

**CONTENT, FORM AND TECHNIQUE OF TRADITIONAL AND MODERN  
PRAISE POETRY IN NORTHERN SOTHO**

by

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY**

in the subject

**AFRICAN LANGUAGES**

at the


**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

PROMOTER: PROFESSOR S M SERUDU

JUNE 1994

DECLARATION

I declare that **CONTENT, FORM AND TECHNIQUE OF TRADITIONAL AND MODERN PRAISE POETRY IN NORTHERN SOTHO** 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.

  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to most heartily thank my promoter, Professor S.M. Serudu. Mokwena, you have been a father throughout the years, and your wise guidance is greatly appreciated.

I will not forget the time when I was really demotivated and you assigned dates on which I was to submit the succeeding chapters. "*Namane ye e boago kgobadi Moletlane .... Šankiša mokaka o ba amuše gomme Modimo a go okeletše.*"

To Professor J.A. Louw, I want to say, "God should spare you for many days to come. Thank you."

To my colleagues I say thank you. Special acknowledgements go to Malekutu who at times left his work and office to go and assist me in the search for materials in the library. *Kgomo!*

My greatest indebtedness goes to Ms M. Morufe and her colleagues for their typing of this work. I know you had a tight programme in your work. Thank you!

My heartfelt gratitude, also goes to Mrs C Greaves of our subdepartment, and Ms I.M. Cooper for the editing of this thesis and to Mr M.D. Thokoane for checking of the translated texts. And to all the authors whose texts I used in this work, I say "God bless."

To all the informants who were always ready to give information I also say "God bless." Special thanks to *Kgošigadi* Lekgolane Sekwati of Mamone, *Kgoši* Seopela Kgoloko II of Schoonoord, *Kgoši* Maloma of Ga-Maloma and *Kgoši* Madihlaba of Ga-Moloi who were always willing to organize my meetings at their offices.

Finally to my dearest wife Dimakatso and children who sometimes missed me because of research, I love you.

## SUMMARY

This thesis is a critical evaluation of the content, form and technique of traditional and modern praise poetry in Northern Sotho.

Chapter 1 presents the aim of the study and the method of research and defines the concepts of poetry and praise poetry. Praise poetry is viewed from a traditional and modern perspective.

Chapter 2 deals with the content and technique of praise poetry. Content consists of oral praise poetry lauding the heroic deeds of men in battles and casual encounters. Modern praise poetry comments on current events. Devices for rapid composition of the praises are discussed. Techniques differ between poets and according to time, place and occasion.

Chapter 3 covers the traditional praises of chiefs, warriors, initiates, animals, birds, divining bones and totem praises, examining them from the perspective of content and form. The praises extol human achievements, peculiar animal characteristics and the interpretation of "mawa" of divining bones.

Chapter 4 deals with the development and transition from traditional to modern form as well as the reciprocal influence. The content and form of modern praises of chiefs, academics, community leaders, animals, birds, divining bones, man-made objects and some natural phenomena are discussed. Many modern poets have also written praises of fictional characters.

Chapter 5 compares oral and written praise poetry by concentrating on the similarities and differences between traditional and modern praise poetry. This study shows that there are differences in of theme, rhyme, beginning and ending, sentence length and significant emphasis on man-made objects such as cars and locomotives as exceptional modes of transport for commuters.

Chapter 6 concludes the study and proves that praise poetry is a living or dynamic entity which will continue to exist. Praise poetry highlights persons, interpersonal relationships, attitudes and values derived from an African conceptions of the universe.

Key terms in the study are oral praises, written praises, critical evaluation, historical record, compositional techniques, traditional praises, modern praises, comparative perspective, similar and dissimilar characteristics, and reciprocal influence.

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## CHAPTER 1

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to examine closely the content, form and technique of traditional and modern praise poetry in Northern Sotho and in so doing to also discern, assess and trace the development of Northern Sotho poetry from the traditional to the modern forms. This will be done by considering various aspects that characterise Northern Sotho poetry, whether traditional or modern. It is essential to show that traditional poetry was handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth and that it took the form of praise poetry. It is hoped to inculcate a love for this kind of poetry in the younger generation and to reach the minds of men and women who have a vague, general appreciation of poetry as well as those who consider praise or remember it purely as a means to an end: to pass examinations.

As in the time before the invention of printing and of mass education, when oral poetry was something of a mass medium, this thesis hopes to reach out and arouse the feelings of many who do not appreciate poetry because it seems to have nothing for them. Reeves (1965: 2) says:

Poetry has been going on as long as human speech, it has engaged the interest of large numbers of people for many centuries, it has tempted devoted men and women away from worldly success, and it has won the passionate concern of men and women of all kinds and in all countries.

Poetry is universal and is a collective cultural interest. It should be looked upon as a social institution. It cannot be measured by time. That is why Gummere (1970: 3) says:

As for the past of poetry, kings have been its nursing fathers, and queens its nursing mothers, and for its future, one may be content with the words of the late M Guyau, a man of scientific training and instincts, who has looked carefully and temperately at the whole question and concludes that poetry will continue to be the natural language of all great and lasting emotion.

While it has ceased to function, we find that attempts have been and still are being made, through radio and other means, to revive the enjoyment of poetry as a collective activity. Today we all share in what is the greatest cultural inheritance the world has ever known because of its influence on the various kinds of modern poetry. However, it is not easy to influence a person to love poetry because the love of poetry is an affair of the heart.

This study further aims to analyse the differences between modern and traditional praise poetry, and bring to light the characteristics and techniques that operate in them. This study will follow a comparative approach, which will outline the similarities and dissimilarities.

We find it fitting, then, to say that, while this cannot be regarded as an exhaustive study, it will serve as the basis for further research thus bridging the gap between the written and unwritten lore of the people. Paradoxically, scholarly discovery of this rich legacy of oral poetry is relatively recent. In fact, to date, many of our composers concentrate almost exclusively on the classical poetry considered as an object of real interest. In conclusion, then, we hope

that this study will provide real impetus to folk and oral research and study.

## **1.2 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS: WHAT IS POETRY?**

### **1.2.1 The origin of poetry**

Several authors have attempted to define poetry. Some of these writers will be cited in order to highlight the status of poetry in a cultural context.

Shelley regards poetry as imaginative passion while Coleridge and others consider it from the point of view of its form and structure and regard it as the best words in the best order. While Coleridge emphasises on the form, Shelley seems to base his argument on the nature or content of the poem.

From this it is clear that an accurate definition of poetry is not always possible. Much has been written by poets like Arnold, Sampson and Aristotle Bergman and Epstein, Reeves, Okara, Stedman, Wheeler, Bloom, Cook, Pottle and Hayden. But from its many designs, its many elements, its many idioms, none of them has ever felt convinced that his definition is quite convincing. We also find endless possibilities in their definitions.

Many see poetry as an aspect of the use of language. And when we talk of the language, again, we are essentially talking about the culture of the groups of people or the country to which the language belongs. This is because language in its different forms (oral or written in addition to the other forms of artistic media) gives expression to the culture of the speakers of the language.

Language itself has been seen as a symbolic method for conveying ideas and as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by which members of a social group cooperate and interact. The latter view seems to be an extension of the former, and also seems to have some discernible relevance to the polygenetic view of the origin of language.

Now to poetry. Poetry is said to have originated in magical spells and incantations as practised by traditional healers in mediating between their adherents and their God or gods. This view of the origin of poetry is, we think, universally accepted. The earliest poetry was closely related to religious rituals and feasts and was often a fusion of song and dance, based on powerful incantatory sound patterns. Already we see an influence between traditional and modern poetry. And in the context of Northern Sotho one has no doubt whatsoever about the relevance of this connotation. Today, amongst the Bapedi, poetry exists side by side with its originators. It originated from the so-called traditional healers, praise singers and diviners. As practised by the healers, praise singers and diviners, it has its sympathetic audience in the vast majority of the Bapedi who are mainly rural dwellers, and poetry based on European models and tradition finds its scholarly audience in the universities and colleges.

### 1.2.2 Definition of poetry

So far the origin of poetry has been discussed. But what is poetry, what is it all about, and what purpose does it serve? Lovers of poetry and critics have been searching for an accurate definition of it for at least two thousand years. And there are as many ways of accounting for its power as there are poets. According to Wainwright (1987: 45),

Were one to have the opportunity of asking one hundred people what they consider to be the nature of poetry, one might anticipate a hundred different responses.

For Anden (Bergman and Epstein 1983), "Poetry is memorable speech".

Arnold (1976: 44) maintains, "Poetry is at bottom a criticism of life" while for Wordsworth (1976: 45), "Poetry is a spontaneous outflow of powerful feelings".

These are but a few of such responses and there is no correspondence between them.

Many believe that poetry is a precision instrument for recording man's reaction to life. This view is endorsed by Okara (1976: 44) who, when quoting Herbert Spencer, defines poetry as, "a form of speech for the better expression of emotional ideas".

Clive Sampson (Okara: 1976: 44) supports Spencer when he says,

Poetry is a rhythmical form of words which expresses imaginative-emotional intellectual experience of the writer's and expresses in a way that it creates a similar experience in the mind of their reader or listener.

All these definitions are based on an objective view of poetry and seem to be saying the same thing with probably equal validity, though Sampson's definition seems more clear than the others.

Further, deliberating on poetry, Heese and Lawton (1975: 12) say:

It was an expression of man's most fundamental feelings and desires: his urges to communicate with his gods, his joy and gratitude at the bounty of nature, and his desire to exercise some sort of power through ritual and magical chant over natural processes.

Sweetkind (1964) sees poetry as a reflection of a number of complex linguistic and psychological elements such as senses, images, emotions, and the like.

To him (1964: 10), poetry is more than just everyday language:

A poem is a complex organism in which all the elements of sensual appeal, emotion, imagery, incidents, rhythm, pattern, and ideas function simultaneously to communicate an imaginative experience forcefully.

Accordingly, a poem aims at achieving the inner satisfaction of the poet. The emotions, attitudes and thoughts of the poet are expressed through the words of the poem. In this case, two main functions are indicated: the aspect of self-fulfilment and the aspect of reaching other people or the audience through the vocal expression.

Also contributing to the theory of poetry, Arnold sees it as the most perfect speech of man. Because of the emotional element which is reflected in poetry, man finds himself speaking the truth through the words he utters when praising a river, a train or someone else poetically. This is supported by Billows (1961: 279),

Poetry is speech, memorable and eloquent speech, patterned and enticing speech, powerful and insidious speech, incantatory and spell-binding speech perhaps, but still primarily speech and sound, rather than patterns on paper.

Billows gives priority to the element of speech above other characteristics. Others view poetry as more than everyday speech. But, since it is attached to human life it is also acceptable. What becomes evident is that everyone wants to mention an element that is related to life. On this attachment to life, Hayden

(1982: 10) says:

While some minor theorist in the nineteenth century saw literature as merely an expression of the writer's feelings, the traditional view from Aristotle to the present has been to see literature as mimetic - that is, as representing life or human experience either directly or implicitly.

As a matter of fact, right from the beginning the enjoyment of literature has been said to derive to some extent from the recognition of a work of literature as being true to life. Pottle (1963: 63) also concurs that poetry was thought of as a superior way of apprehending Truth, as the apex of the pyramid of the mind. He alludes that where the mind expresses its intuitions in verbal symbols, that expression is poetry.

Whether sung, spoken, or written, poetry is still the most vital form of human expression. It is the diamond of these concretions. It generates a light of its own, but also anticipates the light of after-times, and refracts it with sympathetic splendours. Stedman (1970: 44) offers the following condensed definition:

Poetry is rhythmical, imaginative language, expressing the invention, taste, thought, passion, and insight, of the human soul.

In this definition, we see poetry as an expression of intellectual thought, the functions of which are, in a sense very readily assumed and mechanically imitated. Poetry is an expression of the beautiful. The poet is a revealer and creator through insight and imaginative invention. The key of our concept of poetry is the statement that poetry, carefully considered, is language. It is an



art of words. Poetry is words. This is the first step in the study of poetry and one that does not seem to point clearly in any one direction. Stedman has left it wide open as Playstead Wood (1972) has done. He simply says that poetry is thought about the what, why and who of poetry. One cannot be wrong in what one says about it, for the simple reason that one cannot be right. This schism over the correct definition has enormous implications.

While many advocates, such as Shelley (1821), were of the opinion that poetry transcends language, their theories have produced no viable conclusions. Language as we know, has words and rules on how the words are utilised. Therefore, poetry has to be seen as a special way of using language, within the context of other uses of language.

All these poets would agree, however, that poetry differs markedly from the prose of legal contracts, encyclopedias, or newspapers. Poetry is more intense than other writings, more intense in feeling and in its concentration of meaning. It is, according to philosophers and critics, the true language of emotion. In poetry we have all the experience of joy, love, or sadness so great that no matter how urgently we need to express it, words fail us. Wood (1972: 11) calls them the noble and ignoble emotions that come first and stay longest. He alludes that they motivate our attitudes and our actions, and that they are the subjects of poetry.

It is, however, true that events such as the birth or death of a child, the return of the supposed comrade Messiah after twenty-seven years' absence, the death of a parent, can leave us speechless. At such times we might wish we were poets. For poetry, it is said, succeeds where ordinary speech fails to communicate those urgent and subtle feelings that are most essentially human. That is why poetry is the most enduring form of literature.

