



Animal Characters as Deux ex Machina in Maranao Folktales

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Abstract

This study examined the portrayal of animals in Maranao Folktales. Specifically, it examined (1) how animals were depicted in Maranao Folktales; (2) their role or common purpose in the tales; and (3) how they were used as Deux ex Machina. To determine these, the paper employed the formalistic critical theory known as New Criticism and Textual Analysis. New Criticism accentuates the importance of close reading. That is, examining a text closely without the use of external evidence to explain the work. Textual analysis, on the other hand, is a methodology that involves understanding language and symbols present in texts to gain information as to how people make sense of life and communicate experiences. The findings reveal that animal characters are portrayed in Maranao folktales as helpful advisers who are extremely wise. They have the capability to teach human beings a lesson and allow them to rise from poverty or even from a difficult situation. They are depicted as extremely loyal who are willing to do anything when they are indebted. Their common function is to aid when necessary. They give the protagonists knowledge, talent, skill, or solution to a problem, resulting in a cooperative and beneficial relationship between human beings and animals. They also appear as a motif: magical and intelligent animals who bring harmony, wealth, and greatness. Furthermore, they may serve as symbols. They may either represent as God's providence or as the follies/vices and cunningness of humans. Lastly, they are used as Deux ex Machina. They appear just when the situation has become too difficult for the protagonists or when a solution to a crisis is necessary. By being present, they can change the course of a story. They save the day as deux ex machina to show that even if the protagonists are handsome, intelligent, or powerful, they still need assistance, guidance, and advice as they are only human beings who can be vulnerable and powerless.

Keywords: Animal characters; deux ex machina; wise and magic animals; helpful animals; Philippines.

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1. Introduction

The Maranaos are native people living around the Lake Lanao. They are referred to as the “People of the Lake.” They are one of the biggest cultural minorities in Mindanao, Philippines, settling mostly in the province of Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte. They are popularly known for their finest and colorful woven textiles made of cotton, silk, and rayon thread. They are also known for their brass wares, wood carving (sarimanok), dugout boats (awang), and well-engineered houses (torogan). The Maranaos speak M’ranao or Meranaw, but there are those who are fluent in Arabic, English, and other foreign languages. Their oral and written literatures are often influenced by their religion, Islam, but they also have pre-Islamic oral traditions. The Maranaos are rich with literature. Even if their literary involvement is not fully recorded and appreciated, they have legends, myths, epics, folktales, symbolic speech of courtship, proverbs, riddles, poems, songs, and ballads. In fact, their well-known epic song Darangen was proclaimed by UNESCO in 2005 as one of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Despite industrialization and modernization, the Maranao largely remain undiscovered, making it possible for them to maintain their customs, culture, traditions, and ways of life. Because much of their literary involvement is not recorded, the verbal aspect of their culture is transmitted orally or by observation. Much of their traditional material is passed on from generation to generation, preserved and shaped by memory. Those of which have been recorded are collected and referred to as Maranao Folktales.

Often, folktales attribute great power, understanding, autonomy, and significance to animals. While folklorists find this deeply poetic, they are also made uncomfortable by the suggestion of magic and superior rationality [1]. In fact, in most narratives, animal characters have all the physical features of animals. Yet, everything else about them is anthropomorphic; they behave like human beings [2]. Thus, the researcher decided to focus on animal characters as depicted in three selected Maranao folktales, more specifically on (1) the portrayal of animal characters; (2) their role or the common purpose for their depiction; and (3) how they were used as *deus ex machina* in the Meranao folktales.

Deus ex machina is a dramatic device which dates back to the 15th Century BC in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* and Euripides’ plays. This dramatic device often appears as a God that solves crises by divine intervention. *Deus ex machina*, or “god from the machine” in Latin, is a person or a thing that appears or is introduced into a situation to provide an artificial or contrived solution to an apparently insoluble difficulty [3].

