



# An Application of Axel Olrik's Epic Laws in *Imbiza Eyayingavulwa*



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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to apply Axel Olrik's epic laws in *Imbiza eyayingavulwa*, one of the traditional isiZulu folktales. Even though these laws have been widely applied to non-African folktales, there seem to be fewer studies that have evaluated the relevance of this approach to folktales of the South African indigenous languages. This study sought to determine if Olrik's epic laws are applicable or not by focusing on isiZulu as one of the South African indigenous languages. The folktale analysed was derived from a published isiZulu volume of folktales titled '*Phinda Ungixoxele*'. The study adopted the qualitative method as a research technique and textual analysis as a data collection technique. Olrik's epic laws for folk narrative were considered the main theoretical base for the analysis of the textually analysed data. The findings revealed that these laws can be successfully applied to the folktale *Imbiza eyayingavulwa*. However, as argued by some scholars of the South African indigenous languages, it was discovered that these laws do not occur in the expected sequence and that not all of them may comprehensively appear in a single folktale of the isiZulu language. The law of the importance of final position and the law of twins, for instance, in the analysed folktale, are two examples of laws that do not appear in the analysed folktale. The study is significant as it contextualises Olrik's epic laws from a South African languages perspective.

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## INTRODUCTION

Folklore refers to teachings, customs, stories, beliefs and knowledge passed from generation to generation. It is a unique form of storytelling that is culturally specific. Folklore has a dual role as it reflects a given culture and actively shapes culture.<sup>1</sup> Previous studies on folklore have alluded that folklore contributes immensely to reinforcing cultural identity and moral values in many societies.<sup>2</sup> One of the common aspects of all societies is that folklore is carried from generation to generation effectively.<sup>3</sup> It serves as a pool of teachings reflecting socio-cultural norms. According to Smith, folklore embodies the norms and values of societies. It is a representation of the world that carries the indigenous traditions.<sup>4</sup> Some native

<sup>1</sup> S. Pate, *Folklore, Reflecting and Influencing Culture* (Lakeland: Southeastern University, 2021), 1.

<sup>2</sup> S.M. Mofokeng, "A Study of Folktales in Sotho" (University of the Witwatersrand, 1951); C.T.D. Marivate, "Tsonga Folktales: Form, Content and Delivery" (University of South Africa, 1973); N C Rananga, "The Structural Elements of Venda Folktales: The Transcriber versus the Narrator (South Africa)," 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Siziwe Mandubu, "Folklorisation and the Emergent Moral Degeneration: A Functionalist Approach," *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies* 30, no. 1 (March 15, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.25159/1016-8427/6898>.

<sup>4</sup> Marian W. Smith, "The Importance of Folklore Studies to Anthropology," *Folklore* 70, no. 1 (March 1959):312, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.1959.9717162>.

people use different genres of folklore, such as folktales, traditional songs, etc, to teach and preserve some of the cultural habits in society.

Folklore genres were traditionally verbal acts presented in social gatherings. The theoretical conceptualisation of these genres started when they began to be recorded as written texts.<sup>5</sup> When it comes to folktales, there was a surge of new theoretical insights, with some of them emerging from structuralism. Olrik's epic laws on folk narrative became a product of this epoch. Another approach, for instance, which is similar in some respects to Olrik's epic laws, is the morphology of the folktale by the Russian Vladimir Propp. Propp comments on the sequence of elements and how they shape the structure and organisation of folktales.<sup>6</sup> Propp identified the functions of the folktale, which were later modified by Dundes.<sup>7</sup>

This study seeks to explore how Olrik's epic laws could be applied to the folktale titled *Imbiza Eyayingavulwa*. Olrik's epic laws provide a theoretical lens with which to focus on structure and tradition. As far as isiZulu folklore is concerned, no study has been conducted with a focus on *Imbiza eyayingavulwa*, even though there are several studies conducted on isiZulu folklore. For instance, Motinyane explores folktales to synthesise certain questions that challenge young writers to write new stories and regenerate culture and heritage, in such a way that they would preserve and speak to societal values, while at the same time addressing the contemporary needs of children, especially in the education setting.<sup>8</sup> The results reveal that folktales can be used as models to reinforce moral principles in youngsters and assist in social identities. They provide role models that instill moral principles in young people, including decency, solidarity, and compassion. Folktales further aid in the formation of social identities.

Mzimela, on the other hand, examines the role and significance of teaching using folklore in developing Grade-R learners' repertoire of skills in their mother tongue.<sup>9</sup> The focus is on Grade R as it is perceived as a crucial class to lay the foundation towards formal education while developing language usage by learners. The findings indicate that folklore is determined to be one of the best pedagogies as it promotes oral communication and is regarded as one of the best tools for bridging the gap between home and school.