In conclusion, the differences in the definition, of poetry are all to be part of a whole and that they have reminded one of the story of the blind men trying to

describe, an elephant from various parts of its anatomy - its tail, feet, body or trunk. Such is the nature of poetry. It is the embodiment of life itself, the full knowledge of which is yet beyond human intellect. We can only grope for a definition in the course of our intellectual exercise and express our views, which will be as many and as varied as the number of persons. However, four elements emerge from the many definitions:

Poetry is language, rhythmically, emotionally, imaginatively and intellectually used.

Poetry is a use of language rather than a kind of language.

Poetry is artful.

Poetry aims at the fulfilment of a purpose intrinsic to the language itself.

### **1.3 ORAL AND PRAISE POETRY**

#### **1.3.1 What is oral poetry**

To talk about poetry and oral poetry raises the question, of what relationship, if any, oral poetry has to poetry. This is a relevant starting point for a comparative approach. But to tackle this means using the definition of poetry to which we have already referred to and language. Talking about the two we are essentially talking about the culture of a group of people. This culture is given expression by the language of the people. It is poetic language that is used to express their ideas. Words and common words are spoken every day by the masses in communicating with one another. When these words are spoken, it presupposes that the listener is not mute. The listener is also able to speak and make appropriate responses.

The discussion of the definition of poetry referred to poetry as rhythmical form of words which expressed the imaginative-emotional, intellectual experience of

the writer in a way that creates a similar experience in the mind of the reader or listener. This pronouncement shows that the poet uses a combination of word-symbols to convey his ideas. Whether or not he succeeds depends on how well he manipulates the word-symbols. He uses common words that touch us emotionally and are spoken orally.

Oral poetry is poetry that lives in the mouth of the people and is transmitted verbally from one person to another. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, defines "oral" as "spoken, verbal, by word of mouth". Oral poetry is unwritten poetry. According to Finnegan (1970: 14),

'Oral tradition' (including what we should now call oral literature) is passed down word for word from generation to generation and thus reproduced verbatim from memory throughout the centuries, or alternatively, that oral literature is something that arises communally, from the people or the 'folk' as a whole, so that there can be no question of individual authorship or originality.

Oral poetry essentially circulates by oral rather than written means. In contrast to written poetry, its distribution, composition or performance is by word of mouth and not through reliance on the written or printed word. Cuddon (1977: 465) says:

Poetry belonging to this tradition is composed orally, or made up as the poet goes along. As a rule it is usually sung, chanted or recited and it is the earliest of all poetry, in the sense that it precedes written poetry.

This is the poetry that is fading away in many parts of Lebowa because of the fast-emerging influence of modern European poetry. As literacy is now spreading throughout the entire world at a rapid rate, oral poetry seems destined, in time, to disappear if it is not collected and stored in accordance with one of the aims of this study.

Like Shaw (1972: 1266), we can say that oral poetry is that which is uttered by the mouth. It is poetry that survives through the spreading or passing on of material by word of mouth. This term is applied especially to the ballad, epic, and folklore. Scholars point out that some of these were originally made known to audiences only by recitation and singing and were handed down to succeeding generations through memorisation rather than in written form. This is in accordance with the theory of transmission, which asserts that traditional material was first the property of the so-called common people who repeated or sang such items, consciously or unconsciously uttered them, and taught them to their children from one generation to the next. Finnegan (1978: 1) says:

The context that often springs to mind when 'oral poetry' is mentioned is of some remote village far off the beaten track with the indigenous people - non-literate and unindustrialized - engaged in performing some local song or piece of traditional verse,

....

Oral poetry is defined not only in terms of form but also of technique of composition, manner of transmission and its performance. Thus, oral poetry is not only a poem that tells a story, it is also a poem that, regardless of its manner of composition, has been changed in the process. As a matter of fact, Finnegan (1977: 26) points out that the distinction is blurred. One must know something about its history, how it first came to be written down, how it came

to its singers or reciters, and whether or not it exists in other forms. Identification of a poem as an oral poem is impossible without this information for it is quite possible for a sophisticated poet to imitate the characteristics of oral poetry successfully. Matsepe, Tseke, Mamogobo, Machaka, Sehlodimela and other Northern Sotho poets have, in fact, done so.

Oral poetry is transmitted and recreated by popular virtuosi. Only where such virtuosi still exist is oral poetry a living tradition, and there is no evidence of any imaginative postulate of a culture in which everyone is a singer-composer. There is, on the other hand, considerable evidence to support the hypothesis that when popular virtuosi go out of fashion, when their function is replaced by some other medium, especially one which people have little control, oral poetry deteriorates, fades away and becomes, at least, an imperfectly remembered survival. Such seems to be the situation with Lebowa and its people. Leach *et al* (1949: 826) refer to "time binding" as enabling men to communicate over intervals of time so that the younger member of a group can begin where the older ones leave off. According to this statement, it is man's survival mechanism, in terms of which relative sanity or insanity can be measured. For Kgobe (1989: 11),

Oral traditional literature tends to make the songs and poems from the past serve the goals of the present for the sake of the future. It is only when tradition is dying that it begins to lose contact with the present and becomes a preserver of its own past rather than a continuator.

The most distinctive characteristic of oral poetry is its fluidity of text. Fluidity of text, or the absence of a single fixed text, arises from the technique of composition, which the poet learns over many years, regardless of the genre of verse in question. It is a technique of improvisation by means of formulas

or phrases which say what the poet wants and needs to say, fitted to the varying metrical conditions of his tradition. Ong (1987: 55) talks of this characteristic as an "aggregative rather than analytic" thing, which refers to the acceptance without questioning of what he calls formula current in everyday speech. He is thinking of slogans and clichés, of course, rather than the formulas of oral traditional verse. Phrases such as "*Phaswa 'a Makwa*" when referring to *Kgoši Sekhukhune* or "*Kgatswatswa' a Mabjana*" for *Kgoši Sekwati*, are terms used without further analysis whenever their praises are rendered. We should therefore be able to distinguish between slogans and the formulas of oral traditional poetry. Slogans and clichés are both quantitatively and functionally different from the formulas. Father Ong (1987: 57) puts it as follows:

The use of the formula for both popular slogans and clichés as well as the formulas of oral traditional poetry might lead to ambiguity, because the latter are by no means bereft of meaning, and both poet and audience have some sense of that meaning, which they do not need to analyze every time they are used. Moreover, the formulas of oral traditional poetry have an important and necessary function in the composition and transmission of that poetry, a function which has no parallel in the slogans and clichés of popular usage.

Another characteristic of oral poetry is redundancy as opposed to sparseness, or perhaps spareness of expression. Repetitions and formulas are kept well into the written period as oral residue. According to some folklorists, repetitions should not be viewed only as reminders of what has been said, but should also be considered as ritual repetition. We know that in poetry, the fullness, the

copiousness, comes from ritual elaboration. Only those elements which are fully described are of significance. It is not any old sword that is described at great length, but the hero's special sword. The repetition and fullness are there for an important role of their own, a ritual one of great antiquity and not just to fill up time for the convenience of the audience.

Because oral poetry is not written, it is considered additive and not subordinative. This is clearer in folksongs where every line starts with a conjunction. In some praises conjunctions are also used. A case in point is the first chapter of Genesis, which was written with the abundant use of "and". Connectives are also not used. Milman Parry (1930) refers to the use of coordinating conjunctions as the "adding style". The use of parallelisms are outstanding manifestations of the adding style.

A further characteristic of oral poetry is that it does not usually have a title. Titles are, in fact, a convention for the presentation of written rather than oral poetry. This allows for a free shift in reference from one individual to the next in the same family or clan. It does not have a composer. The composition is often not a once-and-for-all action. Every singer and performer can equally be regarded as the author in so far as he contributes to the form and detailed exposition of the poem. Sometimes the collector takes the name of the performer and regards him as composer which then makes the attribution of authorship wide open and not absolute. In other instances, a closer examination might reveal that some names are of the initial composer and not the performer. Sometimes the performer and composer blend into one identity.

In conclusion, it is clear that oral literature cannot be separated totally from written literature in any absolute sense. The common criteria of orality, such as oral composition, performance and transmission, are relative and elusive, and may well conflict with each other for a poem may be orally composed then later transcribed into written form, or perhaps written initially but then performed and circulated by oral means. This then makes it impossible to draw up a

precise and undisputable definition of the concept "oral" as experienced with the definition of poetry. A flexible approach will therefore be adopted to what can be counted as oral, which means that a poem need not have been totally composed, transmitted, and performed orally without any significant contact with writing in order to qualify as oral. The aspects of oral delivery and circulation also lead to some literature being regarded as oral. Would we not all agree as Finnegan (1978) assumes that verse broadcast over the radio is an instance of oral poetry? She looks at this point from the urban and industrial context and says that oral poetry now becomes a living art form in the modern world and not just the exclusive possession of remote and long-ago peoples.

### 1.3.2 What is praise poetry?

Praise poetry is but one facet of Northern Sotho oral poetry and may be engaged in by virtually anybody, in a number of contexts, and directed at a variety of people, animals or objects. Herdboys praise their clay oxen, the live animals in their care, or their friends: a ploughman praises his lead ox; a hunter, his dogs; a father may praise one of his children or his homestead; a wife, her husband, and so on. According to Opland (1973: 69),

Men may compose little autobiographical *izibongo* which they may utter while dancing or fighting. In all these instances, the praise would probably be personal and would be uttered with little regard for communication of sense, but they would at least be apposite.

Praise poetry is fundamentally a collective art. It is a communal property whose spiritual qualities are shared and experienced by all. In short, it is an art form that can and must communicate with people of all races and cultures and that should enjoy the ultimate fate of all great currents of human thought.



It is an investment programme with high hopes and expectations. This is true because each individual, tribe or nation has a set of praises and these are used on ritual occasions to invoke the ancestors. Individuals also have praise names, often mentioning some personal quality or recalling a past experience. As Wainwright (1979: 11) points out,

The praises cover a wide range of topics, yet whatever the subject treated, be it traditional clan praises or modern *izibongo* about mine life, personal praises or the eulogy of a chief, the poetry evidences such an array of poetic riches that it must surely rank among the foremost oral literatures of the world.

Praise poetry is the most familiar form of traditional poetry. It is the form that is regarded by many to be synonymous with traditional poetry. The reason for this is not difficult to find. While social changes have rendered the other forms almost extinct, the conditions for the rendering of praise poetry are entrenched in the life of the people. This poetry is regarded as an art of communication. Lestrade (1946: 295) describes a praise poem as:

A type of composition intermediate between the pure, mainly narrative epic, and the pure, mainly apostrophic ode, being a combination of exclamatory narration and deeds for which the person has acquired fame, enumerating, in hyperbolic apostrophe, those qualities for which he is renowned, and they include a recital of those laudatory epithets applied to him either as an individual and known as his praise names.

Praise poems exist in many different parts of Africa. Its laudatory verse is addressed to kings, chiefs and even ordinary persons, including children. In a way the term "praise poetry" is a misnomer since such poems contain elements of satire and at times whole passages can be abusive. The subject of the praise poem may include anything from people to lifeless objects. In this way we may talk of poems composed in praise of practically anything. The poem may be partially narrative or partially or wholly descriptive. When the praise poem is in the form of a narrative, it glorifies the deeds of individuals and gives details of successful battles waged. When it is descriptive, some attribute of the person addressed is usually singled out for extended treatment. According to Msimang (1981: 51),

As an ode it apostrophises the king, referring to his personality and physique, pointing out both good and bad qualities. As an eulogy, it lauds the king for his diplomatic and military achievements. As an epic, it alludes to his history.

It is true that one never praises a person for having done something bad. On the contrary, one praises or speaks well of a person because of some meritorious deed. If, for example a person has distinguished himself in some way or has achieved something good and praiseworthy, he will be congratulated with a phrase like, "Well done". By saying that the person is praising him - (*o a mo reta*). This is synonymous with describing a person's personality. It is like saying how good, brave, strong or wonderful the person, animal or thing is. Praises are part of everyday life among Africans. For example, when young children obey their parents, the parents often burst forth into praises in commemoration of their ancestors to inspire the children (their young descendants) to emulate their achievements. Because of its name, praise poetry among African people belongs to a tradition of immeasurable wealth and antiquity. If, as students and researchers today, we want to explore

this field, we face a voyage over uncharted waters. According to Kgobe (1989: 26),

African names, in any case, are usually sentences that describe the familiar circumstances of the accretions that the bearer collects in his passage through life and are called out to fix him in his true nature, and in effect, to encourage him to live up to them.

Such epithets are known as *direto* among the Bapedi and *izibongo* among the Zulu, *dithoko* among the Southern Sotho, and *Maboko* among the Tswana people. When several of these are compiled to form a lengthy celebration of a subject, they become praise poetry, which is also *direto* in Northern Sotho.

Praise poetry may be classified into various types known to occur throughout Africa. This brings home something of the diversity of forms in which human beings have expressed their poetic imagination. At the same time it reminds us of the many parallels and overlaps with written literature. This study will mainly adopt the established terms of Western literary study to describe different genres. These terms form a convenient means of grouping together certain broad similarities. However, it cannot be assumed that they would be the most appropriate ones for detailed analysis of a given oral literature, or that their use in a preliminary account implies any attempt to set up a definitive typology of genres.