2. Materials and Methods

This paper employed the formalistic critical theory known as New Criticism and Textual Analysis. New Criticism accentuates the importance of close reading. That is, examining a text without the use of external evidence to explain the work. It is the objective analysis of a literary text which is an independent and complete work of art. It stresses close attention to the internal characteristics of the text itself. Textual analysis, on the other hand, is a methodology that involves understanding language, symbols, and/or pictures present in texts to gain information regarding how people make sense of and communicate life and life experiences. Visual, written, or spoken messages provide cues to ways through which communication may be understood. These two methods of analysis were used to determine (1) how animal characters were portrayed in Maranao folktales, (2)

the common purpose for their depiction, and (3) how were they were used as *Deus ex machina* in the tales. To clarify, this study focused on 3 selected Maranao folktales.

2.1 Folktale synopses

Henpecking wives

“Henpecking Wives” is about the pious Sultan of Tandarak-Kaya who dearly loves his wife, Ba’i sa Tandarak Kaya, though she has not born him any heir. One day, he beats two snakes who are having adulterous relations. When the male one dies, the female escapes and threatens her husband to avenge her, claiming that she has been wronged for no reason. The husband, in anger and pity for his wife, prepares to kill the sultan, but overhearing Sultan sa Tandarak Kaya relate to Ba’i sa Tandarak Kaya what really happened, he decides to give him his precious stone. The stone allows the sultan to learn the languages of all animals. The snake dies but warns the sultan not to tell anyone about the precious stone or he will die. When the sultan is back at home, Ba’i sa Tandarak Kaya requests a sugar cane from the backyard. While she munches the cane, her husband hears the grunts of an ant over her “greediness,” complaining that not a single drop of juice is left for it. The sultan laughs which irritates the sultana, thinking he is mocking her. She threatens to end her life unless he explains himself. The sultan cannot tell his wife his secret. On his way to the mosque to pray for enlightenment, he sees a goat couple and learns from them that a wife often bluffs. He learns how to respond to his wife, knowing that she is only bluffing. Afraid to die and failing to kill herself, Ba’i sa Tandarak Kaya asks the sultan to divorce her. She feels ashamed. But Sultan sa Tandarak Kaya loves her so much he does not know what to do. He asks again for time to think it through. On the next day, as the sultan is on his way to the mosque to seek guidance from Allah, he sees another animal couple. This time, rats. He learns from observing and listening to them that a woman would not leave the house without property with her. The sultan quickly heads home and finds his wife packing all their valuable treasures. He tells her that he will allow the divorce only if she leaves without carrying away anything from the torogan. Ba’i sa Tandarak Kaya knows that she cannot be married again without wealth or precious jewels to decorate her person, so she cries and does not leave the torogan. Overwhelmed with love and compassion for her, the sultan embraces the sultana. They live happily ever after.

2.2 The Faithful Lovers

“The Faithful Lovers” is about a prince, Imam sa Adra, and a princess, Putri sa Madayan, who love each other so much so that they promise to die next to each other. After two years of blissful marriage, Putri sa Madayan suddenly falls ill and dies. To fulfill the promise and because he cannot think of a life without his wife, Imam sa Adra joins the corpse of his wife on a raft that was placed on the high seas. The raft floats aimlessly for months until the princess’ body decays and only bones are left. Imam sa Adra, however, is still intent on keeping his wife company, even when the raft is carried by strong waves to the shores of an unknown country. The light raft is thrown many meters inland, and Imam sa Adra and the bones of his wife land near a pond. When Imam sa Adra gains consciousness, he starts picking up the bones to place them on the raft and sail again. He notices, however, through a dead snake, that the pond near where they landed, has a magical, healing effect. Reciting some prayers, Imam sa Adra scoops water from the pond and pours it on the bones of his wife. He does so until

Potri sa Madayan regains her consciousness. She does not remember that she has died; she thought she was only asleep. Imam sa Adra tells her he wants to sleep and rest because he has not slept for months. He instructs her to wake her up should anything happen as he rests.

