

The Humorous Depiction of Characters in the Prose Works of S.M. Burns-Ncamashe

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Summary

The purpose of this article is to discuss and evaluate the employment of humour in the depiction of characters in the prose works of S. M. Burns-Ncamashe, as humour tends to manifest itself significantly in this aspect. This humorous depiction of characters is discussed with emphasis laid on the various methods of character portrayal that display the employment of humour. Each method is discussed in terms of its theory and application. An evaluation of Burns-Ncamashe's use of humour in depicting characters is made part of the concluding section, in which some findings are highlighted. Devices of humour that are employed by the author are spotlighted within the discussion.

Opsomming

Die doel van hierdie artikel is om die aanwending van humor in die uitbeelding van karakters in die prosawerke van S.M. Burns-Ncamashe te bespreek en te evalueer, omdat humor in hierdie opsig sigself pertinent manifesteer.

Hierdie humorisriese uitbeelding van karakters word bespreek met die klem op die verskeie tegnieke van karakteruitbeelding wat die gebruik van humor uitbeeld. Elke metode word bespreek in terme van die teorie en toepassing daarvan. 'n Evaluering van Burns-Ncamashe se gebruik van humor in die uitbeelding van karakters vorm deel van die afsluiting waarin sommige van die bevindinge uitgelig word. Die verskeie humortegnieke wat deur die skrywer aangewend is, word ook ontleed.

Introduction

S.M. Burns-Ncamashe's depiction of characters in his prose displays an extensive employment of humour. This is not surprising as the author himself was a humorist by nature. The idea of him having been a humorist and the manifestation of this element in his writings are confirmed by Pahl in the introductory part of Burns-Ncamashe (1979), where he points out that Burns-Ncamashe's writings are full of humour and that, wherever Burns-Ncamashe would be, people would not stop laughing because of his humorous nature. It is for the manifestation of this aspect in the depiction of characters in the prose works of Burns-Ncamashe that the discussion in this paper is undertaken. The prose works that will be considered for this discussion include Burns-Nca-

mashe's short stories which are contained in *Masibaliselane* (1961) and *Dimbaza* (1970). In this discussion attention will be given to the definition of the concept of humour and the various modes of character depiction that display humour. These modes include the humorous description of characters, humorous dialogue, humorous soliloquy, humorous monologues and humorous names.

Humour Defined

The adjective "humorous" is derived from the noun "humour". It is therefore significant to define humour before commencing with the discussion in this paper, to have a clearer idea of what the paper is all about. The definition of humour is discussed by Mtumane (2001) as follows:

Humour is not an easy concept to define. Pirandello (1960: 107) views this difficulty as being caused by the infinite varieties and characteristics of the phenomenon. This difficulty may also be the reason why Lewis (1989: x) views a clear-cut definition of humour as impossible, and maintains that it can only be described by means of a series of generalisations. However, in spite of this difficulty, this study wishes to give the opinion of the author about what humour is. This opinion will be based on definitions that are already in existence.

The word "humour" originates from the Latin word *humores*, which means a balanced mixture of the body fluids. These fluids include phlegm, choler and melancholy (Matthew 1969: 115; Nutting 1976: 5). Normally, the imbalance of these body fluids may result in abnormal behaviour by the person and incite laughter in the observer. While in literature humour is not used to signify these body fluids, its employment has some connection with their state, as Pirandello (1960: 103) contends that humour must originate out of a special state of mind.

The incitement of laughter, which seems to be a major dispositional characteristic of humour, depends on the state of the mind, which is determined by the state of an incongruent behaviour that is, in turn, determined by the imbalance of the said fluids. If his mind interprets a particular behaviour or situation to be abnormal or incongruent, the observer may be amused and then laughter is stimulated. This is in line with Russel's definition of humour, cited by Mkonto as

intellectually, ... a contemplation of life from the angle of amusement, and emotionally, a joyous effervescence over the absurdities in life ever present to the discerning eye ...

