

**SOME ASPECTS OF N.S.PULENG'S  
POETRY**

by

**SEKGO THE NGWATO CEDRIC MOKGOATŠANA**

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**SUPERVISOR: Prof S.M. Serudu**

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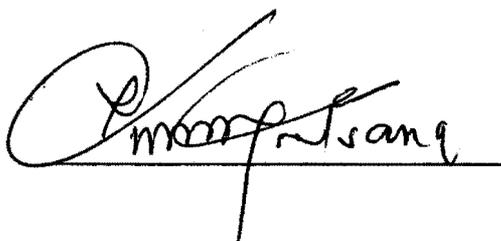
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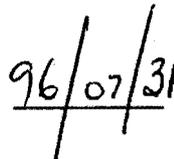
## DECLARATION

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“I declare that **SOME ASPECTS OF N.S.PULENG’S POETRY** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.”

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mokgoatšana', written over a horizontal line.

(MR SNC MOKGOATŠANA)

A handwritten date '96/07/31' written in black ink, with each part of the date separated by a vertical line.

DATE

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 Phiri ya feta mamane a timela,  
 Ye ba rego ga e kakole e a tšea,  
 E ja *mahura* a kgomo tšabo yona.

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*Re kopantšwe ke Modimo. Tsela ye e sa le ye*

*telele.*

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Above all, *ditumišo le dithapelo a di ye go Bakgalaka le Magopo go iša go*

*Mmopi!* Let peace reign supreme!

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to THREE people:

- (a) My uncle Morwa 'a Mashilo 'a Mokabane, Jim Dihlokwe Mamakoko who has been my model at an early stage, and later became my guardian for secondary education. *O e hlabane Mphela!*
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## SUMMARY

The study vacillates between the text, the reader and the author. Examining biography and such socio-cultural factors as marriage and cosmology, the reader is equipped with sufficient background which illuminates the ideology behind the text.

The cosmological conceptions of the Northern Sotho shed some light on the poet's views on the child's first cry. These assumptions lay a foundation for the religious views expressed in his texts. The contradictions between African religion and Christianity help us comprehend the frustrations of secular and religious lives in our country. These also serve as linchpins towards understanding the pursuit of religious pluralism.

The concept 'intertextuality' is explored. Cases of *intratextuality* and *intertextuality* which dispute the absolutist view in meaning composition highlight the interrelatedness of texts and how each relationship impacts on meaning.

**KEY WORDS:**

Influence, intertextuality, intratextuality, textual identities, African  
Traditional religion, motherhood/womanhood, Northern Sotho  
mythology/cosmology, socio-cultural influence.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

### 1.1 AIM

Some aspects of N.S.Puleng's poetry is a study that looks into Samuel Puleng Nkomo's (the author's real name) poetic works with a view to unfold the essential background that informs his writing. It is significant to cast an eye on such conditions that dictate the *text* in Puleng's works. Because of the varied nature of such conditions, this study cannot claim to be a holy cow in the interpretation of Puleng's poetry, but shall attempt to prove with textual detail that conditions outside the text play a major role in the analysis and understanding of literature.

This study attempts to prove that the field of literature cannot be divorced from politics. Literature as an ideological apparatus will have a particular set of beliefs and convictions that it disseminates. The value system that a particular literary form advocates is closely tied to the social and political class for which the artist purports to reach.

African writing in South Africa concerned itself with the idiosyncrasies and the dehumanising effects of *apartheid*, most particularly to the African masses. This writing has been an attempt of the "few" who could see through

the mirror, the horrendous nature of *apartheid*, and to arouse and awaken their people from those slumbers of the time, into action that would culminate in the legacy of the *apartheid* regime.

Those in power slam such writing as politics and propaganda. The question is, whose politics is it? It is an undeniable fact that the poet deals with political issues as much as the ruling dynasty deals with politics from a different angle.

Those in power are bent to end and discourage through legislation any criticism levelled against them so that the *status quo* is maintained. Dominance is achieved through government institutions such as education, art, religion, legislation, government notices and gazettes. All these state institutions are accountable to the state.

On the contrary, the dominated class explodes into various shades of protest to deny the recurrence and escalation of the dominant order. In view of these situations, one wonders whether there is any field of literature which can be insulated from politics because even escapist literature is in a way trudging on a 'safe' political platform for fear of being implicated as 'political'.

It is in the light of these factors that the researcher chooses to use **Some aspects of N.S. Puleng's poetry** to show how the poet, N.S.Puleng, resorts to this mode to incite his fellow Africans into action to correct the injustices and imbalances in this country.

The field of modern Northern Sotho poetry is still a less traversed area as compared to other fields of literature. There are quite abundant works published by old and young poets which lie fallow and some rust in the publishing houses without being read by the general public. Perhaps this is because of the high level of illiteracy and the fact that reading is limited to school readers. The general public has not developed an incentive to use libraries and to read for pleasure. This propensity affects the writers adversely as their popularity to the South African populace depends solely on the prescriptions done by the language boards and universities.

N.S.Puleng is one of those poets who reflect on the socio-political nature of the South African life. His poetry does not only mirror the horrors and evil nature of colonisation, but transcends the limits of protest against imperialism and goes further to lash at social improprieties without regard to the problem of race and class.

A poet of his calibre who has produced a master piece such as *Seipone sa madimabe* (1981) which has won him the E.M.Ramaila award has not been afforded chance to be studied by the public. The book was once recommended for prescription by the Northern Sotho Language Board for the standard eight classes, unfortunately the book never saw the classroom again. It appears that prescription occurred on the mercy of the Department of Education and Training, particularly the division that was concerned with publications. Another book which was withdrawn after the Board's recommendation is *Ihlo la moreti* (1981) by H.M.L. Lentsoane. The investigator holds that an intensive research has to be conducted on the activities of the defunct Northern Sotho Language Board and its connection with the Education and

Training Division that dealt with prescriptions. There is a strong feeling that there had been an “invisible hand” which had a final say in terms of prescription. It is probably this “hand” which knew which book was suitable for whichever standard irrespective of the Board’s recommendation.

Realising that Puleng is one of the prolific and vociferous writers who do not receive much attention for study, the writer decided to explore in **Some aspects of N.S. Puleng poetry** the vein of protest and ideology behind his protest.

Only a few articles are available that are based on the works of N.S.Puleng. A Bachelor of Arts (Honours) article was done by M.R.Mamabolo (1991) which looks into the religious theme in *Seipone sa madimabe*. Because of its limited nature, it does not cover a wide scope to do justice on the poet, N.S.Puleng. It should however be noted that this work lays a solid foundation on the study of Puleng's view on religion. It uncovers that Puleng borrows freely from both the African and Christian religions.

Kgoana (1991) studies only one poem, namely, **Mohu O.K.Matsepe**. Although the above study serves as a forerunner in the study of elegiac poetry in Northern Sotho, it fails to do justice to the wealth produced by Puleng because it is limited to only one poem. Another study conducted by

Milubi (1988) looks into the vein of protest in **Bohwa bja ka**. Mogale (1993) looks into Mamogobo's influence on Puleng. He uncovers that Puleng

like Mamogobo adopts a multiple of names for the Almighty God. Mogale also shows beyond doubt that Mamogobo has had an influence on other poets like S.N.Tseke and H.M.L. Lentsoane.

On the whole none of these scholars has devoted his/her attention on the works of Puleng. This study thus makes a cross-examination of the works to uncover the influences that are discernible in Puleng's works and the ideology couched in his poetry.

## **1.2 THE LIFE AND WORKS OF N.S PULENG**

### **1.2.1 SAMUEL PULENG NKOMO'S BIOGRAPHY**

N.S.Puleng as he is known by his audience, was born on 10 January 1958 in the "Blacks only" township of Bengweni just outside the then "White only" town of Randfontein. He is the only son of the late Reverend Paul William Bismarck Nkomo who is said to come from the then Rhodesia; now known after independence as Zimbabwe, and came to South Africa as a missionary. Although this church leader of the Dutch Reformed Church has made a remarkable influence on his son's future life, he unfortunately did not live to see him grow to his teens as he died as early as 1965. The death of the Father intensified the maternal bond between Puleng and his mother, Sarah "Peggy" Priscilla Mmapoo who had to fend for her only son and daughter, Mantsho who at present resides in Seshego - a township adjacent to Pietersburg. The Mother, a qualified general nurse and midwife, worked until retirement at the

Groothoek Hospital. The mother's attachment to Groothoek Hospital has strongly inspired the up and coming Puleng to compose poems on some of his mother's activities in the hospital as well as those that are attached to the hospital as it can be seen from the poem **Sekutupu** (Serudu 1989a).

After the death of Reverend Nkomo, the family moved to Section Six in Zebediela. In his own words he confirms:

Faseng la Borwa  
Mo ke bonego mahlaseditsatši,  
Mo ke bonego bagwera,  
Mo ke bego ke eja tša matsaka,  
Ke enwa ke khora -  
Tate a hwetša pitšo  
Gobane e be e le Morutantšu  
La fihla lebaka  
Ra katologa Motsemollakoma,  
Ra kgaogana le mekgolokwane,  
Mekgolokwane ya Motsegauta  
Ra leba faseng la dinamune,  
Fase la Matebele Makonkwane  
'Section Six'!- (Puleng 1991:41)

(In the South where I was born,  
Where I made friends,  
Where I ate to surfeit,

Where I drank and ate to my satisfaction,  
My father had a call -  
Because he was a preacher.  
Time came that  
We should leave the din of the city,  
Divorced ourselves from the dins of the city,  
Ululations of the gold city,  
And headed for the Orange estates -  
The land of the Matebele Makonkwane  
'Section Six' -)

From the preceding poem, it appears his father died when they arrived in Zebediela. In **Bolwetši bja letšofalela Puleng** (1991:42) remarks:

Anthe e be e le leeto,  
Leeto mafelelo la rena le tatane:  
Ba rile ba hloka kgomo Ditlou,  
Thamaga lešo Thamaga lešo le setšego Limpopo  
Ya ba hlabelokgauswi,  
Ra tšhiphelwa, Mmamorategi le Koko  
Motantshi,  
Ba nkhomotša le kgaetšedi Mantsho.

(It was a journey  
The last journey with my father,  
When the Matebele had no beast to slaughter,

My father who crossed the Limpopo  
Became their immediate sacrifice,  
This saddened us, my beloved mother and  
grandmother Motantshi,  
Comforted me and my sister Mantsho).

Reading this extract, one gains an impression that Puleng's father was killed by the Matebele of Zebediela after his arrival there when he came to do missionary work. In a personal interview (1993) with him, he confirms that he strongly believes that his father like other priests who came to Section Six was bewitched. This belief is heightened by many mysterious incidents which occurred to his father and the words of an elderly man who was generally feared for his cleverness and subtle use of herbs. The Orange estates had a saying; "*baruti ba mo ba ka se dule*" (Personal communication, Puleng 1993) which implied that the priests of the area would not stay long. The mysterious death of his father was believed to have been concocted by the same old man whose assertions seemed to become true.

Life under the orange estates in Zebediela made a remarkable influence on the young Puleng who had just resumed his primary education at Lehlasedi. It is here where he observed the harsh treatment of Blacks by their white employers and the attitude of white ministers who could hardly visit other homes except his father's on the orange estate.

In 1970 he moved to Seshego to finish up his primary education at Kgobokanang Primary School, where he stayed with his only sister, Mantsho. He proceeded to Hwiti Territorial School where he did Forms I-IV.

It was while at Hwiti that he first met Phatudi Sekhukhune who by then was a senior student who inspired him through debates to love the niceties of language particularly Northern Sotho. Puleng's developing interest in Northern Sotho and participation improved him so remarkably that he won the National Road Safety Speech Competition in 1977; the prize that was previously held by Phatudi Sekhukhune. In a personal interview (Puleng 1993) with him, Puleng confirms that Phatudi Sekhukhune has largely inspired him to write and he goes to an extent of calling him his literary mentor. Thanking the efforts of Phatudi Sekhukhune in the preface of *Ditlalemeso* (1980) Puleng writes:

Ga ke lebale ditlhohleletšo le mafolofolo tšeo o  
mphilego gammogo le kgotlelelo tseleng ya  
bongwadi. Mafoko le maele mmogo le maano  
tšeo o ntogišitšego, lehono ke di hlagiša ka gare  
ga pukwana yekhwi ya ka ya leitšibolo.

(I cannot forget the courage and inspiration as well as perseverance in the process of writing that you enthused in me. Today I reveal in this book the words of wisdom that you instilled in me).

He also identifies with teachers whose keen interest was Northern Sotho - Simon R. Mamabolo and A.M.Ramonyai. In the preface of *Kgaa kgati tša khwiti ya noka yešo* (1983a) Puleng describes the latter as:

. . . monna tsoko yoo a kwešišago mathimethime  
le mararankodi a polelo . . . a kgalema bošae  
di bja polelo ge a be a sa ruta Hwiti mo go ilego  
gwa hloga dikala tša bangwadi.

(a certain man who understands the aesthetics  
and complexities of language... who treated the  
poor command of language with contempt  
while teaching at Hwiti, where the incentive was  
sown for aspirant writers).

It is no wonder then that such a man who showed the love and understanding of language should not be admired by young people who also loved their language like Puleng, more so that Ramonyai was very strict on the correct and appropriate use of language.

Among his friends who know him better, Solly Mabulana at present resides in the trouble-torn and violence-ridden Thembisa at the moment of writing this dissertation, features prominently in his poetry.

Owing to disruptions at Hwiti High school, Puleng moved to Boleu High school in Tafelkop where he completed his matric in 1978. After a year's break from schooling, Puleng proceeded to Mokopane Training College at present known as Mokopane College of Education where he studied for the Primary Teachers' Certificate (PTC) in the period 1980-81. It was here that Puleng experimented in writing with friends like H.J. Thema. The two reflect common socio-political themes in their poetry.

After a considerable period of teaching, Puleng enrolled with the University of the North to complete a BA degree and Higher Education Diploma (Postgraduate). In 1994 he read for the Honours BA degree with the University of Pretoria. At the time of finalising this research he was doing a preliminary reading for MA studies in narratology (youth novel).

Puleng admits that his mother has been a source of inspiration to him, this was a result of the love she showed him in times of dire need and desperation. The Mother figure which receives much attention in Puleng's works will be spotlighted in the body of the text. It could be seen that Puleng did not merely paint the image of an African woman, but a mother who suffered hardships during delivery, and had to venture and lead children through tempests into the vista of years in preparation for the hard and rigorous challenges of life. This umbilical connection between the two is hard to separate.

If one wants the history and genealogy of the Nkomo family, Puleng's poetical works bear enough testimony. It would not be difficult to know

people such as Mantsho, Motantshi, the Molele where his mother descends, and many more. On the basis of this, one may say without doubt that Puleng is not only a poet, but an historian, this fact is discernible in most poems; for an example; **Phumola megokgo ya bona** (Puleng 1981:1).

### 1.2.2 LITERARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Puleng does not only have the credit as poet, but also writes dramas for the radio and closet drama. He has penned *Thellenyane Batlabolela* (1990), a drama which also prompts one to believe that it is an autobiography. In the interview he admitted that the characters are people he knows, has lived and worked with. He merely invented new names to "old friends". Like Puleng, Thellenyane has a love and knowledge for choral music. The break that Thellenyane had before finishing matric is tantamount to the break Puleng had from Hwiti to Boleu.

He has a verse drama in the pipe line which he hopes to finish in time. Still in the field of drama, Puleng has produced the two single dramas, namely, *Seboko se tsene nyobeng* and *Mantšu a ke a bomang?* which has won him the Astera Prize in 1984. In 1989 he was a nominee for the Idem award for his radio serial *Go thaila mathaithai mo!*

At the time of preparing this study, he had just released his new anthology of radio serials published by de Jager Haum under the title *Le diphiri di tla utologa*(1994). This collection contains his previous works:

- (a) *Inama, inama se go tshele*
- (b) *Le diphiri di tla utologa*
- (c) *Roko e ntsho*
- (d) *Le badimo ba tla bolela*
- (e) *Ke nna 'A' le 'O'*

and the title as it can be seen is taken from one of the earlier works contained, that is, *Le diphiri di tla utologa* (1994). These serials have been broadcast already in Radio Lebowa before they were anthologised. Early in 1996, his first one act play *A leka Kaleka Maleka* (translated: **He tried Kaleka Maleka**) received a first prize and became an over-all winner in the De Jager Haum 1994/95 Literary competition for the category: Northern Sotho One Act Plays.

Puleng has not only shown his skill in writing drama, but explored his talents in composing choral music which is also sung with pleasure by music lovers, cf. Puleng (1980:22)

Ka hlama koša wa ntlhathollela yona,  
 Mokone wa ntšhidikgolo Masenya kgopana  
 A tla a e kgakola sentsokela tema ya wela  
 Ka tšhoga ge ke ekwa melodi ya menotobidi

Ge bana ba Hwiti ba e gobela  
Go thwe e hlamilwe ke Puleng.

(I composed a song that you arranged for me,  
The squat high-browed Mokone, Masenya  
Came to test it several times with success  
I was dumb-stricken by the sweet melody  
Sung to tune by Hwiti students  
Saying it has been composed by Puleng).

This extract bears testimony to the fact that he also composes musical pieces. Perhaps this is because of the great love of choral music particularly pieces composed by Mohapeloa that he also puts his ideas into musical notation. In this field he has been influenced specifically by Mr G. Tlaka who is at present the principal of Hwiti High school.

His earlier attempts at writing poetry did not bear sufficient fruit because he seemed emulating other writers and thus lacked originality. Although a score of his works was rejected, this did not lower his morale and incentive to carry on writing. He gathered some of the poems which were considered of good quality in the rejected manuscripts and compiled the volume *Kgaa kgati tša khwiti ya noka yešo* (1983a) which is actually his first book although it reached the public before its actual successive work *Ditlalemeso* (1980). His third volume of poetry *Seipone sa madimabe* (1981) won him the E.M. Ramaila Prize in 1985. In 1983 he produced one of his masterpieces *Malopo a boreti* (1983b) which was followed by *Sefahlego sa pelo ya ka* (1991).

Some of his poems appear in M.S. Serudu's collections *Matšwela* (1989a) and *Sešegotheto* (1989b). He is also involved in a joint authorship with H.M.L. Lentsoane, M.J. Mojalefa and J.R. Maibelo in the series *Direti tše nne: Books 1 - 4*. At the time of writing this study he was involved in another co-authorship enterprise with a number of authors to produce the book *Diphororo tša boreti* edited by I.S. Masola. He is busy attempting a youth novel which he hopes to finish before long.

Puleng has made an invaluable contribution to the corpus of Northern Sotho literature so much that he merits attention for research as an aspirant and promising writer of our times.

### **1.3 SOME LITERARY APPROACHES RELEVANT IN THIS STUDY**

The Formalist view that the text and the author are two mutual opposites fails to realise that art bears the stamp of its producer, and that ideological concerns of particular epochs cannot escape the hand of the artist. Eliminating the author from his work tends to regard literature as a celestial mystery that should only be marvelled in a vacuum.

It is because of the researcher's strong conviction that literature is closely bound with the society it serves, as well as the life and times of the author, that in this study a *mélange* of approaches is chosen. First, the **historical-biographical** and **marxist approaches**, on which we shall heavily lean in our discussion of Puleng's works. Although we choose to apply these

approaches, we are in no way going to abstain from borrowing freely from other literary theories. We shall always allow literature to flow spontaneously to accommodate theoretical concerns than force it to meet theoretical dogma.

The study will not undermine the interdependence which exists between the author, the literary text and the reader. Some tenets of the historical-biographical approach as well as those of Marxism are applied in the study as elements of the contexts in which the literary work has been produced. Interviews will be conducted to provide a basis for the historical context of some of the poems. These interviews will focus on only salient details which will illuminate the text with a view to discover new insights into the poetry under discussion.

In some cases, it shall be the nature of the text which shall dictate the analysis in the present study. No attempt will be made to overaccentuate the text at the expense of the reader and context. As far as possible, the socio-cultural context which serves as the basis for the production of the text and its meaning shall be taken into account when the text is interpreted.

The third element to receive attention is the reader. Throughout the study, the reader's responses shall be reflected as objectively as possible. It cannot be denied that these responses are linked to the other contextual terrains which have a bearing in the production of meaning of the text. The use of Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality does not only provide a platform for the reader's reception aesthetics, but assists the reader to establish textual

relations which inform each text. While busy with the textual data, the reader finds an opportunity to travel between the texts and establish how each of these texts composes meaning on its own, and for the others. In the meantime, a cursory look should be cast on some of those theories from which we shall largely borrow.

### 1.3.1. HISTORICAL-BIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH

The historical-biographical approach seeks to find factors outside the text which have contributed to personal persuasion; and yields knowledge of more general interest in terms of humanity's cultural strivings and heritage. This approach is the brainchild of the French critic H.A.Taine who elaborated its tenets in his philosophical dictum: *race; milieu; et moment*, as contained in his *History of English Literature*. In terms of this approach, a literary work is seen as a reflection of its author's life and times, or the life and characters in the work (Guerin, *et al*, 1979:25). Critical analysis begins with an assessment of 'extrinsic factors' such as the times, audience and occasion, a biography of the communicator, and a description and analysis of the effects of speech. The artistic piece is studied in the full context in which it is borne. The ideological, intellectual, scientific, economic, socio-political, and artistic conventions of the historical epoch in which the piece of art was ushered should receive attention if the full meaning of the work is to be realised. In support of this assertion, Guerin, *et al* (1979:27) cite R.D. Altick who proclaims that almost every literary work is attended to by a host of outside circumstances which once we expose and explore them, suffuse it with additional meaning. In the same vein, Guerin *et al.* (1979:31) add that:

. . . any knowledge or insight (with special reference to scholarly disciplines like history, philosophy, theology, sociology, art and music) that can help to explain or clarify a literary work ought to be given the fullest possible chance to do so.

The historical-biographical approach examines literature as a dialectical problem. It takes its basic ground from a set of relationships between the artist and the world surrounding him/her. It is unfortunate that opponents of this approach slam it as a deterministic approach like *positivism*.

It has to be pointed out emphatically that the relationship between the world and humanity is not a mechanical process of causal relations which can be predicted to yield such mathematical relations as  $a + c = x$  in the natural sciences where  $x$  is always defined in terms of  $a$  and  $c$ . The independence of  $x$  from the two other variables is questionable. Such a misconception will denigrate human volition into the behaviourist postulates of stimulus response and positivism.

The dialectical relation between humanity and the world implies an act of influencing and being influenced. In the interaction, people are shaped by the conditions in which they find themselves, while they in turn influence one another. The spirit of the time as well as a set of ideological conventions operant at the time will make its mark on the life of the artist and his/her

works. It is noteworthy that people do not choose to be influenced, but are spontaneously affected by various relationships.

### 1.3.2. MARXIST APPROACH TO LITERATURE

The tenets of Marxist philosophy are not easy to summarise because this field keeps on being developed from time to time. Two well known statements by Marx serve as a point of departure to understand the maxims of a Marxist approach:

- Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways, the point is to *change* it, and
- It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines that consciousness.

To Marx materialist conception of history stems from the simple realisation that 'life involves, before everything else, eating and drinking, habitation and clothing' (Ryan & Van Zyl 1982: 128). In laying down the foundation of *historical materialism* he went on to proclaim that it is the base (root) that becomes the ultimate determinant of all societies and their history. The *base* in itself is the production of the means to satisfy the needs outlined above, which to him is the production of material life itself.

The mode of production of any society in the world always involves two sets of relationships; and Ryan and Van Zyl (1982:129) opine that they are firstly between human beings and nature where nature provides the raw material on which people labour and, secondly, social relationships between people since production is inherently a socially co-ordinated process.

The relationship between humanity and the world entails what Marx regards as the forces of production while on the other hand the relations of production will refer to the nature of social relationships in the event of production and maintenance of life for existence.

## **BASE AND SUPERSTRUCTURE**

The contradiction between the base and the superstructure forms the matrix on which Marx bases his argument of understanding and interpreting social development. Marx outlines his base-superstructure polarization as follows:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relationships that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a

legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness. (Eagleton 1976:4)

In terms of this view, the base constitutes not only the socio-economic basis that determines the nature of relationships between those who produce the wealth by selling their labour and those who make profit by exploiting the have-nots, but further entails a relation of dominance, subordination and exploitation by those who own capital.

Those in power use state controlled apparatus such as literature, religion, art, education, the legal system and all material and power at their disposal to justify their dominance. All these 'state apparatus' amount to what Marx calls the *superstructure*. The superstructure develops from the base not through a mechanical process of causal relations, but a complex relation that cannot be arrived at by mere functional relation. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* Marx gives at least one meaning of the concept superstructure which goes as follows:

Upon the several forms of property, upon the social conditions of existence, a whole superstructure is reared of various and peculiarly shaped feelings (*empfindungen*), illusions, habits of thought and conceptions of life. The whole class produces and shapes these out of its material foundation and out of the corresponding social conditions. The individual unit to whom they flow through to tradition and education may fancy that they constitute the true reasons for and the premises of his conduct. (Williams 1977:76)

From the foregoing assertion, it can be inferred that the superstructure refers to the whole ideology of a particular class; particularly the ruling dynasty. This ideology constitutes the way in which the class sees itself in the world in relation to the other group(s); and embodies a form of class consciousness.

Although Carling (Levi 1991:114) uses superstructure to denote only the legal and political relations which are necessary to stabilise relations of production, the term includes everything that the ruling class employs at its disposal to justify the *status quo*.

In a capitalist state like The "Old" Republic of South Africa, the state used legislation to justify social, political and economic imbalances based on racism. The Publications Control Board largely served the interests of the ruling dynasty and any attempt to correct these imbalances was declared

propagandistic, subversive and undesirable, and such a work and its artist would be banned.