Imam sa Adra falls into a deep slumber, so deep that he has not woken up when a boat drops into anchor and another prince, Radia Manganiyaya, grabs Potri sa Madayan and claims her as his. When he finally wakes up, he discovers a big wound on his wrist. He realizes that his wife has struggled to wake him up. He looks for her everywhere but fails to do so. In despair, he asks three travelers to give him a lift. When they agree and Imam sa Adra climbs in their iron cauldron, the iron cauldron rises several inches above the water. The three travelers determine him to be a pumbarakat or magician. They go to a sultanate where the king is suffering from an affliction without cure. The three travelers recommend Imam sa Adra. When Imam sa Adra is escorted to the presence of the king, the affliction is suddenly gone. To reward him, the king tells him to ask for anything, to which Imam sa Adra only responds with: "All I ask is food and shelter..."

After three days, Imam sa Adra is invited to go to a neighboring kingdom where Radia Manganiyaya is celebrating a wedding with a captured, unwilling bride. When they arrive at the palace yard where a game of sipa is happening, he catches sight of Potri sa Madayan looking out of a palace window. He quickly joins the sipa game and kicks the rattan ball to make it land inside the palace where his wife is looking out. Startled, Potri sa Madayan recognizes him, but he motions her not to do anything. Radia Manganiyaya looks out the window as well, because the people are cheering for Imam sa Adra. He invites Imam sa Adra inside to eat with him, introducing his bride in the process. The couple act as if they do not know each other. At this time, Imam sa Adra's noris (golden birds) happen to pass by, looking for him. They recognize their master and his wife and hurry to action. They help them and flew them from the palace to their home where the mourning people of Adra and Madayan are happy to welcome them back. The reunion with parents, relatives, and people is celebrated and the couple live happily ever after.

2.3 The Magic Rooster

"The Magic Rooster" is about Bagoamama and his rise from poverty. He is the son of Lokus a Mama and Lokus a Babae. They live in a tiny kingdom called Agama Niyog (Coconut Kingdom). They are poor because Lokus a Mama does not know how to farm. He only knows how to gather fruits in a nearby forest. When he falls ill, Bagoamama questions why they are poor. He thinks something can be done about their situation. A thought strikes him and he tells Lokus a Babae to go the Solotan and ask for some abaca fiber. He uses the abaca fiber to make some strings and ropes. He places all these inside a sack, sharpens his father's bolo, and hurries to the nearby forest. He follows the tracks of some wild fowls until he comes across hundreds of them. Only then does he start to set traps. When he arrives home, he is informed by Lokus a Babae that Lokus a Mama is dead. He knows that they will have to pay for the services of the local imams, so he decides to bury Lokus a Mama only with Lokus a Babae. When they get enough money, they can assemble the priests and ask them to pray for the repose of his soul. The next day, Bagoamama walks to the forest to discover that all the traps he has set has caught a chicken. There are hundreds of them. Bagoamama jumps in joy. Later, he discovers that he has caught a huge rooster which pleads him to be set free as it can crow all kinds of cloth and defecate gold and silver

coins. Bagoamama tells his mother to sell some of the chickens and to buy some rice. He then tells the magical rooster to crow and defecate. Soon, all priests are summoned to pray over the grave of Lokes a Mama. Each priest has for himself a cloth and some money. Meanwhile, the messengers of the Solotan witness what is happening. The rooster knows of their intention, but it let them carry the message of Bagoamama's sudden wealth to the Solotan. They tell the Solotan that he is no longer the richest man in Agama Niyog. They also tell him of the existence of the magical rooster. The Solotan proposes to buy the rooster with everything he has. He also offers his daughter's hand in marriage. The rooster advises Bagoamama to accept the Solotan's offer as it will not be staying long anyway. Bagoamama accepts. He marries the Solotan's daughter and sells the rooster to the Solotan. The rooster crows all kinds of clothes for everyone. He also defecates silver and gold for all. When every man and woman is happy, it sees that it has done its job well and flies away. Bagoamama waves it goodbye as tears roll down his cheeks, knowing that he owes all his fortune to the magical rooster.