The classification of kinds or species of praise poetry most commonly accepted in Northern Sotho praises embraces the following:

- (1) Praises of tribes, chiefs and heroes
- (2) Children's songs, associated with children's daily chores and play

activities

- (3) Miscellaneous songs associated with adult life situations and daily chores
- (4) War songs, associated with warriors and their life

To these however, the attitudes of various scholars have been uniform. A few scholars do not seem to be perturbed by the label 'praise poetry'. Lestrade (1935), for instance, refers to Bantu praise performances including a recital of "Laudatory epithets applied to (one) as either a member of a group, or as an individual and known as his praise names". Schapera (1965), writing on the royal poems of the Tswana, adheres to Lestrade's use of the term "praise poem". Torn between the terms "heroic" and "praise", Kunene (1971: XVI) opts for heroic even though there is no strong reason for preferring either term.

While many literary scholars seem to be aware of the inadequacy of the label "praise poetry", however, in the absence of a more adequate tag, loyalty to the phrase remains unshaken. At this stage praise as a predominant issue is satisfactory.

Praise poetry occurs in various forms in African societies and is a component of folklore. In this regard Pretorius and Swart (1982: 29) assert,

The most important component of the traditional African poetry is the praise song (praise poem).

Referring to praises as praise songs, many scholars, consider them to be an admixture between the epic and the ode found in European poetry. The praise closely resembles the ode which has been used to commemorate an event of some significance. It is used to compliment rulers and warriors, and is frequently the vehicle for public oration on a state birthday, accession, funeral or the unveiling or dedication of some imposing memorial or public work.

Finnegan (1970: 7) prefers the loose description of the ode as panegyric.

In his introductory lines to praises of animals in Bantu studies, Lekgothoane (1938: 120) says that we can praise, everything that we see with our eyes or hear about.

Not only people but also animals qualify to be praised, especially cattle, large game and small animals which earn the right because of some strange characteristic. For example, Mashabela (1973: 5), praises Sebotse (The beautiful cow). Anyone fortunate enough to have been in contact with traditional healers is aware that even divination bones may be showered with praises to indicate the order in which they have fallen on the ground, which is the divine message they have to impart. It is more the inherent message than the individual bones that is reflected in the praise.

Before the advent of Europeans and missionaries in this land, boys and girls had to compose praises for themselves at the initiation institutions. These they would recite in public on their inaugural day at home. Even instruction in the secrets of manhood and later life was given through the medium of songs which they memorised. During this process the initiate also acquired a name which became his praise name and was combined with the praise poem.

While this study will consider all categories of praise poetry, special attention will be given to the praises of kings, heroes, initiates, outstanding personalities in the community, animals, birds and divining bones. With regard to these categories, Elizabeth Gunner (1979: 239) says:

Zulu praise poetry (*izibongo*) is a contemporary genre of oral literature with a distinguished past. Because of its association with war and with authority, it is usually regarded as a male preserve.

Besides the educational Latin influence, heroic poetry, which was well known, more than anything else gave the Dark Ages their character. It was the age in which the exploits and conflicts of kings and chieftains were uppermost in the minds of their people and were recorded in different forms of poetry. According to Bowra (1952: 1),

In their attempts to classify mankind in different types the early Greek philosophers gave a special place to those men who live for action and for the honour which comes from it.

This is the poetry that originated during the heroic age, the age of the deeds and exploits of heroes like gladiators, knights, warriors and kings. Msimang (1980), citing R Kunene (1962), calls this period the Shakan period with emphasis on the national quality of the poems and the aggressiveness of the subject of praise. This age also included the praises of the founders of the Bapedi nation, that is *Kgoši* Thulare, Sekwati Mampuru and *Kgoši* Sekhukhune and the legendary figure, *Marangrang*. As Kgobe (1989: 29) points out,

In their praises, there is an overwhelming number of verbs expressing the acts of chopping, cutting, clearing, kneading, piercing, bending, beating, killing, smashing, overpowering, spearing and annihilating.

In such heroic praises, the true chief is one who brings good living, fame, reconciliation, and harmony. The chief is foreshadowed by the hero and there remains something of the hero in the king as long as he has not attained the highest level of perfection.

Heroic poetry creates its own world of the imagination in which men act according to easily understood principles, and though it celebrates great doings because of their greatness, it does not do so overtly by praise but covertly by making them speak for themselves and appeal to us in their own right. Many of the heroic poems are in the first person singular. Many Northern Sotho poems, especially those of *Dikgoši*, say at the beginning that the cow is milked by "me" referring to *kgoši* personally. Heroic poetry is determined by special conceptions of manhood and honour. The Zulus today, like the Northern Sotho, do not doubt that Shaka, like *Kgoši Sekwati* and *Kgoši Sekhukhune*, was a great man who took risks in pursuit of honour. As told in the content of these poems or in history books, chiefs Sekwati and Sekhukhune fought many dangerous battles and in many instances emerged victorious. This was how they were decreed worthy of praise.

## **1.4 THE SCOPE AND METHOD OF RESEARCH**

### **1.4.1 Method of Research**

Since the written composition of modern praise poetry is new to all the African languages, including Northern Sotho, the unwritten oral lore dominates. A crucial part of the research for this study was therefore to go out and collect these unwritten oral lores as extensively and comprehensively as possible from those who were fortunate to have received them from previous generations and had maintained them orally. In the process it was found that almost every village in Sekhukhuneland had one or two men or women who could offer something of this type of poetry. Some would offer a praise of their chief or a general praise of *Kgoši Sekwati* or *Kgoši Sekhukhune*. Others would offer praise poems of initiates, in which case they praised themselves. However, this was the most difficult to acquire since they had been taught that the ritual was a secret. For that matter, one could not even dare to ask what the poems meant.

Despite these restraints, it was possible to collect many poems of chiefs, warriors, animals, birds, initiates and deviants of praises of divining bones. However, in some aspects, especially animals and birds, it was difficult to do so because of a lack of abundance of wild animals and birds. Even in the case of domestic animals, once the wealth of the Black people, praises were not known. By way of contrast, current oral poetry included praises for lovers, football teams, race horses, vehicles, individuals, schools, places, trains and several non-living objects. Many such poems were collected from texts. These modern categories led to the decision to adopt a comparative approach, which would search for the relationship and continuity between the oral and the written. Thanks much go to the few poets who were brave enough to put down some of their ideas on praises of animals and birds.

The research was carried out over a period of three years, that is from 1990 to 1992, although some of the projects had to be repeated in 1993 because of mechanical failure of apparatus. In this regard sincere thanks go to Unisa which was always prepared to supply the relevant equipment.

Among the most problematic areas in the research was the translation of the data collected, especially oral lores collected from the mouths of the people, coupled with the problems of transcribing the data from the tapes. It is not always easy to put a comma or a fullstop where it actually belongs. Some archaic words and allusions also complicated the task. Poets from whom good poems of historical value could be obtained were always the older members of the communities. These members, because of their advanced age, tended to have poor diction, which made the transcription a mammoth task. However, of the few that we were able to assemble, some are used as examples in the text, while others will appear in the appendix.

#### **1.4.2 The scope and composition of the chapters**

Since many of the relevant aspects had been discussed in Kgobe (1989), the



scope of this study was limited.

Chapter 1, defines the concepts "poetry" and "oral or praise poetry" as the point of departure in an attempt to examine the content, form and technique of traditional and modern praise poetry in Northern Sotho. The orality and characteristics of praise poetry are explored as a foundation for a detailed study of the form and technique of the praises.

Chapter 2 focuses on the content and technique of the praises. After a thorough study of the content, the techniques the poet uses, such as composition, audience, performance and style of delivery, are examined. This chapter emphasises a new aspect called ring-composition.

Chapter 3 attempts to give a detailed dichotomy of traditional praises of chiefs, warriors, initiates, animals, birds and divining bones.

Chapter 4 looks into the modern praises of chiefs, imaginary people, academics and outstanding personalities in the community, and includes praises of non-living objects such as a train.

Chapter 5 offers a structural-comparative view of the modern and traditional praises, emphasising similarities and dissimilarities.

Chapter 6 concludes the study and evaluates the praises from point of view of similarities and differences in content, form and technique. An appendix of the collected praises from both recorded and written materials, follows.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE CONTENT AND TECHNIQUE OF THE PRAISES

#### 2.1 THE CONTENT OF PRAISE POETRY

Content refers to the constituent elements of a conception. Dan Ben-Amos (Opland 1980: 295) says that like style and structure, content is expressive features of a genre. The two subdivisions, that is content and form as indicated in the title, are only vaguely distinct, and amount to opposite ends of a continuum. Content always displays form and formal features are never wholly extricable from content. Although material segregated under the two captions overlaps and interrelates, the advantage of the classification is that it points to contrasts and stress. Content is an important aspect that distinguishes the praises from any other form of folklore.

Praise poems have been reported from Eastern and other parts of Africa as indigenous means for recording and transmitting historical information (Schapera 1965; Vansina 1965). But it is generally accepted that the information contained in them is rather sparse and so selective that Vansina (1965: 148) calls them propagandistic. Praise poems are a starting point of enquiry into Northern Sotho history but the main object of this study is to examine the content of the praises, more broadly.

The praises are generally associated with some social purpose so it is not often that one finds the poet, an individual, engrossed in his own personal emotions. This is particularly so because of the highly centralised nature of society. Even events which have no direct connection with court festival must revolve around a social unit, such as the family, or the rites of groups. As is the case throughout Africa, Northern Sotho praises are not limited to high office, but perform an important function of status validation in many spheres of social

action. Parents praise their children as a reward for good conduct, and Krige (Cope 1968: 21) describes how this constitutes an important part of their socialisation.

Praises are an important instrument in the educational system. Not only do they act as an incentive to and reward for socially approved actions, but their recital is a reminder to all present what qualities and conduct are considered praiseworthy.

The content of praises therefore represents the whole range of the African world-view. The praises deal with all subjects: history, geography, religion, music and philosophy. There is certainly no limit to the subject matter with which the praises may deal.

As mentioned earlier, praises are therefore stories or a group of stories taken from the rich experiences of forefathers. Kgobe (1989: 38) maintains that they constitute a drama never previously experienced. These stories are lists of what has happened previously in history. These praises, according to Cope (1968: 26), are "short sentences commemorative of notable actions and events in his life," which any man - but particularly a chief - may earn. They are lists of precedents carefully laid down for us. The underlying philosophy of the whole system is that history repeats itself.

Like literature in general, praise poetry helps us to understand the culture and philosophy of people. Cook (1931: 184), in discussing *izibongo*, supports this view as follows:

... they form invaluable historical evidence as well as giving in highly picturesque language a concept of the ideals and actions of the

Swazi people. They have therefore literary, historical and even philosophical interests.

African praise poetry is a vast storehouse of diverse cultural information. In poetic form it presents overwhelming enumerations of culture traits, giving explicit descriptions of practices, beliefs, institutions, techniques, material culture, values, modes of living and thinking, and natural and human environments. Besides the normal flow of communication in the sequence of narrative episodes, highly condensed information is contained in songs and aphoristic statements. By extracting from each text direct references to plants, trees, animals, objects, activities, techniques, persons, divinities, places, houses, patterns of living, and so on, one can compile an impressive inventory of Northern Sotho culture. Sometimes there is no explanation for many of these cultural items, since the texts belong to the Northern Sotho people who know their content, usage, meanings, and cultural background.

The culture of the Northern Sotho peoples is too intricate to be synthesised in a single set of literary documents. Like all other texts that come from antiquity, they are selective. Damane and Sanders (1974) have selected ecological factors, education, warfare, marriage, the position of the chief, religious beliefs, witchcraft, divination, rainmaking and medicine as appearing in the content of praises. However, even amongst these, one could still state that the information they give is limited, incomplete and imprecise. Certain broad aspects of the culture are lacking. However, as Okpewho (1979: 66) points out:

Believers in a heroic age have usually put more than necessary faith on traceable history in the content of heroic tale, forgetting that the oral artist's concept of history or fact is in many ways different from ours.

For years many folklorists have argued that the content of praise poetry is unbelievable. For instance, there is little information on religion, honouring the many divinities and almost none on the complex rites and ideas that pertain to the hunting of big game. Only a few of the trapping devices and hunting and gathering techniques are described. No insight into the system of land tenure or the pattern of local control is given. The data on kinship and territorial organisation is limited. Although there is a great deal of information on political organisations, the secret environmental rites are only mentioned briefly. In that way they have been found to give an imbalanced view of their constituent parts.

However, it was found that without any written cultural proof, the praises implicitly have much to offer on the Northern Sotho people's world-view, ethical system, values and ideology. Lekgothoane (1938) points out that, "... for everything that we see with our eyes we can praise". It is evident, then, that the content of praise poetry varies greatly and that classification according to content cannot be made according to hard and fast rules.

As in the case of Zulu, Vilakazi (1938: 112) points out that Northern Sotho poetry is determined by the poet's treatment of his subject-matter under separate headings which govern the poet when determining his stanzas. Again, from a few examples it is evident that this does not seem to be a systematic treatment of the main theme so as to form one complete and analysable vista. While the primary aim of the praises is to highlight and to celebrate the royal personality, in most cases the poets seem to ramble on about their subject-matter. Guma (1967: 152) says that in a community that could neither read nor write, the praises constituted an authentic record of past events in the history of the individual and his tribe. According to Okpewho (1979: 66),

History for the unlettered artist is both what  
has actually happened and what is fabled to

have happened. For him, myth has considerable historical value, because it has been told all too often, it bears the stamp of truth.

According to Thompson (1974: 105)

When poetry was maid of all work the making of history came to be one of her duties. The myths acted as a kind of history, in giving people a sense of the past, of order in the universe, and of man's place in it.