The Dutch Reformed Church with its Calvinistic doctrines has pioneered and championed the growth and development of *apartheid* in South Africa. The doctrine of the church leans on the premise of a chosen people with a promised land. This later developed into a strong sense of Boer supremacy which is influenced largely by Hitler's principle of a *herrenvolk* - a master race. This notion was so strongly held amongst the Afrikaners that equality with Africans all along was slammed, and racial inequalities were considered a right sanctioned by the Bible. Stoker accounts for this situation in this way:

God willed the diversity of Peoples. Thus far He has preserved the identity of our People. Such preservation was not for naught, for God allows nothing to happen for naught. He might have allowed our People to be bastardized with the native tribes as happened with other Europeans. He did not allow it. He might have allowed us to be anglicized, like for an example, the Dutch in America . . . He did not allow that either. He maintained the identity of our People, He has a future task for us, a calling laid away.  
(Moodie 1975:67)

In line with Stoker's South African neo-Calvinism, the racial diversities are products of God's will, and the 'People of God'; the Afrikaners - are destined not to be bastardised - hence they cling to the *apartheid* which justifies separate development through a well devised education policy - Christian National Education (CNE).

At present, the ultra rightwingers including the AWB and the Boere Beweging Party cling to this ideology and refuse to join the democratic forces in South Africa to bring about a new political dispensation and choose to stand aloof from the election process because it would mean a serious menace to their idea of the People's state (*volkstaat*).

It is noteworthy that this Afrikaner ideology is challenged with resistance by the other racial groups that are discriminated against and deprived of political power. Various forms including literature are used to challenge the system. It is this conflict which arises as a result of the need to be empowered that forms the matrix of the Marxist criticism as it shall be used in this study.

#### **1.4 SCOPE AND CHAPTER DIVISIONS**

This study is a cross-examination of the poetic works of N.S.Puleng. Although assertions are made about his dramatic texts, they however, do not receive attention in this study. The poetic texts which are on the spotlight are:

- *Ditlalemeso* (1980)
- *Seipone sa madimabe* (1981)
- *Kgaa kgati ya khwiti ya noka yešo* (1983a)
- *Malopo a boreti* (1983b)
- *Sefahlego sa pelo ya ka* (1991)
- Untitled manuscript (unpublished)
- *Matswela* (Serudu 1989a)

Although other poets are largely alluded to, the main focus of this study is to illuminate Puleng's poetic texts in line with other texts, be it socio-cultural or other poets.

The first chapter states the aim and approaches in this paper. It also focuses on the biographical data of the poet; Samuel Puleng Nkomo, concentrating on the formative influences particularly the mother's on his upbringing. The

chapter further sketches the contributions he has made on the repertoire of Northern Sotho literature.

Chapter II concentrates on the socio-cultural perspective of Puleng's poetry. Here the study concentrates on: the Mother figure and the *first cry* as they are portrayed in the poetic works, the theme of coyness, the institution of marriage and the images of women within the institution.

Chapter III studies religion from an Africanist view. Factors to receive attention in this chapter include: the creation myth and the *first cry motif* and how these inform Puleng's poetry. The role of ancestor propitiation and prayers are discussed.

Chapter IV examines the *intertextual readings* from the Bible and hymns, and further elucidates how these readings enhance or impede meaning in the texts under discussion.

The last chapter summarises the findings of the study, and makes recommendations for further study.

# **CHAPTER 2**

## **THE SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE**

### **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter, it will be shown as far as possible how the close affinity between the poet and his mother is reflected in his works. The greatest influence from the mother is evinced in the way the poet reflects on the love his mother gave him and his view on marriage. Another striking feature that will be indicated in this chapter is the fact that Puleng uses his personal experiences and those of his sister as the starting point in his writing.

In most cases, it will be evident that not only the family circle has impacted on Puleng's writing, but also the cultural setting in which he has been reared. His views on marriage and problems surrounding the institution of marriage are not only his, but have also been sharpened by his religious background, the family and the cultural context in which he finds himself. Following from this, the study will touch on the images of women within the institution of marriage.

Being immersed in the culture of the Northern Sotho speaking people, the poet displays a vast knowledge of their folklore. Lastly, the theme of coyness will be spotlighted.

## **2.2 THE MOTHER FIGURE**

Puleng's depiction and portrayal of the Mother figure in his poetry does not come as a great surprise if it has to be considered that his general upbringing was in the hands of the mother. An analysis of his poetry that loses sight of this fact will be doomed to failure, and will fail to realise the close affinity between the poet and his mother, and that this influences his writing.

A large section of his poetry is dedicated to his mother. The poems which depict the Mother figure have praise as their central theme. The mother is praised for the courage, love and perseverance she has shown in the upbringing of her children. This is so because she had to fend for her children alone after the sudden death of the Right Reverend Paul Bismarck Nkomo in 1965. The assertions below delineate the laudatory tone of the poet:

Ke go rweša dīala  
Wena mma pelegiši  
Ya dikokoto le matšhalaka,  
O tseba botho le leago  
Mogwera wa baloki,

Moagiši wa bakgopo  
Peu ya gago ke bothakga  
Le botse gammogo le lerato.  
Lešoko la gago  
Ke le bone bonnyaneng  
Ka kgodišo le phepo.  
(Puleng1980:26)

(I honour you,  
You, Mother who helps deliver  
Heroes and cowards,  
You understand kindness and goodwill,  
Friend of the virtuous,  
Counsellor to the wayward,  
You sow goodness and love.  
Your compassion was demonstrated in my early  
years of life  
By supporting my growth).

The preceding quotation identifies motherhood with love, understanding, kindness, proper care and counselling.

The same ideas are reinforced in **Malebo go mma montswadi** (Puleng 1981:22-23) where the poet paints a very horrendous picture of life in the first stanza:

Fase le ge le ahlame,  
Le ahlametše nna  
Gobane o mpelege go lona  
*Le dutše le ahlame.* [My emphasis]

(Even though the world is agape  
Opening its mouth for me,  
Because you gave me birth on it,  
While it was agape)

The image of the agape world creates a mental picture of a beast-like creature that is ready to swallow its prey. In this image the world seems ready to prey on the speaker who is helpless and bound to face his death as outlined in the line *lebitla lona ke a le bona* (I however see the grave). The image of the monster is heightened by that of the grave. A grave is not merely a bed for the dead, but a place associated with ghosts. It is perhaps this dreadful image that depicts the world as unfriendly and a difficult place to make a better living in unless one finds support from fellow human beings. Fortunately, the poet has his mother who serves as an anchor that gives an unswerving support in his life. This prompts him to say:

Tebogo ya ka ya lerato ke sephiri seo se  
tebilego,  
Ka molomo wa maušwaušwane ke šitwa go se  
hlatholla.  
Gobane šoko lago go nna ke thakangwaga ya

nnete;

Le lehono ke sa kgotsa gore ke a makala ke  
tlabegile. (Op cit.)

(My thanks to being loved are a deep-seated  
conundrum

Which my ordinary mouth cannot unravel with  
ease.

For your compassion to me is a real blessing

Which continues puzzling me each day of my  
life.)

Motherhood is conveyed to the reader as the receptacle of love, care and  
compassion. These qualities are reiterated in **Mma** (Serudu 1989:13) in the  
lines:

O na le lerato

O na le šedi,

O na le botho.

(You have love

You have care

You have kindness)

Reading through Puleng's literary works, one finds that these qualities are imbued in the images of motherhood delineated. A cursory look at the Mother figure in this subsection will reflect these qualities handled from various perspectives.

The sudden death of Puleng's father welded the bond between him and his mother. It is no wonder when Puleng prepares to wail unendingly when his mother would be parting with life. This he unleashes in the lines:

Le mohla o katogago morithi wa letšatši,  
Seo ke tla se hidinyago selo e tlo ba sa  
mafahlogelo,  
Ga ke tsebe gore ke tlo homotšwa ke mang a  
kgona;  
O mpho, o lefa la ka, o bophelo bja ka.  
(Puleng 1981:23)

(Even the day you leave this world,  
I will ceaselessly wail to the surprise of all.  
I do not know how anyone can manage to comfort me  
For you are my gift, heritage, and my life.)

The poet's preparedness to wail ceaselessly represents his yearning to keep the relationship with the mother. The claim that nobody would stop him is intensified by the metaphors *o mpho, o lefa la ka, o bophelo bja ka*. The

ground of these metaphors is built on the fact that within the cultural context of these metaphors a person's mother may not be bought but is inherited through blood relations. Flowing from this notion, motherhood is thus a rewarding god-given institution that should be accepted. It is not something to labour or toil for, but a blessing. Puleng goes to an extent of equating his mother with (his) life. Such an analogous comparison demonstrates the intensity of the bond between the two, and further overemphasises the indivisibility of the relationship. Indeed, the two are inseparable. Their relationship seems to be stronger than that of Puleng - the person, and his wife, Jacqueline. Perhaps, it is for this given proposition that Puleng (1981:23) wishes:

A go phela matsatši a go atele . . .  
Gore o tle o hlahle molekane wa ka tsela ya  
lerato  
Gobane lerato ke le bone ke tšhitadingaka.  
*A mašweu!* [my emphasis]

(May the days of your life be prolonged  
That you would teach my wife the ways of love  
For I have realised that love is a puzzling thing.  
Keep well!)

The mother is seen as the torchbearer of love, who is capable of demonstrating to the bride what it all entails to be in love. The formula *A mašweu!* provides a formal expression of thanks to the mother. It is most unlikely that

in a lyric speakers would bid their respondents farewell. Here, the use of the formula adds to the dramatic quality of the poem, and serves as an exchange of goodwill and compassion to the mother who has unconditionally provided these qualities. The same formula intensifies the poet's wish for the mother's long life as well as free and safe passage of life. It was his mother too who inspired the young Puleng to continue writing. She went to an extent of buying him a typewriter that he still uses to unleash his ideas on paper (Personal Communication, Puleng 1993-94).

Given this background, the reader will soon realise that Puleng's poetry is a dedication of thanks to his mother. His poetry does not merely praise, but also explicitly expresses his love for the mother as it can be seen from the quote below:

Ke rata mma ke hlompha tate a ithobaletše,  
Gobane ba nyalane ka lerato le borapedikgolo.  
Ke leboga go ba setšwammele sa theka la bona.

( I love my mother and respect my deceased  
father  
For they were married with great love and  
religiousness.  
I am thankful to be a product of their loin).

The love he expresses evolves from the maternal love he received from early childhood after the death of his father. The tenderness and the gentle care of his mother is something that will be difficult to forget. If we have to psychoanalyse this text, we shall realise that childhood experiences are exhumed, resurrected and relived in the poems. These are experiences that haunt the poet from day to day. Even today, the bond between the poet and his mother is very much intact. It is probably the Christian character of the family that has sown this love, which has characterised itself in proper parenting and upbringing that Puleng advocates in his poetry.

It is here where he refers to his father with reverence because the latter has sown the seed of the Christian religion in the family and the world outside the family circle. Reference to *tate a ithobaletše* (my father who is asleep) reveals the Christian character of the poet himself. As a Christian he believes in life after death. It is a strong Christian conviction that the dead shall one day be resurrected and glorified to enjoy eternal life that receives God's blessing as death has been conquered by his only-begotten son, Jesus Christ.

Seemingly, it is for this reason that the poet does not say *tate a hwile* (my dead father). The euphemism also indicates the respect that he has for his father. The same opinion may be read from the Bible where Christ tells his disciples about the death of Lazarus in John chapter 11. Stunned with Jesus' appeal that they should go to Judaea, he retorts:

Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I will  
go and wake him up. (Good News Bible  
1977:133)

Failing to understand this parable, Jesus had to explain to them that Lazarus is actually dead (Good News Bible 1977). Even the relatives who had buried Lazarus four days before Jesus' arrival were shocked when Jesus told them that they would see God's glory when they believed, and thus Jesus ordered that they open Lazarus' grave, who was then unroped and let to go. Puleng uses the same paradigm that underpins his religious philosophy to explain that his father is asleep and not dead as many people may believe.

There is a meeting point between the poet's traditional belief and the incursion of the Christian faith in the preceding line. The father is depicted as a "sleeping father" which aptly implies an act of consciousness, and the possibility of being awakened. Such a person can be livened by propitiation as it is strongly held in African societies that the spirit of the dead lives and looks after the well being of the living. The use of euphemism is also characteristic of African literature, and is rooted in the African tradition.

In *Bolwetši bja letšofalela* (Puleng 1990:38) he traces the roots of maternal love to the pregnancy period and labour. Pregnancy is a testing period for the mother. It is here where the mother would demonstrate her love and patience for the most trying times in her life. Extended labour may tempt the mother to commit suicide or abortion to get rid off the pain, but with love for the long awaited baby, the mother would persevere until the great moment arrives when the child is born.

The following extract clearly indicates the poet's ideology about life before birth. He regards life before birth as the most pleasurable period free from

the contamination of the world, a period of great compassion in which the mother exchanges prenatal love unconditionally by feeding, nourishing and caring for the baby without regard to any distinction.

Kgweedi tše senyane  
Ke sa gola ke di dutše  
Ke di dutše leratoratong.  
Moya wa ka o be o humile  
O humile go feta le gauta.

(The nine months  
That I spent while growing up  
I have spent them  
Spent them in perfect love.  
My spirit was rich  
Richer than gold)

The poet deliberately uses overstatement to depict the warmth that people receive from their mothers before they are born. Puleng in this extract portrays the mother as the conduit and preserver of life. The young children's lives are protected against all odds until the children can fend for themselves. It takes pains from the mother to show and exchange the deep-seated love which the poet finds difficult to express in words as it can be deduced from the line: . . . *ka molomo wa maušwaušane ke šitwa go . . . hlatholla*. The literal meaning of this expression provides a good clue towards the interpretation of the metaphorical base. A mouth smudged with

porridge all over presents an ugly and unacceptable scene to the reader or beholder. One may think the poet refers to a slovenly character, but; one should consider how the poet uses the same paradigm to expose the ordinariness and peculiarity of the persona. It is for this reason that he finds himself unsuited to express the thanks to his mother sufficiently. Thus, the expression points out that the poet may not be able to dedicate thanks to his mother in the manner and efficacy which he purports to use.

Motherhood is delineated as a very special position in society, an institution of security and protection. It is, however, unfortunate that the image of motherhood in Puleng's poetry is so highly treated that the reader is made to believe that the institution is above life itself. The religious metaphors in the extract:

O swika la motheo,  
O leswika la go wa le go tsoga,  
O na le mpho ya tlhago lerato.

(You are the foundation stone,  
You are the most trusted one,  
With a natural gift of love)

provide evidence of such interpretation. The stone imagery is borrowed from the biblical reference to Peter, one of Jesus' disciples. The solid quality of the rock suggests to the reader not only the biblical reference, but the

mother's perseverance, the ability to withstand trying times in life as it can be seen in *Mma* (Serudu 1989a:13) where Puleng says:

O bile le kgotlelelo.  
Gare ga maima le mathata,  
Wa ntela ka lešoko,  
Wa nkgodiša.

(You had patience  
Amidst problems and hardships,  
And with compassion  
Brought me up.)

The extract provides an historical narrative on the poet's life. The *I* in this poem refers to the poet although it can be said to represent a general persona. He elaborates on the hardships his mother had to suffer to bring him up. This was bound to be a difficult task if it has to be considered that the family depended on the meagre income of the mother who had to raise her children single-handedly in the burning days of *apartheid*. Such ability to withstand hardships unfortunately blinds the poet's eyes to an extent that he feels that with the mother he has everything against natural life. It is for this reason that he claims:

Kwadi ya marumo ga e ntšhoše  
Gobane morago ke tšwago ke na le motheo,

Mantšu ke kwele a Maria mmagoJesu;  
Ke kwele thuto ya khumedi ya ditšhaba  
Lehu ga le sa ntšhoša ke kgonwa fela ke tlala ...

(War trumpets do not bother me  
For I have a sound foundation,  
The teachings of Mary; Jesus' mother.  
I received learning from the source for all.  
Death does not bother me for I can only be  
killed by starvation . . .)

Comparing motherhood to the Virgin Mary goes off the board by over-accentuating the mother's virtuous qualities. The poet is so blinded by the mother's love that he fails to realise that motherhood as an aspect of being human, is also susceptible to fallibility. Motherhood is depicted as a holy institution as if there were no imperfect mothers who are as fallible as Hunadi in **Hunadi, etešetša serathana se** (Puleng 1991) who wants to commit abortion. The symbolism of the Virgin Mary however, underpins the Christian values transmitted to the young Puleng with love. Looking through the vista of years, he reckons the religious teachings that he received which toughened his conscience against death. It is a Christian belief that death should not be feared as it has been vanquished by Christ on the Cross.

The idea of not fearing death is clearly evident in John Donne; one of those poets whose works have shaped Puleng's interest in English Literature. In **Death be not Proud** Donne writes:

Death be not proud, though some have called  
thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so:  
For, those, who thou think'st, thou dost  
overthrow  
Die not, poor Death; nor yet canst thou kill me.  
From Rest and Sleep, which but thy pictures be,  
Much pleasure, and from thee, much more shall  
flow;  
And soonest our best men with thee do go -  
Rest of their bones, and their soul's delivery!  
Thou'rt slave to Fate, Chance, Kings, and  
desperate men,  
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell;  
And poppy and charms can make us sleep as  
well.  
And better than thy stroke. Why swell'st thou  
then? One short sleep past, we wake eternally,  
And Death shall be no more: Death, thou shalt  
die! (Smyth & Swacina 1987:160)

The quote indicates the Christian view that people have no reason to fear death as it has been defeated already. The paradox in the last line of the quoted poem is rich with biblical overtones. Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection demonstrate that death is neither mighty nor dreadful. It is probably the same notion shed by Donne that prompts Puleng to claim that he fears not death but famine.

Puleng's mother has not only demonstrated love to her children, but has extended it to other people in the Moetlane area. She has cared for the aged in Sekutupu - a home for the aged people at Groothoek Hospital, and also helped with midwifery tasks in the same hospital until retirement. In explaining briefly the service she gave to the people Puleng writes:

O letlile Moetlane  
Moetlabatho moetla  
Le ba madi a šele,  
O letlile Manyasa  
Batho bao ba boago Malawi  
Ba setše Limpopo  
Ba aga Sebitiela dinamuneng  
Ba okwa ke wena tlogolo sa Dikwena. (Puleng  
1980:29)

(You have helped Moetlane,  
The people's saviour  
That saves people of foreign origin.  
You have saved the Manyasa  
Who came from Malawi and crossed the  
Limpopo  
To settle on the orange estates in Zebediela.  
They received treatment from you,  
Descendant of the Bakwena).

This quote also provides an historical narrative on the life of the Nkomo family in Moletlane. The Nyasa people referred to are representative of the foreigners who came to Zebediela in search of employment. Caring for this people has elements of geopolitical nationalism as Reverend Nkomo also came from the other side of the Limpopo. This represents yet another love for fellow expatriates to her husband. These expatriates and other people around Moletlane received her warm treatment both in their social and health lives.

Her warmth and hospitable character is seen as a reward and heritage to the people as outlined in the preceding extract. It is for this reason that Puleng (1980:29) compliments her: *A go hlabele matsatši mmabatho* (Live long you that love people). The same idea is echoed in yet another poem in the line: *A go phela matsatši a go atele* (Let your days be lengthened) (Puleng 1981:23).

Lastly, it is vital to note that Puleng does not merely reciprocate the maternal love in his poetry, but uses his poetry as an honour to the mother who has guided him through the dark corridors of life and shaped him to face the rigours of life with courage.

### **2.3 IMAGES OF WOMEN IN THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE**

Marriage and culture are as inseparable as two sides of the same coin. In the light of this, marriage cannot be thought away from the culture in which it is

being contracted. Although there is no universal definition of marriage, marriage involves a love relationship of two or more people, and that relationship is welded and legalised by certain cultural rituals or ceremonial acts that are so highly held by the cultural group that violation thereof arouses feelings of contempt and scepticism.

Among the Bapedi, marriage is legalised and contracted by the transference of bridal property called *magadi* from the kraal of the groom to that of the bride. Marriage is not considered a private affair of the couple in love, but an extension of communal relations that bind the two groups together. The tying of *tšhimama* on the newly wed symbolises a knot of the two affinal relations, and the dissolution of marriage is considered out of question because the relationship is meant to weld the two families forever.

Within this cultural group, marriage cannot be concluded without the concern of the two families and relatives involved. It is customary to have a mediator (*motseta*) who mediates the process of transferring the bridal wealth. Ngcobo sums it well when she says:

As elsewhere, marriage amongst Africans is mainly an institution for the control of procreation. Every woman is encouraged to marry and get children in order to express her womanhood to the full. The basis of marriage among Africans implies the transfer of a woman's fertility to the husband's family group. There is

a high premium placed on children and the continuity of each lineage. To facilitate this transfer of fertility, a dowry must be paid; not to buy as the missionaries have wrongly understood. (Peterson & Wästberg 1988: 141)

With the advent of Christianity and western civilisation, many Africans have "modernised" this rite of passage in various forms to reflect the changing nature of society. The modern youth in particular, trying to be "civil" and free from cultural ties, disregard cultural practices and adopt western styles of living together as love partners, preferably cohabiting. Such acts are, however, met with opposition from the community of authors and the public in general.

In **Kgotlelela Mantsho ngwana' mma Puleng** (1991:37) alludes to one such instance where Mantsho disregarded the prescribed procedures in contracting marriage and went forth to cohabit with a man. The two found shelter in Seshego township where Puleng - the person, finally had to join his sister to help with some odd jobs after she was deserted. It was here that he continued his primary education, with her sister as one of his teachers. Mantsho's parents did not approve of this "marriage". Her affair is viewed as a violation of tradition and can in no way receive the blessing of *badimo*, most particularly that they were not properly informed of her rite of departure or incorporation. This is revealed by the poet in very strong words in the lines below:

Wa tloga ntle le mekgolokwane le direto,  
Le pudi ya leleme le letala ya šitwa go wa ka  
lefase . . . (Puleng 1991:37)

(You left without ululations and praises  
Even a blue-tongued goat could not be  
sacrificed)

The goat sacrifice is a symbolic communication between the bride's parents and the *badimo* who are expected to protect the bride and bless her with children. It is for this reason that marriage is accompanied by such rituals that would appease the ancestors so that misfortune does not befall the bride and the groom in their marriage life.

Mantsho's involvement in this relationship represents a longing for freedom from the socio-cultural chain that snares women's liberties and relegates their position to passive objects worthy of manipulation by their male counterparts. It marks the modern woman's resistance and yearning for individual expression, particularly in matters of choosing one's life partner. It is a silent appeal for the society's deregulation of marriage. Of interest, is the fact that both men and women as persons have feelings of love and affection, hate and contempt, and all other shades of feelings. Society declares it an outright privilege for men to express their passionate feelings about women yet the contrary is treated with scepticism.

Society's disapproval of Mantsho's affair represents yet another inclination to maintain male dominance over their female counterparts. Man is elevated to a status of humanity above that of a woman, persisting to discriminate against the latter, whereas they (men) resist to be subordinated by their fellow-men. Looking at Mantsho's position, one is shocked by the way her partner is left to get away with his unbecoming behaviour as it may be observed from the lines:

Di rile di baba tša mošašana,  
Poo ya lehlaka e ikgapa e ikgoroša,  
Mola o ile ntlong ya sesadi,  
Ka di bona le motswala Mashakwe  
Gobane o ntšere le yena gae Kgobadi 'a  
Nyedimane  
Gore re tle re thupetše lapa Seshego . . . (Puleng  
1991:37)

(As your house became embittered  
The ungovernable lad acting at will,  
While you went for maternity leave  
I together with my cousin Mashakwe saw  
wonders  
As you took us from Moletlane  
To look after the house in Seshego)

Instead of looking after his pregnant 'wife', the male partner in the extract lavishes in misconduct and fails to set an example to the young Puleng and Mashakwe. To make matters worse he ends up bringing his girlfriends into the house. This is clearly articulated by the lines:

E rile go lala mafekong mpša ya kgotho,  
Ya bona bokaone e le go tliša ka lapeng...  
O rile go tšwa thupantlong ya basadi,  
Pholo o e phathakgetše namane - Mpho,  
Mabatha ya fela e sa a lebišitše boenyane,  
Wa re o lemoga ya go kgeregela ka dinaka,  
Ra go rwadiša thoto gare ga mpa ya bošego...  
(Puleng 1991:37-38)

(Having slept out with his girlfriends,  
He finally brought them into his house  
After you had left the maternity hall,  
With the sturdy and robust boy - Mpho in your  
hands,  
The promiscuous visits still continued,  
And he rose in revolt as soon as you became  
aware of his foul moves.  
We had to help you remove your property in the  
dead of night).

The dog imagery in the extract aptly describes the insatiable sexual lust of the male partner and further reveals the disgusting nature of the character in the poem. No better words could describe him other than denigrating him as a dog for the unfaithful and disrespecting qualities he displays. Like a dog that appears to be driven by its sexual drives he also leaves his wife for other girlfriends and rubs salt into the wound by bringing them home in the presence of his wife. This does not only show lack of respect for the wife, but the pursuit of male folk's inconsiderate and egocentric needs. The reader is struck by the poet's attitude to this behaviour that seems to be justified by his paradoxical request *kgotlelela Mantsho ngwana' mma* (Persevere Mantsho, my sister). Although Mantsho has violated her tradition, she may not pay heavily as the poet appears to justify the penalty that is not even considered a misfortune as it can be read from :

Wa gata o thelela, wa ipitša yo madimabe,  
Anthe magobala o a nyakile kutung ya lerato.  
(Puleng 1991:38)

(You trod and slipped, claiming you have bad  
luck,  
Indeed you have inflicted injury on yourself for  
the sake of love).

From this analysis one realises that men are portrayed as demi-gods who act freely without reproach and their follies are celebrated with praise while women have to resist change so that the clock is not reversed. Husbands like

the one in the poem cited above, should take the male dove's example as it can be inferred from:

Lebelela nonyana e thotha, e fepa, e sa lape,  
Lebelela nonyane e le mo mošomong wa  
kwešišo,  
Tlhokomelo, lerato, kwelobohloko, le tirišano ke  
mmala wa yona,  
Ka nako ye ya tshadi e le sehlageng sa yona  
Ka nako ye ya tshadi e mo tetelongkgolo ka  
lapeng la yona,  
Ka boiketlo le boipshino e alametše mae,  
madibana a bokwena,  
Ka temogo ya pholo e iphepela e tiišitše pelo e  
sa fele,  
Ka kholofelo e dira bjalo go fihlela bana ba  
ipega.  
Nonyana ye ke mohlala wa bophelomareledi,  
Nonyana ye ke morutimorutiši moilakgati,  
Nonyana ye ke sešupo sa tselabotse mo lapeng,  
Nonyana ye ke mosadi wa leago go rena  
mašaedi,  
Nonyana ye e lebelele le nna ke e šetše re tope  
bohlalehlale,  
Nonyana ye, leebana le, ruri le phaphasediša  
bothakgathakga. (Tseke 1973:52)

(Behold the bird collects, and feeds tirelessly,  
Behold the bird at its task with understanding  
Care, love, sympathy and cooperation mark it;  
By the time the female one is in its nest,  
By this time the female one is expectant  
Comfortably and peacefully broods eggs the  
crocodile's pools,  
Realising this, the he-bird cares for her patiently.  
With hope it does so until the chickens are  
hatched.  
This bird is exemplary to ideal life  
This bird is a teacher, a preacher who shuns a  
stick.  
This bird is a symbol of good family life,  
It is a counsellor to us who are imperfect.  
Take heed of this bird and I shall observe his  
ways to gain wisdom.  
The bird, this dove, indeed hovers in diligence).