3. Results

3.1 Portrayal of Animals in Maranao Folktales

In all three Meranao folktales, animal characters are portrayed as helpful and extremely wise, imparting wisdom to the struggling protagonists. In the "Henpecking Wives," it is through the goat couple and the rat couple that Sultan sa Tandara Kaya learns how to respond to his beloved wife and keep her by his side despite her threats of committing suicide and leaving him.

The troubled sultan witnessed the mock quarrel of the creatures from the very start. But he did not know that the creatures wanted to teach him a lesson.

This shows how the animals are portrayed in Maranao Folktales as having extraordinary intelligence which have the capability to teach human beings a lesson. Also, in this particular folktale, it is overtly implied that even though animals can communicate with human beings, they have their own animal language. This is consistent with two authors' [4] insistence that readers expect animal characters to speak like human beings, but it is impossible as "the tongues of the non-human primates are long and that their supralaryngeal vocal tracts cannot assume the range of shape changes characteristic of human speech," [5] thus animals must have their own, different language.

My master! My Lord! My righteous sultan," cried the snake. "You have rightly punished my faithless wife. In reward I am giving you my precious stone. Remember my advice—never tell anybody that you are in possession of it. If you do, you shall die. With this magic stone, you will not only hear but also learn the language of all living creatures...

The discouraged speaker was an ant but nobody heard or noticed except the sultan...

...he knew well enough that if he told her what he heard from the ant, she would insist in knowing how he happened to understand the language of the creature...

In “The Faithful Lovers,” it is through a dead snake and two faithful, golden birds that Imam sa Adra is able to bring his wife back to life as well as bring her back to their home.

Meanwhile the noris (golden birds) of Imam sa Adra who had flown everywhere in search of their master happened to pass by the palace of Solotan Radia Manganyaya. The birds were so tired they decided to perch on the palace windows and rest. One of the birds who happened to alight on the window sill where Imam sa Adra was seated recognized him. It quickly informed its companions. The birds hastily planned their course of action. They decided to tie their wings together and swoop down on the palace. Then they made Putri sa Madayan who had gone inside one of the palace rooms to get a betel container (lotoan) ride on their wings after which they flew away.

This shows how animals are portrayed not only as beings able to direct human beings (“they made Putri sa Madayan...ride on their wings...”) but as well as loyal creatures to their master (“...the noris...had flown everywhere in search of their master...”).

Lastly, in “The Magic Rooster,” it is through a clever, magical rooster that Bagoamama is able to rise from poverty and marry the Solotan’s daughter.

But the magic rooster knew of the intentions of the two messengers. So as soon as they entered the house, it greeted them.

Even while the solotan was saying this, the magic rooster already knew about it. So when the warriors headed by Sabandar and Kanankan left the palace the magic rooster conferred with Bagoamama as to what he should do.

“Sell me to the Solotan,” the magic rooster told Bagoamama. “Anyway, I won’t stay long with him. Besides, if you see me to him you’ll become the heir to his crown.”

Indeed, all three Maranao folktales show how animal characters are portrayed as having human characteristics and much more than that. They are depicted as having extraordinary intelligence which guide human beings to act or do something. This is consistent with the claims [2] that animal characters in most narratives have all the physical features of animals. Yet, everything else about them is anthropomorphic as they behave like human beings.

3.2 Role or Common Purpose of Animals in Maranao Folktales

Based on the portrayal of animals in the three Maranao Folktales, the common role or function of animal characters is to provide assistance and appear right when they are needed to equip the protagonists with knowledge, talent, skill, or opportunity to escape, helping them during a time of difficulty. They lend supernatural aid, resulting to a cooperative and beneficial relationship between human beings and animals.