Such claims to truth are frequently employed by the bard as a way of seeking approbation for his craft. He makes every effort to convince the reader or listener that what he says is generally accepted or true and should therefore be taken seriously. To him, history is truth externally re-created with the power of poetry, not as a dry record of the past, but as a vital memory of the past as an exhortation to present action.

Mashabela (1982: 36) contends that the content of praise poems consists of the oral praise poetry lauding heroic deeds of men in battles, hunting expeditions and casual encounters with beasts of prey. As a composition intermediary between the pure, mainly narrative epic, it offers an account of the chief's actions and the events of his reign and as pure, mainly apostrophic ode, it gives an account of the chief's personality, therefore it has a narrative element.

This poetry, as we know, was handed down from generation to generation and retained by means of constant recitation at family, clan or tribal gatherings thereby forming the most important record of heroes, lineages and national history.

Moloto (1970) is of the opinion that man is the subject of praise poetry. Such poetry deals with the vicissitudes of man's life, his aspirations and frustrations, his conquests and discomfits, his nomadism and territorial acquisitions, his poverty and affluence, his courage and despair, his passions, statesmanship, and his cunning, treachery and stupidity.

Of the praise of chiefs and heroes, Marivate (Limi 1978: 55) says that with regard to the content of the **Xiphato** (clan praise) character traits and group habits are expressed. This is done mainly by employing compound forms of sentences and phrases. However, the '**xiphato**' touches on the history of the clan.

Msimang (1980: 221) argues that praise poetry should incorporate physical features, dispositional traits which are expressed in the imagery used. In the history of the individual praised, only those events which are historically significant regarding the individual are recorded.

Msimang supports Kunene (1971: 19) by holding that the use of eulogy in a praise poem may have diverse purposes:

- (1) to describe the chief according to his physical features and moral and emotional attributes
- (2) to identify the hero with some animal or thing
- (3) to tell about his deeds
- (4) to identify him with his regiment
- (5) to identify him with some people as relatives
- (6) to identify him with his place of origin

Cope, Damane and Sanders have also deliberated on the eulogy. Only one example from the poems about *Kgoši* Sekhukhune will be used to illustrate some of the references to content.

First, history in our context can be defined as a narrative of events or a chronicle. We use the stories and narratives of history to depict ourselves as cultural beings. There are many kinds of histories, personal histories that classify world development, and the histories that exist somewhere between these extremes. Here we are interested in the way communities use history in the narration of their lives, the way it is manipulated, presented, and interpreted by these groups. As Cohen (1989: 2) points out:

It is not only a way to represent pains and pleasures. History is used in the negotiation and representation of daily experience and daily life. It is one of the ways we create ourselves and transcend our individual lives to ally ourselves with shared cultural experiences. It is an important tool in the creation and manipulation of political economy, cultural ideology and social identity.

Like written history, the praise poems present events from the past for those in the present to comment upon and learn from. Nyembezi (1948: 11) maintains:

The praises were a reservoir for historical events which took place from time to time. It must not be forgotten that the Bantu had no system of recording on paper, etc, the events as they came to pass, so that the handing down of history from generation to generation had of necessity to be oral.



Praise poetry therefore provided reliable historical evidence, the poet being the repository and interpreter of the nation's history. However, it is disturbing when the historian asks chronological questions from oral tradition because in most cases he is seeking information that these sources were never designed to provide.

In poem 14 of *Kgoši Sekhukhune* in the appendix, first we observe the meticulous rhythmic and rhyming language that is apparent. The poet opens with imagery on different levels of meaning. Sekhukhune is portrayed as the conqueror who causes his enemies to roll over and become one with the soil. He is Theledi (the slippery one). He is the destroyer of men, children and their wives (*Ke masenyeletši 'a Matuba, Masenya magadi a batho*). In this way they are affected both socially and politically. Marota is a clan name of the Bapedi of Maroteng, derived from the regimental name Marota of *Kgoši Thulare's* full brother Mothodi. Matuba is also a Pedi regimental name. Much of the subject-matter referred to above, such as historical, military, political, social, ritual and linguistic, has been touched upon. Lines 5 and 6 are frightening. There is a real combination of an ode and an epic:

*Tšhukutšwana 'a Mphatana lena madira  
tšhabang,  
Tšhabang mantsokodi a etla.*

(You armies beware of the puny rhinoceros,  
Beware, the whirlwind is approaching.)

Kgobe (1989: 30) maintains that in some praises we find *Kgoši Sekwati* or *Kgoši Sekhukhune* enmeshed in a complex network of personal relationships, rooted in kingship, in friendship and alliance to political and ritual associations, and in supernatural linkages with animals and divinities. In the lines there is a comparison between the pugnacious Sekhukhune and an angry rhinoceros digging up the earth with its sharp horns to serve as a warning to the opposing

armies to fear him, who is shaking with rage. As a hero he displays many contradictions of character. As Biebuyck (1978: 103) points out:

He is alternatively ruthless and magnanimous, fearless and pusillanimous, threatening and merciful, insolent and shamefaced, heartless and grieved, boisterous and sedate, thoughtless and poised, verbose and meditative.

According to Msimang (1980: 220), the stanza quoted suffices to give a good example of the incidents in the Shakan period. The period of the heroic epic was characterised by emphasis on the national quality of the poems and the aggressiveness of the subject of praise. Large ferocious animals constitute the predominant images. But, the word "*mphatana*" in "*Tšhukutšwana 'a mphatana*" brings out Sekhukhune's stature, which is also reinforced by the use of the diminutive "*tšhukutšwana*" (small rhino).

Further in the poem, allusion is made to "*Ntšana*", people whose progenitor was Lehlokwa and who are also members of the Pedi household of Maroteng. Sekhukhune, as a truly magnanimous leader, praises these people whose williness and strategy have won him many a battle. The imagery of the copper anklet and the idiomatic expression "*go loma serethe*" (pursue persistently) the danger of his guile is underscored. This copper anklet is smeared with poison and can cause death. Finally, Sekhukhune is also praised for being the father of Ngwana' Mohube. Ngwana' Mohube is the leading Aunt of Maroteng and a sister of Morwa' Motšhe. Historically, she was the mother of Phatudi III. Today we still find the school "*Ngwana' Mohube*" at Mphahlele which was named after her.

Only the most important subject matter or content contained in the stanzas will be discussed. In the fourth stanza reference is made to the laurels of

achievements of a regiment, that is the Matuba regiment. Sekhukhune is praised for being a leading killer in fierce fighting. According to Mokgokong (1975: 203)

By so doing, Sekhukhune retains his majesty  
and dignity and so, do all the Pedi  
chieftainship.

Reference is also made to the initiation of the Makwa regiment, which he also conducted. The leader of this regiment was Morwa' Motšhe, so that through him the Maroteng people could have a future chief of the same calibre as himself. That Sekhukhune did not engage in warfare for his own selfish ends, but for the safety of his people is evident and accentuated by the repetition of 'Theledi' and 'Kgalatlola'.

In the fifth stanza his hardworking personality is portrayed. Sekhukhune never believed in an unfinished project. He believed in perseverance as the mother of success. The '*ekopelo*' in line 13 emphasises the fact that although he perseveres in the face of danger, he is also a preserver of the vanquished.

Kgobe (1989) contends that Sekhukhune was a grinder and a crusher. In the sixth stanza of the example he is portrayed as Mašile (the grinder). During the research the name 'Diphale' was found to be very prominent at Magakala. Diphale is the name of Sekhukhune's sister, who was considered as the fountainhead of the Pedi of Magakala. In this very stanza he shows his fierceness by metaphorically warning the little beasts of prey, who are his enemies, to beware of the huge elephants which could trample them. He was telling his archenemies, the Matebele, to forget all attempts at war.

The seventh stanza is also fearsome. It is proof of Sekhukhune's bravery and fierceness. On the other hand, it refers to the strange language, that is the '*nkutunkutu*' of the Matebele. In this stanza he is associated with the angry bull

stamping its hoofs as a challenge to other stamping bulls. In this challenge he was declaring war against Nyekelele, whom he viewed with contempt.

The eighth stanza emphasises the use of divining herbs/ charms. He talks of "*mmanakadifetšaseatla*", that is the medicinal horns that were used to fortify him against impending dangers. These enabled him not to flee (*Gagešo ga re tsorotsopege*). This word is majestic, officious and authoritative. Sekhukhune despised the Matebele of Mahlangu, who often fled in the face of approaching enemies.

The ninth stanza displays both beautiful rhythm and rhyming. It is a continuation of the previous stanza and emphasises the sense of defiance that was shown by a raging bull. He is the pride of the Bakgatla. The Bapedi are the descendants of the Bakgatla. "*Go re/ela*" is symbolic of the bull ready to fight. Sekhukhune displayed this attitude to the Boers under General Joubert. He still promises to show the same stubbornness to the British under Shepstone. "*Ramapantana*" is derived from the wearing of the belt that hangs down the shoulders. The British were feared even by the Boers, and this fear looms large even in the following and the final stanza.

However, the praise poem ends with sad irony because the Pedi were defeated by Wolseley in 1878 and had to swallow their pride. But when the white ants fought against each other, Sekhukhune obtained relief from his frustration and the contempt of others.

The same content is found with individuals and outstanding community leaders. Pretorius (1989) refers to this type of praises as the prototype. The praises are thematically and structurally a slavish imitation or simulation as poems written by individuals. While the traditional praises drew their inspiration from combats, hunting expeditions, rituals, political and social circumstances, the modern praises are inspired by academic achievements or education in a new or changed society. The praises may also spring from the good leadership

qualities shown by some people in the community. Up to 1987 academics at Unisa always praised their institution, the achievers from the institution and their tutors. Unisa became a springboard for many universities such as the University of Zululand, and the North. In *'NgeUnisa eminyakini eyikhulu'* Msimang points this out.

In *Meso ke Legonyana Mogashoa* (1990: 68), outlines the great and versatile Phatudi's genealogy and tries to show the connection between the Marota and the Kekana people at Moletlane.

Segooa (1972: 33) portrays the academic achievements of Phatudi, strikingly:

*Šatee! yo a sa rego šate o a lla o rokame,  
O okometše diba tša thuto Morwa' Phatudi  
Ke mmeakanyi wa ditaba hlotlo la ba  
tšiekgalaka.*

(Hurrah! He who does not extol is dead  
alive,  
He is elevated, and watches over fountains  
of education, son of Phatudi,  
He is the organiser of affairs, the staff of the  
Blacks).

The imagery used is quite appealing. Phatudi is raised high above everyone as an administrator of the affairs of education in Lebowa.

Tseke also praises Maje Serudu for his deserving achievements. He starts first by extolling him as belonging to Magatle, a district of Moletlane and then proceeds to his achievements as a conqueror of books and highlights the great contribution he makes to society. According to Tseke (1987: 54)

*Namane ye e boago Kgobadi Moletlane  
Ye e boago Magatle a dikhungwane  
E tlogo e šankiša mokaka motseng  
Go amuša bathobatho ba moriri wa hlogo.*

(The calf that comes from Kgobadi of  
Moletlane  
That comes from Magatle of dikhungwane  
That comes back to the village with a  
satiated udder  
To come and feed fully fleshed human  
beings.)

Just like Sekhukhune in the traditional praises, Maje is associated with the river. He is the tributary of the Gompies River, a river that offers life. We all know that nothing can survive without drinking water. He himself is the fountain where many come to draw water. The poem also portrays him as the real herb that is used by young and old. As an educationist of great repute and an educator, nothing befits him more than Tseke's pronouncements. His words are appealing and encouraging.

Again, the various animals, wild and domestic, which roamed the Pedi territories, were praised in many different ways by different people. They were praised for their peculiar idiosyncrasies. These peculiar features evoked the desire to compose praise poems about the good or evil things which were observed. Traditional healers also composed praises when they interpreted "Mawa" (the fall) of their divining bones. Like most African communities, the Northern Sotho praise singer spent a great deal of time observing natural phenomena. Animals and birds evoked a spontaneous utterance of appreciation. The affinity to these animals was activated by totemism, in which case a specific group associated itself with or venerated a certain animal. It is unfortunate today that most of these oral creations have disappeared and for

some reason only a few poems are preserved, thanks to people such as van Warmelo, Lekgothoane and van Zyl, who recorded a few of these poems.

In these poems animals are closely watched and observed and their external features and habits described. Pretorius (1989: 66) points out:

*Animals (diphoofo) and birds (dinonyane)*  
became popular subjects in the creation of  
aesthetic thoughts.

In such praises, the description of the subject matter often includes colour, physical characteristics or abilities and specific habits. A dog may be praised for securing the home while the owners have gone visiting. It may also be praised for offering them some relish by way of catching a hare or a buck. A cow is wealth and may be praised for offering milk, for pulling a plough or for its black and white colour. The lion may be praised for being the king of the wild and for roaming all over in the forest without fear. Lekgothoane (1938: 192) praises the leopard for its beautiful colour and its habitat.

Endorsing Lekgothoane, Sehlodimela (1962: 51) says:

*Ke nna nkwe,  
Nkwe thaladi ya dithaba.  
Ke mmabotsana magana-go-šupša.*

(I am the leopard  
Leopard the roamer of the mountains  
I am the beautiful one who does not like to  
be pointed at.)

Like animals, birds are also praised. In such praises, attention is often given to the colour of the birds, their physical characteristics and their specific habits.