In the preceding extract, Tseke expresses his regret over husband and wife relationships. The underlying protest is couched in the title of the poem **Ga se lekgoba** (It is not a slave). The poet uses the dove image to create an ideal love relationship between husband and wife which is characterised by: love, mutual understanding, co-operation, care, sympathy and patience. These qualities also characterise the male dove which extends its patience and co-operation to the female dove during the gestatory period. This is, however, not practised by human beings as it has been explained in the analysis of **Kgotlelela Mantsho Ngwana mma** where the man in question

takes advantage of the wife's position to indulge in promiscuous behaviour. In cases where the husbands change chores with their wives, or meaningfully share household activities, they are considered to have been enslaved through the use of herbs.

Casting a look at the images associated with women in the bond of marriage, one is struck by how women's status is relegated to that of subordination and lack of effervescence. In **Kgadi 'a Bakone** (Puleng 1980:19) the following lines need to be scrutinised in the light of women's position within a matrimonial contractual bond:

- (1) Re rute gore tšhemo ya mosadi ke  
diatla tša gagwe.

(Teach us that a woman depends  
on her hands for a living)

- (2) Re rute gore mosadi ke tšhwene o  
lewa mabogo,

(Teach us that women should be  
industrious)

(3) Re re lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi . . .

(We say that a good wife' grave is  
at her in-laws)

(4) Re re o tsebe gore mosadi o roka  
molomo ge monna a bolela. . .

(We say you should know that a  
wife shuts her mouth when the  
husband speaks)

(5) Re re mosadi ke theko ya lerumo  
re foša kgole,

(We say the wife is a spear's  
handle to throw afar)

(6) Re budušetše tselakgolo  
molapomotle re be ngatatee.

(Sharpen for us the great bristling  
path that unites us)

- (7) O rata go tseba khupamarama tša  
banna twehlanyamantho...

(You are eager to inquire into  
men's privacies, you who cause  
rivalries amongst people)

- (8) O bjalo ka beine ye bose yeo  
monwi a hlalalago ge a e nwele...

(You are like wine that elates the  
drinker)

- (9) BoAdam ba phenkgolotswe tulong  
tša borena tšhemong ya Eden . . .

(Honourable Adam was dethroned  
from his royal seat in the Garden  
of Eden)

(10) BoSamson ba utolotše sephiri  
bakeng sa gago...

(Honourable Samson had his  
secrets revealed because of you)

(11) Ba ile batho go šetše wena lewatle  
leo le homotšego.

(People have died save for you  
silent sea)

The metonym **tšhemo** in (1) in the preceding extract is associated with production and industriousness. Women are encouraged to fend for themselves in trying times particularly when their husbands are incapable of bringing sufficient income into the family. Women have to depend largely on their fields for their livelihood. From this assertion one is struck by the way women are dissociated from other commodities like cattle in the family. This is the case with patriarchal societies - women do not own wealth, not even the children they give birth to, but all the wealth, whether generated by them through their own means, belongs to their husbands or fathers as heads of families.

The baboon analogy in the proverb in (2) should be understood within the context of the cultural background in which the poet is immersed. Baboons are employed by witches as *familiars* and are known for their remarkable industriousness. Witches who employ baboons in their craft are highly held and feared by everybody in the community. Another factor that should not be overlooked is the image baboons have in the oral lore of the Northern Sotho people. Baboons are made in the prose narratives to play roles that are typically naïve and show lack of insight. Given this background, the baboon analogy to describe women (wives) sheds another stereotype about women. They are considered to be weak-minded and thus are excluded from the main discussions of the *kgoro* in which they are married.

When the alluded proverb is used, the probable meaning that comes to the people's minds is that of industriousness. The people have been socialised and made to accept through enculturation that the *status quo* is correct and should be maintained. The relegation and equation of women (wives) to animals that are vulnerable to manipulation and employed to accomplish bizarre acts, falls into the background. Although the conventional meaning is acceptable that women are married for their industriousness other than beauty, the covert meaning - meaning hidden behind the cultural *symbols*, is however unacceptable.

The metaphorical expression, . . . *mosadi o roka molomo ge monna a bolela*, as in (4), brings to mind a picture of a woman whose lips are sewn together. In a state like this, she cannot articulate her desires or utter any meaningful word. This image explains well women's position in society. They are expected to accept their position without questioning. They do not have a

say in the politics of their own social groupings, not even in the matters that affect them directly. Theirs is to tacitly submit to their husbands. If they succeed to do that, they will 'enjoy' their marriages because they are expected to endure even the hardships that a normal human being would not tolerate.

A situation like this is not only found among the Northern Sotho speaking people, but in all patriarchal societies. Al Ghazzali warned against what he considered a woman's legendary propensity to talk too much as a serious imperfection of a would-be-bride. In response to Ghazzali's opinion on the qualities of a would-be-bride, a well known Algerian female writer, Fatna Air Sabbah, says:

Pourquoi donc le silence et l'immobilité, c'est-à-dire les signes et la manifestation de l'inertie, sont-ils les critères de la beauté chez la femme musulmane? Qu'est-ce la beauté a à voir avec le droit à l'expression? Pourquoi, selon les canons de la beauté en Islam, une femme qui ne s'exprime pas doit exciter le désir chez l'homme?

[Why is it that silence and immobility, that is, the signs and manifestations of inertia, are the criteria for the beauty of the Muslim woman? What has beauty to do with the right to self-

expression? Why is a woman who does not express herself, supposed to arouse desire in men, according to the Muslim canons of beauty?] (Makward in Davies & Graves 1986:271-272)

It is this "silence" into which women are married to enjoy their marriage life. The bride has to keep silent even if conditions are unbearable. The same idea is outlined by the proverbial expression alluded in the line:

Re re bogadi go dula digadi e sego dingangele,  
Re re bogadi ke bogadikathaka wa gadika phodi e ka  
swa. (Puleng 1980:19)

(We say only the valorous and not hellcats stay  
at the in-laws,  
We say only the strong-hearted endure at the in-  
laws.)

The first line in this quote encourages the bride to be prepared for the rigours of womanhood, rigours requiring her endurance. She is warned against being a hellcat as this may spoil her marriage life.

As an outsider within the group, she has no rights of inheritance nor can she give legacies to anyone. She is always dependent on the husband or the in-laws for the actual running of her own homestead. Marriage becomes an act of incorporation and alienation. She is incorporated into a new family group in which she has limited rights, but alienated from her own family group. She has to change even her name and acquire a new one from the in-laws, and this really distances her from her family. The proverbial expression in (3) serves as one of those maxims above which she cannot exist. She is prepared and indoctrinated to believe that she has to live and die for her in-laws as if life can only be realised within the marriage group. Marriage seems to be an institution through which women would realise a full perfection of being human. While unmarried men are not looked upon at with scorn, unmarried women are conversely relegated to lower positions in the social echelons that they finally prepare themselves for marriage. Even if the marriage does not seem a success, the woman is encouraged to save it from sinking as this may affect her markedly. It is as though marriage helps them to fulfil their real womanhood. The grave imagery in *lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi* (Lit. a good wife's grave is at her in-laws) also explains the rigours which the new brides have to contend with. No reference is made to life here but death, as implied by the use of *lebitla*. Indeed, the new bride who has to be initiated into the chores of the in-laws finds life and death synonymous. Ironically, this is what constitutes a "good wife" in patriachal societies.

The concept *molapomotle* in (6) is borrowed from the proverb that says *molapomotle ga o hloke semenya* (there is no house without a mouse) which suggests that women, like roses, are good to behold and not to hold. The metaphorisation as applied to women denigrates them and does not

acknowledge that there are beautiful, honest, good, and loving women in life. Kgadi'a Bakone, equated with a beautiful valley which in itself portends danger and the horror of the cliffs, is thus ridiculed instead of made to feel at home in her new bridal house. Distrusted as she is, the in-laws expect her to prove her "motherhood".

The line *re budušetše tselakgolo . . . re be ngatatee* is a direct appeal to the bride to bear children who shall serve a unitary function in the family. The usage of *re* above collectively incorporates the husband and his cognates and the woman as an affinal relative is actually excluded. *Tselakgolo* alludes to procreation. It is a belief amongst most African societies that mothers have to undergo a journey into the great pools to fetch children for the in-laws. It is for this reason that childlessness is directly associated with women. Explaining this dilemma in which young mothers find themselves, Ngcobo remarks:

. . . as a result, childlessness is associated with women, for the alternative is unthinkable. Central to many African beliefs is that there are states of human existence - the land of the unborn, the land of the living and the land of the ancestors and the dead. Belief has it that the children of any given family are always there waiting for the mothers to come and rescue them from oblivion and bring them to life in the land of the living. Failure therefore, to 'rescue' the children is a sorrowful capitulation and a

betrayal. *In cases of childlessness, people do not think of and share the couple's or woman's agony - rather, they hear the echoing cries of the unborn children that she (the mother) will not 'rescue' and bring to life.* [My italics]  
(Peterson & Wästberg 1988:142)

From the above assertion, it is striking to note that it is not the couple that has to rescue the children into the world of the living, but solely the mothers. Fathers are never considered to be impotent or infertile, hence *go remela* would not involve the father but the mother only because of the strong belief that he carries the seed. Arrangements to marry her younger sister would be made to supplement the fertility rights which would be conceived as unproductive.

In (8) the poet compares a woman with wine. Although wine provides a source of pleasure to the partaker, and is known for its hygienic relevance, particularly in the digestion of food, it is, however, an intoxicant, a stimulant that works upon the consumer's mind. The elation of the drinker is not something that happens consciously but in response to stimulation by wine. The comparison of a woman to wine suggests that she provides temporal pleasure to the husband or the in-laws, and eventually would bring the family into disrepute. Another striking idea married to the wine analogy is the fact that wine matures with age. In the same vein, a married woman acquires certain rights and responsibilities over newly married brides and certain homesteads in their kraal.

Another important aspect of the wine metaphor can be drawn from its inventor in Greek mythology, Dionysus, who has been known for causing madness in all those who opposed him or planned to capture him. The relationship between wine and women can be traced to the time when he invited Thracian women to Mount Cithaeron where Pentheus, King of Thebes, disliking his dissolute appearance, arrested him and ordered that he be killed (Graves 1955). Here again, instead of shackling Dionysus, the king shackled a bull and went mad. The elation of the drinker can be traced back to the madness with which Dionysus struck his opponents throughout the world as he went about introducing the wine industry. Comparing women with wine does not merely derogate them as an insane folk that requires attention, but also relegates them to objects to be consumed.

Examples (9) and (10) are indicative of the biased portraiture of women characters in the Bible. In (9) the poet alludes to an unfortunate event in the garden of Eden where Eve is deceived by the snake into eating the forbidden fruit. This event represents the breaking of the covenant with God, and human nature inherited mortality thence. Although both Adam and Eve fell prey to the snake's deception, most readers apportion the blame to the First Woman, Eve. In the quoted line, the poet couches the same ideology that regards women as the source of evil, and charged with sole responsibility to original sin. Women are castigated and painted as tricksters, betrayers of the human soul and characters not fit to be trusted.

Taking a look at (10), a biblical allusion to the story of Samson as contained in the book of Judges 13-16 is given (Good News Bible). Reference is made to Samson's betrayal by Delila who accepted a series of bribes from the

Phillistine kings who wanted to exterminate Samson. She offered the death of Samson for thirty pieces of silver by cutting his hair short. Delila tricked Samson into revealing that he was a Nazarite and his strength lay in his hair which was never cut. It is not only Delila who betrayed Samson, but the girl from Timnah also tricked Samson into unravelling his difficult riddle. Examples such as these clearly paint women as betrayers of the male folk and justify the scepticism with which women are viewed.

Some of the images related to women are, amongst others, those domestic objects worthy of manipulation like *tšhilo le lwala* (the grindstone and the grinding piece). These are common in the wedding song:

Tšhilo le lwala re tšere  
Le tlo šala le eja lewana,  
Re tla ja mathume.

(The mill and the grinding stone we have seized  
You will remain eating unground corn  
We will eat finely ground corn)

The same image is found in Kgadi 'a Bakone in the line:

Re golele Mosebjadi wena tšhilo le lwala tšešo  
(Puleng 1980:19)

(Mosebjadi grow for us, you the mill and the grinding piece)

The bride is compared to the objects *tšhilo* and *lwala* which are used to grind corn and mealies in the household. These objects are indispensable in each family because they are used in the preparation of the staple food. If someone seizes a grinding stone from any family, the said family will be upset and left in shambles. It is the same misery that is depicted at wedding songs by the use of the line *le tlo šala le eja lewana*. A family subsisting on *lewa* is subjected to abject poverty and in most cases without basic necessities like milk, meat, vegetables or even the millstone, as explained above. Regarding Mosebjadi as *tšhilo le lwala*, clearly shows the significance of the woman in each family. She is as indispensable as these objects and thus should be cared for accordingly. The marriage of a hardworking bride brings pleasure to the in-laws and regret to her parents who are left without help after the departure of their diligent daughter.

It can be argued that the two objects *tšhilo* and *lwala*; are used metonymically to represent women because they are associated with the domestic chores that are traditionally women's exclusive task, yet the application serves to justify male dominance in the family and society as a whole. It should be remembered, however, that these are objects that are manipulated physically to satisfy people's physiological need of hunger. In the same breath women are lowered to the level of tools and equipments in the family and men use them as sexual objects to gratify their need for sex. It is for this reason that the girl's marriage in some traditional societies is arranged even before her birth. This clearly indicates that they are without

power in the marriages in which they are contracted and expected to remain docile, hence the expression:

Re re o tsebe gore mosadi o roka molomo ge monna a  
bolela,  
Re re mosadi ke theko ya lerumo re foša kgole,  
Re re theka la mosadi ke peu ya morarele  
kgorošamantho. . .  
Re re tsena ntlong o bone kunutu la basadi baenasešane,  
Re budušetše tselakgolo molapomotle re be ngatatee.  
(Puleng 1980:19)

(We say a wife keeps quiet when the husband  
speaks,  
We say she is the spear's handle to throw afar,  
We say her loin is a complicated seed that  
breeds human life,  
We say procreate and experience women's  
privacy,  
We say sharpen for us the great glittering path  
and make us one)

In the same way, a woman's status in her marriage normally improves as she grows older. This is evident in the words of Ngcobo:

At her in-laws she does not move in to attain her independence or find her place of centrality. Instead, she is reduced to a permanent state of dependence and estrangement. She will always be an outsider among his people, always the first suspect when things go wrong. And her position of motherhood entails hard labour to provide food for the family. Nothing will change until in old age, if she is a powerful woman or a senior wife, she will be empowered to move centrally, to exercise authority and train the younger women in the practised art of walking the tight-rope, which is exercising her immense power from the outside - the paradox of a position of centrality which is exercised from the periphery. (Peterson & Wästberg 1988:143)

In (11), the assertion:

Ba ile batho go šetše wena lewatile leo le  
homotšego.

(People have died save for you silent sea)

the woman is compared to a silent sea. The association with a silent sea is built on the unpredictability of still waters. It is not easy to predict the depth of such water and swimmers may unblinkingly drown in it after they have miscalculated the depth of the water. The image of silent waters is employed here to reveal the danger that women portend and men are warned to be on the look-out for trouble. This association conveys another facet of phallocentrism. The image is heightened by the icon *twehlanyamantho* in (7). Women are charged with the sole responsibility for conflicts in human society. The same idea is expressed by Tseke in the lines:

Re bana ba setsiba ka therešo mogolle,  
A re lemoge ntepa e belega e sa age . . .

(We are indeed children of the same father,  
brother  
Let's be aware that women procreate but do not  
build) [Mokgoatšana 1993:51]

The use of *ntepa*, a skin apron to cover the buttocks, is associated with women. Women are blamed for the conflict between these two brothers who finally advise each other not to divulge their secrets to women. This idea is expressed by the line *fela ga di se ye mafagelong a dipitša* (and let them not be disclosed in the households) which is explained by Mokgoatšana (1993:52) in these words:

The concept *mafagelong a dipitša* is used to connote the household and the wife in particular. Wives are closely associated with cooking by the fireplace which is normally in the kitchen. With this metonymic relation the poet warns men not to divulge secrets involving brotherly relations to wives. *The reader can infer that the source of all the trouble, in the families described in the poem is ascribed to the wives.*

[My italics]

These misconceptions about women represent a lack of commitment from male writers and critics to tell the truth particularly in family politics where the woman always bears the brunt. It is unfortunate however that these writers are unable to obfuscate the dominant ideology which renders women as the second class citizens of the world or rather as pivots of Hereditary Debt<sup>1</sup>.

Some of the assertions go as far as *naturalising* women's victimisation and torture. The *thaka* and *phodi* (pumpkin) metaphors in *bogadi bogadikathaka bja gadika phodi e ka swa* (only those who persevere make it at the in-laws) should be understood against the background of their physical makeup. The seeds of *leraka* are known for their hard and sturdy seed-cover while the pumpkin seed has a thin layer which is sensitive to heat generated by fire.

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<sup>1</sup> Hereditary Sin (synonym). The term is a derivative from the guilt or responsibility that the individual shares with Adam for humanity's FALL from grace, since Adam was the first head of all humanity according to the Christian Bible.

When these seeds are fried, the *maraka* seeds resist the heat and will take a very long time to burst even though they may be exposed to excessive heat, while the pumpkin seeds need less heat and will soon be well done. Excess heat will spoil them and they may not be enjoyed. This analogy is used to teach young brides that only those who are able to endure the hardships will have a successful marriage, whereas those who fail shall regret their marriage life like the pumpkin seed (*mphodi*) which will be exposed to heat and be reduced to ashes.

The phallogocentric approach to literature has run its course after having dominated the field for centuries, and should give way to new approaches that recognise women as at par with their male counterparts. Addressing the Annual General Meeting of *Lebadi*, an acronym for *Lekgotla la Bangwadi ba Dipuku*, (an association of authors) Mokgoatšana (1994:4) maintained that the legal position of women in the new Constitution (of South Africa) cannot be a reality unless the Church, literature and society change their perceptions on the status of the woman. The same idea is shared by Angela Pitt (1981:14) who adds:

For women to have meaningful rights they would need to be stated in the laws of the land, the doctrines of the church and shown in the practices of the time.

South Africa has the law that grants equality to all its citizens irrespective of sex, colour or creed and it is up to its citizens to uphold it. It is, however,

regrettable that some men do not seem to appreciate the clause dealing with women's liberties as it can be seen from the split of the Anglican Church throughout the world, South Africa included, over the ordination of women priests.

Literature should begin to reflect on putting women at the same scale with men and arguments for the preservation of culture cannot be ruled out. It should, however, be noted that cultural change affects both men and women alike, and thus no attempt should be made to preserve men's rights only, disregarding the innovations of the whole society as well as the incursion of other cultures upon our society.

## 2.4 COYNESS

Although Puleng does not dwell much on the theme of coyness, this theme is strongly expressed in the two poems: **Ga o kgone** (Puleng 1980:42-44), and **O hloma bjang?** (1981:41-44). The strength of the words employed in these poems, together with the interconnectedness of ideas expressed in them prompted the researcher to include the theme for discussion. Puleng castigates those young men who are shy and coy to express their passionate feelings to the girls they love.

The poem **O hloma bjang?** (Puleng 1981) is a sequel to **Ga o kgone** the poem in which he addresses timid young men without specifying the personae. The first stanza opens with the line:

Maloba ke go boditše ka re ga o kgone

(I have recently told you that you are incapable)

In the alluded poem the poet castigates a young man who has extensively read love stories, with a myriad of university degrees, but fails to express himself to the girl he loves. The poet warns him

O ka ba bohlale bjang le bjang,  
O ka apara diphurabura tša mehutahuta,  
O ka kgaphetša mapanta a mebalabala ...  
O ka dira tšohle ka sebetse, temogo le maime,  
O ka dira le metlae ya bohlale ka bokgwari,  
O ka ba nkgwete ya thaka tša gago;  
Fela wa palelwa ke go lahla la bošiwana  
Ge o bona tshohlana ya dithamadimapupurese.  
Ge o sa kgone, ga o kgone ngwanešo . . .  
(Puleng 1980:42-43)

(However intelligent you may be,  
You may have all sorts of regalia  
Crossing a myriad of hoods . . .  
Doing everything with bravado, care and  
dignity,  
You may be a hero among your peers

Making informative jokes with precision,  
But be incapable of expressing yourself  
When you meet a buxom lady  
When you are coy, you are coy my brother)

The warning and advice expressed in the extract is a mild attack on the timid young man whose love is not shared nor outwardly expressed. Love is not a matter of physical might nor any academic excellence. The poet also indicates that the person's sense of humour will also not help him gain the hand of any girl as he is destined to be what he is. It is interesting to note how this young man in the poem has read extensively and can make very profound jokes filled with wisdom, yet he cannot express himself on real love matters.

It seems the poem **O hloma bjang?** (Puleng 1981) builds on the ideas expressed in **Ga o kgone** (Puleng 1980). There are some intertextual details that seem to clarify those in **Ga o kgone** (*op cit.*). The poet uses the same declamatory tone as used in **Ga o kgone** (*op cit.*). Although the persona in both poems is an unspecified young man, **O hloma bjang** (*op cit.*) goes on to be more direct and specific on some of the issues treated vaguely in the other poem which prompts the reader to see the *dramatis personae* of the two poems as one and the same.

In **Ga o kgone** (Puleng 1980:43) the poet remarks:

O ka ba sogana la kgatswatswa,  
Tsantsanka ya tholi seemakadinao,

(You may be a handsome lad  
A tall and robust fellow)

The same idea is expressed in **O hloma bjang?** (Puleng 1981:41) in this way:

O sa le tsatsanka lesogana o thololo,  
O eme ka dinao o na le lebala le botse

(You are still a handsome, robust lad  
Upright with a good appearance).

The words *tsatsanka*, *tholi* and *seemakadinao* refer to tallness. They are used in the same line to emphasise and foreground the young man's lofty posture. The lanky posture of the persona is intensified by the loan word *tholi*, derived from the English adjective *tall*. The morphological derivation of this term in the Northern Sotho language has through adoption, not tempered with the original shades of meaning of the word: [+tall; - short; + nominal], but has resulted in the change of grammatical category from adjective to noun. It should, however, be noted that since adjectives and

nouns fall within the same nominal category, the shift may not be considered very drastic and unprecedented.

The word *seemakadinao* provides a further semantic dimension by adding a quality of being upright and well built to the persona. The same idea is developed in the second extract where he is bestowed with a handsome appearance. The well-built posture of the young man is heightened by the use of *thololo* in the second extract. It adds to the description of a smooth and round posture that also qualifies the young man as graceful and majestic. The class 9 noun *thololo*, contrasted with *tholi* in the first extract constitutes a fair description of the persona while his unparalleled height is suggested by the continuant [l] in both nouns.

The word *tsatsanka* in both extracts suggests the young man's sense of inflated pride that he displays in his wiggle and waggle gait. He probably prides himself on his elegance and fine attire hence his description as *setswatswa* - an immaculate character. The poet goes further to say:

O seithati ga o rate patswa ya bošaedi  
mmeleng... (Puleng 1981:42)

(You are dainty and need no stain of  
imperfection on your body)

a description elucidated in the same poem in the line:

O senya sebaka ka go itshenka go feta tekanyo  
(Puleng 1981:42)

(You waste time by over-inspecting yourself)

These assertions trace the young man's timidity to his inflated pride coupled with the lack of self-moderation. He concentrates his energies to a narcissistic attitude that frowns upon others. He is obsessed with his affectation and costume to the detriment of his passion, a trait which makes him unable to flee out and share his love altruistically.

In **Ga o kgone** (Puleng 1980) the persona is matched by any garment of whatever make, notwithstanding the beauty and quality of the apparel. On this issue Puleng (1980:43) remarks:

Wa swanelwa ke lefela la mafelelofelelo

(And be matched by a worthless apparel )

The concept *lefela la mafelelofelelo* refers to a nonentity to the last degree. Only a person of unsurpassed beauty may take the quality of this persona, for it is this beauty that dominates the eye of the beholder more than his costume. The same notion is evident in **O hloma bjang?** (Puleng 1981:41):

O a swanelwa o swanelwa le ke lefela la  
mafelelo.

(Everything suits you well, even a worthless  
material)

The first extract describes the clothing as worthless to the last degree while the second one merely describes his apparel as worthless.

There are various reasons that can account for the young man's coyness. The young man in the poems under discussion does not only suffer pride, but also lacks the guts to face the lady he loves as it may be noted from the extracts below:

... wa re ge o kopanya sefahlego  
Le yo montlha wa go katoga lefase,  
Ngwana' mahlo nkego ke a namane;  
Wa tsenwa ke tetengwa le fiša tšhiritšhiri.  
(Puleng 1980:42)

(When you meet the face of  
A lofty and chaste lady,  
With bright beautiful eyes;  
You tremble in the hot sun)

as compared with:

Senoinoi se sekhwi pele ga gago . . .  
Ge o kopanya mahlo le sona o tsenwa ke  
tetengwa,  
Kudumela e tshesane e nyaganyaga fahlogong sa  
gago ...  
Wa re ke inoša meetse gwa se thuše selo.  
(Puleng 1981:42)

(Before you stands a winsome lady  
Who shrinks you into fright,  
Causing you to sweat and dry in fear  
Attempts to drink water could not help you)

The remarkable beauty of the lady expressed in the concepts *senoinoi* and *yomontha* in both extracts sinks the young man into despair and inferiority. All the dreams that haunted him to confess he shall jump out of his skin to express his deep-seated passion fade into oblivion.