(Mkonto 1988: 10)

Concurring with the above definition, Lewis (1993: 11) is also of the opinion that to understand and appreciate a humorous piece, the observer's mental and emotional elements have to be incited. This refers to the interpretation of the situation by the mind (mental element) and the effect this interpretation has on the observer's emotions. In humour, this effect may be perceived as the joy that is manifest in the incitement of laughter. Abrams, who also emphasises amusement or excitement of mirth, defines humour as "an[y] element in literature that is designed to amuse or to excite mirth in the reader or audience" (Abrams 1981: 207).

The amusement or excitement of mirth referred to in the foregoing definitions is dependent on some elements or devices that incite laughter. These devices include exaggeration, distortion, incongruity and others. In this regard Kiken maintains that "we laugh at things which portray a universe simultaneously anabolic (i.e. ordered) and catabolic (i.e. chaotic – in the sense of distorted or confused)" (Kiken 1977: 9).

At the same time, Risenga, who emphasises facetiousness and cracking of jokes, also avers that "in order to trigger laughter in the observers, a humorist is obliged to be facetious. He is required to describe absurd incidents or crack facial jokes about someone or something" (Risenga 1995: 85).

Therefore, it is on the basis of the above explanation that the author of this paper considers humour as the art of speaking or writing that amuses and incites laughter in the listener, observer or reader and stimulates laughter by employing certain elements or devices to amuse the audience and incite that laughter. It is this stimulation of laughter in Burns-Ncamashe's depiction of characters that has triggered the undertaking of this study, as it will be demonstrated in the following sections.

Humorous Description of Characters

Description is one of the methods of character portrayal (Wellek & Warren 1949: 19; Sirayi 1989: 193; Msimang 1983: 100; Mtumane 1995: 53-54). Burns-Ncamashe even uses this device humorously in his prose. This humorous description is evident when the physical appearance and personality of the characters are presented, as the following discussion will illustrate.

Physical Appearance

By describing the physical appearance of a character the narrator aims at demonstrating the connection that may exist between the external appearance

and the personality traits. Therefore, it is important to look at the visible elements of the character, that is, his physical appearance and clothing. While Burns-Ncamashe does this, he often does it in a humorous manner. An example of such a humorous description is found in “UZizi uzuzwe nguZulu”, where the physical appearance of Zulu is described as follows:

Ngokwembonakalo wayesisiqingqi somfo othupha onengxeba. Wayeyintsundu enomkhitha, entshetwana imnzalukana ngathi imka nomoya kukusoloko iphululwa ichazwa nokuchazwa. Ubuso obu bufine ukuba bude, abagqiba. Eli liso liseleyo beselikhholisa ukujonga phezulu xa akhangele umntu umninilo. Makaxabane ke, lisuke linge liza kuthaka nalo, liye kuthi chukru kulowo alwa naye. Nto ibisoyikeka kukumana likhamisa elinye eliya laphuma ukhozo, xa anomsindo; litsho kunjalo nje litsaze into ebuthukurha ...

[In appearance he was a short and bellied man. He was dark and comely with some remains of the beard as if blown away by the wind, as it was always brushed and combed. His face seemed long but not completely. The remaining eye used to look up when he watched a person. When he is cross it seemed as though it would jump out and land onto the one he quarrels with. What was more fearful was the constant opening and closing action of the one which had no eyeball when he had wrath, and it would secrete a gummy matter ...]

(Burns-Ncamashe 1961: 15-16)

It is interesting to note how Burns-Ncamashe uses humorous language in his description of this character. He uses images which are manifest in metaphor, alliteration and simile. For instance, the metaphor *wayesisiqingqi somfo othupha* [he was a short man] signifies the shortness of the character. The word *isiqingqi* is normally used to describe a short stick that is used by boys in the stick-fighting game. The use of this word, therefore, brings the image of such a stick. It is the image of such a short man who is also bellied that evokes laughter in the above description. The reader cannot avoid imagining the shape of a very short man with a huge belly, probably protruding at the front.