Ihuezze explores the extent to which creative works utilise folklore to understand Africa and its literature and culture.<sup>10</sup> The findings demonstrate that folklore is an instrument that one can utilise to understand, entertain, and preserve the culture of Africans. In addition, Lubambo seeks to study manipulative behaviour in Siswati folktales.<sup>11</sup> His study focuses on how manipulation is used in folktales. Thus, the causes and key strategies are utilised by manipulators to manipulate their victims. The results state that manipulation is one of the key elements utilised in folktales to instil moral values. Importantly, Moephuli investigates whether form exists in Southern Sotho folktales and, if so, to what extent it relates to the character in Southern Sotho folktales. His research analyses folktales to test the applicability of Olrikian laws in Southern Sotho folktales.<sup>12</sup>

The analysis of the studies above reveals that when it comes to the application of Olrik's epic laws in the folktale of the South African indigenous languages, the only notable study was conducted with Southern Sotho folktales as a case study. There is still a gap when it comes to other South African languages. This article aims to fill in this gap by analysing one isiZulu folktale using Olrik's epic laws. The aim is to determine to what extent these laws are applicable. The rationale of this study is motivated by Moephuli, who, after studying Southern Sotho folktales, argued that Olrik's epic laws do not appear in an expected sequence and that not all of them may appear in a single folktale.<sup>13</sup> The desire to critically

<sup>5</sup> R. Harland, *Literary Theory from Plato to Barthes: An Introductory History* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 1999).1.

<sup>6</sup> V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (University of Texas Press, 1968).25.

<sup>7</sup> C. T. D., Marivate and C.T. Msimang, *African Languages Honours: Only Study Guide for TRAPO-G (Traditional Prose)* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1992). 33.

<sup>8</sup> Mantoa Motinyane, "Reimagining the Role of Folklore in the 21st Century: Don't We Need New Ones?," *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies* 32, no. 2 (2022): 1–14.

<sup>9</sup> Jabu Mzimela, "Exploring the Role of Teaching Using Folklore in Developing Grade R Learners' Mother Tongue," *Studies of Tribes and Tribals* 14, no. 2 (December 3, 2016): 129–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0972639X.2016.11886740>.

<sup>10</sup> Olivia Adaobi Ihuezze, "Folklore in Literature: A Tool for Culture Preservation and Entertainment," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention* 4, no. 4 (2015): 57–61.

<sup>11</sup> R.J. Lumbambo. "Manipulation in Folklore: A Perspective in Some Siswati Folktales". University of South Africa, 2019.

<sup>12</sup> I. M. Moephuli, "Structure and Character in Cyclic Folktales of Southern Sotho" (University of South Africa, 1979).

<sup>13</sup> Moephuli, "Structure and Character in Cyclic Folktales of Southern Sotho."

investigate this claim, using a single isiZulu folktale as a case study, prompted the researchers to undertake this study.

### **Axel Olrik's epic laws of folk narrative**

A careful analysis of studies in African oral literature reveals that attention has been paid mostly to oral narrative over the years.<sup>14</sup> In studying examples of oral narratives such as folktales, theoretical and methodological approaches have predominantly focused on origins and structure. In analysing structure, a considerable number of structuralist branches emerged, and one of them is the epic laws of folk narrative by Axel Olrik.<sup>15</sup>

The epic laws of folk narrative are the fundamental elements identified by Olrik to enhance the understanding of the structure or form of folktales.<sup>16</sup> According to Green, Norwegian folklorist Moltke Moe introduced the concept of fundamental epic laws in 1889 and focused on the operative forces in traditional composition, but Olrik, the Danish scholar, is the first to focus on the folk narrative structure and form in his theory of epic laws.<sup>17</sup> Kirilmis and Krohn highlight that Olrik argued that cultural narrative tradition is a product of universal rules which are obeyed naturally by narrators.<sup>18</sup> Since these rules are obeyed naturally, this suggests that they are applicable to any folk narrative, irrespective of the culture.

Olrik's epic laws are centered on structure, and this suggests that they receive their main support from the broad theory of structuralism (as indicated earlier), a school of thought that focuses on the general structure of any cultural phenomenon.<sup>19</sup> Olrik identified fourteen laws, which are as follows: the law of opening, law of repetition, law of three, law of two to a scene, law of contrast, law of twins, law of the importance of final position, law of single strand, law of the use of patterning, law of logic of the sage, law of unity of plot, law of concentration on a leading character, and law of closing. These laws form the basis of his theory, and they are applied to one isiZulu folktale in this article. Each one of them is explained before its application in the analysis section.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed the qualitative research approach, which is the best in revealing different perspectives of a phenomenon, as it allows for numerous views on the subject being explored. Qualitative research is applauded for generating a deep understanding of theoretical and abstract issues that might emerge from the data.<sup>20</sup> There is no strict rule on the size of the sample in a qualitative study. A suitable sample is selected based on the research questions to be addressed. Therefore, the target size of a sample is not important, but rather the depth and breadth of the collected data.<sup>21</sup> In this study, data was analysed thematically, as the analysis focused on the folktale mentioned earlier. The folklore was selected based on its richness to address almost all the aspects relevant to Olrik's epic laws.