Realising that it is difficult to face the lady, he resorts to other means to help him out of this situation. It is probably his failure that leads him to drink in lieu of plucking up courage. This is revealed in the text below:

Lehono o iphoufatša ka mokankanyane;  
O re o tšea mahlo a tšhipa ka kelo le bohlae  
Anthe o lebala gore o e rwala ka moka...  
(Puleng 1981:41)

(Now you fool yourself by drinking;  
Claiming that you subtly pluck up courage,  
And forget that you are overdosing yourself)

The character drinks with a strong feeling that liquor will give him the necessary courage to express his inner feelings of love. He, however, fails to realise that moderate or small doses of alcohol may substantially impair performance on standard intellectual tests.(Royal College of Psychiatrists 1986). The Royal College of Psychiatrists further explains the people's obsession to drink with the hope to improve their judgement as a pathetic fallacy. They aptly report:

The more alcohol is drunk, the more judgement is lost. Unfortunately, many people under the influence of alcohol believe that their

performance is normal, or even improved.  
(Royal College of Psychiatrists 1986:48)

This assertion clearly points out that drinking impairs judgement, and thus the character in the poem who fails to convince the lady he loves when he is sober-minded, will find it more difficult to procure the love of the winsome lady before him. He will have to deal with problems of impaired fluency, word memory and quality of associations.

Compare Puleng (1980:43)

Leratano . . . ga le tlolelwe dirokolo le  
mešunkwane.

(Love cannot be procured with herbs)

with Puleng (1981:42) where he says:

Lerato ga le tlolelwe dirokolo le mešunkwane.

(Love cannot be procured with herbs)

The earlier text advises the character that love is not enkindled by herbal or any magical means. The character is warned against the use of '*samolatela*', some kind of love potion (charms) - a magical herb believed to coax and tame young men into loving. This is asserted in the fourth stanza of **Ga o kgone** (Puleng 1980). Although the latter text sheds the same idea, it goes further to give more details and develops the narrative forward. The poet warns:

Dikgagareng o tšo botšiša wa hwetša bohlatse  
O lebala gore hlare sa ntšhirela ke wena ka noši,  
... o katologile batho  
Maano o tlo logišwa ke mang  
... o iphetotše tšhikanoši? (Puleng 1981:43)

(You have consulted divining bones and found  
the cause  
You forget that the cause is in you  
... you have distanced yourself from the people  
Who shall assist you when you have become a  
recluse?)

Realising his plight, the character turns to traditional doctors for help. To his dismay, he is proved to be the cause of his grief. This idea is also maintained in the earlier text by witchdoctors who retort:

'Dibabotlase lehono ke leteka,  
Bo gopišišwe ke bohlotlolo le botšopša.'

(Today the fountain is half-empty,  
It has been dried by lechery and promiscuity)

an assertion normally uttered to someone whose time for marriage has passed and considered too old to marry. Such a character has already enjoyed most of his youthful life and possibilities of enjoying marriage life and procreating are believed to be very slim. Hence the water imagery *leteka*. It is for this reason that he is warned that his chances to extend the family lineage may likely wane for life. Although the water imagery *dibabotlase lehono ke leteka* is exclusively referred to women, here the poet juxtaposes it to reveal the dilemma in which the character in the poem has landed himself. The fountain image gives a vivid explanation of the fact that the character is likely not to bear children. This is achieved through the use of contrasting words *bo gopišišwe* and *leteka*. This opposition heightens the character's predicament and problems.

Having lost the confidence to face the world and the ladies he loves, the character takes to alcohol to pluck up courage with the hope that he will succeed. The poet strongly castigates him by alerting him that:

O sentše thipa wa buwa digwagwa,  
Bjale o itshwara hlogo ge o bona nama tša  
makhura. (Puleng 1981:41)

(You wasted ample time,  
And now you regret when you realise new  
opportunities).

The assertion is borrowed from the adage that reads: *O sentše thipa wa tswia magotlo kganthe nama tša makhura di s'e tla.* The poet's ingenuity to juxtapose frogs for rats in the assertion is very interesting. Frogs in most communities are considered inedible, and if the contrary is true, they are not highly held like other types of meat. The frog imagery serves well to convey efforts and time wasted by the character that he now would regret. He has failed to win the hands of winsome ladies who tried all in vain to procure him into the game of love. His haughty attitude could not allow him to propose to ladies who made advances to him, unfortunately time has run out and has to contend with the hapless life.

Compare the statement:

Fela wa palelwa ke go lahlela la bošiwana (Puleng  
1980:42)

(And, however, you failed to express yourself)

with

Kgetha wa gago ka mahlo le ditoro o tlo mo hwetša  
Go yena o itele mašiwana o tlo lokelwa ke a go botša  
(Puleng 1981:42).

(Let your eyes and dreams guide you to choose  
the one you love  
And unto her express yourself you will succeed  
I assure you)

Despite his handsome nature, the young man is overwhelmed by an inability to share his love feelings with those he loves. The second extract adds flesh onto the earlier text wherein the character is advised to look around for beauties and to make a choice. The poet assures the character some measure of success if he could jump out of his skin and make advances to the lady. In the earlier text, he is warned that failure to do that would make him dearly pay for his coyness, as this may mark an end to his lineage as outlined in:

O tla timelelwa ke tlhale ya tatamoloko  
(Puleng 1980:44)

(You will lose your lineage thread)

This warning is built on the idea that people have to raise the seed of their kin for as long as they live. This timid young man has to face possibilities of not extending and raising his family name or die a 'coward'.

Compare Puleng's assertion:

Lehono o fetogile sešokiša (Puleng 1980:44)

(Now you are pitiable)

with

O hloma bjang le nna o ntšhokiša lesogana?

(What troubles you, for I pity you too young man?)

where the character appeals to the beholder's sympathy. He has become a slave in the shackles of love. In the later text, he has now turned a hermit, who shares nobody's ideas. He ostensibly suffers starvation for the love which is unrequited. Surprisingly, he begrudges friends who propose the

lady he loves, and even plans banal acts to stop them though he does not even attempt to make love advances.

Compare:

Yena yola mokokotlo wa pelo ya gago . . .  
E sa lego o ena le badimo beno le babo  
Gore le ka mpha yena nka bolaya mma ka šala  
naye. Puleng (1980:43)

(That one who is the backbone of your heart,  
Who you vowed with her departed relatives and  
yours  
That you may kill your mother for her sake)

with

Ke hlwa ke go kwa bošego ge o robetše  
O mmitša ka maina a baratani,  
Yena yola o mo tšhabago mosegare le eja  
motho. (Puleng 1981:43)

(I always overhear you in your sleep  
Addressing her with love praises,  
That one who you fear at daybreak)

Puleng's poetry could not escape the influence of Matsepe, his literary model. The same theme under discussion here is handled by Matsepe (1970:19) in **Kganya o inaganne**. In this poem, the character in the poem is a young, pompous and haughty lady who frowns upon lads who approach her in lieu of proposing love. Fooled by her charming and seductive appearance, she dismisses all advances until it becomes too late to realise that her body's freshness is worn out. This prompts her to rejuvenate herself, something which is difficult to do as Matsepe (1970:19) points out in the assertion:

Ge bofsa bo go hlanogela ga go ka mo o ka bo  
utamışago.

(There is no way in which you can disguise  
your age)

The quoted assertion is found in the two poems for discussion by Puleng as quoted below. Unlike in Matsepe, the coy personality here is a pompous, charming young man who brags about his decent apparel. Like the winsome lady in Matsepe, he does not accept love advances. Both characters are victims of *Time* - they all realise until late that they have misused their

chances. These two characters share several qualities that may prompt the reader to infer that Puleng as a later poet, might have adapted the same theme in his composition, and had the sex of the character transformed. This composition may not be declared parochial on the grounds of similarity in the *leitmotif*. Puleng's poems provide more background detail such as the educational status, interests, fears and beliefs of the character in the poems than the one in Matsepe.

The assertions:

(1) . . . . bofsa bo a go hlanogela (Puleng 1980:44)

(Youthfulness deserts you)

(2) O lebala gore bofsa bo a go hlanogela (Puleng  
1981:41)

(You forget that youthfulness deserts you)

all cited from Puleng convey the same message given by Matsepe in the extract cited earlier on, in an attempt to warn the coy personality in the poem to guard against time which steals his youth. In Puleng's earlier text, the coy personality having stayed a bachelor for years has now overgrown the stage

of youth and yet he does not seem to realise that. In the later text, he wastes time on sheer ostension hoping that his costume will help him. This prompts the poet to use the citation in (2) above to warn him that old age stands at his heels.

The fact that coy people like all creatures are subject to *Time* was revealed early in the seventeenth century by the English poet Andrew Marvel in his poem, **To His Coy Mistress**, whose second stanza follows:

But at my back I hear  
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;  
And yonder all before us lie  
Deserts of vast eternity.  
Thy beauty shall no more be found,  
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound  
My echoing song; then worms shall try  
That long preserved virginity. (Brooks &  
Warren 1976)

The humming sounds in this stanza suggest a rapid motion of time which hurries youthful activities to a stop. The poet satirises a lady who refused love advances by the persona, and only waits for worms which shall feast on her virginity. The vault metaphor suggests the temporality of human life on earth.

Regarding the temporality of beauty and human life Puleng (1981:41) says:

Kgarebe tša lefase leno ke matšoba di a pona le  
tšona

(Like flowers, the ladies of this world also  
wither)

as compared with Matsepe's view:

Ge le pona letšoba ga go ka mo le ka  
ithapeletšago. (1970:19)

(There is no way in which a flower may avoid  
withering).

The symbolism of flowers suggests the temporality of human beauty. Like attractive flowers with fragrant smells which finally wither, human beauty also diminishes as one shrinks into old age. In the preceding extract, the character in the poem is warned against dilly-dallying on love matters as those ladies and the character, too, will soon shrink into old age.

Matsepe in the preceding quotation uses the same flower imagery to indicate that the imminence of old age cannot be avoided. All cosmetic attempts to restore one's youthful life are vulnerable to *Time*. Both poets use the flower imagery to communicate their cosmic view of life and the world. The withering of the flowers suggests the transience of human life's mortality. As applied and directed to the personae in the poems, they are advised to meaningfully use their youthful life with moderation and should not forget that life on earth is transient.

An interesting flower imagery is provided by Lentsoane (1974:4) where he says:

Go pona a pona,  
A pona letšatši lela.  
A tla mela gape.

(To wither, they do,  
They wither on that day.  
And shall grow again)

Although Lentsoane shares the same ideology with the other poets cited above, he goes a step further by adding his Christian view on life after death. In line with the views of these poets is Shakespeare's warning that the human race can do nothing in stemming the tide of time, which will take its course unhindered as outlined in the couplet below:

And nothing 'gainst time's scythe can make  
defense

Save breed, to brave him when he takes then  
thence. (Allison, *et al* 1983:186)

It is interesting to note that not only does Puleng borrow ideas from earlier writers, but the latter also seem to borrow from him. In *Ga o kgone* (Puleng 1980) the coy personality's wishful thinking goes:

'Bonang, bonang ke tšo retolla letheka la  
mampobe,  
Ka rafa nose ya semane ka ja mamapo.'

(Behold, behold I have turned round the queen-  
bee's loin,  
And extracted the honeybed and surfeited)

which may be compared with Lentsoane (1988:28) where he says:

Todi ye e na le beng ba yona,  
Todi ye e na le nako ya yona.  
Kgotla o mone o šuela . . .  
Ke todi ya bophelo,  
Toditodi ditoding,

Bosasa e ka go galakela,  
Wa šala o hlapaola morafi,  
Wa šala o šitwa go kgothola mamapo.

(This honey has its owners,  
The honey has its time.  
Dip, lick and leave for others . . .  
It is a honey for life,  
A honey amongst others,  
In future it may trouble you  
You will insult the honeybed-extractor,  
And fail to empty the honeybed)

**Mampobe** is the bee queen, which is rarely seen. It is normally surrounded by the swarm and kept safe from any violent attacks. The difficulty with which one may reach her is metaphorically used to refer to a winsome lady who is difficult to procure into loving. The bee paradigm is tied to the honey image used in Lentsoane. To succeed convincing and softening the heart of *mampobe*, would make the character enjoy the honey-comb. In Lentsoane, the honey imagery is used to connote sex, and further used to warn against the abuse of it. No claim can be made thus far that Lentsoane's citation is a mere parody because he has used the image in a different context to achieve a different purpose, that is, to warn children to abstain from sexual intercourse as it is the exclusive right of adults.

## 2.5 SUMMARY

The chapter focused on the portraiture of the Mother figure in Puleng's works. It has been noted that motherhood is depicted as an institution above life; the mother, known for her virtuous qualities, provides love, security, shelter and guidance. It is the Christian character of the family that cherishes and sows the values: love, patience, courage, praise and thanksgiving. The poet uses his poetry to honour and thank his mother for the care and guidance she has provided throughout his upbringing.

Though the mother is in the category of women in all respects, her portrayal within the bond of marriage is unlike the rest of the womenfolk. She is perceived differently from the other women, and thus the poet seems not to classify motherhood within the category of womanhood. The former is seen as an institution above the ordinary.

Images of women delineated in this chapter are mostly negative and reflect the way men use a series of maxims to justify their dominance. Within the bond of marriage, women are shackled in the dynamics in which they cannot unwind themselves. Although women are encouraged to be subservient to the in-laws, and their fertility is controlled through marriage, modern women, however, take pains to liberate themselves by providing alternative solutions to their domination.

Although Puleng uses negative images of women in his literature, he accepts that there are virtuous women such as Portia, Brutus' wife. Such a portrayal is an attempt to strike a balance between positive and negative women characters.

Puleng also condemns young men who fail to procure ladies into loving. He spells out that a person's academic status or apparel has nothing to do with his ability to propose love. In this section, it has been observed that Puleng has adapted the theme of coyness from Matsepe, and the influence of English literature cannot be completely overruled.

# CHAPTER 3

## RELIGION : AN AFRICANIST PERSPECTIVE

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The complexity of religious views around the world makes it difficult to coin a definition which will hold true for all religious communities. One major factor which complicates the problem is the nature of the relationship to the deity or deities involved. An inclusion of the Supreme being or supernatural excludes other sects which have no place for the supernatural existence in their religion. Despite these problems, an attempt has been made to define the concept religion.

Schmidt (1980:12) defines religion as:

. . . a response to such enduring aspects of human existence as death, suffering and the need to construct a human community.

He goes further to cite Yinger who remarks:

religion can be defined as a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggles with these ultimate problems of human life. It is the refusal to capitulate to death, to give in the face of frustration, to allow hostility to tear apart one's human associations. (Schmidt 1980:12)

Yinger further explains that religion endures because it is an attempt to explain what cannot be otherwise explained to achieve power, all other powers having failed us; to establish poise and serenity in the face of evil and suffering that others have failed to eliminate.

Jonas and de Beer (1973:176) cite Geerts' definition which regards religion as:

a system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

This definition emphasises the meaningfulness of symbols to represent reality. In Christian circles bread and wine are functional symbols as large aquatic snakes are symbolic of fertility in some African religions. Religion encompasses people's set of beliefs and encapsulates their self-definition. Through religion humanity seeks to find the cause of its existence and how it relates to that cause. It is through their religion that humanity relates to the divine world inhabited by spirits, God and other celestial bodies that have control over the universe. Their religious beliefs give them a sense of security and hope.

Spiro summarises some of the functions of religion in this way:

(a) religion satisfies the need to understand, and find an answer for inexplicable and apparently meaningless phenomena;

(b) it satisfies "substantive" desires, that is, for rain, crops, heaven, healing, victory in war, and relief from anxiety;

(c) it provides an acceptable way of expressing "painful motives" that society finds unacceptable. So, for example, the desire to remain dependent on adults can be satisfied symbolically by trust in and reliance upon

superhuman beings (Jonas & de Beer 1973:176-177).

A common element of the definitions cited earlier on is the place of the ultimate power. The notion of ultimacy presupposes the existence of an absolute power, a transcendental power that is above all creation. Christians believe in the existence of the only God whose gateway is his only begotten son Jesus Christ.

Missionaries have disputed the existence of religion amongst Africans, and where they acknowledge such an existence, the religion was considered a natural one, that is *animism*. The missionaries failed to realise that Africans, like other communities, continue to search for a metaphysical explanation of the cosmos. Their religious experiences are reflected in their myths of origin, proverbs and their conception of the world. They believe in the existence of God, ancestors, divinities and spirits. God manifests himself in all reality, he is ever present among the living, in living objects and even amongst the livingdead. The question that needs to be answered is what African traditional religion is. Thorpe (1991:3) explains:

... since traditional religions are oral and their concepts passed from generation to generation by word of mouth, we do not have written records by which we can trace historical developments within a given group.

African traditional religions as primal religions are incorporated into the lives of the people. There is no way in which one can speak of the peoples' lives and exonerate them from religion. Their religion permeates all life. It is not a one hour Sunday religion organised by a select group, but a living religion which allows individual freedom. Failing to recognise that religion is an integral part of African life, early Christian explorers and missionaries often labelled Africans as *heathens* or *pagans*.

An earlier Portuguese explorer to Southern Africa once reported that **the people are all Hottentots and they have no religion** [my emphasis] (Booth 1977:1). His report is fraught with stereotypes that reveal his ignorance. Using his European conception of religion, he claimed that African people are irreligious beings. He could not think of a world other than Europe, because for him and his fellow Europeans, the centre of all existence is Europe; thus anything other than what is practised in Europe is judged with contempt. His second failure lies in the syllogism: **the people are all Hottentots** [my emphasis]. He could not realise that there were several African tribes in the southern tip of Africa in which Hottentots were a small fraction. In explaining the source of this attitude towards Africa, Booth (1977:1) goes on to suggest:

After all, he was from Europe, where the presence of religion is manifested in church buildings, priests, and sacred scriptures. Perhaps he was on his way home from India where comparable phenomena would have been seen. In that part of Africa, however, he saw no

identifiable religious buildings, no distinctively religious functionaries, and certainly no scriptures. Therefore, "they have no religion."

The same attitude is found from an explorer in Bechuanaland who reported that the Batswana:

did not practise any form of worship. They called their god Morimo, who was considered cunning and malicious. (Parrinder 1981:45)

On the same page, a similar sentiment is echoed where it is reported:

Essentially similar is the Kaffir idea of the spirit world. They cannot be said to practise any form of worship. They believe in an invisible god, but do not represent him by any image. Their tradition speaks of a Being whom they call the Great-Great (Unkulunkulu) and the first Appearer or Exister.

Distortions such as these are not only blasphemous, but seek to find a way to destroy the Africans' conception of their cosmogony. The assertions further elicit the European attempt to subvert, if possible, all traditional

African religions and substitute same by Christianity tinted with the European culture. One wonders why *Modimo* is regarded as a god rather than God. From the assertions cited above, *Unkulunkulu* is acknowledged as he who appeared first, that is before all humanity and creation, and this presupposes that all humanity descends from him. Even if such a view is self-evident, Europeans continue claiming that Africans have no reverence to God. Although Christians dispute the premise of God as an Ancestor, they harp on addressing him as 'Our Father' which in a biological sense is a progenitor. They mistake theological differences to represent irreligiousness. It should, however, be noted that these differences signify different modes of epistemological and ontological existence.

The assertions are fraught with racist diction which deliberately inflicts spiritual insult on the Africans and their beliefs. The main pursuit of these explorers is to justify their attempt to revolutionise and colonise Africa for their material benefit. In this regard, they first want to capture the Africans' minds and souls by making them believe that they are spiritually 'hollow' and thus have to seek redemption from the Europeans and their system of beliefs, values and norms.

## 3.2. TRADITIONAL AFRICAN RELIGIOUS THOUGHTS

### 3.2.1 THE CREATION MYTH AND THE FIRST CRY

Throughout his poetry, Puleng often refers to the child's first cry. This runs like a golden thread from one volume to another. The answer to the question why the child cries after birth is not a simple matter to resolve.

In *O llelang*, (Puleng 1980:8) the rhetorical question is retorted in the opening lines of the poem.

Motho o llelang ge a belegwa?  
Bohloko le dihlabi tša pelego ke tša motswadi,  
Lethabo le tlhologelo ya lefase di tšwele  
madibeng:  
A wa kalana mokgoši wa kwala.

(Why does a child cry at birth?  
The pains are those of the mother,  
The world's pleasure and aspirations evolved  
from the pool,  
Ululations are chanted at birth.)

The poet is puzzled by the fact that it is not the child who suffers the labour pains but its mother, yet it cries at birth. On the contrary, the child adds excitement to the mother and the family as a whole, hence the ululations alluded to.

Reference to *madibeng* in *lethabo le tšwele madibeng* once more alludes to the Northern Sotho myth of creation. It is strongly held among African communities that life started from a pool. The Zulu consider life to have started from a reed-bed (*emhlangeni*). The celebration of the reed dance to them is a celebration of life, fertility and rebirth. Although among the Northern Sotho this myth is scarcely mentioned, a series of allusions both in everyday speech and literary works reveal a common myth with that of the Nguni with some slight differences. The following are some of those references which prompt the researcher to conclude that the Northern Sotho also have a creation myth that traces life from water:

(1) Ke felegeditše dithaka . . . (madibeng)

(Lit. I in vain accompanied my friends to the  
pools)

(2) Lekgala o boile tseleng . . . (ya go ya madibeng)

[Lekgala has miscarried. (Lit. Lekgala has turned on the way leading to the pools)]

- (3) Bana ba matsatši a ba tseba madiba e sa le meganyaganyane

(Modern youth untimely plunge into sexual relations)

- (4) Lethabo le tihologelo ya lefase di tšwa madibeng  
(Puleng 1980:8)

(The pleasure and avidity are derived from the pools)

- (5) . . . O moetedimogolo kobeledi  
Ya mašako pherehlamadiba (Puleng 1980:26)

(You are the great visitor the stretcher of  
The worlds to disturb the pools)

- (6) . . . Mathari a lehono a tšhaba go ya madibeng  
Ba re ke sebjalebjae . . . (Puleng 1980:29)

(Modern women are anxious to give birth,  
Claiming that the times are modern)

- (7) . . . Ke segwanasegolo mphabadimo,  
Ke motho motšwamadibamatala  
Faseng la khutšo le kagišo . . . (Puleng  
(1980:33)

(It is a God-given water bowl,  
A human being from the blue pools  
In the land of peace and harmony)

- (8) Fahlegwana tša meetsemagolo,  
Fahlegwana tša madiba 'a bokubu le bokwena,  
Fahlegwana tša rato la watile la badimo...  
(unpublished manuscript [s.a]. :20)

(Little faces from the great waters,  
Little faces from the hippopotamus and  
crocodile infested pools,

Little faces reflecting the love of the ancestors'  
waters)

- (9) Mola ke sa le madibamatala  
Ke sa khutile mpeng ya mme (Puleng 1990:38)

(While I was still in the green pools,  
Hiding in my mother's womb)

- (10) . . . O nthatile pele ke bona  
Mobu le mahlasedi a letšatši,  
Wa ntlheka ka kgodišo ya lerato  
Ke sa le madibamatala (Puleng 1990:24)

(You loved me even before I experienced  
The world and the sun's rays,  
You supported me with your tender upbringing  
While I was still in the womb)

All the cited excerpts make reference to the water imagery. They all have something to do with childbirth which reveals the idea that the Northern Sotho speaking people also trace life from water. This idea is not strange because the Basotho of the New South Africa and Lesotho also believe that the first Mopeli came from a pool situated in Ntswanatsatsi, a mythic area in the east. It should be noted that the two groups have a common history that

also suggests without doubt that at one stage they may have been a single group. This is suggested by a host of common linguistic and mythological heritage. The fact that the first Mosotho was called Mopeli also suggests a common link with the Bapedi, a group of Northern Sotho speakers who are predominantly found in Sekhukhuneland and Nebo. Another striking fact is the idea that the Basotho emerged from an area somewhere in the east. The area to the east of the Northern Province including Bolobedu as well as the eastern side of Tzaneen is commonly referred to by people in the Far Northern Transvaal as Bopedi. Probably this is where the first Mopeli came from.

The tracing of life from water should not be taken literally. This is a metaphorical expression that connotes the whole pelvic area, the womb and the pubic hair. The concept *madibamatata* creates a mental picture of a great pool surrounded by tall green bulrushes whose shades are reflected in the water. These bulrushes are symbolic of the pubic hair that surrounds the pelvic region. The pool referred to extends to the plasm in the placenta which bursts open before a child is born.

The expression in (1) above is mostly uttered when a parent (the mother) has completely lost confidence and trust in her child because of the latter's wayward behaviour. The mother regrets all the pains that she took to give birth to such a disgraceful and disgusting child.

In (2) one would ask oneself what path is referred to. The path alluded to is the same path that leads to the pools from which children are drawn. In (5)

Puleng's mother is named *pherehlamadiba* because she was a qualified midwife who helped in the antenatal clinic at Grootshoek Hospital. The assertion . . . *mathari a lehono a tšhaba go ya madibeng ba re ke sebjalebjae* . . . in (6) proves beyond doubt that the intended meaning has more to do with procreation than the ordinary water or pools. The poet overtly condemns the use of modern technology in an attempt to control childbirth. The assertion clearly communicates the poet's regret on these attempts under the guise of modernity.

Of significance is the fact that the water imagery is in most instances confined to women. The women initiation school has the process *go ya madibeng* where in some cases they also have to repeat the same process during their initiation period. Men do not have their *dikoma* which are associated with water in any way. The praying of rain has to be done with the spread of *mohlapo*. Women's menstruation is referred to as *lehlapo* hence *go hlapa* (to menstruate). The female sexual organs are euphemistically called *dihlapi* (fish). It should be noted here that fish is an aquatic animal and thus the usage here is tied to the water imagery again. Seemingly *go hlapa* is derived from the fact that fish always splashes in water, and the regularity of the menstrual circle prompted the people to coin these lexical items. The symbolism of water cannot be divorced from the women's procreative function.