For example, the weaver bird is collectively praised for going about in a flock and making a great deal of noise. During harvest time, they can enter and destroy one's corn. They are also praised as the grey ones that have little red beaks. Their habitat is referred to as the mimosa tree. Lekgothoane (1938) also describes the hammerhead and its habitat as:

*Mašianoke a selwana*  
*Se axa ntlo bodibeng.*  
*Mašianoke a selwana*  
*Seagantlo ka bodutu.*

(The lonely hammer-head  
Builder of a house at the pool,  
The lonely hammer-head  
Builder of a house in solitude.)

It is easy to work out the importance of this little bird that goes about in solitude. It is true it has some secret that traditional healers like in its nest which is built alongside a pool.

The reference to traditional healers introduces the last aspect, which is the content of praises of divining bones. Guma (1967: 148) refers to praises for 'Mawa' of divining bones. Watt and van Warmelo recorded many kinds of 'Mawa' at Moletlane in 1929, and Eiselen recorded some from gaMasemola in Sekhukhuneland. During this study 'Mawa' were also recorded at Schoonoord, Mamone, Riverside and Glen-Cowie. The 'Mawa' of the divining bones is never fixed. Van Warmelo (1945: 199) endorses this about the Venda 'Mawa':

Each of these positions has its name, its 'tshirendo' praise (at the same time an epitome in veiled language of the general meaning).



It is more the inherent message that is reflected in the praise than the individual bones. The content is in the message they give. They may point to danger which is "*Moranwana* or *Mohlakola*". Other messages include *Mpherefere*, *thwagadima*, *hlako*, and *selomi*.

Many renowned traditional healers claim that their bones know practically everything, but they themselves are not always able to understand what the bones say. At Mamone, the chieftainess Lekgolane took out the divining bones belonging to the royal court and a few diviners or traditional doctors were requested to interpret their fall. One old man had to run away because these doctors could not agree on the leading message they pointed to. When this happens, some go to the extent of using a plant called '*theri*' to assist their memory in the interpretation. Even the throw itself is sometimes repeated many times before the leading *mohlakola* or *mpherefere* or *selomi* can interpret the message.

In conclusion, praise poems are culturally very important. Their functions within society are manifold. They can serve as a simple verbal salute from an older member of a family to a younger one when they meet each other for the first time in the morning, or just as a means of encouragement to the younger one if he has done well. They provide the Bapedi with a great deal of psychological satisfaction. By listening to the poems, they are reminded of their ancestors. Past deeds and achievements provide them with confidence for the present and courage to move to the future.

So far it has been shown that the praises constitute some form of record of the history of the Pedi society and most informants, especially the professional bards, seem to regard the poems as such. Indeed, the genesis of the praise and the method of composition confer some authenticity on the content of the praise and highlight its potential historical value.

Praises of *Kgoši* Sekhukhune and Sekwati's era presented to the hearers an image larger than life, the passions and emotions and portrayals were idealized in content and expression. In content they presented the Pedi to themselves as they would have wished to be, immeasurably bold and gallant and openhanded. As in the Bible, where the words of the early Hebrew prophets especially Isaiah, contributed to the Jewish sense of nationhood, these praises provide a base for a new consciousness of the Bapedi nationhood.

The praises are like footprints imprinted on a newly cemented floor. When a man dies or an animal with its unique features becomes extinct, their praises never perish. If one were as ferocious as a small rhinoceros or as curing as *serokolo* like Maje, who contributed so much to Northern Sotho society, or Sekhukhune, who was always hungry for war, one's reputation would remain imprinted in the minds of friends and relatives. This is the case with eulogies.

## **2.2 The technique of praise poetry**

One of the most important characteristics of praise poetry is its oral nature. This is important to note because, as an unwritten form of poetic expression, it has techniques which are peculiar to it. Written poetry has forms which, because they can be recognised by the eye, make it easy for the reader to understand ideas as classified in a particular form. Stanzas, for instance, are clearly recognisable as compartments of certain ideas and the reader on seeing a stanza immediately expects a new group of ideas.

The poet in preliterate communities has to adjust his material to suit his medium of expression. Because his poetry is oral, he has to depend on mental props and subtle suggestions for the accurate communication of his ideas. Amongst the many tools that he employs are techniques of composition, performance, and mode of delivery. Before delving into the techniques he employs in expressing his views, the performer, the composer, the creator himself will be considered.

### 2.2.1 The poet

The question asked by many a folklorist is, "Who are these traditional poets?" To begin with, it is important to define the terms so that references may be clear. But, there are many situations in which poetry was and still is recited or sung in traditional African society, and it would be better to see the poets within the contexts in which they operate.

According to Finnegan (1977: 170), a poet can be anyone in the community. A poet in a society is self-appointed, and his success is determined by the response of the people who listen to what he has to say. A poet is someone who interprets and organises public opinion. As Mafeje (1967: 197) puts it,

If the people felt that what he said was representative or reflective of their interests and aspirations, then he was generally accepted as the "national poet", *imbongi yakomkhulu* (the poet of the main residence), or, more recently, *imbongi yesizwe* (the poet of the nation).

This shows clearly that if the poet fails to convince his audience in the interpretation of public opinion, he does not achieve the status of national poet. This means he has failed in the exercise of his main duty.

According to Opland (1980: 296), almost anyone in the community, if he or she produces a praise poem, can be regarded as a poet. There are two major categories of poets in African society. There is the oral poet and the literate poet. This thesis, will refer to the two from time to time because of the comparative nature of the study. As this research will show, the oral poet is largely nonliterate and it is the vocal performance of his poems that gives them their very existence. The poets in this category are somewhat restricted in the

sense that they are charged with chanting a specific type of poetry and would need to have undergone some training for the purpose. According to Kgobe (1989: 148),

To be a praiser, you should be gifted with a sweet voice, and have a long repertoire of the praise poems of principal lineages in the land.

This they normally do by committing to memory all the praises belonging to the genealogy. But, this does not mean that the poets use secondary material to fashion their poems and that they are not composers of original materials in their own right.

Such poets could be found in the royal courts of communities ruled by kings, or else attached to wealthy or powerful men in societies dominated by privileged men. Among the Bapedi, most professional poets are court poets attached to the king for the purpose of singing the king's glories and recording in their poems, important historical events surrounding the ruling family.

The oral poet usually performs face to face with his listeners or audience, and the demands made on him by this audience determine and condition his product, the finished oral poem. Lord (1960) points out that for the oral poet, the moment of composition, the making of the poem, is simultaneous with the performance, the act that gives existence to the poem, though there are a few instances of pre-meditated oral composition.

Since traditional poetry is passed from one poet to another, it is clear that it must be learnt from somebody. Otherwise he would lack the technique which enables him to improvise at short notice and to provide the kind of poem which his audience expects.

Then there is the literate poet who writes down his poem that remains the same at all times, barring distortion or mutilation. Here the moment of creation is usually not the moment of performance and, even though every poet of the literate tradition intends to read it, he is not face to face with his audience. His audience, unless they have the poems read aloud to them, are usually fellow literate people, and the kind of direct communication line between the oral poet and his audience cannot be said to exist although clearly, a line of communication does exist.

Among the Africans, there is no formal training of poets in this category. Self-training takes place within the family, which has traditionally taken up the artistic role and in which the son imitates and copies from his father in the task. The would-be poet studies his father closely from early youth and grasps some of the appropriate idioms of the art as well as the strict processes. If talented, a young man with the gift of poetry will learn fast and after some time join his father in the performance.

On the other hand, if they are attached to the court, as in the first category of poets, their first task will be to know the genealogy of the king. Through close observation of his daily activities, the king will be glorified with exaggerated images appropriately chosen to swell his pride and give him a high sense of the worth of his ancestry. If he suffers any failure in war or commits an unwise act of leadership, however the court poet takes care to choose words of caution or blame that would not earn him the anger of the king. In the case of a diviner, he requires some imaginative skill to manipulate the recognised verses of his chant around the special problems brought to him by his clients. It used to be assumed that because these forms of poetry were handed down from father to son or from one generation to another, there were no changes or differences between one version of a chant and another. But recent research has shown that, even in the more restricted forms of traditional poetry, the poet still has to depend on his imagination as he is called upon to perform the same text at a variety of occasions.

Between these two main categories of poets, we find the oral poet who turns to being a freelance entertainer in the public. He is not tied to such restrictive environments as the king's court or the diviner's consultation room. Here we find a kind of poet who relies on his skill at singing or chanting traditional poems to earn him some recognition and material reward or praise. One situation in which such a freelance poet may commonly be found is at a place where there is some form of merrymaking. As Olatunji (1979: 181) indicates,

Interviews with practitioners of the various modes reveal that the primary concern of the poet is to entertain his audience.

Such poets, after establishing themselves or being accepted by the society, are often also invited to entertain at a wide range of social functions. A wedding celebration or a funeral ceremony or the first fruit tasting are some of the common social occasions. On such occasions the poet shares in the joy of the occasion and his goal is to make the occasion lively.

But, more accepted poets are those who can offer praises of persons, family or lineage. These are the deciding factors in assessing the competence of an artist. According to Babalola (1966: 24),

It is traditionally believed that the correct performance of a praise in honour of a progenitor gladdens the progenitor in the world of the spirits and induces him to shower blessings of his offsprings on earth. The reciting or chanting of the appropriate praises in honour of the ancestors of a particular family causes members of that family who hear the performance to feel very proud of their pedigree, and if they are far

away from home, they also feel exceedingly homesick.

This poet is often uninvited at many occasions. In many cases he follows hearsay and simply gathers up his regalia and goes to the event. During the drinking and dancing, if inspired, he may suddenly turn up at the side of the one to be praised and start producing the refrains.

The freelancer's training comes from self-attachment to an accomplished poet. If there is divine will and natural talent, he may simply watch an experienced performer over a long period, listening closely to his skilful control of words and rhythms as well as his handling of the materials. Like all the others, he could then quietly try out the game himself as he does his daily chores. Being free and unrestricted, he can manipulate the set of phrases which he regularly uses either for praising or for mourning people. The salient point for him is to fit in the names, the status, the career or the attributes of the new subject in the proper places, and that will serve him well for the occasion. This is not to say that the job is easy. It takes considerable effort as well as skill to master the techniques of adjustment and improvisation.

One vexing question is what the role of poets in society is? Many scholars have attempted to answer this question. According to Wainwright (1979: 6),

One of the most interesting figures in traditional Xhosa society who has survived to this day is the praise poet or *imbongi*.

Why has he been able to survive? Because most important chiefs have an official poet whose primary function is to proclaim the chief's praises on public occasions.

At such times the poet is clad in camouflaged clothing, carrying an assegai or a knobkerrie and loudly and publicly praising the chief, usually in an emotionally charged manner.

The poet is something of a public spokesman and, as such, mediates between the ruler and the ruled. Opland (1977: 49) says that the poet's loyalty is to the nation or chiefdom as a whole. He voices the feeling of the people, praising the chief on their behalf, thus enhancing the chief's standing and maintaining support for him, but he also voices the people's dissatisfaction and grievances. Mafeje (1967: 195) asserts,

It is, therefore, apparent that the main function of the South African bard is to interpret public opinion and to organise it ....

When the chief is at fault, sometimes these grievances showered on him urge him to mend his ways. This is not intended to deride or depose the chief since it takes place in a normal atmosphere, but is aimed at encouraging him to be a good ruler. According to Wainwright (1979: 8),

The *imbongi* points out and criticizes deviations from the norm and thus encourages adherence to it, not only on the part of the subject of the poem (the chief) but also on the part of the audience.

As Mafeje notes, the poet must be aware of the people's thinking and saying and be able to give expression to public opinion. In that way the chief will be made aware of and try to remedy discontent.

In general, then, the poet fulfils a complex role in society. He incites his audiences to loyalty for his chief through the medium of his eulogy. He must



be fluent, have a knowledge of tribal history and be able to express the truth as he sees it. Except for those literate poets who plan in advance, most poets never prepare a poem in advance. They have no time to sit down and study. Having acquired the knowledge through listening over many years, inspiration works through their emotions.

If a poet constantly sings in praise of one particular individual or chief, his poems tend to have verbal stability, especially in lines referring to the physical characteristics of the subject of his past exploits. But, as the subject of praise engages in new things worthy of note, these actions are incorporated into successive performances in praise of him.

Most poets have their own personal way of starting and finishing a performance. Whether traditional or not, they tend to use them every time they sing, irrespective of the subject.

### **2.2.2 Compositional techniques**

It has been said that true literature is the creation of a single individual while true folklore is a communal composition, arising as if by magic from the collective throat of the masses. Kgobe (1989: 105) also alleges that in composition inspiration manifests itself in a manner which no one can mistake. The poet unaccountably finds himself dominated by something which absorbs his being and excludes other interests from his mind. Such a man is never requested to do his duty, but, stirred by the performance of a tribal ceremony and imbued with national pride, he feels it most opportune to express his feelings, and this fulfils his self-imposed duty. Some of the greatest folklorist of the past ... most notably the brothers Grimm and Gummere, held this distinction to be valid. But in the last fifty years, the communal theory has steadily declined in popularity and now it is fairly widely accepted that each poem and song, like each folktale, has a single original author and that singing, dancing throngs do not, in fact, qualify as art.

The question now arises as to what this magic or inspiration is? It is not easy to define exactly what it is. Certain elements might give direction. It is something with a powerful character and atmosphere. It imposes itself on the poet with the majesty and authority of a vision. It externalises itself in words that pour out of a poet.

