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Family Plays

TOKOLOSHIE

A ZULU FOLKTALE BY
PIETER SCHOLTZ

TOKOLOSHE

First presented in the Natal University Open-Air Theatre.

A Zulu folktale. By Pieter Scholtz. Cast: 2m., 2w., 2 either gender with doubling, or up to 10 (3m., 2w., 5 either gender). Tokoloshe is a ubiquitous and mischievous water sprite who can become invisible by swallowing a pebble. He is central in most Zulu folklore and legends, as he is in this modern, yet magical, story revolving around a young girl named Thandi. Thandi is the heroine, a young girl who catches a strange and wonderful fish. The fish is in fact the water sprite, Tokoloshe, with the powers of shape-changing. In return for his freedom, Tokoloshe vows to serve Thandi. He saves her from the clutches of a malevolent Go-Go (her grandmother) and an unwelcome suitor. He also aids her search in the city for her long-lost father. The play ends with a magical and unexpected climax—as delightful to Western audiences as it is to Zulu children. Open stage. Costumes may range from uniform jumpsuits or dungarees to imaginative and fanciful costumes. Approximate running time: 90 minutes. Music in book. Code: TM4.

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Tokoloshe

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By

PIETER SCHOLTZ

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311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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ORIGINAL CAST

TOKOLOSHE was first presented in the Natal University Open-Air Theatre on Saturday 24 August, 1991, with the following cast:

THANDI	:	Philippa Savage
VOETSEK	:	Dayle Spavins
GOGO	:	Patti Nokwe
TOKOLOSHE	:	Michael Gritten
LEGUAN	:	Dennis Schauffer
LUCKY MAKHATINI	:	Alfred Nokwe
THANDI'S FATHER	:	Dennis Schauffer
NARRATOR	:	Pieter Scholtz
TWO STAGEHANDS	:	Theresa Norton Penny Pretorius

TOKOLOSHE

Zulu folktales (izinganekwane) form part of the oral traditions of the Zulu people. Folktales were widely used as a means of education and socialization when there were no schools. They constitute a particularly apt source of material for Theatre for Young Audiences, since the concrete images contained in the folktales remain much more deeply impressed in the young minds than theoretical precepts or commands. But more significantly, folktales have been perpetuated and transmitted orally in a traditional format which includes a presenter or performer, traditionally the grandmother, who has the task of educating her grandchildren, and an audience, usually children, but also adults and especially the close members of a family. They transmit simple universal truths; simple maxims containing a proven wisdom, acceptable to members of a society based on traditional social norms.

The two main categories that characterise folktales are also familiar themes in Theatre for Young Audiences. Folktales may be either Fables and Animal Stories (Ezezilwane), in which human society and its actors are represented in the guise of animals, who assume the function of universal human characters, or Trickster Stories (Ezeqili), where the weaknesses of human nature are clearly and cruelly exposed.

The play TOKOLOSHE is based on a Zulu folktale and features probably the most notorious trickster of Zulu folklore, the Tokoloshe. However, some scholars maintain that the tokoloshe is much maligned and that he is really a mild little creature who lives peacefully on lonely river banks and is particularly fond of children. When he can, he will lure these boon companions away from their frog-catching and swimming, and will lead them into the ferny coolness of the bank where he will spread a delicious feast and delight in seeing them fill their round tummies to bursting point. The minute the tokoloshe suspects that he is being watched by an adult, he will pop a magic pebble into his mouth and vanish at once.

It is the concept of this mischievous, fun-loving imp on which the play has been based.

CHARACTERS:

THANDI	:	a young girl
VOETSEK	:	her dog
GOGO	:	her grandmother
TOKOLOSHE	:	a mischievous water-sprite
LEGUAN	:	King of the Tokoloshes
LUCKY MAKHATINI	:	Thandi's suitor
THANDI'S FATHER	:	a role that can be doubled with Leguan

* NARRATOR

* TWO STAGEHANDS

* These may be additional performers, or they may be shared by members of the cast.

PRONUNCIATIONS IN THIS PLAY

ZULU

- Tokoloshe:** Taw-kaw-lawsh (q as in talk, first syllable accented.)
A mischievous river-sprite, said to resemble a tiny, hairy dwarf, who has the ability to become invisible by rubbing or swallowing a magic pebble.
- Mantindane:** Mun-teen-darn-ee (Man as in sun, second syllable accented.)
A small creature, the familiar of a witch.
- Thandi:** Tun-dee (Thgn as in sun, first syllable accented.)
A girl's name, meaning "one who likes, loves".
- Sanibonani:** Sun-born-aan-ee (second and third syllables accented.)
A general greeting used at any time of day or night, to more than one person; (good-morning, good-day, hello, etc.)
- Izigebugu:** Ee-ske-beng-goo (ggbengu as in sketch, third syllable accented.)
Rascals, ruffians, hooligans.
Note: "Skebenga" is a version used by many English-speaking South Africans.
- Gogo:** Gaw-gaw (first syllable accented.)
Grandmother.
- Isiphukuphuku:** Ee-see-poo-koo-poo-koo (phyk as in pull, third and fifth syllables accented.) A stupid or silly person.
- Bra:** Bra (a as in far)
Brother.
- Unkulunkulu:** N-koo-loon-koo-loo (u as in pull, second and fourth syllables accented.)
God; Supreme Being.