The shortness of Zulu is further emphasised by the use of the word *othupha* [the short one]. This word is derived from the word *usithupha* which refers to the great finger of the hand. This finger is the shortest with two bones while the others are longer with three bones each. Compared with all the other fingers, the great finger is relatively bigger in size than the others. The use of the word *othupha* then signifies the shortness and the heftiness of Zulu in the story.

It is also the action of the remaining eye (as if it would jump out), when Zulu is cross, and the opening and closing action of the one with no eyeball that also evoke laughter. However, this laughter is accompanied by sympathy towards the character. This is then an instance of *derisive humour* which is humour in

which the subject of humour, who is made a laughing stock, and the audience engage in what Hodgart (1969: 105) refers to as “sub-laugh”, which is “the laugh that is inhibited by good manners, or not fully called out by the situation”.

The shortness of Zulu is also emphasised in the following humorous description of his attire:

Ngumfo wedyasi ende erhuqayo ngokwesinxibo. Phaya ezantsi seyide yanemi-sebe erhuqa emhlabeni. Ihulukhwe yomntu omkhulu ibisoloko iphindiwe, isisikhaxa emaqatheni phaya kuba kaloku umfo lo mfutshane. Izele ke nale bhulukhwe ngumntu lo, kude kuthi khona apha ngasesiswini kuthi puqa.

[He wears a long coat that drags on the ground. At the bottom it has threads as it drags on the ground. The pair of trousers of the old man was always rolled, forming a bundle at the ankles for the man is short. These trousers are full of this person, especially around the stomach it protrudes. At the navel it would not be buckled up because of the huge belly of the man.]

(Burns-Ncamashe 1961: 15-16)

The length of the coat and its dragging on the ground, and the rolling of the trousers to form a bundle at the ankles imply that Zulu’s attire was oversized. Probably because of his shortness he would not find the correct size of clothes for himself. One would argue that clothes that are meant for children would fit him as he is too short. On the other hand, his heftiness and belly would make it impossible for such clothes to fit him. Therefore, the only solution for him would be to wear oversized clothes.

The humorous appearance of Zulu ties up with his humorous nature, which will be pointed to later in this article. All this reveals Burns-Ncamashe’s skill in keeping the interest of the reader in the characters he presents. This description attracts the attention of the reader, makes him enjoy reading the stories and enlivens the story.

Personality

The description of the personality of characters by writers of narrative prose is another technique which is generally used to depict characters. In their use of this technique, writers announce what kind of a person the character is, that is, they reveal his moral make-up. Burns-Ncamashe’s humorous use of this technique is evident in “UZizi uzuzwe nguZulu”. In this story, Zulu, who is semi-blind as he lost one of his eyeballs, is depicted as telling people the incident of losing his eyeball as follows:

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Ubacubhula abantu ngentsini xa abalisa ezamhla lwathaka olo khozo lwaya kuthi chukru elongweni elujongile,

[He makes people laugh when he narrates about the day that his eye-ball jumped out and landed on the wall, with him watching it]

(Burns-Ncamashe 1961: 15)

In this excerpt Zulu is described as a character who makes people laugh, that is, he is a jocular character. It is his telling people that he watched his eyeball while it jumped and landed on the wall that proves his jocular nature. All this gives the impression that Zulu was calm when the incident took place. Normally, when one eye gets hurt, the other tends to close to prevent being affected by the danger. Also the normal reaction in such a situation would be for one to hold the endangered part with a hand while closing the other eye. It is therefore abnormal and an exaggeration that Zulu would watch his eyeball jumping out and landing on the wall, as if he never reacted in a normal way to what happened.