Having discussed the creation myth in the preceding paragraphs, attention has to be given to childbirth itself. From the citations given, the poet's ideology on childbirth and the first cry is shaped by the folkloric knowledge of his language he has gained. The underworld is a world of plenty, safety and

security. It is for this reason that when one is in serious trouble one expresses the wish *lefase pharoga ke tsene*. In some cases one hears of people who are said to have vanished into thin air; that is, *ba tsene ka monga wa seloko* (they disappeared into the crevices of clay). Although the loved one complains of the absence of such people, belief has it that *ba ja ba lahla* (they eat to surfeit). Puleng's poetry also reveals the same notion about the underworld.

In **Bolwetši bja letšofalela** (Puleng1990:39) the poet remarks:

Moya wa ka o be o humile,  
O humile go feta gauta . . .  
Go be go le bose go nna,  
Pelo ya ka e hloka sekgopi  
Gobane ke be ke khuditše,  
Ke hwetša khutšo,  
Ke hwetša borutho;  
Ke be ke eja,  
Ke be ke enwa  
Sengwe le sengwe . . .

(My spirit was rich,  
Richer than gold . . .  
It was pleasant to me,  
My heart bore no grudge  
Finding comfort,

Finding peace  
And finding warmth.  
I was enjoying food  
And enjoyed drinking  
Each and everything)

Accordingly, the underworld here is described as a tranquil place where unborn children eat to surfeit. It is described as a world of plenty where peace reigns. Breaking from such a world would mean being severed from peace and security. Apparently Puleng expresses the same notion with the *first cry* motif which runs like a thread in his poetry.

He provides a number of reasons which he hopes will unravel this mystery. He suggests that perhaps the cry is symbolic of the child's freedom from being tied to the mother by the umbilical cord. He refers to this world as the world of no-return. This philosophy is born out of the Sepedi adage that says: *maropeng go a boelwa ke teng go sa boelwego*. The adage itself teaches the community not to spoil its nests without considering the fact that the future may be bleak and force them to return to their roots. Considering the Northern Sotho people's belief of life in the underworld, the locativised noun *maropeng* carries with it a further semantic dimension other than the conventional meaning. The ruins normally refer to the place where people had settled earlier on before they trekked from it. In most cases the ruins are deserted and soon reclaimed if life in the outside world does not provide sufficient relief. Hence the adage alluded above. In contrast to this, the word has been used to connote the underworld as opposed to the mother's womb. The idea expressed by the adage serves as a fulcrum towards the

understanding of the poet as well as his society's conception of the world, and further illuminates the intuitive knowledge they have acquired while contesting with life.

The poet further suggests that the child longs for the freedom from the world of no-return into the world in which he is capable of being married to in later life. The lines:

Mohlamong seo ke seka sa khunologo  
Go tšwa lefaseng leo le sa boelwego  
Go ya lefaseng leo go boelwago,  
Gobane motho ke setšwammele sa lefase  
O boela go lona mohl'a lehu. (Puleng 1983a:8)

(Maybe it is a symbol of being freed  
From the world of no-return  
To the world in which it shall return,  
Because people are products of the earth  
And they return to it when they die).

clearly indicate how the poet's religious background shapes his ideas. It is a Christian view that people are made from the soil and had God's breath enthused into them, and thus shall be returned to it while their souls are set free until the day of judgement. The idea expressed by the poet is borrowed from the book of Genesis chapters 2 and 3 as cited below:

Then the Lord God took some soil from the ground and formed a man out of it; he breathed life-giving breath into his nostrils and the man began to live. (Good News Bible 1977:5)

The same idea is further developed in the third chapter where God pronounces his judgement to Adam and Eve by saying:

You will have to work hard and sweat to make the soil produce anything, until you go back to the soil from which you were formed. You were made from soil and you will become soil again.

Puleng's text does not parasitically feed on the biblical text but adds flesh to it. The new text articulates the poet's conception of the world and further expresses a wish to return to the world as a fulfilment of God's Law. It should, however, be noted that the poet does not view this return to the underworld as a punishment as Genesis pronounces it, but as a basic condition that terminates life on earth.

This belief is not far from the traditional religion which has also shaped the content of the poet's poems. In terms of this belief, life emanates from the underworld and people will thus be returned to it when they are dead. The assertion *motho ke setšwammele sa lefase* is indicative of the people's and the poet's philosophy that human life is a product of God's making - God

created them from the soil, as it can be inferred from the concept *Mmopi* (Creator) - he who moulds things from clay.

People strongly believe that they are tied to the world by their umbilical cords which are shed when they are born. It is for this reason that they also claim origin on the basis of their birth rites. Severed from the world from which they were born grossly frustrates and confuses them, thus a return to the soil after their days of living reunites them happily with their ancestors in the spiritual world.

The assertion *o boela go lona mohla' lehu* also reveals the poet's strong belief in life after death, which is not only held by Christians but also the African traditionalists. This return represents a moment of great relief from the pressures of the world into the underworld characterised by peace, safety and affluence.

The poet puns on the word *lefase* (the world). The words are appositely used to denote different spatial relations. The first one in which the world is considered a world of no-return subtly refers to the mother's womb from which the child is said to be freed. This is the first mark of independence from the mother. Perhaps the child is freed from the routine of being fed directly from its mother and feels incapacitated to stand on its own. The second reference of the word denotes both the physical world and the underworld. The poet's assertion that . . . *ke seka sa khunologo . . . go ya lefaseng leo go boetwago* acclaims the pleasure of returning to the underworld which he has described as the world of plenty and tranquillity.

The poet clears the ambiguity of the world which he defines as *lefase leo go boetwago* by providing distinctions between these worlds, namely, the underworld and the physical world populated by human species. Earlier on the underworld has been described as a tranquil and affluent world whereas the physical world is considered:

Lefase . . . la dikgaphamadi, dillo le ditsikitlano  
tša meno. (Puleng 1983a:8)

(A world of violence, grief and suffering)

The poet suggests that it is perhaps because of the hostile nature of this physical world that the child cries when it is born. In the same poem, the poet surmises that the child might be apportioning blame on the horrors of the world. The same idea is intensified by the assertion:

Mohlamong ke ka lebaka la moya wa lefase leno  
Woo o nkgago digarolamatswalo le  
dikgagamatšo,  
Mohlamong ke mobu wo, woo o sa swanego le  
wa madibamatala  
Moo go nwago bokubu le bokwena,  
Woo o tšhošago tlhago ya motho wa mmele, le  
pelo le moya. (Puleng 1983a:8)

(Perhaps it is because of the atmosphere of this world

Which smells horrors and surprises.

Perhaps it is this soil, which differs from that of the green pools

The drinking place for the hippopotami and crocodiles,

The atmosphere which frightens the nature of a person's body and soul.)

The poet uses the *first cry motif* to condemn the atrocities of the world. The inhospitable nature of this world, dominated by conflicts, bloodshed and traumatic events might be responsible for the child's cry. The innocent child is probably frustrated by the marked difference between the two worlds: the world of the living and the world of the spirits (the underworld). Coming from the underworld characterised by affluence, quietude and stability, the child is received into a world without these qualities. This is a matter of concern to the child who needs to be given a warm welcome.

### **3.2.2 PROPITIATION OF ANCESTORS**

To understand the African philosophical conceptions of religion demands a glimpse at their cosmogonic view and the way in which their society is ordered. Society is characterised by a hierarchical order from the king to the lowest echelon where resides the commoner. The king, that seat of authority invested with divine rights, is approached through intermediaries and the

same principle is adhered to when God, the Supreme being, a being above all nature revered by all, cannot be approached directly.

The ancestors, contrary to what the missionaries believed, mediates the needs and requisites of the people before God, and this should not be translated to mean that Africans worshipped them. Mbiti (1975:9) observes the obscurantist and bigoted attitude of the West towards African religions in this way:

'Worship' is the wrong term to apply in this situation; and Africans themselves know very well that they are not 'worshipping' the departed members of their family. It is blasphemous, therefore, to describe these acts of family relationships as 'worship'. Furthermore, African religions do not end at the level of family rites of libation and food offerings. They are deeper and more comprehensive than that. To see them only in terms of 'ancestor worship' is to isolate a single element, which in some societies is of little significance, and to be blind on many other aspects of religion.

Despite the missionary assaults on African religions, Mbiti (1975:9) observes that the same westerners who harp on 'ancestor worship' keep flowers,

candles, and even photographs of the dead on the graves of relatives and friends.

African religions, like other religious forms are characterised by symbols and rituals which should not be taken literally for what they seem to be, but should be contextualised in their conception to reveal the inner philosophical and religious meaning embedded in them. Regarding what westerners mistake to be ancestor worship Mbiti further explains:

Libation and the giving of food to the departed are tokens of fellowship, hospitality and respect; the drink and food so given are symbols of family continuity and contact. (Mbiti 1975:9)

Living in the spiritual world of "the livingdead", ancestors liaise with their descendants on earth, and carry their concerns to the Almighty. In this study, the researcher dismisses such nefarious bigotry that denigrates Africans as "irreligious" beings concerned with the worship of lesser heavenly deities. God is no foreign concept to them, but Christianity clothed in white culture alienates Africans from their primary knowledge - a knowledge that seeks to find the nature and origin of things in their Creator.

In the first stanza of **Ka moka di nkholang?** (Puleng 1981) the persona mediates upon the mysteries and complexities of life and does not find a

simplified solution towards the understanding of the world. Finding life incomprehensible, he consults his departed father for explanation:

Ka yo khunama dihlogong tša tate yo a  
robetšego,

Ka hlatša sello sa pelo ka gomela gae . . .

(Puleng 1981:2)

(I went to kneel at the head of my father's tomb,

And presented my case and returned home)

It is not strange in African societies that departed relatives are consulted for definition and explanations of the complexities of life. The departed relatives have strong bonds with the living, and still maintain their ties through the sacrifices and offerings given to them. They are expected to reciprocate for the attention they receive from their descendants, hence in periods of neglect they will also neglect the welfare of the living.

The persona finally returns home and shuts himself behind doors where he regrets what he has done. It is at this time that he continues a deep search, a search for personal and cultural identity. This identity sought for has been eroded and diffused by the meeting point between African culture and western Christian culture. This search is symbolic of the confusion in which Africans find themselves in the crossroad of their culture and western imperialist culture.

The erosion of African cultural patterns has been a calculated endeavour by missionaries and philanthropists who encouraged the neglect of African customs and traditions. African religions were either dismissed as *animist* or *pagan* religions which reflect a large scale of barbarism and backwardness. The "civilising" mission of the church has left most Africans with a weak cultural foundation on which they would lean as they wish to be identified with the "civilised" world with its values and norms. The same problem was further heightened by unprecedented urbanisation:

Mefanyetšo ya ntshe ke ya selehono  
Moo tlogolwana tša Thulare di gogwago ka nko;  
BoRamaisela ba ipitša boJacqueline,  
BoMatsobane ba ipitša boDennis  
Anthe ba bolotše sešane le komatona ya banna.  
(Puleng 1981:17)

(Styles are modern  
Where Thulare's descendants are misled;  
Ramaisela and her ilk call each other Jacqueline,  
Matsobane and his ilk call each other Dennis  
Although they went through female and male  
initiation schools)

The change from African names to European names does not only start at the level of the city. African people could not be baptised in the orthodox churches in their African names. They had to shed off their African culture

completely to be accepted into Christianity, this included even their names. The earliest converts were encouraged to speedily adopt the European culture under the guise of "spiritual change". This was made possible by establishing mission stations at which the converts would live without being tainted by their traditional practices. At these "holy" stations no indigenous ritual could be performed. In areas where it was difficult to establish the "stations", the *magoši* of those areas were either asked or forced to grant a separate portion of the land in the same village to the converts where they could not be influenced by their cultural idiom any more. These secluded areas are still found in many areas of Sekhukhune district and are commonly referred to as *Majakaneng*.

*Majakane* as the converts are called, are not to be seen taking part in *dikoma*, *go phasa*, and not even in traditional dances such as *tšhutšhu*, *makgakgasa* and *kiba*. They were largely preoccupied with the adoption of western life-styles inculcated by the schools which they attended. Admission at schools was another vehicle that was used to change African names. No one could be admitted in his African name. Pupils had to be registered in European names. The researcher, too, has been a victim of such a system. It is a frustrating experience of earning a name which does not have meaning, a name that initially becomes a way of identifying a person at school (for the western world). One is thus torn between two worlds: At home one is Sekgothe, at school Cedric - the researcher's foreign name. At times one even forgets that he is Cedric and does not respond when the teacher calls his name. This is even worse when one is awarded a prize during school functions. One's parents fail to identify their child in the name with which he is addressed.

Arriving in the city, the rustics would not like to be identified with the rural areas because city life to them is "golden" and "civilised". Name changing is another form of westernising and shedding of the countryside's way of life. The pursuit of these country folks is to be seen as the Other and not African:

Setšo se lebetšwe se lebelelwa ka bosodi,  
Go lebeletšwe dipere le ditšekephote,  
Maano a bohwirihwiri a tsentswe ka gare,  
Boradia, bonokwane le bophelephethe ke  
boiphedišo,  
Go lebeletšwe gore mpa e dule e tletše. (Puleng  
1981:17)

(Culture is viewed with contempt,  
People crave for jackpots and betting horses,  
Evil plans are wrought,  
Slyness, criminality and wretchedness are a way  
of life,  
The pursuit is to fill one's tummy.)

Concentration on betting horses and jackpots is another way of identifying with the western world. The *botho (ubuntu)* aspect of African philosophy is neglected by indulging in wretchedness which is aggravated by the inhospitality of the city which Lentsoane (1975:57) briefly sums up:

Ke tlopatlopišwa bokaphoofolo,  
Ke tsena mo ke etšwa,  
Molato ga o tšwe ka kgoro.  
Tša mmušo wa gago o di nyakile wa di hloka.  
Gae ke tšwago tše bjale ga di gona,  
Go nna tšohle ke bohloa,  
Motho ga a tsošwe borokong.  
A phatlalala mahube a banna,  
A ntamiša ke letša meno,  
Sello re gaela ka dipolelopoelo,  
Sello sa marobalo.

(I am made to run helter-skelter like a beast,  
Running from pillar to post,  
The problem is far from being solved.  
[Particulars] Of your government you demanded  
and could not find.  
Back home where I come this we do not  
experience,  
As for me, these are ill-omens,  
No person may be awakened from his sleep.  
The dusk is fading,  
I meet it trembling in cold weather,  
We complain in different languages,  
A need for accommodation)

The extract lampoons the injustices of the *apartheid* system, smacks its face with an intent on subverting it. Kganyago cites Malcolm X who aptly points out that

Unemployment and poverty have forced many of our people into a life of crime. . . . The real criminal is the white liberal, the political hypocrite. And it is these legal crooks who pose as our friends, force us into a life of crime and then use us to spread the white man's evil vices in our community among our people.  
(Kganyago 1995:17)

It was largely the *apartheid* redtape and its legacies that led to this heart-breaking experiences. Homelessness and unemployment orchestrated by the various *apartheid* regimes were responsible for the highest levels of criminality that stalked the cities. African people from the countryside could not be employed in the city unless they were contracted from their *magoši* through the Commissioner of Bantu Affairs. Those who had already moved to the cities *ultravires*, sought ways of deluding police brutality. Some changed their surnames and claimed to be Coloureds and had to go through a series of classifications. This was a way to evade homelessness and unemployment. Similar to "boRamaisela" and "boMatsobane" in Puleng's poem, these people experience a cultural shock owing to circumstances beyond their own control; they all change their identity to quell their inner disturbances so that they would be recognised as people.

In *Nonyana tša phelo bja ka* (Puleng 1991) the persona mediates upon life and does not find an easy solution to the mystery of creation. The question *mašemo a a lemilwe ke mang?* (who has tilled these fields?) has no immediate answer until the ancestors are consulted for clarification. The lines:

Ke rutha le dikgopolo tša lefaufau,  
Ke teba lehumong la sephiri,  
Ke bolela le badimo bešo ba le kgole:  
Tšeo ke hlokago ke di hwetša motsotsong woo.  
(Puleng 1991:31)

(I indulge in tall dreams,  
And plunge into the wealth of secrecy,  
I speak to my ancestors being far away  
Who provide my needs within a wink of an eye)

are indicative of the dilemma which an ordinary person cannot unravel, but the caring, ever-concerned departed souls of the ancestors can do. The lines:

Ke bolela le badimo bešo ba le kgole:  
Tšeo ke hlokago ke di hwetša motsotsong woo.

(I talk to my ancestors being far away  
Who provide my needs within the wink of an  
eye)

are parodied in his earlier work **Seipone sa Madimabe** (1981:38) in this way:

Motho a re a tsirinyega ditsebe,  
A khunama a ipobola go badimo babo,  
A re a ponyologa kgole ya ba kgauswi.

(When a person's ears start itching,  
And kneels down to beg their ancestors,  
And find that the horizon is narrowed)

In these lines the poet over-accentuates the people's consciousness about their departed relatives. As intermediaries, *badimo* have to console their dependants when in stressful conditions as alluded to in the poem **Maikutlo** (Puleng 1981).

Puleng's belief in the power of the spirits seems to have waned as a result of the influence of the western religious views that he may have riveted in himself from the Christian character of his family. It would be wrong, however, to suggest that he has completely shed off the African traditional beliefs since it is shown throughout this study that he has married the two

religious systems into his text. The contradictions that are discerned represent the dialectic problem posed by the threat of Christianity/imperialism over the religions of Africa and the third world.

Distanced from his father who has been buried on the orange estates of Section Six, Puleng finds himself alienated from his place of origin and his father in particular. The poem *Lefase leo ke le hladišitšwego ka megokgo* (Puleng 1991:26) adopts an autobiographical mode which he uses to transcend the physical world into the spiritual world where he can meet his departed father. Staying in Lebowakgomo, though a stone-throw distance from Section Six, he is nostalgic and wishes to be reconciled with scenery that reminds him of his father. The appeal:

Ntshwarele hle mma,  
Fela ke gopola thaba ya Mmabolepu le Matome,  
Ke kgaoga letswalo,  
Ke rumula megokgo e le kgole le mna . . .  
(Puleng 1991:26)

(Pardon me oh Mother,  
Still I remember Mmabolepu and Matome  
mountains,  
I become frightened,  
And untimely disturb the tear glands)

represents a dramatic dialogue between the poet and his mother who has turned to be the seat of comfort since the death of the father. The third line in the preceding quotation is laden with remorse. The breaking of one's conscience will be accompanied by severe pain and grief. The idiom *ke kgaoga matswalo* is applied to suggest the mournful state into which the poet sinks when he recalls the death of his father. The same idea is reinforced by the image suggested by the expression *ke rumula megokgo*. Like someone poked into violence, tears are shed unendingly as a result of the sad memory that he tries hard to forget. As a member of the hierarchy of the livingdead, the poet's father also appears through dreams and visions to his direct dependent. In explaining this visitation the poet says:

Ke reng ke sa robale?  
Ke reng ke lala ke lora toro tša maephuephu  
Ke bona bahu bagologolo ba ntlogetše kgale...  
(Puleng 1991:26)

(Why am I restless?  
Why should I suffer higgledy-piggledy dreams  
And meet departed relatives who deserted me  
long ago)

The poet suffers a sense of separation, and wants to satisfy his innate need of belonging. He knows that he belongs to his father who has been transfigured into the spiritual realm. Separated from the graves of his departed relatives, the poet feels alienated from his sanctuary. It is through

a dream that he finds a means to express his nostalgia. Finally, he appeals to his mother to allow him the opportunity to consult with his father:

Mpušetše gae,  
Ke yo khunama hlogong tša mohu tate,  
Ke yo hlatša selo sa pelo ya ka  
Gobane ke thonkgegile maikutlo;  
Ke kgole le boithekgo bja ka . . . (Puleng  
1991:26)

(Return me home,  
To kneel at the head of my deceased father's  
grave,  
To present my case  
For I am emotionally hurt  
That I am far-removed from my support)

The poet's yearning to return to Section Six is influenced by his cultural and African religious ideology. This occurs contrary to the Christian notion that the living have no more relations with the dead. Though a devout Christian, his African beliefs resist to be nullified in the face of Christian beliefs. He finds no peace of mind and hopes to obtain same by consulting his departed father. Returning to his father's grave would also be an event of revival and renewal. It will mark a reunion with his lost 'home', a home to which he was tied by an umbilical cord when he was born. It is during this period of

absence and alienation that he finds himself without an anchor and support in life.

Although the poet seems to be attacking the propitiation of ancestors, his tone is characteristic of African religion. African religion is not an individual affair; it is a corporate religion which encompasses the whole community, and thus the ancestors are approached by the group to satisfy group interests and needs. Even if an individual attempts to open a line of communication with them, that individual would use the plural as in the extract above to indicate that the interests are not his/hers but the group's which he/she represents.

### **3.2.3 PRAYERS**

Prayer is a mode of communication between people and their Creator. This communication can be direct or indirect, depending on the cosmogonic view of those praying. The African traditional view on prayer is centred on the expression of the community's plight through intermediaries who direct these concerns to the Almighty. An act of worship is dedicated to God and not to the ancestor. The ancestor is here used as a link between the living and the Supreme God whose power cannot be faced in the people's ordinariness. Having identified ancestors as their liaison, all ceremonies, rituals and functions of note are to be communicated to these ancestors who are believed to channel the information to their most senior, that is, God.

In **Morena o a nyadiša** (Puleng 1981) the marriage of Tlhako and Matsatši is accompanied by a series of rituals which are typical of the religious pluralism of the modern African societies torn between African traditional religion and Christianity or Islam. The first stanza represents a dialogue between the persona and God, where the persona presents to God the purpose of the ceremony:

Re eme bjalo ka dihlatse mobung wa Ditlou,  
Go tlo kgonthišiša kano tša mohlamonene,  
Ge o ntšha kgopo ya Babinakwena pontšheng,  
O e hlomela bjalo ka lehlogedi thekeng la Batau.  
(Puleng 1981:20)

(We stand here as witnesses on the land of  
Ditlou,  
To ascertain the vows taken thence,  
When you publicly removed a Mokwena's rib,  
And stuck it like a bud on the Batau's loin)

The quotation alludes to a biblical reference in Genesis 2:21-25. The biblical reference is used here to intensify and consolidate the poet's conviction that marriage is meant to weld the couple into completeness. Marriage is considered an act of perfection in which a duality fuses into a monolithic unity. The biblical creation of a woman from a man's rib clarifies the complementarity of each other in their marriage life. This should not be misconstrued to be an allegorical explanation of the womenfolk's domination

by their male counterparts. It has nothing to do with the subjugation of women to the periphery of human affairs. The choice of the rib is fundamental to the understanding of the function and role the woman should play within the institution of marriage. God has deliberately chosen a rib, a bone on the side of a man, and not a cranial or metatarsal bone for these would have clearly been mistaken for icons to justify men's domination and subjection of the womenfolk to their social and political whims. Here, the reference is also a subtle reminder to Tlhako and Matšatši that their decision to marry each other is not something incidental, but God's plan.

The second stanza seals the ritual with the church minister; Reverend Masekela of the Lutheran Church, knitting the couple into the completeness explained earlier on. Another reference to the book of Genesis is found where the persona says:

Tlhako šo, Matšatši šo,  
Lešapo la lešapo la Kgwaditšameetse,  
Wa le amanya le nama ya nama ya Batau...  
(Puleng 1981:20)

(Here stands Tlhako and Matšatši,  
The bone that derives from Kgwadi-tša-meetse,  
Which you yoked with the flesh of the flesh of  
the Batau)

Tlhako and Matšatši are here brought into focus, and in proximity to the Divinity through a supplicative mode in which the creative mission of God is fulfilled through marriage as a uniting force. The preceding quotation supplements the ideas expressed in the biblical reference quoted earlier on. The minister of religion leads the ritual as a priest who communicates and directs the pleas of the people to God that the marriage between Matšatši and Tlhako should last long. The assertion,

"Bjalo se Modimo a se tlemagantšego,  
Motho a se ke a se aroganya . . ."

(That which God has brought together  
No person shall put asunder)

borrowed from Matthew 19:20 serves as a linchpin towards understanding the poet's views and ideology regarding marriage. Reading this text as applied to the new context, the reader finds a new meaning concocted by Puleng within a cultural background different from the biblical background that also helps to illuminate insights into this reading.

Of interest is the existence of religious pluralism in this poem as alluded to earlier. After a continuous dialogue with God, the persona turns to another part of the spiritual world inhabited by the *livingdead* to inform them about the arrival of a new bride in the kraal. The speaker maintains:

Ditlou, Bakwena le Ditau,  
E gorogile natshehlana ya ba gaMminele,  
Naledi ye kilego ya re e bona bošego ya re  
mosegare,  
E tlile go tsošetša ba gaMashabela mello e  
timilego;  
Amogelang matswagodimo a atla sa Mmopi ka  
tše pedi . . . (Puleng 1981:21)

(Ditlou, Bakwena and Batau,  
The beautiful one from the Mminele has arrived,  
The star that once mistook the night for day,  
It has come to ignite the dead fires at the  
Mashabela's kraal;  
Merrily welcome the gift from the Creator  
(Puleng 1981:21)

One vital element of prayer contained in the preceding quotation is **invocation**. The name of the ancestor or spiritual Being whose attention is sought is invoked. In the extract above, three praise names appear; namely, **Ditlou, Bakwena** and **Ditau**. These are totemic praises which are probably the direct progenitors of the couple tying the knot. The Elephants (Ditlou) are grandparents to Tlhako, it is probably their remarkable chronological age that makes the speaker address them first as a sign of respect and acknowledgement of their seniority. In an interview with Tlhako Mashabela (1995) the subject of this poem, he concedes that his grandmother alluded to in this poem is Motšwana Grace Ledwaba who was originally from

GaMashashane. The totemic praise **Ditlou** refers to the Ledwaba lineage group. The invocation of the grandparents goes further to invite the distant relatives in the physical plane to join in the jubilation of that day. Within the context of the ritual, the physical and spiritual worlds are fused to achieve unity of the inhabitants of both worlds. It is for this reason that the ancestors are invited to partake of the delicacies of the ceremony with the living. Such a ceremony is to be enjoyed by even the distant ancestors who are believed to be well-nigh to God, and shall invariably inform him accordingly.