- Ubuthakathi:** Oo-boo-tug-aa-tee (third syllable accented).
Witchcraft.
- Phuthu:** Poo-too (u as in pull, first syllable accented).
Stiff porridge made from corn-flower and water.
- Isangoma:** Ee-sung-gaw-mu (Sang and ma as in hut, second and third syllables accented).
Witch-doctor.
- Tsotsi:** Tsaw-tsee (first syllable accented).
Young layabout, young thug.
- Lobola:** Law-baw-lu (la as in hut, second syllable accented).
A Zulu tradition, where the parents of the bride are given cattle, money or goods for their daughter's hand.
- Mphepha:** M-pair-pu (pha as in hut).
A colloquial expression meaning money (paper).
- Tshwala:** Tsh-waa-laa (second syllable accented).
Zulu beer, traditionally served in a calabash.
- Ubuthakathi lokho:** Oo-boo-tug-aa-tee (third syllable accented), law-kaw (first syllable accented).
That is witch-craft.
- Angazi lokho:** Ung-gaa-see (second syllable accented) law-kaw (first syllable accented).
I don't know about that.
- Zitike:** Zee-teek-eh (second syllable accented).
Eat your fill.
- Hhayikhona:** Aai-kaw-nu (na as in hut, second syllable accented).
No!

WORDS AND COLLOQUIAL EXPRESSIONS USED BY ENGLISH-SPEAKING SOUTH AFRICANS

Voetsek:	Foot-sack (first syllable accented). A slang word, frequently used when chasing animals, meaning "get away"; also used as an expletive.
Leguan:	Leg-oo-ahn (or the Zulu "leg-er-vahn"), third syllable accented. A large South African lizard, sometimes measuring more than a metre long.
Ek se:	Airk-sair (e as in where). A colloquial expression (Afrikaans), literally meaning "I say".
Three bottle-tops 'an one pea:	Pavement gamblers place a pea under one of three bottle-tops; the bottle-tops are then deftly moved around, bets are placed, and if the bottle-top with the pea underneath is identified by the onlookers, they win the bet.
Sjambok:	Sham-bok (first syllable accented). Rhinoceros-hide/cow-hide whip.
Veld:	Felt: Open country (Afrikaans).
Bakkies:	Buck-ees (first syllable accented). One-ton open trucks, used by many farmers in South Africa.
Beetles:	V.W. motor cars.
Mini-bus with Maxi-load:	African taxi-drivers use combi-type vehicles for taxis, frequently overloading with 15-20 passengers.
Shanty-town:	Informal squatter settlements.

Spruit:	Sprayt: small stream.
Not a sausage:	Colloquial expression meaning: "nothing".
Prickly-pears:	Plant generally found in arid regions, bearing pear-shaped edible fruit.
Pampoen-kop:	Pum-poon kawp (Pam as in hut, Afrikaans). Pumpkin-head.
Garage attendant:	Gasoline filling-station attendant.

ACT ONE

The cast wear loose-fitting dungarees over their costumes. They enter through the audience.

Shshsh!

Listen . . .

Toko-Toko-Tokoloshe

Hear the stream chuckle over tickling stones

Toko-Toko-Tokoloshe

Hear the stream sighing through slender reeds

Toko-Toko-Tokoloshe

Hear the stream roaring over jagged rocks

Toko-Toko-Tokoloshe!

Be still!

See the sunlight glancing, dancing on the waves

Toko-Toko-Tokoloshe

See strange shapes and shadows in the mud

Toko-Toko-Tokoloshe!

ACTOR ONE: What do you know about the Tokoloshe?

ACTOR TWO: I've heard . . .

He's a funny little mischief man

Who tickles toes in the river sand

When maidens bathe in the heat of the day

Who pricks them 'till they make for land

And that's the truth as I've heard say.

ACTOR ONE: That's him!

ACTOR THREE: I've heard

He's got a monkey face, he's covered with fur

And when he rubs his magic pebble

Then you know he's going to meddle

For he makes himself invisible

With magic quite considerable.

ACTOR ONE: That's him!

ACTOR FOUR: I've heard . . .
He's got eyes like buttons, pointed ears
He's the spirit of all sparkling streams
And visits children in their dreams
And lures them with sweet river food
And teaches tricks and pranks quite rude.