Even the idea of an eyeball jumping out to land on the wall is an exaggeration. Normally, an eyeball that gets hurt opens up a hole and only the liquid inside the ball runs out. If the eyeball does get out, it usually hangs off the eye socket without jumping a distance. The manner in which Zulu describes the incident proves the use of exaggeration by the author.

An eye that is injured is also accompanied by some pain and horror. The person whose eye is hurt does not remain cool and calm, as Zulu seems to have been when his eye got hurt. He becomes very restless and horrified, and may sometimes scream at the top of his voice. Zulu being depicted as calm in such a situation then is an incongruence and exaggeration. All this ties up with the description of Zulu as a jocular character in the story. The humour involved here is an instance of comic humour which involves amusement and evokes pleasure and boisterous laugh to both the writer (or speaker) and the audience (Hight 1962: 18). This amusement comes about as a result of the use of jokes and jests which normally evoke innocent laughter that is free of the inhibitions of restraint, pity or contempt.

Humorous Dialogue

Dialogue is one of the most important modes of character revelation. In its use characters are presented exchanging ideas in a manner that reveals their nature in the narrative. Two or more characters may be presented speaking to one another or discussing another character. Dialogue is the linguistic autonomy granted to characters, as they are afforded an opportunity to speak for

themselves. What characters say may reveal something about their nature or the character who is being discussed. Notestein argues that “a man is judged by what he says and by his manner of saying it” (1974: 154-155). Concurring with Notestein are Brooks and Warren (1959: 170) who view the manner in which characters talk as one of the most important modes of characterisation. Burns-Ncamashe does include dialogue in a humorous manner in his prose. For instance, in “UZizi uzuzwe nguZulu” the humorous Zulu tells students about the origin of the names St Matthews for a school in Keiskammahoek, Ngobozana and Esinqumeni for villages around Keiskammahoek, and Zulu and Mhlatyana for the amaNgwevu clan. For instance, the origin of the clan praises Zulu and Mhlatyana, and the explanation of how amaNgwevu helped Jesus and His disciples are given as follows:

INKosi yethu uYesu Kristu yafuna ukuza kwaRarabe apha komkhulu. Injongo yayikukuba kubalisela amaNgqika ngezinto awenzelwa zona uNtsikana Gabha akufika ezulwini. Wabiza amaphakathi akhe ke ukuba amkhaphe, avuma. Ahamba ngeenyawo ukusuka entabeni yemiNquma ekhumbule kwaNgqika. Abulawa kukudinwa nayindlala apha endleleni, kwasinda uMateyu lo neNkosi. Babephethe imbewu yeminquma ukuze ityalwe ngamaRarabe ukuze iintonga zalo mthi kusetyenziswe zona ezimfazweni, ebafazini, nasemdudweni. Le mbewu ke yayiphethwe nguMateyu ngengobozana entle yemizi yaphesheya. Woyisakala lo mphakathi emazants’ oDontsa, yaphuncuka le ngobozana yawa. Loo ndawo kwaba sekusithiwa kuseNgobozana. Lithe kuba ikomkhulu lamaRarabe lalise-Cildara, baxomolozwa ukusingisa ngakhona. Kodwa bathe besekuloo ntili yaseMthwaku aphela amandla emphakathini, wagoduka. Kubonakele ukuba makaselengcwatyelwa kuloo ndawo awele kuyo. Wangcwatywa ngamaNgwevu ke. Wona ke kwathiwa aya kuya ezulwini ngeenyawo, nokuba afile nokuba akafanga. Ukususela loo mini kwathiwa angoZulu. Athenjiswa ngomhlatyana ophesheya kwezulu oya kulawulwa ngawo kunye noMelkitsedeki, omnye umNgwevu wakowawo. Yiyo le nto kuthiwa amaNgwevu ngoMhlatyana. Laa mbewu yominquma kwadywidwana ngayo, enye yabiwa ngamaLawo amathathu aseGxulu. Loo maLawo yayinguGqwashu noChwama noChisana. Athi akusukelwa ahamba eyiwisa ukuze afunyanwe engayiphethe. Kwavuka uthulikazi olukhulu, lwayihlwayela kulo lonke elakwaRarabe loo mbewu. Eninzi yawa eMkhubiso kuloo ndawo ngoku sekusithiwa kuseSinqumeni.

