children after the man and his wife have gone out. The narrative further relates how the man goes back to the river to fish, and how this time he catches a club, which miraculously unbundles into many clubs and strikes him hard as punishment for his foolishness. He takes the club home and makes an invocation in the presence of his wife and children. The club magically replicates itself and strikes them all very hard. The technique employed at this stage in the story is decidedly *mischief,* whose underlying moral is that precious items must be jealously guarded. The Shona proverb *chawawana batisisa mudzimu haupi kaviri* ("Hold tight to what you have, the ancestors do not give twice") succinctly summarises the moral anchorage of the punishment.

The eponymous Kamutatari is a survivor of the capital punishment accorded to the people who have robbed the fisherman of his magical goat. After realising the striking power of the magical club, the poor fisherman goes out to look for his goat. When he finds it, he tricks the chief of the area in which the robbers reside into believing that the club is much more potent in providing food and drink in comparison to the goat. The chief releases the goat and then orders all his people to assemble in his big house and asks some men to hang the club on the roof facing downwards. Upon pronouncing an incantation, the club replicates itself and fatally strikes every person that is in the house. The only person who survives the attack and escapes is Kamutatari. What is happening at this point in the story may be categorised as *mischief*—however, of quite an extreme order. While it is morally fair that robbers and thieves be punished, judgment must be proportional to the gravity of the offense committed; and it is expected that it is meted out to offenders only, and not collectively; in this case to the whole community.

In the second phase, the storyteller employs *pathos* and *disguise.* When Kamutatari survives and escapes the fatal clubbing, he finds refuge in a far-off land, which is extremely dry, so much that people there have to drink cattle urine. The headman in that land has two wives, and Kamutatari is accommodated in the residence of the senior wife, who is miserly and mean. She feeds Kamutatari on *mbwezhu*—undercooked *sadza.* The *pathos* triggered by his ill-treatment is exacerbated by the fact that he is given gourds when he goes to herd cattle from which he must collect urine for the family back home to drink. Consistent with the triumphalism of the victim/underdog, Kamutatari has magical rainmaking powers. When he sings a certain song, rain-bearing clouds form overheard and it begins to rain all around him. He then collects water in his gourds and let the livestock herds drink, then takes a bath and departs for home. As a consequence of his rainmaking powers, Kamutatari brings rain to this arid country and personal relationships vis-à-vis him are drastically reconfigured. He is given the headman's daughter for a wife, from his junior wife who had been kind to him. The senior wife is in this way *mischievously* punished and is plagued by jealousy—she harbours a secret wish that she should have become the mother-in-law to Kamutatari, who becomes exceedingly wealthy in his own right; and not the junior wife.

Disguise in this narrative is exemplified by Kamutatari, a refugee who, on account of his abject poverty is derisively called Kamutatari *wenhewe chena* (Fortune 1974, 51). However, from what he does, it is clear that he is in disguise to an extent that the people among whom he lives do not realise that he has magical powers to completely transform the fortunes of his hosts. He is assigned the menial task of herding cattle and is thus depicted as a nonentity when he is in essence, arguably the greatest among them all. This kind of disguise is summarised by the Shona proverb which goes, *Usasvora mbodza neinokuzvimbira* ("Do not despise underdone *sadza* from which you end up having more than your normal fill—Do not judge a book by its cover"). In the context of the story, this moral is directed particularly to the mean senior wife (and her ilk), who ironically served Kamutatari underdone *sadza—mbwezhu.* The general moral seems to derive from the rationale that the human heart is given to deceit and that most people are prone to rely on stereotypical persuasions in their transactions with others. In order to unmask the actual person inside, it is best that the truth be hidden for a season, as most people will deceptively appear genuine only when prospects are there for them to extract some material benefit from the object of their cunning.

DISGUISE AS A DEVICE IN TRADITIONAL LITERATURE

Of the different techniques examined in this article, disguise seems to be the most intricate; and for this reason, deserves further brief exploration. In the traditional narratives that have been examined, it can be argued that disguise occurs in concentric layers or in matrices. The narratives of Pimbirimano, Chinyamapezi, and Kamutatari are illustrative of a certain order of disguise. Here, disguise resides in the magical

powers that the characters possess and are put to positive use for their own benefit and the benefit of society at large. Disguise is also further complicated by the fact that the characters with magical powers seem to be only conduits and/or media of the super material and not the power itself. For instance, Pimbirimano takes no significant action without first consulting his oracle—the magical horn.