Can examining the act of creation itself provide a more valid distinction between oral and written literature? At first, it was assumed that the folk themselves did not create anything, but only adopted the creations of sophisticated artists. Many folklorists believe that the original oral poems which became simple songs were passed on in the fumbling memories of the folk. Only recently through the work of Phillip Barry, Milman Parry, Albert Lord and others have folklorists embraced the notion that in an oral culture, every performance of a tale or song is a new creation or recreation if you will.

Today, poems are still composed in the traditional manner. At various ceremonies, the oral poet is provided with a good opportunity for reciting his composition. As Vilakazi (1938: 105) indicates,

A Zulu man, who is considered to have a natural gift for seeing and feeling most in the make and experience of life, will look at his king, survey him in the light of his ancestors, and then turn over his mind in heroic deeds of his king and even his weaknesses. Suddenly he will spring up in a crowd, with his shield pointed to the sky, and the whole of his body tingling with emotional excitement.

This performance is dynamic and forces a source of vivid almost violent activity. It begins at once to generate ideas of great force and intensity, and these are

often expressed by words which not only clarify them and relate them to the general scheme but are themselves of an unusual force and intensity. Opland (1980: 296) concurs:

The performer of poetry, however, is not necessarily an *imbongi*. Among the Xhosa-speaking peoples, potentially anyone can produce a spontaneous poem on the inspiration of the moment at traditional ceremonies, at sports matches, during church activities at political meetings.

Vision is the main characteristic of oral poetry. Sometimes an idea moves faster than the words which pursue it, and the oral poet is hard pressed to keep up with it. In the process, what begins by being almost unconscious becomes conscious. What is outside the poet's control is gradually made to submit to his will and judgement. Something of this nature seems to be the usual experience of poets, and this is primarily what is meant by inspiration.

It is through inspiration that a state of mind is created in which people see as a whole what they normally see in fragments. Sometimes this state is so tantalising, it may even come without any accompaniment of words for its expression. Being obsessed by it, the poet's task is to give it shape. According to Bowra (1970: 15),

Of course this does not happen unless the poet is a master-craftsman who knows exactly what kind of words he needs, but, if he is, they come in the end with an uncommon force in answer to his patient efforts.

Casalis (Damane & Sanders 1974: 23) points out that praise poems were inspired by the emotions of war or of the chase. Today many praises are inspired by the frustrations of apartheid. Some are inspired by the few achievers in education. In other African states, they are inspired by injustices perpetrated by the regime. Kgobe (1989) mentions the compositions of *Kgoši Sekhukhune* and *Sekwati*, which were composed during a period of leisure and reflection in the aftermath of battle.

Among the Africans, praises are composed at every occasion to recap the adventures and escapes from the dangerous weapons of the opposing faction. Today, the lethiferous weapons of the police are a source of inspiration to professional poets. After the death of Chris Hani, Mokaba started singing from inspiration and the masses joined in the chorus. Other praises could also be composed to boast about the king's powers and that of his mighty forebears. According to Mafeje (1967: 193),

These "praises" were recited on any occasion which seemed to call for public adulation of the chief such as defeat of his enemies, the approach of distinguished visitors, the distribution of royal bounty, and so forth.

There are many stimuli for the composition of oral poetry. Today achievement in its various forms plays an important part in the composition of new praises since kingship is declining and tribal wars and game hunting are things of the past.

In the creation of a piece of oral art, many performances are affected both by the audience and the occasion. The nature and reactions of the audience greatly influence and affect the length of a piece of art. The poet in Northern Sotho and in all oral narratives, does not sit down and compose, but is often

fired to compose and claim by some event he observes. The peculiar energy which enables the artist to create derives from inspiration. Sowayan (1985: 92) maintains:

The poetic genius of an outstanding poet is conceived of as always being at hand, lying dormant like smouldering embers to be set ablaze at the moment of inspiration.

This is especially true of traditional healers when interpreting their divination message. Although some poets also claim that at the moment of inspiration they become delirious, as if they were intoxicated, this is true of the diviners who derive their messages via the medium of thudding drums and loud singing. They attest that during such a state, their hearts begin to bubble with poetic emotions. Ideas seeking articulation come into mind like a dream, and they start rendering poetic utterances. According to Kgobe (1989: 111),

Although poetry is inspired by passions, composition remains a deliberate and reflective process.

It is reflective in that it is compared to a mental journey on a turbulent sea of passion whose depths are terror. It is also deliberate in that it has to be directed like a boat from the Cape to Rio or vice versa. In this turbulent sea, a poet has to devise the means to make a catch. He has to use various compositional methods and techniques that are compared to pearls scattered over desert sand. Only an expert poet can extricate himself and steer safely through this poetic maze.

Nothing is known directly about the methods of composition used by unknown oral poets. They all practised their art without writing. Even blind poets have recorded pieces of literary genius. It is uncertain whether these poets

improvised or memorised, and no one knows when they were composed or who composed them. They are as old as the Bapedi themselves. This study will only consider the following compositional techniques: the formula, ring-composition, audience and mode of delivery.

#### 2.2.2.1 The formula

The formula has been defined in various ways, usually with a view to increasing the number of expressions in the text that can be counted as formulaic. Parry (1930) defines a formula as "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea". It operates as a support around which the ideas and words that it calls to mind group themselves. Lord (1960: 36) adds that the formulas are the phrases and clauses and sentences of this specialised poetic grammar, and it is a grammar of parataxis and of frequently used and useful phrases. The repertoire of formula enables the poet to create in performance for the necessity of the next line is upon him even before he utters the final syllable of the current line. To meet the urgency, the singer builds patterns of sequences of lines which we know as the parallelisms of oral style.

Lord's oral formulaic theory has gained significantly in popularity in literary circles. It has to the realisation that folklore studies do, indeed, have something to contribute to the understanding of art. According to Lord, each performance of a Yugoslavian folk epic is unique, fashioned spontaneously by the folk artist. In order to compose under such circumstances, the artist must master a vocabulary and a syntax of traditional expressions which allow him to put his story together with great speed. After years of apprenticeship, first as a passive listener and then as a fledging performer, the accomplished oral artist can create a powerful poem at short notice.

Lord's conclusions have been applied too arbitrarily to such literary creations as Beowulf and the British Ballads. His theory has added much to our

understanding of the process of folk creativity, but because it has often been mistakenly applied by critics, the oral formulaic theory may lead us to draw imaginary distinctions between folk art and literary art as creative processes.

What folklorists and literary critics do not seem to realise is that in all but one of its particulars, the Parry-Lord theory can also be applied successfully to the creation of written literature. Every artist must learn the formulas, themes, and structuring devices of his tradition. The formula is basically a mnemonic unit of oral composition. From a stock of phrases and lines which tradition and long use have stored in the poet's memory, he constructs fresh lines and scenes and, in that way, supports the overall fabric of his poem.

However, it was Pope (1963) who voiced substantial criticism on the Parry-Lord theory. Following on this theory, which was unknown in Southern Africa, Opland (1980) compared the traditions of Anglo-Saxon oral poetry with the *izibongo* of the Xhosa and Zulu people. Swanepoel (1983: 7) points out:

Pope does not seem to deny the existence of formulas in oral poetry, but he argues that Lord made too much of them.

We know for a fact that most literary artists composed some of their stories formulaically. For example, for Chaucer and Milton, art lay first in a submission to the formulaic rules of poetry and genre. The application of traditional rules has made many disciplines successful. Shakespeare also had to learn certain conventional methods of plot which corresponded to the composition by theme practised by Yugoslavian epic singers.

However, a close examination of the formulaic phraseology in various folk epic traditions indicates that a single canonical definition of the traditional phrase is not a realistic goal. Parry's concept of a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea

is useful as far as it goes, since it does point the way towards the aspects of surface phraseology recurrence, metrical texture, and an underlying core idea. But since these metrical conditions may vary widely from one tradition to the next, such as in the case of Northern Sotho, Parry's viewing of the formula as "a group of words" operating under "the same metrical conditions" has to be rephrased.

Hoekstra (1965: 8/14) advocates that Parry extend his definition and drop his criteria of "extension and simplicity". He asserts that the expressions called formulas are not used regularly and are not part of a system. Therefore new criteria are needed for identifying a formula and the traditional character of a formula. Further on he says Parry's "essential idea" is also vague semasiologically, and "regularly employed" does not apply to a few obviously very ancient expressions which happen to occur only once in extant epic.

Hainsworth (1968: 31) points out that name-epithet formulas in the nominative case are convenient and doubtless traditional, but that there are many gaps in the system as regards the use of an oblique case. Thus Hainsworth constructs a *prima facie* case for impeaching the uncritical analogical extension of the technique of nominative personal names to the whole diction of epics. The formulas in the nominative case are often altered in shape and this vitiates Parry's "under the same metrical conditions". The definition must cover expressions in which all words are functional and fixity of position must not be part of it. Hainsworth (1968: 35) presents a revised definition of a formula saying:

The essence of a formula is repetition, so it must be a "repeated word-group," and "the use of one word created a strong presumption that the other would follow. This degree of mutual expectancy I choose as the best differentia of the formulaic word-group.



The word-group remains the same formula despite changes in the metrical shape of its component words caused by elision, inflection, shifts in meaning, changes in prefixes or suffixes, or use of alternative forms of word stem. The formula also remains the same despite changes in the word group arising from rearrangement of the word order, the separation of constituent words, and the insertion, omission, or change of particles or prepositions.

Kiparsky (1976) compares formulas with the "bound expressions" of ordinary language (e.g. *molwaodutše*). He postulates the question: Are formulas in oral literature special cases of such bound expressions? Hainsworth answers him by distinguishing between unchanging formula and those which can be modified in various ways. Kiparsky (1976: 74) makes the very important point that his analysis "allows for the inflection, separation, and modification of formulas without singling out one form as the prototype and postulating analogical processes to generate the others". After showing how expansion of formula fits within this analysis, he concludes by thanking Hainsworth who abandoned the metrical criterion as part of the definition, enabling the definition to be used also for formulas in relatively free meter and in oral prose.

Nagy (1976) also considers the problems arising from Parry's definition of formulas and offers a working definition of formulas that omits the factors of metre as the prime conditioning force: "the formula is a fixed phrase conditioned by the traditional themes of oral poetry". To him, metre is diachronically generated by formula rather than vice versa. According to Swanepoel (1983: 8),

One prefers to view it as a dynamic composition device consisting of either a word or a group of words fairly regularly employed in performance to express an essential idea, and consequently creating recurring rhythmic conditions.

Words in this sense would refer to a phrase serving as a poetic contraction or abridgement. These include eulogies, metaphors and appellations of various kinds and origins with multiple semantic significance.

However, since the formula is referred to in Kgobe (1989) it will not be elaborated on here but the spontaneity of oral performance has also been greatly exaggerated. Anyone who imagines that the lines of an oral poem simply pop into the poet's head as he opens his mouth to perform, and that the words and themes simply leave his head when he stops singing, is regrettably mistaken. Lord (1960) shows that even the most traditional of oral bards does indeed memorise certain passages and repeats them verbatim in each performance of a given work. This is especially true of the court poets. Each singer has his own stock of expressive formulas, drawn from years of experience and experimentation, which he remembers from song to song.

Formulaic composition, written as well as oral, continues today. However, the difference between the two does not lie in traditionality, the presence of formula, or the speed of composition. The real boundary rests on the fact that the oral artist creates his work before a live audience while the literary artist composes in silence.

#### **2.2.2.2 Audience**

The other feature and technique also expounded by Finnegan (1970: 10) is the audience. This stands for the immediate audience witnessing the moment and product of composition and performance, participating in and assessing, while also affecting the performance. There is no escape for the oral artist from a face-to-face confrontation with his audience and this is something which he can exploit as well as be influenced by. According to Opland (1980: 38),

Performer and audience are united in a  
social relationship that does not exist

between writer and reader, even though the reader and writer might be members of the same social group.

The king or nobleman's poem is an emanation from a particular set of circumstances and is directed towards a known audience. Reference is made to recent events that have affected both the king or the achiever and his companions. The poet produces a poem that is relevant, responding poetically to a situation that is socially integrated. This arises from a common concern of both performer and audience. As Finnegan (1970) shows, when the poet utters his poem, his audience has the opportunity to correct, add or to participate in the performance perhaps by shouting encouragement, laughing in appreciation, or asking for more. By so doing, it influences the composition or performance by means of a social action.

Undoubtedly, the oral poet's performance is public. He is a member of the public and his poetry is an expression of the ethos of his society. On the other hand, the literate poet's products tend to be private. They become introspective and meditative. They are personal. According to Clark (1970: 70),

In this process Nigerian poetry has moved from the pages of daily newspapers, from soapbox and platform of popular political meetings, held in cinema halls and the open market-place, to the private study of the individual and the exclusive confines of senior-rooms ... Recluse or aristocrat, the poet no longer was of the people. Withdrawn into himself, his problems had become his own, his language one constantly geared to express issues personal

to his own sensibility. The day of short circuit for both poet and public had set in.

The oral poet's poem is as unique as the set of circumstances that inspired it. The act of composition or creation coincides with the act of performance, and this, in turn, must coincide with the act of appreciation on the part of the audience. The idea that every message is orientated toward a definite audience and is fully realised only in the consciousness of that audience is not a new one.

What is of great interest is to examine the actual mechanism of interaction between the text and its addressee. It is obvious that when the code of addresser and addressee do not correspond, the fact of the message is distorted in the process of decoding by the receiver. For the moment, however, the other aspect of this process, namely how the message affects the addressee, transforming his appearance is of concern. This phenomenon is bound up with the fact that any text contains in itself what can be termed the image of the audience and that this image actively affects the real audience by becoming for it a kind of normalising code. According to Kgobe (1989: 154),

The audience's verbal participation may be highly structured, as amongst the Bapedi, where the verbal repartee between the artist and audience is established from the outset with a two part formula.