### **Synopsis of the folktale *Imbiza eyayingavulwa***

The folktale is about a girl named Zenzile who was appointed as a domestic worker in a white man's house. This white man is described as wealthy; he owned a big farm with plenty of livestock. He also had many workers. The white man's wife fell severely ill one day and hospitalised. Zenzile was, as a result,

<sup>14</sup> I. Okpewho, *African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character and Continuity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992). 164.

<sup>15</sup> A. Olrik, *Principles for Oral Narrative Research* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> S. J. Bronner, *The Meaning of Folklore* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2007). 136.

<sup>17</sup> T. A. Green, *Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music, and Art*, vol. 1: A-H ((volume)). Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, Inc., 1997).225.

<sup>18</sup> Yasin Kirilmis, "Ahmet Harâmi Destanı'nın Axel Olrik'in Epik Yasalarına Göre İncelenmesi," *Journal of Turkish Studies* 10, no. Volume 10 Issue 12 (January 1, 2015): 740, <https://doi.org/10.7827/TurkishStudies.8656>; K. Krohn, *Folklore Methodology* (Austin: American folklore society, 1971).108.

<sup>19</sup> I. Okpewho, *Myth in Africa* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983). 36.

<sup>20</sup> Alan Peshkin, "Understanding Complexity: A Gift of Qualitative Inquiry," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (1988): 416–24; D.E. Polking-horne, "Language and Meaning: Data Collection in Qualitative Research," *Journal of Counselling Psychology* 52, no. 2 (2005): 137–45; P.D. Leedy and J.E. Ormrod, *Practical Research Planning and Design*, 8th ed. (New Jersey: Pearson Education, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Martin N Marshall, "Sampling for Qualitative Research," *Family Practice* 13, no. 6 (1996): 522–26; Anthony G Tuckett, "Qualitative Research Sampling: The Very Real Complexities," *Nurse Researcher* 12, no. 1 (2004): 47–61; Mark Mason, "Sample Size and Saturation in PhD Studies Using Qualitative Interviews," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 11, no. 3 (2010).

hired as a cleaner of the house. She was given an instruction not to open the big pot in the bedroom, but curiosity got the best of her as she eventually opened the pot and saw human heads. She discovered at that moment that the cat, which was always observing her, could speak. The cat threatened to expose her, and they finally reached an agreement that the secret would be kept for as long as Zenzile supplies the cat with food of its choice. The truth finally came out when, by accident, the white man caught the cat eating its unusual food. Zenzile was released from duty, and the cat obtained favor from the white man.

## The Application of Axel Olrik's Epic Laws in *Imbiza eyayingavulwa*

### Law of Opening

Moephuli states that this is an essential law as no narrator can commence a tale without using any of its forms.<sup>22</sup> Canonici maintains that an oral narrative does not start suddenly, but starts with a calm introduction, which then develops into the stages of conflict.<sup>23</sup> Commenting on the point of 'calm introduction', Dundes similarly asserts that the tale is bound to start from calm to excitement.<sup>24</sup>

The folktale uses the following technique to commence:

*Kwasukasukela, kudaladala. Ezweni elikude. Kwakukhona...*<sup>25</sup>

(Once upon a time, in ancient times, in a far world. There was once a...)

A careful analysis of isiZulu folktales reveals that all of them use *kwasukasukela* (once upon a time) alongside *Kwakukhona* (There was) as common formulas to commence tales. '*Kudaladala* (in ancient times) and *ezweni elikude* (in a far world) are used in this folktale, but they cannot be regarded as common since their appearance is inconsistent in isiZulu folktales. The form *kwakukhona* is used to introduce a sense of calmness in the introduction, as shown in this example:

*Kwakukhona umlungu owaye cebe kakhulu. Wayenepulazi elikhulu.*

*Wayenemfuyo eningi. Wayenezinkomo eziningi. Wayenezimvu eziningi.*<sup>26</sup>

(There was a white man who was very wealthy. He had a big farm. He had lots of livestock. He had many cows. He had many sheep.)