The other form of *disguise* is found in animal characters that are routinely used in folktales. Animal characters such as lion, hyena, hare, elephant, tortoise, and others are in fact not animals per se, but exemplars of human beings and how humans behave—and are either endorsed or loathed. They are a disguising stencil and therefore, not animals *per se*, as it would appear on the surface. They are readily accessible behavioural templates that are used in reinforcing or lampooning certain behaviours in the Shona cultural cosmos. Matambirofa (2013, 59) comments on one humorous template exemplified by the hyena:

> **Hyena:** This character exudes unbridled greed and yet he is the epitome of fear and timidity. He is also the embodiment of opportunism and guile; he has an uncontrollable appetite for food. During unguarded moments he is seen salivating, well before lunch time once he comes into contact with food, particularly meat which is his favourite. Through this image, children were being trained to banish irrational fear as well as to be in control of their appetite, lest it would end up landing them in serious trouble and personal embarrassment as is often the case with Hyena.

Stories of changelings such as the one recorded by Fortune (1974, 56-63) titled *Vakomana Vaisanduka Kuita Shumba* ("Boys who changed into lions") further complicate the concept of *disguise.* The complication arises due to the fact that humans transit to and from the animal world and operate both in the human and animal modes. When the boys turn into lions they are disguised as animals to the other animals, when they are in fact, humans. And when they are eventually discovered in the lions' mode, they are also in disguise because they are not real lions, but instead humans.

Elements of disguise are found in most traditional Shona literature such as folktales, proverbs, riddles, and myths among many. With regards to folk narratives, for instance, the stories narrated *disguise* lessons in ethics, creative narratology, oracy, epistemology, and performance. For instance, proverbs can be used to say one thing in terms of their surface syntax, which is different from their actual semantic content, giving rise to the well-known phenomenon of structural ambiguity and the dichotomy between the literal and actual meanings. The Shona can say *Muromo hauzarirwi nerwizi,* literally meaning "the mouth cannot be flooded by a river"*,* when the true meaning is the equivalent of the English form *Better said than done*. Hamutyinei and Plangger (1987, xviii) make this point more clear when they assert that:

> Proverbs have a deeper and hidden meaning than stated literally, their interpretation will depend on the social situation [in which] they are used. What is mentioned regarding one subject or object is applicable as a general principle in many circumstances. The range of comparisons and applications is quite enormous.

This is a confirmation of the *disguise* that is deeply lodged in proverbs, which operates in much the same way a person in disguise evades detection.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined how *pathos*, *mischief,* and *disguise* as strategies are used to celebrate the triumphs of the victim/underdog in traditional Shona literature. I concede that there are other devices that are used in traditional literature, but settled for these particular ones, owing to their poignant invocation of pity, empathy, and humour, among other human emotions. However, to an extent that literature is not for its own sake, but is rather a special abstraction and a mirror of a people's culture, the study found it enriching to sketch and outline Shona cultural and moral expectations by exploring the concept of *unhu*. This was necessitated by the fact that in the vast majority of cases, traditional literature is unapologetically didactic. The didactic streak is painted in plain language. The lesson encapsulated in folklores is that one must not look down on any person, owing to their apparent distasteful appearances, because often hidden inside them are invaluable pearls. The overriding philosophy seems to be that people are generally in a state of *inherent disguise,* either because no one has absolute knowledge of themselves and that of others, or also because they are in a state of change in terms of who they are as well as their fortunes in life. Thus, one can meet this person today when their fortunes are yet to be realised, while one's fortunes might already be in full bloom—but the latter must never fall into the temptation of looking down on the former. By the irrevocable law of change, whose actual direction is hidden from the eyes of man, after some time, the reverse might obtain, thereby mischievously depriving one of having the last laugh. Viewed from that vantage point, *disguise* occurs on a continuum, which transits from the casual, literal realisation to a higher order philosophical manifestation. In addition, disguise, which, like mischief engenders humour, places the audience in an omniscient privilege and vantage position vis-à-vis the characters that ill-treat the triumphant underdog.

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