ACTOR ONE: That's him!

ACTOR FIVE: I've heard . . .
He's a mantindane, little man
If you can't discern his crooked shape
Just rub your eyes, and then you can
He hides in shadows of the stream
And dances where the waters gleam.

ACTOR ONE: That's him!

ACTOR SIX: That's him? That's what you've said each time. Which one is he then?

ACTOR ONE: He's all of these . . . and more -

ALL: He's Tokoloshe!

ACTOR ONE: Let's show them. Let's bring Tokoloshe right here.

OTHERS: Yes, let's make Tokoloshe appear!

ACTOR TWO: We'll need a stream.

THREE & FOUR: That's easy. *(They unravel a roll of blue fabric and billow it across the stage.)* A spruit, winding through the hills . . .

ACTOR FIVE: Bubbling over stones, smoothed by its constant caress . . .

ACTOR SIX: Lingering in dark places, where vain trees bend to touch their own reflections in the water.

ALL: That's where the Tokoloshe lives.

ACTOR ONE: And we'll need some reeds.

FIVE & SIX: Here they are. *(They bring on two or three clumps of stylized reeds - not painted flats - sufficient to create a hiding place.)* Tall and slim . . .

ACTOR THREE: Bending with the flood . . .

ACTOR FOUR: But always uncoiling slowly, their sprung stems to meet the new day.

ALL: The rest we leave to your imagination.

ACTOR ONE: This story is about a young girl called Thandi . . .

(Actor Two steps forward. She takes off her dungarees, revealing a short, beaded skirt and a brief bolero-type bodice, with a colourful motif. She has bangles on her wrists and ankles, while her hair is braided in the typical manner.)

ACTOR TWO: Sanibonani. My name is Thandi.

ACTOR ONE: . . . and her dog Voetsek.

(Actor Three takes off his/her dungarees, to reveal a shaggy body-suit of fur. He/she pulls on a dog head-dress and adopts an appropriate body attitude. Two members of the cast, or two stage hands billow the cloth gently throughout the scene.)

ACTOR ONE: And, of course, the Tokoloshe! But you'll have to wait to see him. And that's about all we can tell you, because the rest of the story is going to happen . . . before your

very eyes.

(He withdraws, but remains onstage supervising the cloth, Voetsek barks and runs offstage.)

THANDI: Voetsek! Come back here. Stop chasing dragon-flies and shadows. You'll get your fur all tangled with burs, and then don't expect me to comb them out.

(Voetsek slinks back guiltily and lies beside her, head-between-paws.)

And its no good feeling sorry for yourself. I'm not impressed.

(He whines.)

You're supposed to be my friend, You're supposed to be at my side, guard me, not rush off and leave me at the mercy of snakes and skebengas.

(Voetsek barks and looks fierce. She laughs.)

You're an old rogue, but you're a good friend . . . the only friend I've got.

(She sits. He whines and rests his head in her lap.)

It hasn't been fun has it, living with Gogo, my grandmother.

(Voetsek growls.)

She can't help herself - when she screams and shouts, I just shut my ears and try to concentrate on a happy song.

(Voetsek howls.)

THANDI: I said a happy song, not that howling.

(Voetsek looks offended.)

Sorry, maybe that was a happy song in dog language.

(Voetsek nods. Thandi rises.)

But she won't find us here will she? This is our secret place, by the shady bank of this little stream. Do you remember, Voetsek, when he used to bring me here you were just a little pup, and I was just a little girl. He used to carry me on his back and call me his little mantindane.

(Voetsek barks.)

How can you remember, you were just a little bundle of fur.

(Voetsek barks, offended.)

Alright, I'm not arguing. He used to seat me on this bank and teach me how to catch fish - and when I nodded, or fell asleep, he would get very angry.

(Voetsek growls.)

Yes, and when I caught my first fish, and threw it back because I felt so sorry for it, he called me 'little isiphukuphuku. That was a long time ago - five years ago. We were so happy then.

(She sits and paddles her feet, in the water. Actor One manipulates a butterfly, which is attached to a string at the end of a long pole. It flutters over the stream, and settles on one of the reeds.)

Oh look, what a beautiful butterfly.

(Voetsek barks and runs at the butterfly, splashing through the water to get to it. The butterfly flutters up and away.)

THANDI: Now why did you do that? What harm was that little insect doing - just sharing its beauty with us for one fleeting moment, and you have to spoil it!

(Voetsek slinks back again, ashamed.)

And look at you, dripping wet. Oh, I give up.

(Voetsek shakes himself, showering her with waterdrops.)

Stop it! Oh you big baboon, you've soaked me!

(He tries to rub against her.)

Oh no, keep away! Don't you dare come near me 'till you've dried off.