Animals appear as a motif. They appear as magic and wise animals who are as good as advisers. They are

helpful servants as well as creatures who bring harmony, wealth, and greatness to men. They also represent different ideas and actions, such as in “The Faithful Lovers,” where a dead snake in the healing pond gives the idea to Imam sa Adra to pour his wife with the magical water and bring her back to life. By being present, the animals can simply change the course of the story or tale. Animals may also serve as a symbol. They may represent as the aid God sends to his pious servants, such as in “The Henpecked Wives” where the pious Sultan sa Tandaral Kaya is often helped by animals on his way to the Mosque to ask for enlightenment and help from God. The next day came and the sultan could not still decide whether to tell his wife about the magic stone and thereby forfeit his life or just let her fulfill her threat of ending her own life. perplexed and worried, he went to the mosque to pray for divine guidance.

On his way to the mosque, the sultan saw a female goat standing at the edge of a well under an orange tree...

Lastly, animals in Maranao Folktales represent both human morals and good behavior as well as the evil ones, such as in “The Henpecked Wives” where two snakes are having adulterous relations. They show both the follies and vices of human beings as well as their cunningness to teach a lesson. It is one way of making readers understand the natural world. This is consistent with Claude Levi-Strauss who states that employing animals in literature can help expose common experiences, such as terror, violence, injustice, and struggles for survival.

3.3 Animals as Deux ex Machina in Maranao Folktales

Animals are used as Deux ex Machina in Maranao Folktales. They are given human characteristics which are able to think, talk, and decide on their own, appearing just when the situation has become too difficult for the protagonists. They come just when their assistance is badly needed, and they are introduced only in a situation to provide solution to a crisis which appear to be without solution. Animal characters often end up saving the day as portrayed in the Maranao folktales. This suggests that the protagonists, no matter how handsome, intelligent, or powerful they are as a datu, a sulutan, a young man, or a princess, they still need assistance, guide, and most importantly, an adviser. It also suggests that in the end, the protagonists are only human beings who are powerless in some situations, and if they are not given assistance the course of their lives will turn for the worst. This indeed shows that after all, human beings are still vulnerable to some circumstances, such as death and poverty. The animal characters then serve as a deux ex machina as they change the course of the story or tale for the better. Their purpose in the folktales is to make the “they live happily ever after” possible and to bring relief to the readers. They appear just in the right time to help human characters realize something or to take action on something. They are “the unexpected power or event that abruptly resolves a seemingly hopeless situation” [6].

4. Conclusion

Animal characters are portrayed in Maranao folktales as helpful and extremely wise. They are exceptionally good advisers with an extraordinary intelligence. They have the capability to teach human beings a lesson and allow them to rise from a difficulty or poverty. They are also portrayed to have their own animal language even as they can communicate with human beings. Lastly, they are depicted as extremely loyal to their masters who

are willing to do anything when indebted or when they are grateful.

The common function or role of animal characters in Maranao Folktales is to provide assistance when necessary and to appear right when they are needed. They equip the protagonists with knowledge, talent, skill, or opportunity to escape. They help them during a time of difficulty and lend them supernatural aid, resulting to a cooperative and beneficial relationship between human beings and animals. They also appear as motif: magic and wise animals who are extremely capable advisers, bringing in harmony, wealth, and greatness. Furthermore, they may serve as symbols. They may either represent as the aid God sends to his pious servants or as the follies/vices and cunningness of human beings.

Lastly, animals are used as *Deus ex Machina* in Maranao Folktales. They are given human characteristics which are able to think, talk, and decide, appearing just when the situation has become too difficult for the protagonists. They come just when their assistance is badly needed, and they are introduced only in a situation to provide solution to a crisis which appear to be without solution. By being present, they can simply change the course of the story or tale. In summary, they save the day as *deus ex machina* to show that even if the protagonists are handsome, intelligent, or powerful, they still need assistance, a guide, and an adviser from time to time, as they are only human beings who are vulnerable and powerless in some circumstances.

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