[Our Lord, Jesus Christ, wanted to visit the Great Place of Rarabeland. His aim was to come and tell amaNgqika about how Ntsikana of Gabha was welcomed when he arrived in heaven. He requested his disciples to accompany Him and they agreed. They travelled on foot from the Mount of Olives to Ngqikaland. Some of them died of hunger and weariness and only Matthews and the Lord survived. They brought with them seeds of olive trees to be planted by amaRarabe so that sticks from this tree would be used in wars, for *beating up* women and in traditional dance gatherings. These seeds were carried by

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Matthews with a beautiful basket made of rushes from abroad. This man lost strength below Dontsa and the basket fell away. That place was then named Ngobozana. As the Great Place of amaRarabe was at Cildara, they struggled to go there. While they were still on the valley of St Matthews, the man became weak and died. It was seen fit to bury him where he fell. He was then buried by amaNgwevu. They (*amaNgwevu*) were then promised that they would walk to heaven, whether dead or not. From that day they were called Zulu. They were also promised a strip of land across heaven, where they would rule with Melchizedek, another of their umNgwevu. That is the reason why amaNgwevu were called Mhlatyana. People plundered among themselves over those seeds of the olive trees, and some were stolen by three Hottentots from Gxulu. Those Hottentots were Gqwashu, Chwama and Chisana. When chased away, they dropped it so that they would not be found carrying it. Heavy dust blew around and spread those seeds all over Rarabeland. Much of it fell at Mkhubiso, the place that is called Sinqumeni these days.]

(Burns-Ncamashe 1961: 17; my italics)

The above narration evokes laughter in the reader as it is an invented story because Jesus and His disciples never actually visited Rarabeland. The reader laughs when trying to figure out if it would really be necessary for Jesus to travel all the way from the Middle East to Rarabeland to tell people about how Ntsikana was welcomed in heaven. This is a real joke. Also, when the reader imagines a journey from the Mount of Olives (which is in the Middle East) to Rarabeland (in the Eastern Cape) on foot, he has a good reason to laugh as it is unlikely that such a long distance can be covered on foot. This is an instance of exaggeration.

Ngobozana and Sinqumeni are places that are found around Keiskammahoek in the Eastern Cape. The tracing of the origin of the names of places such as Ngobozana to the falling of the basket (*ingobozana*) at that spot, and Sinqumeni to the spreading of the seeds of the olive tree (*umnquma*) in the area also amuses the reader and excites laughter, as it is a joke.

The use of sticks from the olive tree in wars and traditional dances is normal and common practice among amaXhosa, but the mention of use of the sticks to beat up women makes the reader to be unable to control himself but laugh. The laugh is caused by the implication that the abuse of women among amaXhosa is a normal and acceptable practice which needs to be done with a strong stick from the olive tree. Reference to Christ as having brought the seeds of the trees to have their sticks used for this purpose also implies that the abuse of women is acceptable even to Him, while the reader knows that the opposite is true. This is an instance of humour by contrast.

Even the promises the narrator claims were made to amaNgwevu about going to heaven and governing a strip of land beyond heaven make a good source of amusement and laughter as they are an uncommon joke.

Zulu and Mhlatyana are some of the clan praises (*izinqulo*) which are commonly used to praise people belonging to the amaNgwevu clan. A normal and more acceptable explanation of the origin of these clan praises would be that Zulu and Mhlatyana were some of the forefathers of the people belonging to the amaNgwevu clan, as amaXhosa normally derive their clan names (*iziduko*) and clan praises from the names of their forefathers. Zulu's tracing the origin of these clan praises to the promises he claims were made to amaNgwevu instead, tends to amuse the reader and make him laugh, especially bearing in mind that even the making of the promises is part of a made-up story.