(He lies a little way off watching her dolefully. She paddles her feet again. A pause.)

And then ma-ma died. I didn't really understand what had happened. First, they told me I was going to have a little brother. And ma-ma became bigger and bigger. And then one day - I was playing outside the hut - father picked me up, with tears streaming down his face. He didn't say a word. He brought me here, and we sat here silently until the shadows crept towards the dark. Then he said, "Your mama and your little bra have been called by Unkulunkulu and we will never see them again." And that was all.

(Voetsek whines and wriggles towards her. She doesn't notice as he puts his head in her lap. She strokes him distractedly.)

THANDI: And then he left for the city, five years ago, and we've never seen him since.

(The butterfly flutters back again. Voetsek tenses, then looks at her.)

No!

(It flutters off.)

That's a good dog. *(She jumps up.)* And now, enough of sadness. This is our special place, a happy place. What shall we do?

(Voetsek jumps up, barking.)

I know! Let's catch some fish for supper. How would you like that? Better than phuthu and gravy?

(Voetsek barks.)

Alright, where's the fishing line?

(Voetsek barks and races behind the reeds. He reappears seconds later with the line in his mouth.)

Good boy, you remembered where we hid it. *(She takes it.)* And the bottle of worms?

(He races off again, but this time in the wrong direction.)

No silly, here it is. *(She finds the bottle behind another clump of reeds.)* Ma-ma used to say . . . "only boys catch fish and go hunting with their father, she should be stamping meal or helping me sort the beads," and he used to smile and wink at me. *(She has been attaching the worm to the wire hook.)* Oooh, nasty little wriggly things! I don't know why the fish like them so much do you?

(Voetsek growls.)

THANDI: Now you have to lie still, and don't you dare bark when you see one nibbling at the bait, or you'll have nothing for supper, see?

(Voetsek whines. They have positioned themselves upstage of the stream. The cloth is now being billowed gently at about knee height. As the fish enters the cloth should be raised to about waist height, to give the fish scope to move.)

Now cross your fingers, I mean your paws . . .

(He does.)

and let's hope for a nice, fat, greedy fish, who can't resist my worm - ugh!

(She drops the line, so that it hangs downstage of the cloth. Voetsek gives a little bark.)

Shshsh! Behave! *(A pause)* Do you know what song I sing to myself when Gogo screams and shouts?

(Voetsek places a paw to his mouth.)

Oh I'll sing it softly, it won't frighten the fish away. Listen.

(Voetsek cocks his ear. She sings softly.)

Rest your feet by the warm fire
My father
While I bring you food and drink
Look into the glowing coals
My father
And tell me that tomorrow
Will bring sunlight and laughter

THANDI: For you have returned, you are home
My father.

(As she sings, the fish swims languorously in under the billowing stream. It is important that this moment should create surprise and expectation for the audience, so the actor who plays the fish - alias the tokoloshe - should change out of his dungarees offstage. Voetsek tenses as he sees the fish, then is quiveringly erect. Thandi breaks off her song.)

What is it? Oh . . . look at that strange fish! What is it?
I've never seen such unusual colours.

(The fish is indeed unusual. It's colours and design should be stylized, not realistic, perhaps based on a Zulu beaded motif. The actor should wear a large fish head-dress and lie on a low trolley, propelling himself with his arms. The costume and head-dress should be easily removed so that the transformation into the Tokoloshe can be made swiftly. Voetsek takes a tentative step forward.)

No! Stay just where you are!

(He freezes.)

Oh I can't bear to catch such a strange and wonderful
fish, I'm going to pull out the line.

(But it is too late. The fish seeing the appetizing morsel, swallows it, and is well-and-truly hooked.)

Oh no, it's too late. Oh look how its wriggling.

(Voetsek barks excitedly. The cloth is lowered and the fish wriggles onto it.)

Stop it! Stop making such a noise!

(He stops.)

THANDI: Sorry strange fish, I tried to draw out my line but it was too late.

FISH: Let me go!

THANDI: Who said that?

FISH: You're cruel and heartless to use a plump, juicy worm as bait. You knew I couldn't resist it.

THANDI: Voetsek am I dreaming? Did you hear somebody speak?

(Voetsek growls.)

FISH: Set me free at once.

THANDI: I did hear somebody speak, but there's nobody here.

(Voetsek growls.)

FISH: Just because I'm a fish, it doesn't mean I'm nobody.

THANDI: A fish . . . it can't be. Somebody's playing a joke.

FISH: It's no joke I can assure you. How would you like to be at the end of a hook, with no future except a hot pot?

THANDI: It is the fish speaking, it must be.

(Voetsek barks.)

FISH: Oh do tell him to stop, it's getting on my gills! And it shows a lack of respect.

THANDI: Be quiet Voetsek.