The sentences after the appearance of the form *kwakukhona*, indicate the stages of calmness in the folktale. As Canonici states above that calmness develops into stages of conflict, the same can be said about this folktale.<sup>27</sup> Even though the white man is described as being wealthy with plenty of workers working on the farm (calmness), there was no one working inside his house. Paragraph two of the tale explains that the white man's wife fell ill and was hospitalised, and the house was no longer maintained well. This is the initial stage of conflict that is to spark the major conflict. The stage of calmness thus ceases in paragraph two.

### The Law of Repetition

Olrik states that the law of repetition helps to depict what is important so that thought may dwell longer on the subject.<sup>28</sup> Green goes along the same line in saying that repetition has to do with the emphasis that is revealed in levels such as events, dialogues, phrases, and single words.<sup>29</sup>

An example of the law of repetition in the folktale is revealed by means of a song. After Zenzile opened the pot, she was instructed not to open it by the wealthy white man. The cat began to sing:

*Ngizofike ngimtshela ubasi ukuthi intombazane, ivule embizeni, yabon'amakhanda'abantu.*<sup>30</sup>

(I am going to tell the boss that the girl opened the pot and saw people's heads.)

<sup>22</sup> Moephuli, "Structure and Character in Cyclic Folktales of Southern Sotho." 36.

<sup>23</sup> Noemio Noverino Canonici, *Zulu Oral Traditions* (Durban: University of Natal, 1996).47.

<sup>24</sup> A. Dundes, *The Study of Folklore* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1965). 132.

<sup>25</sup> E.D.M. Sibiyi, *Phinda Ungixoxele* (Pretoria: Weza Home Publishing (Pty) Ltd., 2020).15.

<sup>26</sup> Sibiyi, *Phinda Ungixoxele*. 15.

<sup>27</sup> Canonici, *Zulu Oral Traditions*. 47.

<sup>28</sup> Olrik, *Principles for Oral Narrative Research*. 44.

<sup>29</sup> Green, *Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music, and Art*.226.

<sup>30</sup> Sibiyi, *Phinda Ungixoxele*. 16.

The cat makes an agreement with Zenzile in this scenario. It would ask for any food, and Zenzile would give it in return for not telling the white man what she had done. When it wanted more food, it would sing this song again as a strategy to threaten her. Repetition is therefore seen through the repetition of this song, as it was repeated three times. This repetition emphasised what Zenzile had done.

The repetition of the above song can be linked with Scheub's theory. This theory argues that there are 'essential images' in the tale which are remembered and passed from generation to generation through the aid of signals such as songs and chants.<sup>31</sup> The song plays an important role in helping to remember the image of Zenzile opening the pot. It is this song that can easily be remembered and passed from generation to generation.

### The Law of Three

Moephuli and Olrik similarly hold the view that a folktale is a product of a sequence of three things. They state that there shall be the maximum number of people, animals or both, and objects that appear in the folktale.<sup>32</sup>

The first example of this law is seen through the number of characters in the folktale. The tale consists of three predominant characters, namely: the white man, the cat, and Zenzile. The white man's wife is mentioned, but she does not play any part in the tale. The law of three could therefore not be presented well in this.

Another way in which the law of three appears is seen from the example of repetition discussed earlier. This example is applicable to both the law of repetition and of three and this shows the relationship between the two, as Dundes, in support of this, states that repetition is often tied to the number three.<sup>33</sup> The song: "*Ngizofike ngimtshel' ubasi ukuthi intombazane, ivule embizeni, yabon'amakhand' abantu.*"<sup>34</sup> (I am going to tell the boss that the girl opened the pot and saw human heads) is repeated three times by the cat in the tale.

The last example is seen from the three kinds of consumable products Zenzile prepared for the cat as per their agreement. This was to make the cat not tell the white man what she had done. Zenzile first prepared sour milk for the cat as shown in this sentence:

*Atatazele uZenzile alivubele amasi ikati.*<sup>35</sup>

(Zenzile quickly prepared sour milk for the cat.)

Secondly, Zenzile made meat for the cat:

*Aliphekele inyama ekudleni obekumele akudle emini nalolo suku.*<sup>36</sup>

(She cooked and ate the food she was supposed to eat on that day.)

And she lastly prepared plain warm milk:

*Uma selufudumala ubisi, alukhiphe, aluthele esitsheni bese elubeka phambi kwekati.*<sup>37</sup>

(When milk was starting to warm up, she took it out, poured it in a dish and then placed it near the cat.)

These are the three examples that demonstrate the occurrence of the law of three in the folktale.

### The Law of Two to a Scene

Canonici explains that an oral narrator would typically find it difficult to perform the role of more than two characters at any given time, and this explains the limitation of the number of characters.<sup>38</sup> Dundes states that two is the maximum number of characters to be presented at one time in a scene, and three would be a violation of this law.<sup>39</sup> Olrik, on the other hand, highlights an important point in stating that

<sup>31</sup> Marivate and Msimang, *African Languages Honours: Only Study Guide for TRAPO-G (Traditional Prose)*. 29.