Normally, Biblical figures do not have (Xhosa) clan names. Reference to Melchizedek, who was the Biblical High Priest, as umNgwevu also becomes a source of amusement and laughter to the reader as he may never have thought of associating Biblical figures with Xhosa clan names. Furthermore, this association of Melchizedek with amaNgwevu is an uncommon joke. All this proves how humourously portrayed Zulu, as a character, is. This is also an instance of comic humour.

Humorous Soliloquy

A soliloquy is speech by one person to himself, in the absence of an audience. Even though the speaker may be around people, he may ignore them and talk as if his speech is not meant to be heard by or affect others. This view is also shared by Shipley when he describes a soliloquy as "being spoken by one person that is alone or acts as though he were alone. It is a kind of talking to oneself, not intended to affect others" (Shipley 1970: 203).

A soliloquy normally reveals the character's private thoughts. In other words, in a soliloquy the character thinks aloud or speaks out his thoughts. In his humorous use of this technique, Burns-Ncamashe presents characters engaged in a soliloquy in the absence or presence of other characters. For instance, in "Uyise kaNomadrudrudru" in *Dimbaza* the main character is presented as engaged in a soliloquy. When the people of the Jonga family give him a lot of food and leave him alone, the character, before eating, expresses his appreciation by saying: Banobubele ke abantu bakwaJonga. Yini ukundi-phakela kangaka ngathi ndiyi-hagu! [(The people of the Jonga family are very generous. Why do they give me such a lot of food, as if I am a pig!)(Burns-Ncamashe 1970: 12].

This soliloquy reveals the character's awareness of the fact that it is the tendency of a pig to eat a lot of food, as he does. A pig is an unpleasant animal that is known for not getting satisfied when eating. By comparing himself to a pig for having been given a lot of food, then, the character ridicules himself

unconsciously by his statement (soliloquy). This is an irony used by the author to have the reader laugh at the character. This irony is also apparent when the character eats up the food (a whole dish full of *umvubo* and a can of *irhewu*) after his soliloquy about a pig. This is humour used by the author to make the reader laugh at this character. This character is also revealed as a preacher in the story. This also makes the reader laugh when he thinks about this preacher who eats a lot, while preachers are generally expected to be temperate (exercising self-control). From the humour used in this soliloquy the reader does not only laugh at the character but also gains more interest in reading the story. All this is an instance of derisive humour, as it is a polite ridicule of the character.

Humorous Monologue

A monologue is a speech by a single person. The speaker may be in the presence of an audience, addressing them. The speech is intended to affect the audience. He may even be alone as in the case of a prayer, song, lamentation and so on.

In his depiction of characters, the author uses *prayer* as a form of humorous monologue. Prayer is treated as monologue as the character addresses another being (God), who is believed to listen but not respond verbally. In prayer characters are presented voicing their feelings to God. The use of this device is apparent in “Izimo ezingangqinelaniyo” (cf Burns-Ncamashe 1961) where, after the imprisonment of Gebengana, his wife and employees gather for a prayer meeting. In this gathering the wife of Nqu prays as follows:

Thityo wamagesha onke, Amen. Yiba phakathi kwethu kule nkumba. Siyavuya apha sonke, nawe uyaloza. Sivuyela ukubanjwa kukaSiporho, umndyu oneshi embi – inkohlakalo. Ke pholisa ngaphakathi ezizalwaneni zakhe lo unga-sekhoyo, uPhositsokhwe. Ngathi ndiyamloza umndyu wakho, ezibhija, ethintitha! Visa uSiporho lo obo bushu naye. Ndantyuntya! Amen.