By imploring **Ditlou**, Puleng succeeds to cross a further cultural hurdle of acknowledging the authorial power and jurisdiction of the Mandebele of Moletlane. The wedding of Tlhako and Matšatsi takes place in the area under the provincial control and jurisdiction of the Mandebele who are to be informed of all activities performed in the area under their control. The Mandebele ancestors are thus informed accordingly of the ritual performed on their soil without soiling their reputation.

The arrival of the bride is announced to the host ancestors, that is, Bakwena, who are to welcome her, and provide guardianship to her in their marriage life. The responsibility of guardianship is transferred from the Batau to the Bakwena. This transference is announced in the biblical allusions:

Ge o ntšha kgopo ya Babinakwena pontšheng,  
Ge o e hlomela bjalo ka lehlogedi thekeng la  
Batau. (Puleng 1981:20)

(When you publicly removed a Mokwena's rib,  
And stuck it like a bud on the Batau's loin)

and

Lešapo la lešapo la Kgwadi-tša-meetse,  
Wa le amanya le nama ya nama ya Batau...  
(Puleng 1981:20)

(The bone that derives from Kgwadi-tša-meetse,  
Which you yoked with the flesh of the flesh of  
the Batau) [op cit.]

Here the biblical allusion is used to explain to the ancestor the new responsibility they are to assume. The poet finds no contradiction in addressing the church minister to conduct the ritual, and later refer the matter to the ancestors. The dialectics between *badimo* and God are only visible within Christian psychology. The *livingdead* are to be updated during ceremonies and rituals of the misfortunes and luck that strike their dependants on earth. The direct supplications of prayers to God is an old alternative that has existed for centuries but revived by Christians as the "acceptable" form of supplication. The combination of the two techniques here reveals the contradictions that mark the modern society regarding prayers. The invocation of the Ditaui also calls their attention to allow their descendant Matsatši, a safe passage to the in-laws.

After the invocation of the ancestor, another element reflected is **announcement** :

E gorogile natshehlana ya ba gaMminele,  
Naledi ye kilego ya re e bona bošego ya re  
mosegare,  
E tšile go tsošetša ba gaMashabela mello e  
timilego;  
Amogelang matswagodimo a atla sa Mmopi ka  
tše pedi . . .

(The beautiful one from the Mminele has  
arrived,  
The star that once mistook the night for a day,  
It has come to ignite the dead fires at the  
Mashabela's kraal;  
Merrily welcome the gift from the Creator)  
(Puleng 1981:21)

The speaker announces to the invoked party the purpose of the ritual. The plight of the group is announced for the attention of the ancestor or group of ancestors who are expected to forward such requisites to God unless such are dedicated to him directly. The expression:

E tšile go tsošetša ba gaMashabela mello e  
timilego;

(It has come to ignite dead fires at the Mashabela's  
kraal)

adds a consolation to the ancestors. The *defamiliarization* of the message is achieved through euphemism that well strikes the sombre tone that underlies it. The Mashabela's had lost a son, Justice, a close friend to the poet N.S.Puleng. What makes the quoted line attracting is the peculiarity of its meaning: "coming to ignite fires that have been extinguished!" The socio-cultural context dictates the meaning of the expression. It is a traditional custom to extinguish all fires and observe a series of related taboos on a family member's death. The image of a burning fire symbolises sound relations and good health in the family, and thus a house without this is certainly in great desolation. In paying tribute to his departed friend, Puleng uses Tlhako's marriage as a consolation to their social extremity.

The poet deliberately puns on the concept *go tsošološa mello ye e timilwego*. The expression creates a picture of a person displaying his/her eagerness in enkindling a fire that has long been extirpated. Similarly, the Bakwena's consolation comes long after the death of their son. The marriage of Matšatši does not open old wounds, but soothes them. The paradox of the alluded expression finds its meaningfulness in the expectation of resuscitating the fire that has long been extinguished by bringing together the same torches that are almost reduced to ashes.

The preceding analogy is indicative of the Supreme Being's power to transcend time and bring relief to his children. Though debatable, the expression alluded to is likely used to refer to another traditional practice of wiping out the fire in honour of the prince's wife. Along this analogy, the quoted line would thus be used to signify the marriage of a senior bride in the Mashabela family - hence Tlhako is the principal son in the family. The reader should not misconstrue this special stylistic meaning to be operative to all social situations of like manner.

Going through the various poems dealing with supplications, the reader finds instances of direct supplications to God. The persona seems to be in extreme state of helplessness. The poem "Nkosi sikelel'iAfrika . . ." (Puleng 1983b:62) opens up with strong biblical imagery:

`Alfa' le `Omega'

(Alpha and Omega)

which is typical of Christian prayers. By identifying God with these Greek alphabets the poet succeeds to portray God as a being without measure, the beginning and the end of all creation. The biblical imagery opening the poem further explains God as the source of all life and death, pleasure and all discomfort. That God's power cannot be equalled is reflected by the images:

Wene *sebo sa botšhabelo sa bana ba batho,*  
*Seabi sa mahlogonolo a bophelo . . .*  
[My emphasis] (Puleng 1983b:62)

(You the fort for refuge for people's dependents,  
The dispenser of life's blessings.)

The supplicant 's expectation that God can dispense blessings at his will makes the latter direct socio-political whims to God. This we find in the **announcement** :

Ba opela *ba kgopela ka boikgonaro,*  
Ba llela madi a a faletšego bana ba mosadi yo  
moso,  
Ba imetšwe ke maswabi *ba kgethega megokgo,*  
Ba re: "Nkosi sikelel'iAfrika . . ." . . .  
Megopolo e phegeletše ka phegelelo ya pelo ...  
*Ba letetše ditlalemeso ka kholofelompsha,*  
*Ba ngadile mathabo le mekgolokwane . . .*  
Ba llela Mong, Mmopi Motsebatšohle,  
*Ba llela khutšo le lerato maamušotumelo*  
*mokgathophelo,*  
Ba bjalo ka dipue gare ga maphotowatle ba a  
kgelempua,  
Ba re Motsebaphihlodikgolo re ahlolele ka toka.  
[My italics] (Puleng 1983b:62-63)

(They sing pleading with desperation.  
Black people lamenting the blood that has been  
shed,  
Overcome by grief, they spill tears.  
They sing: God save Africa,  
Their minds seriously devoted . . .  
Waiting for the future with great anticipation.  
They have forsaken their pleasures and  
happiness.  
Appealing to the Master, the Omnipotent  
Creator,  
Yearning for love and peace the fruits of life.  
They are like bubbles rolling on the wave  
Appealing for He-who-understands-the- deep  
secrets to intervene with his justice.)

The concept *ba kgethega megokgo* accentuates the extremities facing African people in South Africa in the days of *apartheid*. The toning of *Nkosi sikelel'iAfrika* was used as a political tool for an appeal for the transformation of the South African society. Interesting enough is the fact that the song was like a thread that bound African parties with different ideologies in South Africa. The song united Africans in pursuit of political freedom. Ironically it was considered a national anthem long before the dawn of modern democracy in South Africa, though today it is sung with its rival "anthem" *Die Stem van Suid Afrika*. Puleng uses the chanting of this song as a direct mode of communication between the Africans and God. It is in order for the Africans in the poem to appeal to God for the solutions of the world for he is *Motsebatšohle*, that is, omniscient - he who knows all.

It is for the same reason that they appeal to him: . . . *re ahlolele ka toka* (proclaim your justice) because he is held in hope as the one to unravel these problems without prejudice. Through a direct mode the supplicant condemns racial inequalities, conflicts, the alienation of Africans from their land of birth and thus appeals to God for the change of the wheel of fortune. Note the sincerity with which the supplicant makes his plea:

Re boloke o re dire kgopatee,  
O bitlele diphapano le ditshela tša megabaru,  
Bohle re be bana ba mobu ka lerato,  
Fahlegong sa motho go hlokege pheko la  
mellwane,  
Bohle bohwa ga bo re rone re sa phela;  
Ba ile batho - ba ile kodinko molapomoswana!  
(Puleng 1983b:63)

(Save us and make us one,  
And bury the conflicts and greedy differences,  
That all will enjoy the heritage of the land with  
love,  
Discrimination be removed in the face of  
humanity,  
For all deserve the heritage while we live;  
People have gone - gone to the dead-end valley.)

The appeal *re boloke o re dire kgopatee* can best be understood within the cultural setting of the Bapedi who best recognise that the snail consists of two major parts, namely, *kgohu* (the animal itself) and *kgopa* (the shell). The snail is so tied to its shell that it becomes largely impossible to separate the two without affecting the life of the animal itself. It is this inseparable nature of the snail which the supplicant alludes to in the prayer. The supplicant uses the analogy to beseech God to remove all barriers that discriminate humanity on the basis of colour. The poet further develops the idea by using the face imagery in the line:

Fahlegong sa motho go hlokege pheko la  
mellwane

(Discrimination be removed in the face of  
humanity)

wherein the face is used as a norm of judgement for the enjoyment of or deprivation from certain rights. The concept *lepheko* suffers linguistic deletion and the poet employs the same lexical item to condemn the racial barriers and the colour divide among the South African population. By employing synonyms *pheko* and *mellwane* Puleng topicalises and foregrounds the lack of social harmony and co-existence in South Africa before the 1994 elections. To imagine a cross on a person's face incites laughter from the reader, and makes the reader experience a release from tension. This laughter is subversive and cuts the skin. This is what protest

literature does to send a message of dissent through satire, humour and burlesque.

Puleng uses the same attitude in **Hle mphe le nna!** (1981) where he lashes out at the social imbalances without winking an eye. In the third and fourth stanza's the poet fails to hold his breath when he reckons that nothing seems to be done to rectify the imbalances that are used to be the order of the day:

Le nna hle mphe maatla,  
Ke swane le *bona*;  
Therešo ke tla e bolela,  
Lentsu ga le kube,  
Go kuba monwana  
Bofšega bo ntšhiphetše,  
*A go befe ge go kgonega,*  
*Ke rapetše go lekane,*  
*Se se diregago a se direge,*  
Ke boletše ke feditše. [My italics] (Puleng  
1981:54)

(Please grant me power too,  
To be like them,  
And the truth I shall tell,  
For what has been said cannot be retracted  
As a finger can.  
I denounce cowardice,

All mishaps may face me if they please,  
Enough is enough,  
Let hell break loose,  
I have said a mouthful.)

The uncompromising attitude reflected in the poem clearly reveals the tendentious quality of Puleng's poetry. Overcome by political grief, the poet chooses to use the mode of prayer to express his ideas. Given the historical time in which the poetry was composed, the reader notes the guts that the poet takes to challenge through literature the rigours of *apartheid*. The demands listed in the poem are petitioned to God addressed as *Tate* (Father) in the last stanza for he is hoped to do justice to his children in dispensing power. In the cited extract the poet asks for power which should not be misconstrued for physical might, but political and economic empowerment. The assertion *ke swane le bona* creates the *us/them* polarity that was typical of the South African society in the epoch in which the text was produced. On explaining the dialectics of *Us/Them* relationship Teffo (1995:4) borrows his ideas from Sartre in this way:

The they-group is a privileged class that does not perceive those exterior to them as touchstones of value. Their relationship is characterised by utility and instrumentality. The they-group treats the us-group as instruments to achieve their goal in the Hegelian context of the master and slave or the oppressor and the oppressed.

The poet identifies with the suppressed people and chooses to be the spokesperson for them. Still adopting the mode of prayer, he categorically expresses his contempt for the abuse of power in **Ke go diretše eng?** (Puleng 1981:14) where he states:

Gomme peu ya ka ke mphoka mpholo wa  
mafelelo,  
Ke rongwa ke dithaka bantlhoi ba ntšhupa ka  
marumo.

(My seed is viewed as dangerous to the last  
degree,  
I am dispatched by my peers, those against me  
threaten me with spears)

The persona is seen as an instrument to achieve the master's wishes. The *mphoka* and *mpholo* images help the reader understand that the persona and his dependants are alienated by the oppressive laws that aim at keeping them at bay from the fundamental rights that they aspire to enjoy. That these *objects* are not at home in their country of birth is further suggested through onomatopoeia, to cite an example; the given images contain the sounds [-mp<sup>h</sup>], a sound suggesting the spitting out of an unwanted object which the subject nearly swallows unaware. The same sound is used in the spitting of saliva to kill a tale in Northern Sotho in the expression: *Mph! Sa mosel'a nkota!* The given images aptly describe the image of the African in the face of *apartheid*. Though used as an instrument for economic reasons, their

salaries are merely for subsistence and thus they have no probability to save even a cent:

Ke tsoga ka madimadimane ke re ke seleta  
mmane,  
Tseka tša ka di felela ganong ka moka. (Puleng  
1981:14)

(I wake up at dawn hoping to support my  
mother,  
All I earn is not worth saving)

The poet regrets this unfair treatment which fails to exchange in the right value for the services rendered. Although Africans are carpenters, the architects of the eye-catching constructions in the cities, and doing all the odd jobs within the city (cf fourth stanza), they are not sufficiently rewarded to equal their white counterparts who stay in high-storied houses while Africans still today are the occupants of the shanty towns that mark the beginning of an era to redistribute the land.

### **3.3 SUMMARY**

The chapter focused on the theme of religion, from an Africanist view. Attention was given to those aspects of African traditional religion such as

communion with the ancestors and God. Despite attacks by missionaries, African religion persists to influence African literature. Looking at Puleng, a wide range of his religious imagery has been borrowed from cultural practices and mythology. This is nothing strange because a study of African religion cannot be divorced from mythology and philosophy which has been evidenced by the creation myth and the first cry motif discussed in this chapter.

On treating communion with God, ancestors are used as intermediaries who mediate between the living and the Supreme Being. This mediation minimises the risk of conflict between the people and their Creator, thus the wrath of the Supreme Being is averted through the ancestors.

Puleng has subtly used prayer for the statement of his protest against the malignant power of *apartheid*. A series of poems reflecting the socio-political and economic evils of *apartheid* is clear evidence of Puleng's commitment to the truth, and to speak for his society. Notwithstanding the results of his actions, he volunteers to be his society's mouthpiece. The employment of the prayer mode is largely the influence Mamogobo who is himself a Pastor. It is probable too that Puleng's Christian influence may have contributed to the adoption of direct supplication to proclaim his statement.

# CHAPTER 4

## INTERTEXTUALITY

### 4.1 INTERTEXTUALITY: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The term intertextuality was coined by Kristeva to denote the interdependence of literary texts, the interdependence of any one literary text with all those that have gone before it (Cuddon 1991:454). Kristeva contends that a literary work is not an isolated phenomenon, but made of a mosaic of quotations, and that any text is the absorption and transformation of another. Plottel and Charney (1978:xiv) cite Kristeva who maintains that many passages taken from other texts intersect and neutralise one another.

Kristeva challenges the traditional notions of literary influence. The idea that intertextuality denotes transposition is used to explain the way texts echo each other, and the way that discourses or sign systems are transposed into another so that meaning in one kind of discourse is overlaid with meanings from another kind of discourse.

Plottel and Charney (1978:vii) argue that for some authors, the notion of intertextuality opens all cultural facts and artifacts to the internal exchanges between them, or it opens up words to make them yield the 'infinite modalities' of language. Other writers turn to the more discursive and rational dialogue between literary texts. Still, others spring free the text itself of its referential bounds, while many read the text as the perfectly apt expression that goes between the lines.

Intertextuality has to do with influences and counterinfluence. Wallace Stevens's words clearly sum up the concept intertextuality when he states that one poem proves another and the whole (Plottel & Charney 1978:ix). The same idea is echoed by Jonathan Culler (1981:103) who makes this interesting revelation:

. . . one function of the notion of intertextuality is to allude to the paradoxical nature of discursive systems. Discursive conventions can only originate in discourse; everything in *la langue*, as Saussure says, must have first been *parole*. But *parole* is made possible by *la langue*, and if one attempts to identify any utterance or text as a moment of origin one finds that they depend upon their prior codes. A codification, one might say, can only originate or be originated if it is already encoded in a prior code; more simply, it is the nature of codes

to be always already in existence, to have lost origins.

In terms of this view, intertextuality has to be viewed as a reading or textual strategy that seeks to establish relations between texts. The meaning of the text is built on the meaning of previous texts. This view dismisses the absolutist authority of texts, and insists on their interdependence because each text 'casts its net wider to include anonymous discursive practices, codes whose origins are lost, that make possible the signifying of later texts' (Culler 1981). Flowing from Culler's opinion, intertextuality has no business with the study of sources and origins, but seeks to locate the signification in predecessor texts. Of paramount significance is the way the artist develops ideas previously developed in life in a most remarkable and startling manner that gives his/her text a new status.

On explaining the concept of literary influence Boheemen goes to an extent of stating that there is nothing new under the sun, thus one has to contend with ideas or theories postulated more than sixty years ago (Nel 1989).

In *Variations sur un sujet* Mallarme explains:

... all books, more or less, contain the fusion of some operative repetition: even if there were but one book in the world, its law would be as a bible feigned by nations. The difference from

one work to the next would afford as many readings as would be put forth in a boundless contest for the trustworthy text among aeons that are supposedly civilized or literate. (Plottel & Charney 1978:xv)

The presence of a 'trustworthy text' presupposes the existence of a work of art which is free from 'all constraints including that of language, a text that would coincide with absolute plenitude, with pure being, pure substance, and pure essence' (Plottel & Charney 1978). The same idea is echoed by Kenneth Quinn in this way:

. . . no writer of genius hopes to write a work that is wholly original: complete originality is the dream of the artistically naive, the refuge of the artistically incompetent. (Thosago 1995:82)

Challenging the notion of originality, Mike Featherstone as cited by Thosago (1995:82) claims that everything is already seen and written, artists cannot achieve uniqueness but doomed to make repetitions which they should do without pretention. In societies where the spoken word is still the greatest medium of thought and dissemination of ideas, the artists are likely to allude unconsciously to incidents and phrases which have made a remarkable impact on their lives.

The question of individual originality is a difficult one, and yet cannot be dismissed quite easily for no two things on earth are the same in all respects, even identical twins have marks of difference. In literary works reflecting sameness, that sameness is bound to reflect difference. A line taken from another text loses its original context and is transposed into a new context to generate a new meaning other than that in the 'original' text. This is what Kristeva purported to explain by the assertion 'many passages taken from other texts intersect and neutralise each other'. It is probably this neutralisation act that brings about new meaning which is deferred from the meaning of the 'original' text. Although an understanding of the 'original' source is important, the new context dictates the meaning that the reference should carry. A juxtaposition of contexts breeds a new meaning that the earlier source could not produce. The authenticity of the new meaning is not disputable, unless one pursues a fantasy of absolute originality and uniqueness.

Because a text is not an *ex-nihilo* creation, 'every syllable, every word, every utterance set to paper reflects amalgamation and repetition of countless types, stereotypes, and precedents'. This does not suggest that every piece of information or utterance in the text is a reflection of something that preceded the text, but that within the sameness resides difference that distinguishes the new work from the earlier source or work. Plottel and Charney (1978:xv) contend:

... there is, and can be, no such transcendent text. Every text echoes another text unto

infinity, weaving the fabric of text of culture  
itself.

The preceding assertion is an attempt to explain that the tracing of origins from an origin of origins is a cumbersome task to accomplish. If intertextuality has to do with the digging of origins, the endeavour will have no convincing end. Although certain ideas can be traced from other sources, it is not easy to trace the original source of the so-called original source. Not everything is traceable to a common source or pool; hence the existence of *originarity* - the origin of origin, is unfathomable.

Intertextuality has aroused controversy in the literary discourse. There are those theorists who maintain that the subject of intertextuality deals with influence. Works of art are traced and tracked down to a common original source. Explaining the notion of intertextuality Valery maintains that in a sense all writing is a collage of other writing, of language, and of tradition. He asserts that plagiarism is as natural to literature as the eating of tame sheep is to a lion. Although the assertion is acceptable, the metaphor of the lion goes off the board by lowering and undermining the ingenuity of later artists. In his explanation of the lion analogy, Valery (Plottel & Charney 1978:xvi) goes on to say:

... a lion is an assimilated sheep, which simply means that writers feed on other writers and strong writers (lions) are those willing and able

to digest fully the sheepish literary flock around them.

The employment of the lion imagery presupposes the existence of parasites and hosts in a literary discourse. There is no mutual symbiosis between the parasite and its host. The relationship is sustained by the presence of the host on which the parasite depends for its existence. Do we conceive of such a relationship in the domain of literature? Are there any authors or writers who are to be equated with hosts and parasites without hesitation? The problem of parasites and hosts in literature is an attempt to exhume the much debated positivist theories that are galvanised to look for cause and effect in literature.

Adherents of influence nail down intertextuality to a study of influence, causes and effects, and original sources. Such theorists lay claim that modern writers merely rhapsodize on works previously produced, and such sources can be traced and compared. These theorists group writers into what they call 'greater poets' and lesser poets'. Lesser poets are believed to be repeating, quoting, alluding, copying, and referring to greater poets whose works are consumed and digested. This is what Paul Valery referred to by the analogy of sheep and lion.

Although this study has *influence* as its prime focus, the definition of influence is not considered a causal relationship because there cannot be a one-to-one correspondence between cause and effect. The so-called causation process is multifaceted. There are a number of variables that may account for the literary product, and in these multi-dimensional ephebes,

writers unconsciously repeat certain clichés, core images, symbols and phrases in a way that they are made new and refreshed. Intertextuality thus has to be understood within the spectrum of counter-influences where artists echo previous works, passages, citations with a view to elucidate certain thoughts. The citations may be deliberate as in Puleng's citation of the book of Revelations chapter 2 verses 1-5 in **Ka moka di nkholang** (Puleng 1981). These citations are married into new contexts to explain thoughts which would best be understood if the parallel of the informing text is understood. It is not always the earlier text that informs the later text, but the latter may provide insights that make the earlier text intelligible and accessible to the reader. It is interesting to note how readers happen to understand stories better when these stories are brought closer to the reader's cultural experiences, this is the case with biblical stories too if they are removed from the Palestinian plains and set in the forests and plateaux of Africa.

#### **4.2 TEXTUAL RELATIONS : BIBLICAL IDENTITIES**

The Christian character of the Nkomo family has contributed largely to the composition of Puleng's poetry. There is no way in which he could escape the influence of Christianity when his mother descends from the background influence of the Lutheran Church and that of his father; a church minister of the Dutch Reformed Church. It is by no chance that Puleng's works have the splendour of reflecting the content of the Bible and hymns. As an ardent reader of the Bible, particularly the psalms, proverbs, gospels and the book of Revelations, his poetry reflects a mosaic of repetitions and allusions to the Bible. These allusions are not to be considered signs of lack of originality or authority over the ideas expressed, but function as signposts without which

the reader cannot dispense in the pursuit of meaning composition. Some of the allusions, quotations and references to be discussed in this chapter derive from Christian hymns such as **Ke na le Modiša, Re bafeti mo lefaseng, Joko ya gago e bobebe** and **Jehova Modimo wa Israele**.

Addressing a hypocrite in the poem **Tumelo** (Puleng 1980), the poet challenges him to repent and accept the authority of the Lord to ease his afflictions. On realising the hesitation of the hypocrite, the poet uses intertextual fragments from the Bible to reinforce his appeal:

A hleng nke o gadima morago bjalo ka mosadi  
wa Lota?  
Emišetša mahlo godimo dithabeng o tlo bona  
phologo. (Puleng 1980:62)

(Why do you look back like Lot's wife?  
Lift up your eyes to the mountains from where  
you will see salvation)

The biblical episode refers to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah after the inhabitants of these cities had offended the Lord by practising sodomy. Because of his innocence from the allegations the cities were levelled with, Lot and his family were ordered:

"Run for your lives! Don't look back and don't stop in the valley. Run to the hills, so that you won't be killed." (Genesis 19:17)

The angels of the Lord were intent on saving Lot and his family from destruction, in the same vein the poet exemplifies a dialogism in the text. The double-voice of the text is revealed when the persona addresses the subject of reproach who is intended as the hearer; to quickly accept the salvation of the Lord or else he will perish like Lot's wife who was petrified as it can be seen from the citation below:

But Lot's wife looked back and turned into a pillar of salt. (Genesis 19:26)

Like Lot who had complete faith in the Lord, the hearer may well be saved on condition he submits himself to the authority of God. Other underlying factors informing Puleng's text from the Bible include the namelessness of the hearer as Lot's wife in the parable. Interestingly, the hearer is the passive listener who does not seem to respond to the caution advanced, perhaps he will be like Lot's wife who did not heed the angels' interdiction. Furthermore, the underlying resemblance that can be inferred from the biblical analogy include the lack of ancestry of Lot's wife as it is the case with the hearer addressed in the Puleng text.

Because of the dialogic nature of utterances, the persona's words function further as the poet's voice to the reader. The underlying meaning of the utterances reveals the poet's zeal to proselytise the reader. The biblical analogies reinforce the poet's message to the reader, and thus are central to the interpretation of the Puleng text. These further elicit the poet's religious ideology which he wants to share with his readers. In this way, Puleng uses the predecessor text to create and extend meaning of his text. The new text assumes its (in)dependence in a remarkable way.

The poet borrows details from historical accounts and the poem truly reflects and serves as a true account of what actually happened. The tragic nature of the train accident in Solomondale on 14 May 1980 so affected the poet to reflect on this particular incident particularly when the memory of a loved one is cast into focus. It is basically the memory of the young Legodi lady whose parents died in the accident which triggered the composition of this poem. The poet admits in a personal interview that it inspired him to remake this historical account poetically. Lamenting the loss of life through the accident, the poet further borrows details from Psalms 23:4 which reads:

Le ge nka sepela molapong wa moriti wa lehu,  
Nka se boife bobbe, gobane o na le nna . . .

(Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of  
death,  
I will fear no evil, for you are with me . . .)

which can be compared well with the poet's statement:

Kwaa mekgoši le dillo . . .

Di kgeana ka mabefi molapong wa morithi wa  
lehu. (Puleng 1983b:1)

(Hearken how lamentations . . .