<sup>32</sup> Moephuli, "Structure and Character in Cyclic Folktales of Southern Sotho" 40; Olrik, *Principles for Oral Narrative Research*, 50.

<sup>33</sup> Dundes, *The Study of Folklore*. 132.

<sup>34</sup> Sibiyi, *Phinda Ungixoxele*. 16.

<sup>35</sup> Sibiyi, *Phinda Ungixoxele*. 17.

<sup>36</sup> Sibiyi, *Phinda Ungixoxele*. 17.

<sup>37</sup> Sibiyi, *Phinda Ungixoxele*. 17.

<sup>38</sup> Canonici, *Zulu Oral Traditions*. 48.

<sup>39</sup> Dundes, *The Study of Folklore*. 135.

under given circumstances, a third character may be added for a short performance and for this to happen, one character disappears from the stage before the new one comes in.<sup>40</sup> These insights make it clear that the nature of folktales does not allow more than two characters to appear in the scene.

The occurrence of the law of two in a scene is evident in the tale, and it is demonstrated in three scenes. The first scene is between Zenzile and the white man. In this scene, the white man is appointing Zenzile to her new job of cleaning and instructs her not to go to the designated room and open the pot as shown in their conversation:

*Uyabona kunemigomo kule ndlu. Yonke indawo ungathinta lapho ubona kunezintuli. Uze ungalinge uthinte imbiza esekamelweni lokuphumula. Impela uze ungisize ungalinge uthinte laphaya.*<sup>41</sup>  
(You see, there are rules in this house. You can touch any place where you see dust. Do not by chance touch the pot in the bedroom. Certainly, help me and don't touch there.)

There are three predominant characters in the tale, and this scene shows only two of them. Secondly, the law of two to a scene occurs for the second time as Zenzile frequently finds herself with the cat in the house. Whenever they are together, the white man is visiting his wife in the hospital. The last example, where the law of two to a scene occurs, is when Zenzile, the white man, and the cat are found in the same scene. The truth behind Olrik's view that when there is an additional character coming into the picture, one character either keeps quiet or disappears, is proven here.<sup>42</sup> Zenzile is in a conversation with the cat when the white man appears, and after the white man starts talking, the conversation is now between the cat and the white man. Zenzile keeps quiet even though she is encouraged to talk by the questions she is asked. By her remaining quiet, only the cat and the white man can be counted in the scene.

### The Law of Contrast

Pertaining to the law of contrast, Olrik explains that contrast is normally created between two characters that appear at the same time.<sup>43</sup> This contrast is often revealed in actions. The law of contrast, therefore, has to do with the opposites that are extracted from the characters as judged by their actions, qualities or appearances at times. The law of contrast is evident in the tale, as there are several contrasts that are identified when looking at the characters. Below is the list of these contrasts:

**Black and white:** Zenzile is a black lady, and the other human character is a white man.

**Employer and employee:** The white man is an employer while Zenzile is an employee. The tale takes place during ancient times, when it was a common phenomenon for blacks to work for whites on farms.

**Male and female:** Zenzile is female, the white man is male.

**Demand and submission:** After the cat threatened to report Zenzile, it made demands that Zenzile submit to remain silent.

**Rich and poor:** The white man is rich, as he owns a big farm with livestock and lots of workers. On the other hand, the fact that Zenzile desperately wanted to work as a domestic worker suggests that she is poor.

**Sickness and health:** The white man is healthy, and his wife is ill

It is clear from these contrasts above that the law of contrasts is also among the laws to appear in the tale.

### The Law of Twins

Moephuli maintains that under the law of twins, a minimum of two people are made to play a similar role, irrespective of the fact that they are not actual siblings at times.<sup>44</sup> Dundes states that two characters can avoid the law of contrast and be subject to the law of twins.<sup>45</sup> Central to the law of twins is therefore the idea that two characters appear in the same role and act in a similar way.

<sup>40</sup> Olrik, *Principles for Oral Narrative Research*. 43.

<sup>41</sup> Sibiya, *Phinda Ungixoxele*. 15.

<sup>42</sup> Olrik, *Principles for Oral Narrative Research*. 43.

<sup>43</sup> Olrik, *Principles for Oral Narrative Research*. 44.

<sup>44</sup> Moephuli, "Structure and Character in Cyclic Folktales of Southern Sotho." 62.

<sup>45</sup> Dundes, *The Study of Folklore*. 136.