[The omnipresent God, Amen. Be among us in this house. We are all rejoicing here, as you can see. We rejoice for the imprisonment of Siporho, the cruel person. Now, therefore, console the relatives of the deceased, Julibhokhwe. I imagine your person, writhing himself, stammering! Make Siporho feel the same pain. Oh how tedious I am! Amen.]

(Burns-Ncamashe 1961: 37-38)

What is humorous in this prayer is the fact that it is presented in the *Hlonipha* language. It is unusual to hear a person praying to God in this language. People who have accepted the Christian faith are generally regarded as having been

Europeanised and modern. The use of the *Hlonipha* language, on the other hand, is associated with traditional women. Modern readers may regard the use of this language in a Christian prayer as contrast, as they would expect it to be used in the traditional form of worship instead. The use of this language in this prayer then indicates that Christianity does not necessarily rob traditional people of their valued traditional practices, and that in Christianity traditional people are accommodated as well. Even the unusual use of speech sounds in this language brings amusement to the reader. This is also an instance of comic humour.

Humorous Actions

The presentation of the actions of characters is another device which is often used in characterisation (Pretorius & Swart 1982: 6; Boulton 1984: 90; Perrine 1978: 67; Mtumane 1995: 84-85). As the story progresses what the character does may be presented to the reader. A character's physical actions provide the reader with rough estimates of his motive. It is from these actions that the reader may infer the nature and motive of the character. The humorous presentation of the actions of characters by Burns-Ncamashe is evident in "Uyise kaNomadrudrudru" where the humorous actions of the main character, when he is offered food, are presented as follows:

Zinzi etafileni. Nantso intshebe ixela ukuba imihlathi ixakekile. Izinyo liya-xhola. Loo mthamo! Eso sikotile uya kusithi kreqe umfo waseBharanzili, athobe ngebhekile yonke, axukuxe aginye ukuze kungalahleki nto kuloo nto ebeyitya. Kaloku kumaXhosa banikwa amanzi okuxukuxa abantu bakugqiba ukutya. Ebengawatshici ke yena uyise kaNomadrudrudru.

[He would sit firm at the table. His beard would indicate that his jaws are busy. The tooth is pecking. His mouth fills up! The man from Bharanzil would finish up the dish, drain the food down with a whole can of *irewu* and rinse the mouth and swallow so that nothing will get missing from what he was eating. It is normal practice among amaXhosa to give a person water to rinse his mouth after eating. Nomadrudrudru's father would not spit it out.]

(Burns-Ncamashe 1970: 11)

The actions of the main character in this excerpt seem to be exaggerated. It is this exaggeration that evokes laughter. The use of exaggeration is apparent in the character's being portrayed as eating up a lot of food (the whole dish), drinking up a can full of *irhewu* and his swallowing the water he used to rinse his mouth. A normal person would not be expected to eat up this lot of food and *irhewu* at the same sitting. This is a monstrous action. In this manner this

character is portrayed as a greedy, heavy eater.

Laughter is further evoked by the imagination created by the author about the character as he is eating. This is fulfilled in the words *Zinzi etafileni. Nantso intshebe ixela ukuba imihlathi ixakekile Lo mthamo!* [He would sit firm at the table. His beard would indicate that the jaws are busy How full the mouth would be!]. The ideophone *Zinzi* illustrates the manner in which the character sits. He sits in such a manner that he will not move from the table as he does not want to be disturbed while eating. This is how he prepares himself for eating. Also, the description of the action of the beard to indicate the chewing of food evokes laughter. Normally, the chewing of food is detected from the up and down movement of the lower jaw which is eminent from the outside. The use of the beard for this purpose then evokes laughter as the beard could not be thought of as associated with chewing.

The unusual action of swallowing (instead of spitting out) the water with which the character rinses his mouth also evokes laughter. He swallows the water so that the tiny pieces of food that remain around and between the teeth should not be lost. He wants to make sure that he swallows them as well. All this illustrates how the author uses humour about the actions of the character. He makes the reader laugh and enjoy reading the story.