Bitterly converge on the valley of the shadow of  
death)

The assertion to the fourth verse testifies to the psalmist's assured security from the Lord. This unconditional responsibility is guaranteed to God's children. The biblical notion of walking through the valley of the shadow of death suggests the perilous conditions against which the psalmist may go unharmed. The act of going through the valley presupposes an act of vindication through all the dangers through which one may go. In the same breath, going through all perils the psalmist shall receive God's protection. Puleng's assertion blends well with the biblical expression. In it, the poet expresses the tragic nature of the accident through the employment of the image of the valley of the shadow of death. It is not necessarily death which the psalmist foregrounds here, but threatening situations symbolised by death. In the case of Puleng's assertion, it is indeed death which is in the focus, not its shadow. The new text thrives on the element of absence; the absence of death in the earlier text, and the presence of death in Puleng's text, which affords the text a new status. The polarity: *presence/absence* is an

inherent kernel of intertextuality. The same image of the shadow of death is found in *Itote* (Puleng 1980:16) where the poet says:

Le wena ngwanešo hle, samma,  
Go tloga lehono, tseba Ramasedi'a Poloko,  
O tlo go babalela molapong wa moriti wa lehu;

(And you fellow brethren,  
From today know the Gracious Saviour,  
He will care for you through the valley of the  
shadow of death)

The character in this poem is advised to seek knowledge of the Lord through all the perils of life. It is significant that the image of the shadow of death is not far removed from the 'original' source. Both texts; the biblical text as well as the poetic texts by Puleng share one premise that God is the overseer and author of human life on earth. The assertion: *gobane o ba tsebile ba sešo ba belegwa* (for you have known them before they were born) which is reminiscent of the biblical vision which Jeremiah had when the Lord warned him:

Ke go tsebile mola ke sešo ka go bopa mo  
mmeleng wa mmago.  
O sešo wa belegwa, ka go bea gore o be  
moprofeta wa ditšhaba. (Jeremia 1:5)

(I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb.

Before you were born I proclaimed you to be a prophet for all nations.)

The assertion provides a supernatural divine revelation vouchsafed to Jeremia which raised him to ecstasy and led him to feel the presence of God. The intertext:

Before I formed thee in the womb I have known thee, and before thou wentest forth from the belly have I consecrated thee, to be prophet to the nations have I set thee (Keil & Delitzsch 1980:30)

is pregnant with additional meaning within Puleng's poem, namely, that God:

- foreordains human life and being,
- predetermines before birth what people's calling on earth shall be,
- influences a person's origin and development, within and without the womb,

- proclaims human life as an instrument of his divine mission.

The addressee in Puleng's text is reminded of God's divine election which has to be fulfilled, and thus God shall be the Protector in the midst of enemies whose wishes are the addressee's failure. The biblical verse together with the intertext in Puleng thus presupposes a predetermined ontological existence of humanity. It is on this premise that one may deduce that the Solomondale accident referred to earlier on was an act of God's plan carried out on purpose as it may be discerned from the quote below:

Jehova, Wene Mogaugedi Motseba-pshio-le-  
pelo

O lekotše, o tsinketše, o kgonthišetše, o feditše,  
O šupile ka monwana o dutše tulong sa bogošī,  
Ra hloka boikarabelo rena batho ba nama  
Ge o buna mašemo ao a bjetšwego ke wene ka  
sebele;

Romela mahlasedi ago malapeng a bona  
Gobane la bona tšatši le diketše faseng leno,  
Rena re dihlatse tša matete ago Ramasedi'a  
Poloko.

Phutha dirathana tšeo di gololago sa jo-nna-  
mmawee!

O phumole dikudumela le megokgo ya  
ditšhiwana,

O di godišetše poifong ya kgalemo yago  
Mmoloki,

E re mo yo mobe a fetilego ka bonaba le bošoro,  
O tlepesetše ka kgaugelo o apole mouwane wa  
kgakanego  
Gobane o tseba matšo le maboyo a setšhaba  
sago,  
O re baletše ba lehlogonolo matsatši,  
Ka moka re moletelong ge o bitša re tlo araba!  
(Puleng 1981:2)

(Jehova, Gracious and Omniscient one  
You have examined, considered, pondered and  
decided,  
And controlled from your royal seat,  
And we mortals were left dumb-founded  
When you harvest from your own toil  
Despatch light to their houses  
For they are hapless in this world,  
We are witnesses of your miracles Righteous  
Saviour.  
Take care of the lamenting children.  
And wipe away tears and sweat from these  
orphans,  
Saviour, raise them in the fear of your authority,  
That where the evil one has left his cruelty and  
anguish,  
You shall bring mercy to dispel confusion  
For you predetermined the fate of your race,  
We, the blessed have our days numbered,

We are all on the file, when you call we shall respond!)

That God is the author and giver of life is evident in lines 1-5; 16 and 17. The invocation of God as *Motseba-pshio-le-pelo* portrays him as the source and author of all life. The kidney is the centre for the infiltration of the blood while the heart is another central organ in which blood is pumped and oxygenated. The significance of these systems to human and animal lives may not be overaccentuated. Line 1 clearly points out that God knows and understands the intricacies of these systems. The heart and kidney analogy puts life in the hands of God who even determines its ultimate end as outlined by line 17 which goes further to number humanity's days on earth. It is further intensified by the assertion: *O re baletše ba lehlogonolo matšatši* (blessed ones have their days numbered). This idea is a permutation of the biblical notion:

The length of his life is decided beforehand --  
The number of months he will live.  
You have settled it, and it can't change. (Job  
14:5)

This assertion, subverted in Puleng's text, presumes that the train accident is predetermined and no efforts to save the people could succeed. This deterministic idea expressed by both texts sheds a predestination view which largely informs the doctrines of the Dutch Reformed Church, the official church of Puleng the person. These assertions further build up the idea that

the train accident in this discussion was not a thoughtless incident that occurred without God's notice. As alluded in the image of the shadow of death, the excerpt still places God in the foreground that he is the protector whose actions are calculated with purpose. The purposive nature of God's will is indicated in the second line of the extract above.

The eulogue *Motseba-pshio-le-pelo* sheds to the reader a glimpse of the traditional African thought. It is part of African philosophy to ascribe the seat of true knowledge to the heart. Contrary to western philosophical thought that overemphasises the rationale, African thought sees the heart as the centre of the system that controls life. Amongst the Bapedi, a person with a good memory is said to have *pelotheri*. Such a person is known for his memory of great historical events, stories, and all other information which is a heritage to society. No mention is made of his mind or brain, but he is said to know all these things by heart. A blind person is said to use his heart for seeing hence *o bona ka pelo*. Situations arise where one is faced with a Hobson's choice and the stranded Mopedi would remark:

Pelo ye nngwe e re ke ye, ye nngwe e re ke dule.

(One heart says I must go while the other says I  
must stay)

This does not suggest that a Mopedi has two hearts but helps us explain the untainted African thought on the expression of thought. One should not rush

to conclude that the rationale is dismissed and its operation is non-existent. The talk that goes round town would be that *Matsobane ga a na hlogo* (he is dull) which gives an indication that the rationale is not to be completely ruled out. The analogy of the heart recognises the fact that the heart is the central organ around which life revolves. This of course is a product of the people's experience that when one's heart stops, one dies or his life is temporarily held to a stoppage. From this philosophical outlook, the analogy of *Motsebapshio-le-pelo* is not farfetched.

Psalm 23 seems to have had a major influence on the works of N.S.Puleng. Another citation is found in *Nna ke reng?* (Puleng 1981) the poet satirises Sylvia; a young woman whose obsession with luxury and material possessions makes her desert the persona in pursuit of pleasure. She boasts of luxuries enjoyed in places like Holiday Inn and Jan Smuts Airport while the persona, clings to her empty promises. Her material conditioned love is shattered and she is agonized by those who played angels before her. In such a confused state, she seeks a love back from the persona who advises her to repent her evil ways and seek guidance from God who will show her the way. The poet reinforces his ideas by citing the book of Psalms 23:6 which reads:

Tše botse fela le kgaugelo di tlo ntatela mehla  
yohle ke sa phela. Gomme ke tlo fetša bontši bja  
matšatši ke dutše Ngwakong wa Morena.

(I know that your goodness and love will be with me all my life; and your house will be my home as long as I live.)

compared with the poet's assertion:

Tše botse le kgaugelo di tla go latela mehla yohle.  
(Puleng 1981:52)

(All goodness and kindness will follow you in all your days.)

The assertion testifies the psalmist's boundless happiness derived from the abundance of divine blessings and sunshine which he perceives to have been poured upon his life. Filled with bliss, the psalmist has reached the culminating point of his inward happiness.

Contrary to the psalmist's enjoyment of continued pleasure in the presence of the Lord, Sylvia's pleasure has reached a *cul-de-sac*. Puleng uses the biblical reference to advise her to seek pleasure in the Lord who will demonstrate his goodness, mercy and grace. The sad experiences of the past, including the raw deal she had from Dan and company will soon be replaced by the Lord's loving kindness and goodness.

In **Morutiši wa ka Puleng** (1980) expresses his thanks and showers a series of praise to one of his former high school teachers, Godfrey Tlaka, who also assisted him with the arrangement of his choral pieces. The teacher is urged to reinforce his efforts to help African children so that they would be able to enter into the competitive labour market well-equipped with mathematical insights he continues to give them. In his appeal the poet pleads:

Tloga o iša bana ba thari ya tshephe  
Mafulong a matala ka dipalontshetshere  
O di phetlolle o di fenyekolle therešong  
O ntšhe bana ba Raisibe dipong mahlong.

(Certainly guide these African children  
To the greener pastures with mathematics  
Solve and simplify it earnestly,  
And enlighten the African children)

The second line in the preceding extract is a borrowing from the second verse of Psalms 23 which reads: *he makes me lie down in green pastures*. The image of green pastures suggests to the reader the good life that the psalmist is assured to enjoy in the presence of the Lord. The citation by Puleng contrasts the presence of the Lord with that of Godfrey Tlaka. This contrast should not be misconstrued to mean the equation of Tlaka with God, but used to demonstrate the service that he offers to the African society by preparing the children for the competitive labour market. Given his dedication and

commitment, the students will be well-equipped for the demands set by the industrial world outside.

Another indirect citation of the book of Psalms is resurfaced in Ngwana<sup>9</sup> **Badimo** (Puleng 1980:4) where the poet says:

Ntapološē bjalo meetse a moya wa pelo ya ka  
Nkalafe bjalo o mphekole hlabing sa lefase leno  
Nthekge hlogo ka tsogo la gago le letshadi  
Ke dule farong tše molemo tša bophelo bja ka.

(Restore me the heart of my soul,  
Heal me and help me from the sorrows of this  
world,  
Support my head with your left arm,  
To sojourn in my life's rapture.)

The first line of the preceding extract compares well with the third verse of Psalm 23 which reads:

O lapološa moya wa ka, o ntshepediša mmileng  
wa go loka ka 'baka la leina la gagwe.

(My soul he doth restores again and makes me  
walk the path of righteousness)

On explaining this line Weiser (1962:228) maintains that here the Lord appears as the guide to the wanderer on his path through life. Looking back on his past life, the psalmist is now able to recognise that God has always led him in the paths of righteousness. Of significance is the divine blessings offered to the psalmist, that is; the restoration of his soul and the receipt of salvation (righteousness). One wonders whether Puleng intends to refer to these divine blessings in the preceding citation. The original idea expressed by the psalms has been reworked and wrought into a new context for a new meaning. Here, the poet refers to the intimacy and soothing effect of the love the persona hopes to receive from the loved one. This love is to soothe and comfort the persona's soul at all times. It is for this reason that the persona further appeals to the loved one with the words: *nkalafe...*, *ntheke...* and *ke dule farong tše molemo*, because it is in this relationship that the persona finds a seat and haven for security. These quotations presuppose the existence of the sought after tranquillity and support from the loved one.

The wedding of Tlhako Mashabela has not escaped the watchful eye of N.S.Puleng who has used the same incident to reveal his thoughts on the essence of marriage. By placing Tlhako's life in the foreground, Puleng aptly demonstrates that the institution of marriage is not meant to be dissolved. It is interesting to note how Puleng uses the Bible to reinforce his ideas. In describing the wedding scene the poet says:

Re eme bjalo ka dihlatse mobung wa Ditlou,  
Go tlo kgonthišiša kano tša gago tša  
mohlamonene  
Ge o ntšha kgopo ya Babinakwena pontšheng,  
O e hlomela bjalo ka lehlogedi thekeng la Batau.  
(Puleng 1981:20)

(We stand as witnesses on the Matebele  
territory,  
To ascertain the vows taken thence  
(When you publicly removed a Mokwena's rib,  
And stuck it like a bud on the Batau's loin)

Here Puleng deliberately contrasts two situations which together deal with the taking of a vow. The first incident here is the vow between Tlhako and Matšatši who are tying a knot as contrasted with the biblical exclamation:

Bjale gomme šo, e lego lešapo la mašapo a ka, le  
nama ya nama ya ka. Yena yo ba tlo re ke  
mosadi gobane o ntšhitšwe monneng. (Genesis  
2:23)

(Now here she is, bone taken from my bones,  
flesh taken from my flesh. She will be named  
woman for she derives from man)

The historical event and the biblical text cannot be denied to have had an influence on the poet. The Bible justly informs the content of this poem above. The background information regarding the creation of the woman, particularly the initial purpose of providing man with a helper on his course to fulfil God's will, also illuminates insights into the understanding of the poem. The creation of Eve is again juxtaposed to the wedding of Matšatši. Like Eve who was brought to life through Adam's rib, she is also brought into the Mashabela's kraal through Tlhako as it may be inferred from the assertion:

Ge o ntšha kgopo ya Babinakwena pontšheng,  
O e hlomela bjalo ka lehlogedi thekeng la Batau.

(When you publicly removed a Mokwena's rib,  
And stuck it like a bud on the Batau's loin)

which parallels the idea of marriage to the act of creation in the biblical sense when Adam's rib was extracted to create Eve, his helper. In the poem under discussion, Matšatši is to be seen in the light of Tlhako's helper. The parallel is in no way irrelevant because right from creation, man and woman were destined to live together as husband and wife complementing each other. The poet goes further to say:

Tlhako šo, Matšatši šo,  
Lešapo la lešapo la Kgwadi-tša-meetse,

Wa le amanya le nama ya Batau ...  
Go phethege malaeledi a Mangwalo:  
"Bjalo se Modimo a se tlemagantšego  
Motho a se ke a se aroganya..." (Puleng  
1981:20)

(Here stands Tlhako, and Matšatši here  
The bone taken from Kgwadi-tša-meetse,  
And identified it with Batau's flesh,  
To fulfil the message from the Scriptures:  
"That which God brought together  
No one shall put asunder"...) )

Compare with Matthew 19:12 which says:

"Bjalo se Modimo a se tlemagantšego  
Motho a se ke a se aroganya..."

(That which God has put together  
No one should put asunder)

The Matthean quotation serves to emphasise the ideal of indissolubility. An adulterous relationship violates the order of biblical creation with its monologous ideal as expressed in becoming "one flesh". Puleng's text is

reminiscent of the same ideas expressed in the Bible. Tlhako and Matšatši are thus advised to remain united in marriage unless the contract is broken by "unchastity" as outlined by Jesus in Matthew. Here, the biblical text subverts and invades the terrain of Puleng's text. The presence of the biblical text further opens up Puleng's text for a multiple of readings. It is for this reason that we speak of textual pluralism; an act which complicates the reading of a text.

Puleng uses the biblical narratives to create and expand poetic meaning. The citations represent what can best be described as literary transference - a transference of a figure, symbol, assertion or event into a new context in which it assumes a "new meaning". The poem **Le ba mohola** (Puleng 1983:54) is an expression of multiple identities which certainly afford the text a multiple reading as a "plural text". The second stanza of the poem is couched in dramatic dialogue between the speaker and the youth who are instrumental in shaping the country's transformation. The tone of the poem tends to be calm, intimate and apologetic.

On encouraging the youth not to despair in their pursuit and commitment to the struggle for change, the poet borrows from Jesus' teachings in the Gospels:

Lena le letswai la lefase. Bjale ge letswai le  
tapa le sa tlo nokwa kang? Ga le sa hola selo ge  
e se go lahlwa la gatwa ke batho. Lena le seetša  
sa lefase . . . le sa lena seetša a se bonegele

batho ka mokgwa woo, gore ba bone mediro e  
botse ya lena. (Matthew 5:13-17)

(You are the salt of the earth. Now, if the salt  
loses its savour, how can it be made salty again?  
It has become worthless so it is thrown out and  
people trample on it. You are the light of the  
world . . . so your light should shine in that way  
so that people should see the good things you  
do.)

which compares well with Puleng's appeal:

Le ba mohola bana bešo,  
Le se ke la itapiša ka lefeela:  
*Lena le letswai la bokamoso,*  
*Re sa tlo noka ka lena*  
*Lena le lebebe la tokologo,*  
Setšhaba sohle se tsebentlhane  
Go tšohle le di bolelago,  
Boikarabelo bja lefase bo magetleng a lena.  
*Tsebang molao gomme le ye ka toka*  
Gona le tlo fenya khutlonne tša lefase,  
Tlošang boikgogomošo magetleng a lena  
Gona le tlo hlomphiwa la tamišwa le feta. [My  
emphasis] (Puleng 1983:54)

(You are invaluable fellow siblings  
Do not tire yourself unnecessarily  
You are the salt of the future,  
We shall season with you  
You are the cream of freedom  
The nation is attentive  
To all what you say  
The nation's responsibility is on you.  
Respect the law and be just  
Then you will capture all the corners of the  
world  
Refrain from pride among yourself  
Then you will be honoured and praised from  
afar)

The symbolism of salt is found in Matthew 5, Mark 9:50 and Luke 14:34 where Jesus likens his disciples with salt. The disciples are given two titles, namely, **you are the salt of the Earth** and **you are the light of the world**. To understand the imagery of salt, the reader has to understand the context in which it was used in the Bible, and later evaluate the significance of the same analogy in Puleng's text. In Palestine, salt was essential for the preservation of food, and thus without it food would be spoiled. A bag of salt was reckoned as precious as human life. Because it was greatly valued, salt was heavily taxed. A Commentary on the Bible (1937) confirms this in this way:

To appreciate the value of salt one must live in a land where it is rare, and much more highly priced than sugar ... salt was heavily taxed, and therefore often so adulterated as to lose its salinity.

In Judea, however, though *bituminous salt* was readily available, it was easily rendered vapid and became of no further use save for spreading it on the part of the temple to avoid slipping on wet weather.

The title **you are the salt of the Earth** is no mean title. Salt helps the world from destruction and putrefaction, and in the same way Christ taught his disciples to add joy which is a condition of love to their lives. The analogy further explains that a preacher or Christian who has lost the life of Christ, and the witness of the Spirit may be likened to adulterated salt.

In what way do the textual identities between the Puleng and biblical texts co-operate to fill the gaps that exist in the production of meaning? The reader here has to travel between the two texts for a rich uncovering of the textual meaning. Jesus' disciples are seen in the forefront of the Christianfolk and similarly, the youth in Puleng bears the torch in the fight against socio-political injustices in South Africa. The salt image in both textual terrains serves as an unction to instil values of virtue such as honesty, love, trust and loyalty. Without these values society becomes corrupt and its moral lore decays as a result of greed, lust and indifference. The fact that the salt is part of the earth and can be adulterated and trodden by foot suggests human

fallibility. Because the disciples, and the youth in Puleng's text, are part of the world, they are susceptible to its blemishes. In the biblical text, Christ uses the image of adulterated salt, salt that was good for nothing after it had lost its savour to predict his betrayal by Judas Iscariot. In the same vein, the reader's mind lurks with the sight of the "good for nothing" youth among those dearly committed to a just course. These "good for nothing" youth may bring democratic values into disrepute because what they pursue is merely motivated by greed for material needs, gratification of power thirst and dominance.

The elevation of the youth to the status of disciples accentuates the esteem with which the speaker holds them in a society committed to change. Like the honest disciples of Jesus who led the way to his missionary work, the youth are to become "the salt of the future". Puleng deliberately violates the biblical citation and declares the youth "the salt of the future" and not "the salt of the earth", in an attempt to foreground to the reader the significance of the youth in the shaping of history. The assertion: **re sa tlo noka ka lena** projects the speaker's hope for a meaningful role to be played by the youth in the future. Unlike the adulterated salt which is left trodden, they shall continue to influence decisions with regard to political changes in the country of their birth, and leaving them in the periphery may be dangerous.

Puleng employs *paronomasia* - a play of words whereby the artist exploits similarity of sound and antithesis of meaning. A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation (1990:511) explains that the recognition of *paronomasia* as an important aid to interpretation is that it elucidates the connection between

otherwise apparently random ideas. In the poem under discussion, the concept *la itapiša* in:

Le se ke la itapiša ka lefeela:  
Lena le letswai la bokamoso,  
Re sa tlo noka ka lena.

(Do not tire yourself unnecessarily  
You are the salt of the future,  
We shall season with you)

has a double determination. The first obvious meaning is associated with the persona's appeal to the youth not to tire in the struggle for freedom. Puleng, however, plays around with the sound of this word for another possible meaning in this context. He apparently uses the concept *la itapiša* to extend the salt imagery whereby the youth is compared with salt, and thus the injunction *le se ke la itapiša . . .* is applied to advise the youth not to lose their savour like salt, hence *go tapa* - refers to the process of salt losing its saltiness. In a nutshell, the poet exploits the similarity of sound to extend the range of metaphor of the salt in lieu of encouraging the youth not to lose their zest in their pursuit for freedom.

Turning to the second title *you are the light of the world*, the reader would observe a marked *difference* and *deference* between the Puleng text and the Bible. The title *you are the light of the world* was given to eminent rabbis

and was thus associated with *wisdom*. Christ uses the light analogy to explain that his disciples have to bear the light of hope for the future. This is confirmed by Buttrick (1951:289) who maintains that Jesus had come to shed light, that people might see God through him and his disciples were to shine after him. The biblical "light" should shine without hindrance or else it may be darkened. This analogy is not far from Puleng's intertext which entitles the youth: *Lena le lebebe la tokologo* (you are the cream of freedom).

The first striking similarity between the Puleng text and the Bible is the fact that Jesus awards two titles to his disciples, and Puleng does the same with the youth in *Le ba mohola*. Both titles are functional in the two texts, they reveal the significance of the addressed subjects and urges them to cautiously spread the teachings with which they are concerned. *Lebebe*, a creamy layer that covers milk is susceptible to being spoiled as soon as the milk is spoiled, and thus loses its value, which is the same with light which darkens when overcast. These images suggest the frailty of human knowledge and life in particular. This is aptly articulated by Macbeth who remarks:

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing. (Shakespeare 1971:179)

This indicates that after a tiny "fret", human life "is heard no more". What Puleng does with the title *le lebebe la tokologo* equally demonstrates to the reader the shortcomings human nature has as it may be inferred also from the speaker's appeal:

Tsebang molao gomme le ye ka toka  
Gona le tlo fenya khutlonne tša lefase,  
Tlošang boikgogomošo magetleng a lena  
Gona le tlo hlomphiwa la tamišwa le feta.  
(Puleng 1983:54)

(Respect the law and be just  
Then you will capture all the corners of the  
world  
Refrain from pride among yourselves  
Then you will be honoured and praised from  
afar)

In this extract the poet introduces to the reader intertextual identities by using inference and presupposition. The injunctions:

Tsebang molao gomme le ye ka toka . . .  
Tlošang boikgogomošo magetleng a lena...

(Respect the law and be just . . .

Refrain from pride among yourselves . . .)

reveal by presupposition and inference that the youth has become licentious, contemptuous and haughty. It is these qualities that will jeopardise their position of leadership, thus leaving them with no support or a meaningful role to play in society.

Although the poet consciously or unconsciously links distinct textual terrains by citation, one should not be tempted to conclude that the biblical text serves as the source or cause for the Puleng text. The citation merely adds to what the poet already addresses in a fictional world, and blends the two to achieve a special effect in a manner that is striking to the reader, and this is what authorial originality entails.

The themes of beauty, courtly love and romance of the Canticles has been a subject of great appreciation to Puleng. A careful study of the poem **Ngwana<sup>9</sup> Badimo** (1980:3-4) makes an interesting revelation. The italicised lines in the following extract bear an emblematic relation with the Canticles:

Mpatamele wena ngeloi la maoto a ka,  
Robala hubeng sa ka o ruthofale;  
Bona dinaledi sebakabakeng sa legodimo,  
Di bina koša ye nna le wena re e hlaelelago.  
Ngwana' badimo, ke dira tšohle ka mabobo,

Gore nna le wena re be hlogo le moriri, pelo  
Tša barehloi di beelwe mereba ke mollo wa  
lerato,

Magole a bobedi bja rena a tlošwe ke lenyalo.

*Tlolo tša gago di monkomobose  
magokatshereano,*

Ina la gago molomong wa ka le tsefa boka todi  
Masogana ge a go bona a kgarimanywa ke  
letswalo,

Nkgoge ka dithala tša lerato ke go šale morago.  
Akgofa, o ntitie ka tladimolongwana rothi la  
kholofetšo,

Wena moratwa wa pelo ya ka, o yo botse go  
makgarebe,

O swana le pitsi tša koloi ya Farao ka  
mebalabala,

O phala morara ka bose, mehlamo ya gago e  
kwetše komelo.

Ngwana' thamadimaphadiphadi  
bolotamohlodihlodi wa leratano.

*Molala wa gago ga o tšhephišwe ke pheta fela,*  
O betlilwe ke petlwane ya badimo ba iketlile;  
Theka la gago le rarilwe ke moketwane wa gauta  
phodiša mahlo.

*Moratwa wa ka o yo botse e le ruri,*

*Mahlokgomo a gago a bitša mehlamu e le kgole,*  
Ke kgahlwa ke nao tša gago malekanelalefase,  
E ke lefase le sepela godimo ga legodimo.

O letšobana la ka moremolewagaregatšhemo

O moriti wa ka selemosesehla Bopedi,  
*O bokhutšo bja moya wa ka gare ga ditlaišego,*  
*O nkiša botaleng dijong tše mphedišago ka*  
mehla.

*Ntapološē bjalo meetse a moya wa ka*  
Nkalafe bjalo o mphekole hlabing tša lefase  
leno,

*Nthekge hlogo ka tsogo la gago le letshadi,*  
Ke dule farong tše molemo tša bophelo bja ka.  
[My italics] (Puleng 1980:3-4)

(Draw near me angel of my feet,  
Lie on my bosom to feel my warmth;  
Lo, the stars in the sky,  
They dance to the tune I and you lack.  
Child of the spirits, I do all with enthusiasm,  
That I and you shall be one,  
To disappoint our enemies with our love,  
That marriage shall conceal our flaws.  
Your cosmetics have a pleasant fragrance,  
Your name is as sweet as honey on my lips,  
Young men are shy to face you,  
Draw me near with your robes of love.  
Hurry and give me a kiss of hope,  
My dear beloved, you are the fairest among  
ladies,  
You are like the horses on Pharaoh's chariotry,  
You are sweeter than wine, your tidings are rich.