This is one of the laws that do not work well in the folktale. Only one example could be identified and extracted, and this is when Zenzile and the cat acted in a similar way, as per their agreement, to hide the truth from the white man. They acted in a similar way for several days, and there was no suspicion from the white man until the truth came out unintentionally. It should be noted that Zenzile and the cat are not siblings. This is a human being and an animal.

### **The Law of the Importance of the Final Position**

Olrik, in *Canonic*, states that the principal person or thing comes first in the sequence of the folktale, but coming last is the person who arouses sympathy.<sup>46</sup> In addition, Green says that under the law of the importance of initial and final position, the character who is deemed as weak and young proves to be the strongest and smartest in the end.<sup>47</sup>

In analysing this law in the Sotho folktales, Moephuli concluded that this law does not hold entirely well with all tales, and the same can be said with '*Imbiza eyayingavulwa*'.<sup>48</sup> To begin with, Olrik's explanation highlights that the principal character comes first, but this is not the case in a folktale. The white man is not the principal character, but he comes first as shown in the introduction:

*Kwakukhona umlungu owayecebe kakhulu.*<sup>49</sup>  
(There was a white man who was very rich.)

The principal character is Zenzile, who evokes sympathy but comes second, as shown in these sentences:

*Wabona ukuthi kumele aqashe umuntu ozosebenza lapha endlini, alungise konke okungahambi kahle. Nebala wamthola owesifazane ogama lakhe nguZenzile.*<sup>50</sup>

(He saw that he should hire someone to work by the house and rectify all that is not going well. Indeed, he found a woman whose name is Zenzile.)

Zenzile made food as usual, and while the cat was eating, the white man appeared and was surprised by the kind of food the cat was eating (meat). The truth came out that way. Zenzile arouses sympathy as she faces the possibility of losing her job. She is speechless as a result of knowing the trouble she is facing. The last 'person' to come last is the cat, and the role of evoking sympathy is not played by it. This shows that the law of importance of final position does not occur in this tale. Green's view above, however, holds true; the cat is deemed as weak but proves to be the smartest at the end.

### **The Law of a Single Strand**

A folktale is single-stranded and does not fill in missing details.<sup>51</sup> According to Dundes, instead of going back to fill in the missing details, a tale may use dialogue to provide such information.<sup>52</sup> In the initial stages of the tale, the narrator introduces the white man's wife, who is taken to the hospital because of severe sickness. There is no description, history or any other information about the wife. It is not said which disease she is suffering from, even when the tale continues. The law of single strand is thus illustrated as the narrator attempts to avoid unnecessary information and details. The wife's details were to be extraneous and would have returned the plot to its previous details. This would have affected the flow and sequence. Background information or missing details are not provided even through the dialogue in the tale, and this shows how strictly the law of single strand is applied. The only dialogue is on the main episode between Zenzile and the cat, and it does not include any background information or missing details, but it leads to the climax stage of the folktale.

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<sup>46</sup> Canonici, *Zulu Oral Traditions*. 48

<sup>47</sup> Green, *Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music, and Art*. 226.

<sup>48</sup> Moephuli, "Structure and Character in Cyclic Folktales of Southern Sotho."

<sup>49</sup> Sibiya, *Phinda Ungixoxele*. 15.

<sup>50</sup> Sibiya, *Phinda Ungixoxele*. 15.

<sup>51</sup> Canonici, *Zulu Oral Traditions*. 51.

<sup>52</sup> Dundes, *The Study of Folklore*. 137.

There is also little information about the white man. He was always away visiting his wife in the hospital, and this again illustrates how the folktale avoids details that are not necessary. There are also no flashbacks used to provide any information. The plot does not break in order to return to what previously took place, as seen in the example of the white man's wife.

### The Law of the Use of Tableaux Scenes

Canonici states that this law is made evident through some scenes that could look like painted pictures. He further states that these scenes can be easily imagined because they are described in full detail.<sup>53</sup> Olrik, on the other hand, maintains that in the law of the use of tableau scenes, episodes are allowed to form clear pictures in the imagination.<sup>54</sup> Major events in the tale, which create surprising situations or tensions, are presented through these images.

A careful analysis of the folktale shows that the law of tableaux scenes is illustrated once in the folktale. An abrupt, surprising situation was created when Zenzile opened the pot she was instructed not to open. She sees different human heads in the pot, and she is startled. This scene can easily be imagined because it is described in full detail. It created a surprising situation. The phrase from the folktale illustrates this:

*Gembeqe isivalo sembiza. Athuke ahlale laphaya uZenzile. Isifuba sigubhe wuvalo. Wabona into angakaze ayibone selokhu azalwa. Kwakunamakhandakhanda abantu amaningi kule mbiza.*<sup>55</sup>

(She opened the pot. Zenzile became afraid. She was afraid. She saw something she had never seen since birth. There were kinds of people's heads in the pot.)