In this formula, which is a stylised traditional introduction, the first part is provided by the artist while the second part is provided by the audience. An immediate contact is established by declaring to the audience:

*Kgomo 'a tshwa!*  
The cow spits!

to which the audience respond with:

*E gangwa ke mang?*

Who milks it?

It is in the midst of this interaction that the poet composes and performs. In cases such as this, in which every member of the audience is, to some degree, an active performer, it must be recognised that each participant simultaneously plays the role of both the performer and the audience.

In this way, a relationship is formed between text and audience which is characterised not as passive perception but rather as a dialogue. Dialogic speech is distinguished not only by the common code of two juxtaposed utterances, but also by the presence of a common memory shared by addresser and addressee. After all, if nobody listened, the praises would not survive for long.

### 2.2.2.3 Ring-composition

Another compositional technique which has been shown to be native to the narrative song and which Homer, in particular, is seen to employ is known as "ring-composition". The formula, the theme, and the simple repetition are the devices that ensure the growth of the song, whether vertically or horizontally. The ring, on the other hand, is a device enabling stabilisation and control. In explaining directly what ring-composition is, Meinster (1990: 40) says:

We speak of a ring-composition or of a frame-poem when beginning and end of a poem are the same, or almost the same, and the repetition forms a ring or frame around a central piece.

Other folklorists and poets alike prefer to call it an envelope as indicated by the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (1986: 241). Since Northern Sotho poetry is not new and can be traced back to an oral provenance, this device is not new to African literature. It would appear that the ring was mostly limited to the introductory and concluding formulas.

What actually happens is that the singer's fertile imagination has a tendency now and then to digress from the main thrust of the praise. A word or an idea suggests various associations, a line or an idea recalls an event or a tune, and the imagination is drawn off at a tangent. Meinster (1990: 140) says:

In modern Arabic the variations within this basic structure range from the very simple repetition of a whole stanza without changes, to the repetition of simply a word or idea, and from the single ring to multiple rings, which are either placed concentrically with each other, interlock, or succeed each other within the enclosure of one large frame.

What this implies is that, in order to be able to continue with the main subject of his performance, the poet has to return to the *locus ex quo* by repeating the word, line, or idea that gave rise to the digression. It requires considerable presence of mind for the singer to reorientate himself, using the device by means of which he interrelates the parts of his material which are centrifugal.

In Northern Sotho praise poetry this would account for the simple repetition of words or ideas in a stanza. Some refrains and formulas would also account for some of the rings as defined. Certain stanzas may start with a specific word or line and also conclude with the same line or word. Similarly, some rings open at the beginning of a poem and close at its end. Others only commence after the introduction and terminate either before or at the end of the poem.

According to the exponents of this compositional device, it fulfils a specific function in a poem. It either encloses and demarcates a kernel, thus setting it off from the rest, or it introduces the main theme which is subsequently elaborated upon within the enclosed piece.

In Northern Sotho praises, the following two poems, "*Ina la kxoši Sekhukhune*" by Phala and "Phiri" by Soana, will suffice to illustrate a few points about this compositional feature.

### INA LA KGOXI SEKHUKHUNE I

1. *Kxomo 'a thswa! E xama ke mang?*
2. *E xama ke nna, Seala-Kukuta ó tlile,*
3. *O tll'lo ja Baditšana bô morwa Rakxamanyane 'a Mo-rôbêla-hlaka.*
4. *Tsôtsôbôkô a thšoša, thšoša khubedu, moxatš'a K'o-xolakae.*
5. *Sesenyi bohlwele bo-laiwa-dirathana,*
6. *Le bô Pitšana-apea 'a Dikxale,*
7. *Makhura a tšwa ka dibêrê;*
8. *Nneeleng dikxopa Makxalaka-tenang;*
9. *Xo batamela xo amoxa Mašile.*
10. *Xomme Makxalaka a re: Rena kxopa xa re nayô,*
11. *Xomme ba re e na le Mmamabolo 'a Byatladi;*
12. *Xomme Mmamabolo a re: Rena kxopa xa re nayô;*
13. *E na le Makubu Ma-se-axa-ka-mošaša.*
14. *Xomme Makubu a re: Rena kxopa xa re nayô.*
15. *E na le Dikxale tša Molapo.*
16. *Xomme Sešupyane ó dutla dikudumêla.*
17. *Xomme ó tš'o xapa tlou tša Masetle, tšiboxong la Baalé.*
18. *A ó thsetše ka lefé?*
19. *A ó thsetše ka la Kxorwane letšiboxô la mošono le la mošola,*
20. *Di itše xa di kxereša letšiboxô la mošola le la mošono,*
21. *Xomme Kxoputšo ó lle nalá ya mefapa.*

22. *Xomme nna ke lle ya Ma-mpa-mpa Theledi,*
23. *A Kxalatlole 'a Makwá,*
24. *Seolo-sa mmataladi Theledi 'a Kxalatlole 'a Makwá,*
25. *Se-kxopa-banna-matôlô.*
26. *Motswako xa a re, lle-le-ruuu o kwa 'rumo la rena.*
27. *La mo-rôbêla-hlaka-'a marumô.*

1. The cow spits! Who milks it?
2. She is milked by me, Sealakukuta is here,
3. He has come to kill the poor, the son of Rakgamanyane of Morobela-hlaka,
4. Sharp-pointed assegai, red assegai, the wife of Ko-xola-kae,
5. The plunderer has relaxed at the usual place of the initiates,
6. Where even the girl initiates of Dikxale are instructed,
7. The fat comes out of the relish,
8. Give me the royal jewels, you Makxalaka,
9. If I come nearer I will take it by force, Mašile.
10. And then Makxalaka said: The jewel, we don't have it?
11. And they said that it is with Mmamabolo of Byatladi,
12. And Mmamabolo said: The jewel, we don't have it.
13. It is with Makubu the builder of make-shift dwellings
14. And Makubu said: The jewel, we don't have it.
15. It is with Dikxale of Molapo
16. And Sešupanyane is exuding perspiration.
17. And he is from capturing the cattle of Masetle, at the gateway of the initiates.
18. And where did he cross?
19. He crossed at the Kgorwane the drift of the girl initiates, the pool of the disgraced.
20. And when they destroyed the drift from hither and thither
21. And Kxopotšo killed the red and white ox,
22. And I killed a fat one Theledi,



23. Of Kxalatlole of Makwa,
24. The flat antheap Theledi of Kxalatlole of Makwa,
25. The one that trips the men and they fall on their knees.
26. When Motswako says: *Ile-le-ruuu!* he is afraid of our spear,
27. Which pierces him through the heart.

In the example, the hero is embarking on a journey to capture the jewels which had belonged perhaps to his ancestors. This he does not accomplish without fighting. He is sent to and fro and moves from pillar to post in search of the jewels. This is evident from the long operatic scene of exchanges between the hero and a string of other dramatis personae. Immediately after the stylized traditional introduction, the hero informs us that he has come to kill the son of Rakxamanyane with a sharp-pointed, red assegai. Here the ring is opened and the theme dramatically developed until it closes with the last line of the poem which is similar to the opening ring. It is important, however, to note that the formal structure and theme of the section enclosed within a ring-composition often develop in tandem throughout the poem and show congruence with the surrounding frame. This is true of this poem, which starts with signs of plundering and also finishes in the same tone, which is even more explanatory.

In some rings, we have a coda or envoi in which a ring closes before the end of the poem. This occurs mostly in French poetic forms, such as the ballad and the royal chant. In our example above, the refrain "*Rena kxopa xa re nayo*" accounts for the envoi. However, it is mostly found as a special closural device when the structure of the work itself does not adequately determine a conclusion. *Princeton Encyclopedia* (1986: 242) says that its true function ... was to serve as a pithy summing-up of the poem. Smith (1968: 188) calls it a "terminal section." The following poem by Soane (1986: 30) called "*Phiri*" succinctly illustrates an envoi:

## PHIRI

1. "Kgomo e a tsha!"
2. "E gangwa ke mang/"
3. "E gangwa ke nna Phiri ya makakola dibata,
4. Phiri ya feta mamane a timela;
5. Phiri ya monola morwa Mantopele.
6. Ke ithomile dikgapane maloba,
7. Dikgapane go sohlola molato magetleng,
8. Go beng temogo e le gore go bola ga o bole.
9. Ka tulo ke ga Tisane 'a Maramage,
10. Fao letšatši le hlabago ka sekgalela.
11. Ya nkhwetša mpša ya mmušo Maepa,
12. Ka mmea magetleng ka ba mogolwane,
13. Mongmabu a nkotla ka kgati ya segoši,
14. Ka e tshinamela ntle le poifo,
15. Seo ya ba sediba sa lehloyo, le lehono!
16. Ba ile kae magagešo Mangabane,
17. Fao ke širogetšego muši wo o mphahlago, Mmaswi?
18. A ile kae Matladi a gešo a Tisane,
19. Mmu o ba lle nna ke sa kgona go iphepa,
20. Mmu o ba lle ke sa kgona go fepa bana;
21. Ga go boloi nka be ke ba latetše.
22. Ke boa Tlhako gaTisane 'a Maramage,
23. Fao go nkgago meetse a setseke, Mohlarong,
24. Magetleng a kgoši ya Marota Thulare
25. Ipshineng ka manaba a Phiri ditšhošane,
26. Dulang komanamadulaabapilwe ke a fihla,
27. Lefase le le na le Mong wa lona,
28. Phiri ke lefeela tsela ya bohle o tla e sepela,
29. Se feleng pelo, masa ga a na swele."

1. "The cow spits!"
2. "Who milks it?"
3. "She is milked by me, Phiri the beast of prey,
4. Whenever I pass the calves disappear,
5. Phiri of the moisture, the son of Mantopele.
6. I went to a place of my own liking the other day,
7. Where I had gone to state my case,
8. Being aware that to rot it never does rot.
9. By residence I am from Tiisane of Maramage,
10. Where the sun rises at midday.
11. He found me the policeman Maepa,
12. I took him by surprise and humiliated him.
13. The Chief punished me with a royal cane,
14. I received it without fear,
15. That became a source of hatred until today!
16. Where have my people Mangabane gone to,
17. Where I had sought refuge from the blinding smoke, Mmaswi?
18. Where have Matladi my people from Tisane gone
19. They have all died and I am still able to feed myself,
20. They have all died and I am still able to feed the children;
21. There is no witchcraft I could have followed them.
22. I come from Tlhako at Tisane of Maramage,
23. Where there is the smell of little water, Mohlarong,
24. On the back of chief Thulare of Marota.
25. Enjoy the enemies of Phiri, you good-for-nothing,
26. Be on the alert because I am coming,
27. This earth has its own Creator,
28. Phiri is nothing, he will also follow the way of all flesh,
29. Don't be impatient, the sun will rise.

First, it should be mentioned that "Phiri" is an imaginary hero. Like all traditional praises, the poem starts with the common stylized traditional

introduction which is followed by the focus on the personality of Phiri. This is followed by some reference to an unknown destination where Phiri had gone in order to try and resolve a problem. This is followed by a ring or an envelope which is only a line referring to his correct place of abode (*ga Tisane a Maramage*). This introduces the main theme of what he is actually doing or what is taking place. It is elaborated until it reaches a closure or a coda in line 22. In line 10 he describes his home. In lines 23 and 24 he concludes the description and switches to an antithesis of the punishment he has received. He asks the people of be on the alert and to keep waiting because it will not be long before God will have helped him and he will return.

Thus far an attempt has been made to show that ring-composition is, indeed, an integral part in the closure of the poems. They envelop a central piece that states a problem or advances an idea or argument, which is only resolved at the ring's closure. In "Phiri" the ring partially described the home of the hero only to advance a full description after the coda. The ring thus introduces the proposition, which is subsequently enlarged upon in the main body of the poem and is restated briefly at the ring's closure.

This discussion has attempted to explain that the ring-composition may consist of either an entire stanza, or one or more lines from the beginning or at the end. These repetitions or refrains occur with or without changes. Thus far, in Northern Sotho praises, there are rings which are formed by the repetition of a mere word or line or an idea. Those which have a coda provide resolution at the end. The coda in "Phiri" provides a fuller description of the hero's home town. Smaller rings are also found within larger ones and are used to demarcate different sections within the large envelope or frame.

#### **2.2.2.4 Performance and style of delivery**

As these poems are mainly oral compositions, intended to be heard rather than read, they demand some consideration of the way in which they are delivered

and composed in performance and the kinds of occasions on which they are to be heard. According to Finnegan (1977: 88),

The discussion of a composition has made clear that the oral poet has both constraints and opportunities, but that the range of factors encompassed in terms like 'formulaic expression' do not cover all the conventional elements involved either in the process of composition or the completed poem.

Style and delivery will therefore be regarded as additional factors and techniques of oral composition. First the factor and condition that are favourable for the composition of praises will be considered briefly. Secondly, occasions conducive to the rendering of these compositions will be examined, and finally the actual style of delivery which constitutes performance proper will be considered.

Kunene (1971) captures the essential meaning that a man was not only praised because he had shot a lion, but because he had brushed with death by killing the fierce animal that had laid many men to rest. He says that after every successful cattle raid or battle or hunt, each warrior who had distinguished himself composed praises to himself, or added more lines to previous praises.