Child with beautiful cheeks that abound in love's  
taste,  
Your neck is not only decorated with beads,  
Your waist is chained with gold and silver  
ornaments,  
My dear beloved you are the fairest indeed,  
Your attractive eyes call for the beholder's  
attention,  
I admire your well-sized feet,  
Which make it seem as though the world treads  
upon the sky.  
You are the flower, plant that is eaten in the  
middle of the field  
You are my shadow on a hot summer of Bopedi,  
You are the comfort of my soul in times of  
trouble,  
You guide me to "greener pastures".  
Restore me the heart of my soul  
Heal me and help me from the sorrows of this  
world,  
Support my head with your left arm,  
To sojourn in my life's rapture).

The poem reflects a social dialogue between a male speaker and an anticipated female addressee. The dialogue is reminiscent of the Canticles; that is, the Song of Solomon where the voluptuous King Solomon falls in love with a rustic shepherdess and takes her to his court. The Canticles' discourse is largely *stylised* in Puleng's poem **Ngwana<sup>9</sup> Badimo** (1980).

David Lodge (1990:59) aptly describes *stylization (skatz)* as an instance where the writer borrows another's discourse and uses it for his own purposes with the same general intention as the original, but in the process casting 'a slight shadow of objectification over it'. Indeed, the allusions in Puleng reflect a large scale of originality and ingenuity on the part of the poet. It is, however, important to note that the Canticles always provide a basis for the interpretation of the Puleng text.

The pulchritude motif of the Canticles is reverberated in **Ngwana<sup>9</sup> Badimo**. The poet uses the image *ngeloi la maoto a ka* (angel of my feet) to suggest that the lady's beauty is beyond comparison in this world. The lady is elevated to the level of angels who are not merely beautiful, but holy messengers of God. The cherubic beauty places the maiden in Puleng upon the pedestal for appreciation and appraisal, and set her as the paragon of beauty. Contrary to the Christian application of the Canticles as an analogy to explain God's love to the world, Puleng uses the analogy to explain ordinary human beauty which is mortal and temporal. The angel imagery contrasts the *badimo world* for in this sphere angels have no role to play, they are actually non-existent. Borrowing the angelic image from Christian philosophy represents the plurality of religious views Puleng holds. Indeed, Puleng - the person, though brought up under Christian morals, keeps sufficient space for traditional African beliefs. Most of these ideas were thoroughly investigated in chapter 3. By addressing the female protagonist in the poem: *wena moratwa wa pelo ya ka, o yo botse go makgarebe* Puleng (1980:3) uses a similar expression as in the Canticles to give praise to the loved one. The same idea is further developed by another analogy: *moratwa wa ka, o yo botse e le ruri* (Puleng 1980:4). In the biblical verse, the superlative form, *fairest* is used to suggest that the lady's beauty is

*incompatible*. The accusative *wena* in *wena ngeloi* . . . helps the reader to identify with the beautiful lady of the poem.

In the citation *wena moratwa wa pelo ya ka, o yo botse go makgarebe* (Puleng 1980:3) the concept *makgarebe* bears similar connotations with the Arabic term *glm* (girls). Hope (1977:301) explains that the Arabic root '*lm*' has reference to sexual ripeness without presumption one way or the other as to virginity or sexual experience. The word *makgarebe* (maidens) refers to young unmarried women of marriageable age. Though the concept does not necessarily imply virginity, its use in the Old Testament sense (*almāh*) assumes the maidens to be virgins and virtuous until proven not to be. The same idea is expressed in Puleng's text when he compares the maiden in the poem with angels. Angels are prominent for their beauty and chastity. Similarly, the maidens are distinguished from Solomon's queens and concubines in the Canticles. This distinction is also implied in Puleng's text, though the latter has no provisions for queens and concubines. What Puleng achieves with the allusion is the *nonpareil* beauty of the female protagonist among women in general, and her presumed chastity.

The theme of beauty runs like a golden thread in both the Canticles and Ngwana<sup>9</sup> Badimo. In Puleng's text the line *mahlokgomo a gago a bitša mehlamu e le kgole* (Puleng 1980:4) is a parallel equivalent of *mahlo a gago . . . e ke ke mahlo a leeba* (Song of Solomon 4:1). Eyes with flashes of iridescence are regarded as hallmarks of beauty and perfection in a woman. It is a person of this stature who makes timid young men's hearts to die out as expressed in *masogana ge a go bona a kgarimanywa ke letswalo* (Puleng 1980:3). Rabbinic tradition identifies beautiful eyes with beautiful

personality. In Semitic tradition, a person's name is commonly used to refer to an adoring personality. The same tendency is reflected in the line: *Ina la gago molomong wa ka le tsefa bokatodi* (on my lips your name tastes like honey) which compares well with the biblical version: *Ina la gago ke setlolo ge se išhologile* (your name is oil poured out).

The pastoral and bucolic images employed in the Canticles and in Puleng's poetry are equivocal. On the one hand, the wine and honey imagery juxtaposed reinforce the intensity of the speaker's love while on the other hand the imagery has erotic tendencies. The intoxicating power of wine is exhilarating. Commenting on the erotic nature of the wine imagery, Carr (1984:64-65) remarks:

The links between wine and sex are well attested, and frequently fire is also introduced as a third element in the encounter.

Explaining pastoral imagery such as (walled) vineyards, orchards or gardens, Carr (1984:55) further maintains that on the surface the subject is plain enough, 'yet on close investigation reveals a highly erotic *double entendre* in the treatment of the theme'. The wine imagery in a way refers to sexual excitement which the speaker in Puleng's text hopes to achieve by falling in love with the female protagonist of the poem. Communications between the speaker and the addressee in Puleng's text and the Canticles are elevating and inspiring. Sweetness in *ina la gago molomong wa ka le tsefa bokatodi* and *o phala morara ka bose . . .* also has a double determination. Firstly, the

word *tsefa* (sweet) provides a language of purest affection and adoring admiration. The concept further addresses the speaker's presumed sexual excitement and the bodily pleasures that go with it, these may include caresses and kisses which are later sought for in the speaker's modest appeal: *Akgofa, o ntitie ka tladimolongwana rothi la kholofelo*. Hope (1977:373) explains sweetness by citing a love song which follows:

The honey-man, the honey-man sweetens me  
ever,  
My lord, the honey-man of the gods,  
My favourite of my mother,  
Whole hand is honey, whose fort is her vulva,  
Sweet is her drink,  
Sweet is her mixed drink, drink.

From this quotation, the groom is the 'honey-man' of the gods who sweetens the bride. It is this honey imagery which Puleng uses with erotic connotations.

Hope (1977:324) continues to explain the bucolic symbolism in this way:

The plowing and cultivation of a field is a natural figure for sexual intercourse and doubtless has some associations with the custom

of ritual copulation on freshly fields in order to ensure or encourage fertility.

Flowers are objects of cultivation and always have associations with love. In the expression *o letšobana la ka moremolewagaregatšhemo* the flower imagery heightens the speaker's passion towards the loved one. Flowers are known for their good fragrance which attract the beholder. These fragrances are also referred to in the line: *tlolo tša gago di monkomobose magokatshereano*. The fragrance motif runs from the Canticles, and in the context of the latter, refers to special quality oil which was scarce and expensive. In Puleng's text, the fragrances spotlight the young girl's beauty and further evokes the speaker's appreciation. The concept *moremolewagaregatšhemo* is also reminiscent of the Song of Solomon 2:3 which reads:

Moratwa wa ka a le gare ga tšhemo o etša  
moremolewa o le gare ga mehlare ya lešoka. Go  
dula moriting wa gago go a nkgahla; ganong ga  
ka go tsefelwa ke seenywa seo.

(My beloved you are like a wild tree which  
bears edible fruit. I enjoy sitting under your  
shadow, and enjoy the taste of your fruits.)

The Good News Bible's translation goes this way:

Like an apple tree among trees of the forest, so  
is my dearest compared with other men. I love  
to sit in its shadow, and its fruit is sweet to my  
taste.

The Midrash Rabba interpretation identifies the apple tree with God on the giving of the Law to the Israelites. When other nations refused to sit on His shade, Israel rejoiced to do so. Other than this meaning of the fruit tree, it should be remembered that the symbolism of eating, tilling and gardens is often used to connote sexual intercourse. The motif of *moremolewagaregatšhemo* has tendencies of copulation. In the back of the reader's mind lurks also the idea of the tree in the garden of Eden. This Edenic pleasure is of course a major theme of the Canticles as well as Puleng's text. In Puleng's text, the Edenic pleasure has no past and future implications as the biblical verses, but limited to the present for the fulfilment of the speaker's immediate sexual desires.

The speaker's appeal:

Robala hubeng sa ka o ruthufale;  
Bona dinaledi sebakabakeng sa legodimo,  
Di bina koša ye nna le wena re e hlokago  
(Puleng 1980:3)

(Lie on my bosom to feel my warmth,  
Behold the stars in the sky,  
They dance to the tune I and you lack)

blends well with the erotic theme of the Song of Solomon without necessarily referring to the song in any way. The expressions *robala hubeng sa ka* and *bona dinaledi sebakabakeng* are open to a plethora of interpretations, one of which is lascivious. The first appeal: *robala hubeng sa ka* expresses the speaker's desire to fondle the young woman addressed. The bodily contact desired by the speaker goes further than mere fondling to the level of seducing the lady. The stars provide a paradigm that the speaker wants the addressee to understand. These stars co-operate to provide light to the world, and it is probably this co-operative activity of the stars which the speaker yearns for. Indeed, the speaker wishes the addressee would co-operate and agree to his sexual advances for his merriment. The speaker uses the concept *bona dinaledi sebakabakeng* to entice the addressee to accede to his advances. The expression is normally used in idiomatic form to refer to sleep, thus the speaker exploits the ambiguity of the expression for his gain to reveal his desire to sleep with the female protagonist of the poem. The speaker's wish is clearly outlined by the assertion: . . . *nna le wena re be hlogo le moriri* ([that] I and you shall be fused). This fusion may be copulation or alternatively lead up to marriage to crown the love of the two interlocutors in the poem.

By comparing the maiden in the poem with *pitsi tša koloi ya Farao ka mebalabala*, Puleng borrows details from the Bible:

Wena moratwa wa ka! Ke go swantšha le dipitsi  
tša koloi ya Farao; molala wa gago o a nkgahla.

(You, my loved one! You are like the horses in  
Pharaoh's chariotry. Your neck attracts me.)

To understand the horse imagery used in both Puleng and the Canticles, one has to understand that Pharaoh's horses had their necks decorated with various ornaments to achieve stately beauty. Another notable factor providing the necessary context for the interpretation of the horse imagery is the fact that Pharaoh's chariotry was composed of stallions hitched in pairs and not mares. This idea is confirmed by Carr (1977:338) who maintains that Pharaoh's chariots, like other chariotry in antiquity, were not drawn by a mare or mares but by stallions hitched in pairs. Puleng's intertext: *molala wa gago ga wa išhepišwa ka pheta fela* (your neck is not only decorated by beads) alludes to the preceding biblical text cited above. These horses were decorated with jewels, precious metals, feathers and multicoloured leathers and fabrics. Reference to the decoration is intended to comment on the maiden's beauty. The flexibility of the neck suggests obedience, as also the pliability of the necklace. It is however regrettable that the maiden in Puleng's poem does not seem to be responding in any way as the paragon of beauty in the Canticles.

If we affirm the view that mares were not used to draw chariots, we would better imagine the intense excitement which a loose mare would create to the royal stallions. The stallions would break loose as a result of intense sexual

desire. For what purpose does Puleng use the same analogy in **Ngwana<sup>9</sup> Badimo?** Quite obviously, the maiden's beauty in Puleng's text arouses sexual lust on the part of the speaker. Having been overcome by the desire, the speaker changes the enticement from *mpatamele* (come close to me) to *nkgoge ka dithala tša lerato ke go šale morago* (draw me near you with your robes of love). The latter appeal is suggestive of the speaker's full submission of his desires and wishes his beloved, and needs her assistance to overcome his misery.

The poem **Ke mang?** (Puleng 1983a:2) has overtones of the Ten Commandments. This is evident where the poet calls for the reliability, honesty, truthfulness and absolute trust on the part of the Christian believers who seem to have strayed the righteous path. On condemning the pretended faith of these people Puleng writes:

Dikereke ke a di bona,  
Khutlonne tša lefase ke tšona feela:  
LaMorena le lengwe le le lengwe  
O eme pele ga phuthego morwamotho  
Ka gare ga botšhepi le phurabura:  
“Le se ke . . .”  
Fela ge a etšwa ka kgoro,  
Kgano e šikologa seolo. (op cit.)

(Churches I do see,  
They are there in the four corners of the world.  
On every Sunday  
The son of man stands before the congregation  
Well-dressed in a gown:  
He beseech: Thou shall not . . .  
But when he leaves the church door,  
He forsakes his teachings.)

These lines strongly attack the character of some church leaders who wield authority over the church, and enforce strong decrees which they fail to comply with. The failure of these church leaders suggests betrayal of their own faith which decrees that they should be guided by the law. It is unfortunate that these elders' behaviour is no ideal example from which the congregation can copy for it vacillates between pretended perfectionism and sheer ostension.

The injunction "*Le se ke . . .*" is reminiscent of the Ten Commandments. These commandments were set to serve as guidelines for the children of God, and should likewise guide the character in the poem as a church minister. It is regrettable that these authoritative admonitions are not adhered to by even those who are seen enforcing them. On the contrary, the church minister merely pays lip-service by his patent behaviour. The poet reinforces the character's double standards by borrowing from traditional wisdom pronounced in *kgano o reng o šikologa seolo, bohuedu o tšere kae?*. This proverb explains how a supercilious mongoose would avoid the anthill at all costs. To understand the mongoose analogy employed in this poem requires

the reader to come to grips with the relation between this animal and the anthill. A hungry mongoose would fish its body in the anthill, leaving only the opened anus exhibiting a food-like "bait" which is used to tempt chickens. Unaware of the danger, chickens will mistake the mongoose to be part of the anthill and would try to gobble on the food-like substance, and this will unfortunately mark the end of the chicken's life. Now, a mongoose which shuns away the anthill will definitely be shooting itself on the foot. Quite similarly, the church minister who pays lip-service to his Christian faith will finally pay heavily on the Judgement Day, where he shall be judged on his accounts.

The allusion to a multiple of churches throughout the world seems to be building on Matsepe's earlier observation:

Go ba ntshe ga gago ke tšhitelo go rena  
Bao go kwešiša go re tšerego bophelo ka moka;  
E sego gore go tseba go ba ntshe ga gago re a  
šitwa -  
Lehumo la ba bohlae go fetogile rena.  
Ka la gago go a selwa go khora ka moka  
Bao le le borethe ba nago nalo re šitwa  
Go kwešiša gore ke ka labaka la eng,  
Re boifa go botšiša gore ba dirang.  
*E atetše eng Mengwako ye mekgethwa?*  
*E fapanetše eng etšwe o le o tee?* [My italics]  
(Matsepe 1972:41)

(Your existence is a hindrance to us,  
Those who took years to comprehend;  
Not that we do not know your existence -  
We have fallen prey to the cunning  
Who earn a living in your name, feed  
Those with sweet tongues, we fail  
To understand why,  
We are anxious to ask what they intend  
achieving,  
Why have the Holy Churches multiplied?  
Why do they differ when you are one?)

Like in Puleng's poem, Matsepe here flogs the wayward and treacherous church leaders with a salted whip. These church leaders do not shine properly before their congregations as the gospel commands them, and thus have their lights darkened. It is deplorable for the church elders in Matsepe to use God's name to fill their pockets. Matsepe further questions the multiplicity of the churches and denominations in the face of one God. The assertion:

*E atetše eng Mengwako ye mekgethwa?*  
*E fapanetše eng etšwe o le o tee?* [my italics]  
(Matsepe 1972:41)

(Why have the Holy Churches multiplied?  
Why do they differ when you are one?)

reveals the irony of the Christian grand plan:

Le phegelele go tielela boteeng bja moya,  
setlemo e le kagišo. Mmele ke o tee, Moya ke o  
tee bjalo ka ge go bitšwa ga lena e le kholofelo  
e tee. Mong wa rena ke o tee, kolobetšo ke e  
tee. Modimo ke o tee . . . (Baefeso 4:3-6)

(Do your best to preserve the unit which the  
Spirit gives by means of the peace that binds you  
together. There is one body and one Spirit, just  
as there is one hope to which God has called  
you. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism;  
there is one God and Father of all mankind...)  
[Good News Bible translation]

The existence of Christian denominations with divergent dogmatics and doctrines violates the spirit and character of the cited letter in Ephesians. This is basically the concern of Matsepe who questions the multiplicity of churches in the face of one God. Matsepe uses the ironic tendency in this regard to satirise the church ministers' wickedness and treachery. He strongly condemns the system of collecting money in the name of God, and pawn on the people's fear of the wrath of God. In a similar vein, Puleng uses almost the same intertext to condemn pretended perfectionism and the double standards played by some church ministers in many churches. These ministers defeat the very objectives of their own faiths, and thus open

themselves for 'crucifixion' by their congregations and ordinary people in the street.

### 4.3 SUMMARY

The chapter has investigated the textual relations which exist between Puleng's poetry and the Bible. Puleng's Christian background has played a major role in the composition of his poetic works. Both the New and Old Testaments are seen resurfacing in Puleng's poetry.

The Old Testament theology is furthered through poetry, and the theme of creation seems to have been largely influenced by this. Puleng's imagery ranges from Edenic pleasure here and in the hereafter. As much as the psalms are used to praise God and his works, Puleng borrows from them to reinforce his ideas about the authority of God over people. This is evident in Psalm 23, which he almost quotes or alludes to, to indicate to those who seek pleasure in the immediate present to carry their burdens to the Lord. That God is the comforter through all perils is demonstrated in the Solomondale accident where his help is sought, and in addition he is requested to take care of those who are bereaved in the absence of the deceased.

Solomon's Canticles are seen stylised in Puleng, and in some cases parodied for reasons known to the author. The pulchritude theme and the erotic nature of the Canticles are also found dominating the poem **Ngwana<sup>9</sup> Badimo**

(1980). Of interest is the striking similarities and differences in the way both writers use the images. In the Canticle, the ideas are largely symbolic and equivocal. Similarly, Puleng uses the symbolic nature of the ideas expressed by the Canticles to play around with the words and expressions to reach poetic heights.

The Gospels, on the ideas of marriage; also help the poet to instil into his readers the indissolubility of marriage. The idea is borrowed from the Mosaic teachings which forbade Moses' followers never to divorce unless for unfaithfulness on the part of one of the partners.

The relationships established herewith, have also revealed how the poet uses his ingenuity in developing an idea which was developed in an earlier text without corrupting his own ideas. The ideas of the earlier text provide a base to explain what the artist has in mind, in other words; in the event of the artist's rendition of his concocted theme, he adopts the ideas of the earlier text as merely allegories to elucidate his thoughts. The reading of such texts, is basically intended for an active reader who shall be able to track down ideas from one text to another without losing the thread that weaves both the present text and the other texts which are present and yet absent. There are cases where the reader loses the thread, and thus loses the correct context for the interpretation of the text. In such cases, meaning is sacrificed at the hands of a passive reader who fails to unwind the tissue fibres properly.

Of significance is the fact that meaning is not something absolute, thus the passive reader may still see a glimpse of the writer's searchlight if certain context determinants are designated in the text, and used for analysis.

# **CHAPTER 5**

## **CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this chapter is to look back and evaluate the content of the study, salient facts uncovered, and finally make recommendations for further study.

### **5.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The study cross-examined the poetry of N.S.Puleng in its full context, that is, it focused on the role of the reader in the interpretation of text, and meaning composition. This took into account the independence of the literary work, which makes it open for a myriad of explications. It is for this reason that the researcher, as the active reader, concentrated on the text and its relations from tradition to other literary texts as the Bible.

The study established the relationship which exists between the life and times of the author and the literary text. It is in the application of the autobiographical mode that Puleng succeeds to share with the reader part of his life in his works. His biography can well be sketched from the range of works such as drama and poetry as illustrated in the first and opening chapter of this study.

Puleng's poetry is to a large extent autobiographical. This is evident in his dramatic text **Thellenyane ba tla bolela** where the main character seems to be a disguised representation of the author. In his poetic forms, he concentrates on his personal life, that of his sister, friends and relatives. Although only the poetic works have received attention in this regard, it is hoped that future research will be undertaken in the direction of drama to elucidate how he has almost spiced his writing with his life.

In the case of poetic works, the *I* in his poetry is multi-directional. In some cases, the voice that speaks is that of the poet painting his own picture. This voice at times varies and becomes split between Puleng the poet, and Puleng the person. There are cases where the voice undoubtedly is the representative *I* in which case, the poet guards the centre and speaks for his fellow citizens. This is mostly the case when he inveighs against the socio-economic maladies which characterise his country. He speaks for the nation which murmurs its wishes down the corridors because they are not 'allowed' to express their views. In this way, Puleng assumes the role of public commentator which the traditional bard has always been entrusted with.

Biography, as contextual intertext, further illuminates his views on motherhood. The portraiture of motherhood undoubtedly reveals the poet's conception of his mother, and later uses same to refer to motherhood in general. Motherhood is seen as an institution larger than life. The mother is not only the conduit of life, the receptacle of love, but the symbol of ideal life characterised by care, patience, selflessness and tranquillity. Such an idealism is a result of the close attachment of the poet to his mother. The mother has become a model for what a future wife should be. It is unfortunate that even if the mother has become a model for a desired partner in life, such a partner would not fit like a glove on the requisites and standard set. It is for this reason that the poet is likely to differ markedly with his wife for she is a unique being with a unique existence which must be understood on its own.

Of interest in this study was the way the poet portrayed womanhood as opposed to motherhood. Motherhood is not seen in the same light as womanhood, and thus the mother is not in the category of women. The view on womanhood is largely phallogentric. Puleng's women are denied freedom to exercise their rights. They are incapacitated and thus would not exist independent of their male counterparts. It is for this reason that women are associated with passive objects worthy of manipulation. To add salt to the injury, they are even denigrated as *familiars* such as *ditšhwene* (baboons). This misrepresentation is typical of male writers because of the stereotypical nature of the patriarchal society as it conceives reality as male-oriented. For as long as the normative structure of our society, and the body of knowledge is still seen in racial, class and sexual stereotypes, there is no hope of a better society free from inequalities. The call for non-sexism and non-racialism should not be rendered as mere academic and intellectual exercise, but should

be allowed to penetrate deep into the layers of society to accord human persons to see themselves as people, and not in terms of physiological differences. We should learn from what technology is capable of doing by proving us wrong. Given as it is, people will continue undergoing sex transformations frustrating our sexual conceptions of the world.

As an African, Puleng could not escape the African world view which gives impetus to his poetic works. The primary influence in Puleng derives largely from African cosmology. The study focused on how the cosmological origin of life informs the poetry of N.S.Puleng. The view that life is a product of the underworld is evident in the water imagery employed to designate the poet's conception of prenatal life. This conception is rooted in the traditional Bapedi thought that sees water as the source and conduit of life.

The study is a journey towards an African experience. It disputes the view that African worship is misguided. It makes deeper philosophical reflections that can only be understood from an African frame. At some stages, the study revealed the life of an African at the crossroad of traditional religion and Christianity. Overpowered by the incursion of Christianity with its capitalist promises of a heavenly bliss, some attempt to divorce themselves from the African religion and adopt the new religion with its new rewards. It is also observed that it is not always easy for the Africans to shed off completely their traditional religion.

Within his poetry Puleng is seen vacillating between the two poles: Christianity and African Traditional Religion. This religious plurality is

reflective of what pertains to most Africans in Africa in general, where one or more religions are competing with the traditional religion of the original inhabitants.

The Christian life of the Nkomo family is largely reflected in Puleng's poetry. The essences love, thanksgiving and peace are an integral part of the poems dedicated to his mother. The fact that motherhood is compared with the Virgin Mary represents an attempt by the poet to put Christian life into focus.

A large content of his poetry is allusive to hymns and various books of the Bible. The pastoral imagery of the psalms bestows upon God power above all creation, and submits human suffering and pleasure to the Almighty. The shepherd symbolism underlines the poet's conception of the role of the God, who reigns supreme and looks after his flock with care, compassion and understanding.

Puleng's poetry reveals its interdependence with other texts. On the theme of coyness, the poet develops ideas previously reflected in Andrew Marvel's poem **To His Coy Mistress**. From this poem Puleng also borrows some ideas about the imminence of Time. That a human's age cannot be betrayed is evident in Matsepe's sonnet **Kganya o inaganne** to which Puleng aptly alludes.

The study of the coyness theme further highlights the permutation of the flower imagery in Matsepe, Lentsoane and Puleng. Matsepe uses the image

to explain that no cosmetic attempts can conceal one's age. The same image is used by Lentsoane to uncover his religious views that human nature crowns and embellishes God's creation. Furthermore, the flower imagery is applied to suggest the immortality of human nature and finally reflects on the Christian hope for resurrection. Puleng chooses the flower image to highlight his theme of eroticism as well as to enhance his view on the frail nature of human life. He uses the flower as a symbol for the temporality of human nature.

### **5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Despite the contribution which this study has made, the study cannot claim to be exhaustive of Puleng's poetic works in any way. A vociferous artist of Puleng's calibre, who has penned down volumes of poetry and drama, demands a great need for a work that concentrates its energy on the works of this young man to reveal the wealth which he has in store for our literature. It is hoped this study shall be an eye-opener for the beauty not yet tapped from this young artist.

Future directions on Puleng may take various detours; it may be the political, psychoanalytic or even comparative. Of interest will be a study which either takes all his works and reveal how this young artist has overlaid his biography in every work that he produced.

It is strongly recommended that future studies on Puleng should also look into the works of his contemporaries with a view to uncover the factors which have shaped the content of their poetry.

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