### The Law of the Use of Patterning

Olrik, in Canonici, states that under the law of patterning, people or situations of the same sort appear to share some similarities.<sup>56</sup> Moephuli adds by saying that the use of this law is evident when a pattern set before is repeated at least once in the following situation.<sup>57</sup>

This law is illustrated in the folktale. After the cat threatened to tell the white man that Zenzile had opened the pot, the cat asked Zenzile to make him sour milk, and it would, in return, not tell the white man what she did. The first pattern was set into motion in this situation. The following day, the cat asked for meat as shown in this phrase:

*Lithi ikati lifuna inyama ngalelo langa. Aliphakele inyama ekudleni obekumele akudle emini ngalolo suku.*<sup>58</sup>

(The cat said it wanted meat on that day. She dished meat for it on the food she was supposed to eat that day.)

There are similarities in this, as the cat asks for different kinds of food on different days. The first situation took place in a similar way again in the following days. This shows that the patterns were sequential and similar. Notice that this phrase was cited in the law of the three above. The law of pattern can therefore be closely associated with the law of three and the law of repetition to a certain extent, in that they all emphasise the recurrence of something.

### The Law of Logic of the Sage

Moephuli asserts that folktales use different logic from that of the everyday world in that what is usual in folktales is unusual in everyday life. He further states that characters in folktales perform things that are surprising, if not impossible, in everyday life. There is an element of magic and disbelief, basically.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Canonici, *Zulu Oral Traditions*. 50.

<sup>54</sup> Olrik, *Principles for Oral Narrative Research*. 46.

<sup>55</sup> Sibiyi, *Phinda Ungixoxele*. 16.

<sup>56</sup> Canonici, *Zulu Oral Traditions*. 49.

<sup>57</sup> Moephuli, "Structure and Character in Cyclic Folktales of Southern Sotho." 72.

<sup>58</sup> Sibiyi, *Phinda Ungixoxele*. 16.

<sup>59</sup> Moephuli, "Structure and Character in Cyclic Folktales of Southern Sotho." 80.

In the folktale, the illustration of this law appears in the scene when the cat begins to talk like a human being. This is where the element of magic and disbelief is created. Zenzile went to open the pot, and the cat began to speak for the first time, as shown below:

*Mnyawu! Mnyawu! Ngizofike ngimtshel' ubasi ukuthi intombazane, ivule embizeni, yabon'amakhanda abantu.*<sup>60</sup>

(Myaw! Myaw! I will tell the boss that the girl opened the pot and saw different people's heads.)

Zenzile is shocked to learn that the cat is able to speak. No one could blame her reaction; a cat is generally known in ordinary life for its inability to talk. Anyone in her shoes would have acted the same way. If Zenzile knew what the cat was capable of, she would not have opened the pot while the cat was observing.

It is also unusual for a cat to be controlling and manipulative. Animals do not control people; it is vice versa. Zenzile is later controlled and cajoled as she does everything the cat instructs her to do for her secret to be kept safe. This shows the contrast between the folktale and everyday life. The unusual in everyday life is usual in a folktale. The law of logic of the sage is one of the important laws in a folktale. It is the sense of magic that creates suspense and unbelief, which makes a folktale fun to listen to.

### **The Law of Unity of Plot**

According to Olrik, the law of unity of plot entails the narrative's attempt to focus on a single event as its conclusion and eradicate what does not concern it. He further highlights that each part of the tale works towards the development of the main event.<sup>61</sup> The key is for the plot not to deviate, and the movement must be from the conflict to resolution.<sup>62</sup>

In the folktale, this law is illustrated as soon as Zenzile is urgently employed as a domestic worker. The rich white man immediately tells her about the pot that she should not open as a first instruction. The focus of both the storyteller and the audience is therefore fixed on the pot from that point. All concentration is now on what is inside it. The plot does not deviate after the white, rich man instructs Zenzile not to open the pot; instead, it builds up to the only event of the tale, where Zenzile opens the pot. There are no additional events that make the tale lose its sense. After being instructed, it was not long until Zenzile opened the pot and the conflict was set into motion. The conflict soon moved to the resolution stage, which saw Zenzile being released from duty. This shows how straightforward and succinct the folktale is. The plot is designed in a skilful way that keeps the audience captivated. It is important to note that the law of unity of plot relates to the law of single strands, as both contribute to the plot not deviating.

### **The Law of Concentration on a Leading Character**

Regarding this law, Olrik expresses the idea that the narrative tends to be centered on the main character. It focuses on what is troubling him/her and avoids other aspects.<sup>63</sup> Green similarly states that events revolve around the protagonist, with the focus being shifted from other characters.<sup>64</sup>

This law is illustrated well in the folktale. The focus is on Zenzile from the beginning until the end. All the activities revolve around her and not around the white rich man or the cat. The white, rich man is introduced during the initial stages of the tale, and he only reappears at the end. He is not involved in any other activities or scenes.