Another instance of humorous action is found in “UZizi uzuzwe nguZulu” where Zulu beats up Zizi in the following manner:

Kuxa ke ngoku imfama iwuphumzileyo umnquma wayo. Isuke yaya kuthi zinzi phezu kweli Zizi yaliphuthaphutha apha ebusweni izama ukuzuzana namehlo alo ukuze iwathi gquthe ngodalo ivise lo mfo ubuhlungu nesithukuthezi skuba yimfama.

[This time the blind man had put his stick to rest. He went to stay firm on Zizi and moved his hands on his face, trying to find his eyes so that he could hurt them with the sharp edge of the stick, to make this man feel the grief and loneliness of being blind.]

(Burns-Ncamashe 1961: 19)

What is interesting and humorous in this action is the purpose which Zulu has in beating up Zizi. He wants to hurt his eyes so that he also should be blind as he, himself, is so. From this action it seems that Zulu does not want to be blind alone. He wants someone else (Zizi) to feel how it is to be blind as well. On a positive note, this action would be a lesson to Zizi not to play with (undermine) blind people.

Humorous Names

Burns-Ncamashe's giving his characters names which evoke laughter to the reader is apparent in the name *Nqu*, of a character in "Izimo ezingangqinelaniyo" (cf Burns-Ncamashe 1961), which evokes some laughter in the reader. *Inqu* (the gnu), from which this name is derived, is a wild animal. In isiXhosa there is the idiom *ukuthunga inqu* whose actual meaning is to joke (Mesatywa 1954: 168). This name then may be used by the author to crack a joke, that is, to make the reader laugh.

Laughter is evoked by the single syllabic nature of the name, something which is uncommon in isiXhosa names. Whenever a person has a single syllabic name people tend to laugh at the name. Laughter is further evoked when this character repeatedly calls his name in a prayer as follows: "*NdinguNqu, Bawo. Ndingu-Nqu, Thixo wam. NdinguNqu, Thixo wethu sonke apha.*" [I am Nqu, Father. I am Nqu, my God. I am Nqu, God of all of us here.] (Burns-Ncamashe 1961: 38).

The name *Nomadrudrudru* in "Uyise kaNomadrudrudru" (cf Burns-Ncamashe 1970) also evokes laughter. What actually evokes laughter in this name is the sound made by the last three syllables. The sound (dru-dru-dru) is similar to that of an idling motorcar or tractor. It is also similar to the sound that is made by a horse's heavily passing out stomach wind.

The name *Nograyundlungu* in the same story also evokes laughter. This name is derived from a combination of the infinitive *ukugraya* (to grind) and the noun *umdlungu* (rotten grain) which means one who grinds rotten grain. It is the contrast created by this name that causes laughter, as rotten grain is seldom ground but is used to feed poultry and pigs, as it is, among amaXhosa.

The evocation of laughter in the above names illustrates how the author uses humour in his employment of the naming technique, as these names amuse the reader. This use of names which evoke laughter is typical of the nature of the author as he was generally regarded as a humorous person. Names of this nature tend to assist in breaking boredom and promote interest and joy to the reader as he reads the prose. They also make the reader appreciate reading the story.

Conclusion

Burns-Ncamashe's use of humour in depicting characters, as the above discussion has illustrated, attracts the attention of the reader and gives him joy, enlivens the stories and breaks boredom. It makes the reader more interested in reading his stories. It is the use of the devices of humour, such as exaggeration, jokes, irony, contrast and so on, that makes the author succeed in

depicting characters humorously.

Also, one's ability to identify the different kinds of humour, that is, comic and derisive, proves the author's special ability to use this aspect. However, the difference between these kinds of humour sometimes becomes so narrow that it is not easy to tell it). This is caused by the overlap the characteristics of these kinds sometimes display.

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