This is also true with the cat, which only appears in the conflict and resolution stages. Even though it appears in those stages, the focus is still on Zenzile. Concentration is drawn to her because all activities revolve around her. She starts by getting employed; she opens the pot after a few days on duty; gets manipulated by the cat; her secret is finally revealed, and she gets fired from her job. The whole folktale is made up of these events and she is the leading character in all of them. The use of the law of concentration on the leading character is thus evident. Moephuli argues that this law complements the law

<sup>60</sup> Sibiya, *Phinda Ungixoxele*.16.

<sup>61</sup> Olrik, *Principles for Oral Narrative Research*. 47.

<sup>62</sup> Moephuli, "Structure and Character in Cyclic Folktales of Southern Sotho." 87.

<sup>63</sup> Olrik, *Principles for Oral Narrative Research*. 49.

<sup>64</sup> Green, *Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Beliefs, Customs, Tales, Music, and Art* .227.

of the single strand.<sup>65</sup> The law of unity of plot can also be included in this, as the three of them stress the omission of irrelevant information.

### The Law of Closing

According to Olrik, this law is illustrated after the decisive event in the folktale takes place.<sup>66</sup> He explains that this does not occur suddenly, but the atmosphere calms down. Canonici supports this in stating that after the climax has been reached, the narrator shall ensure that the tale is not brought to a sudden but a smooth ending.<sup>67</sup>

This law is well illustrated. The climax stage comes to an end right after the cat tells the white man the truth about what Zenzile did. The tale did not end instantly, but it slowly came to its calmness. The resolution played a very important role in ensuring the success of this. After Zenzile was exposed, the tale did not end there, but the audience is told she lost her job, as shown in these sentences:

*Yagcina ngalelo langa ukusebenza intombazane leyo. Umlungu wayixosha.*<sup>68</sup>

(It was the last day on duty for that girl. The white man fired her.)

It is interesting to note that the function of consequence identified by Propp/Dundes's theory is evident here, even though this is not the focus. Zenzile suffers from the consequences of her disobedience as she loses her job. Calmness is reached, and the tale finally reaches its ending by showing the results; the cat had found favor in the eyes of the white man:

*Walikhonza kakhulu ukusuka ngalolo suku ikati. Ukusuka ngalelo langa lakwazi nokugibela imoto.*<sup>69</sup>

(He started to have an utmost love for the cat from that day. From that day the cat started to be given a ride.)

Just like the opening formula, Zulu folktales, as shown below, have a closing formula that the narrator always uses to officially end the folktale:

*“Cosu, cosu, iyaphela!”*<sup>70</sup>

(Cosu, cosu, it ends)

### Discussion Summary

As indicated in the introduction, Moephuli argues that Axel Olrik's epic laws of folktale narrative do not occur in the expected sequence and that not all of them may appear in a single folktale. A single folktale was analysed in this work, and it was discovered that Moephuli's claim is relatively valid. The law of the importance of final position does not occur well in the analysed folktale. This did not, however, jeopardise the accuracy of the theory as the other laws were proven to exist. It was also discovered that some of the laws are closely related to each other, which makes it difficult for some of them to be accurately identified. This includes laws three and repetition, and the law of single strand, unity of plot, and concentration on a leading character. A suggestion is made for the possibility of combining them in some similar cases.

### CONCLUSION

In the folktale *Imbiza eyayingavulwa*, the law of three and repetition occurred through the repetition of a song three times. In this case, these laws could perhaps be combined instead of being treated separately. The law of single strand, unity of plot, and concentration on a leading character are also related in that they speak to the plot. Concentration on the leading character cannot be determined outside the plot. This is the same case with the single-stranded aspect of the folktale, which helps to explain the uniformity of the folktale.

<sup>65</sup> Moephuli, "Structure and Character in Cyclic Folktales of Southern Sotho." 82.

<sup>66</sup> Olrik, *Principles for Oral Narrative Research*. 56.

<sup>67</sup> Canonici, *Zulu Oral Traditions*. 51.

<sup>68</sup> Sibiyi, *Phinda Ungixoxele*. 17.

<sup>69</sup> Sibiyi, *Phinda Ungixoxele*. 17.

<sup>70</sup> Sibiyi, *Phinda Ungixoxele*. 17.

Since there are currently two studies on the South African indigenous languages (Southern Sotho & isiZulu) that evaluate the application of Olrik's epic laws, a call for similar studies to be done is recommended. It is through the application of these epic laws, in more South African indigenous languages, that this theory will be better contextualised, understood, and evaluated.

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