Sekhukhune was also praised because he fought many battles to establish the origin of the Bapedi and their stronghold. Moshoeshoe, after his successful cattle raids, also had to acquire the name Moshoeshoe through which he praised himself. This name has now become a formula. About heroic poetry, Bowra (1952: 4) says:

It works in conditions determined by special conceptions of manhood and honour. It

cannot exist unless men believe that human beings are in themselves sufficient objects of interest and that their chief claim is the pursuit of honour through risk.

Women in the village also loved and praised men who had deliberately risked their lives. It is true of boys who go to an initiation institution in cold weather and adverse conditions. Boys like these deserve to be praised when they graduate. Handsome men who fit into beautiful suits like a hand in a glove are not worthy of praise. Men of valour are the only ones who deserve to be praised. The gladiators during the ancient Roman Empire often settled their disputes in public and the victorious ones were praised. Even the dead ones were worthy of praise because they had not been afraid to risk their lives. They died fighting. Kunene (1971: 3) expands the likely conditions in which praises would grow and flourish.

Generally, these will be found to be:

- a. frequent wars, battles, and skirmishes;
- b. frequent encounter with wild beasts, as in hunting;
- c. frequent hunting expeditions,
- d. frequent cattle raids; and
- e. generally, the presence of any source of danger to life and property as, for instance, the prevalence of cannibalism.

This subsection will receive more attention in the following chapter on traditional praises. At this stage the question arises as to when is the right occasion for such praises to be performed. According to Cope (1968: 21).

Zulu social life provides occasions for self-display and the publicization of praises, but particularly in the practice of the male solo dance (*uku-giya*), which is hardly to dance but to give a bombastic exhibition of oneself: rushing hither and thither, stepping and starting, leaping, twirling and twisting, rattling spear against shield, glaring with ferocious aspect towards an imaginary enemy, all to the accompaniment of one's praises shouted by one's fellows and sometimes by oneself.

The day of the birth of a first-born child is an occasion to offer a name for the baby. Such a practice is also according to tradition. The birth of a child is an appropriate occasion to shower praises. According to tradition, every name has a purpose. Unfortunately, sometimes people only think of the names of relatives who are loved or well known, and not also of men or women of outstanding qualities.

Opportunities for poets or any other knowledgeable men in the villages to perform or co-operative praises are provided by public celebrations such as the coronation of a chief, co-operative works (*letšema*), a wedding, a child-naming, a house-warning ceremony, the graduation of diviners or traditional doctors. But, in general, there is no special time or setting for the recitation of praise poetry. Whenever men gather together, they are likely to engage in this activity. Among the Northern Sotho people this is relatively common: one would be dancing or drinking with one's friends at a party, when suddenly a skilled poet would stand up at one's side to chant one's praises and wish one well in one's academic achievements, or in one's having been blessed with a new-born baby. At the funeral ceremony of comrade Chris Hani, Mzwake Mbuli, a prominent Xhosa poet, stood up to mourn the death of this great son of the soil. According to Finnegan (1970: 140),

Whatever the initial occasions and subjects of their composition, the situations when recitations are made are basically the same - some public gathering, whether a festival, a wedding, a beer drink, or the performance of some public work. The chanting of praise poetry takes its place among the singing of other songs, and it is frequent for someone to walk about reciting praises of himself or his leader, while those present become silent and attentive.

Finally, in the actual performance and delivery of a praise in Northern Sotho, there is no question of the group singing found in folk-song performance. What happens is one artist at a time chanting soulfully and with full-throated ease in the presence of an audience. If on such an occasion the poet is inspired, he may move dramatically towards the subject of praise or the king and, with his right hand holding a spear or a knobkerrie, give small forward-thrusting jabbing and stabbing movements for emphasis. According to Brunvand (1968: 242),

Gestures are a silent language made up of movements of the body, or a part of it, used to communicate emotions or ideas. As such, they are an important aspect of informants total performances, and, as folklorist. MacEdward Leach emphasized in an essay on collecting, we should try to record everything, the "voice-tone and inflection-gestures, social expressions, [and] attitudes as well as words.



African poets usually start their performances with an introductory formula which in Northern Sotho frames the poem and its verse in itself. This is a way of signalling or establishing that the rendition is about to commence. Dan Ben-Amos (1975: 173) calls these formulas "markers which distinguish the speaking of folklore from non-folklore". The traditional stylized formulas envelop the expressions, setting the boundaries between formal generic expressions and whatever type of verbal exchange precedes and follows them. They signal the nature of a praise poem and enable the listeners to prepare an attitude of belief, disbelief, or humour toward a forthcoming performance. The opening formula which is usually declaimed by the poet is:

*"kgomo 'a tshwa!"*

(The cow spits!)

and the audience responds with an acceptance or an invitation for the poet to proceed by uttering the following words:

*"E gangwa ke mang?"*

(Who milks it?)

A poet may either stand still while he is reciting or take small paces backwards and forwards. The speed of performance is such that only those who are accustomed to this art can attain it. An indication of this is that a verse of five lines would take only about nine seconds to recite. Emphasising this point, Cope (1968: 28) says that the praiser recites the praise at the top of his voice and as fast as possible.

A performer may, in his imagination, temporarily identify himself with the chief; for example, in many of the collected and recorded examples the poems start with *"ke nna ..."* (I am). The poet is associated with the king. In the praises, the poet uses the third person singular for the simple reason that he is talking of things that happened long ago.

The poet, with a spear in his right hand, gesticulates and mimes, makes faces and such facial contortions as would depict the mood of the poem he is reciting. The praises are chanted in a pitch relatively higher than that of ordinary discourse. The recital is extremely rapid. Because the performer is usually in contact with his audience, he is capable of interjecting references to individuals without confusing the audience as to the main thrust of his message. He is able to shift from one situation of thought to another, indicating that he is doing so by a mere change of facial expression or a gesture of the hand or body.

Within the performance itself, the reciprocal process is maintained. It is no exaggeration to state that at almost every pause by the poet the audience interjects with "Agee ...! Ekwa ... Ekwa ...! or Šatee ...! Yo a sa rego mošate o a duma!" He who does not sing praises is jealous! This is an indication of how emotionally aroused the audience is.

It is the line and not the verse that is the entity from the point of view of subject matter and it is, therefore, often possible to cut it in half or join it to the following line if the reciter feels so inclined. His companion interjects with ululation once the poet's voice indicates that he has come to the end of what he considers a verse. During some intervals certain members of his audience will tactfully inspire him by reminding him of incidents to which he has not yet alluded.

A good performer will use any number of techniques in varying proportions, the sum of which constitutes individual style. He must therefore exploit features such as language, voice, mime and gesture to attain maximum exposition of imaginative wealth. He must be able to meticulously use metaphors and metonymy which are known to be dramatic. According to Coplan (1981: 155), quoting Ngubane,

Imagery in the context of notions of visibility

and interconnection, moves the performance of praise poetry in the direction of drama. The recitation of *izibongo* is a kind of dramatic enactment, in which history is made theatrical by pictorial metaphors and by expressive body movement adjusted in their rhythm to the tempo of the chanted words.

This is illustrated by the chanting of "*Mogobo*" which is the dramatisation of military prowess performed by members of a regiment. In the Sekhukhuneland area of Mamone, the singing of "*Mogobo*" at the royal kraal of *Kgošigadi Lekgolane Sekwati* was a fascinating experience. There was the heavy, loud humming which varied between falsetto and diminuendo. During the humming one would see a member jumping in a stabbing movement as if he were killing an enemy. Listening to the chant attentively, would really incite one to action. When the poet is satisfied that he has accomplished his task, by vividly bringing home the theme of heroic militancy associated with the subject of praise, he employs the closing signal which is usually,

*"Ke tšhaba mediti"*

(I am afraid of the leaders)

### 2.3 CONCLUSION

Africa has a long tradition of poetic exercise. Its oral poetry used to deal with topics of local concern in bygone days, including the glorification of heroic deeds by chiefs, warriors, initiates or any famous individual for his services to the community.

They could even be concerned with animals, the nation, ancestry or the ethnic group. Apart from his victories at war, the poems could also describe a subject's personality, physical features and his dispositional traits. However,

some of these were never described in literal terms but, according to Msimang (1980: 223), are embellished in appropriate imagery. An example is this when *Kgoši Sekhukhune* was associated with a ferocious rhinoceros, a lion, lightning, a whirlwind and a storm.

However, as the province of oral art began to expand, a fact which compelled this study, political, educational, social and economic themes became the order of the day. One is praised not only for one's aggressiveness or temperament, but also for the number of degrees which have been conferred on one. An example of this is "*Mafore*" (the deceiver) by Tseke, which praises a fictional character only for his art of being able to deceive women. Others are praised for being good lovers.

During the Sekwati era, the topic of some poems was gratitude to the king for the protection of his domain, his cattle raids and so on. Some poems are an account of the history, customs, and language of the community.

All these features influence the poet to compose praises on the subject of praise. This occurs at a variety of social occasions, sometimes in the privacy of a homestead, in the open courtyard, in the fields, or simply somewhere outdoors. The feeling of group solidarity and a shared social identity is often very strong on these occasions. As indicated, various compositional techniques are used. In the composition the poet and his audience play an important role. They either influence each other to excel or to fail. However, Lord (1960: 13) says that for the oral poet the moment of composition is the performance. In the case of a literary poem, there is a gap in time between composition and reading or performance while in the oral poem this gap does not exist because composition and performance are two aspects of the same moment.

## CHAPTER 3

### 3.1 TRADITIONAL PRAISES

Praise poetry as a genre has been in existence for centuries in Africa. The Africans have sensitive minds which have always enabled them to formulate images or give expressive form to the ideas which make deep impressions on them. In its various forms, with differences in style of oration, occasion and applicability, it is fairly widespread, being found virtually across the whole of Southern Africa. According to Moloji (1968: 4),

Those immediate issues such as tribal history - personified in the chief-custom, ritual and ceremony, which made an impinge on the mind of every Mosotho, found their way into the oral compositions which were handed down from generation to generation.

The label "praise poetry" in the African context is a case in point. Praise poetry highlights a theme that, on one hand, has been inadequately identified and, on the other hand, is known to pervade nearly the entire realm of oral poetry in Africa. It is not yet known if there is a restricted genre in any African culture which is locally acknowledged to hold a monopoly over praise. According to Milubi (1988: 62),

It is a means of giving value to the society as a whole, and it awakens the awareness and induces a sense of good feeling in that society.

It is true that the poems in this regard are a welcome token of the love of the nation for its king, which is evident in their praise of his deeds of heroism and

uprightness. In bygone days many folklorists and poets concentrated on those praise poems that celebrate the achievements of the subject. Today this has changed as Van Zyl (1949) observes that everything that one can see with one's eyes, one can praise. For this reason, the Northern Sotho poetry is characterised by many changes in its form and content. Everything of beauty is appreciated by everyone. For every beautiful thing, an inner feeling is expressed. However limited the range of poetic subject matter, the poets attempted to stamp everything they appreciated with a sign of approbation.

Finnegan (1970: 111) says that praise poetry is poetry that seems to go with a particular ethos, a stress on royal or aristocratic power, and an admiration for military achievement. She also holds that, although these poems are normally addressed to distinguished human beings, they can be concerned with almost anything- a view which allows a great deal of flexibility in the choice of subject matter.

Praise poems do not deal only with chiefs and with kings. Any person may be praised for his skill or his personality. The warriors returning from war have been praised by the women of the village. The farmer is praised by the women of the village. The farmer is praised as a challenge to him to work even harder. Individuals can also praise themselves, summarising their own personality and achievement. Women are praised as girls, wives, mothers, while some of the most vividly detailed of these praise poems are addressed by herdboys to their herd of cattle and by diviners to their divining bones.

Guma (1967: 136) indicates that praise poems, because of their limited subject matter, can be divided into three categories according to their content: praises of the Makolane (initiates), praises of animals and divining bones, and dithoko about chiefs, military leaders and other important personalities in the community. This chapter will only consider praises of chiefs and warriors, initiates, animals, birds, reptiles and divining bones.

## 3.2 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

In Northern Sotho, praises are called "*Direto*". *Direto* is the plural of *sereto*. *Sereto* comes from the verb "*go reta*", which means to praise or to recite the praise name of someone or something. *Direto* is the generic term for all forms of praises.

The praises are classified as traditional poetry. They also have various subdivisions. This classification into subdivisions, especially of praises, is made in terms of their length. Malepe (1966: 53) quotes Lestrade as the pioneer of this division. He subdivides praises into praise-names, praise-verses, praise-stanzas and praise-poems. This division will be discussed briefly before focusing on the actual praises of chiefs, warriors, initiates, animals, birds, reptiles and divining bones.

### 3.2.1 Naming

At birth a Mopedi child is accorded the status of a new member of the group. The child then receives a first infancy name. This name is chosen by the mother although it also has to be decided on by the family of the father, and particularly by his elder sister (*Rakgadi*). In the previous chapter mention was made of *kgadikgolo* (the great aunt) whose role was not explained. Such a sister is the one without whom final decisions cannot be taken. She holds a position of authority and is the most influential member of the family. The family of the wife also regard her with some esteem.

This name, even though somehow debatable, is of little importance. Today its importance is only in the registration of the birth and the birth certificate. It is a name of acceptance into the family group. The names are sometimes chosen from the events occurring on the day of the child's birth. One thing is certain, some of those who appreciate the political changes in the country and who gave birth during the period of the death of comrade Chris Hani have

named their newborn sons Chris. Some names may come from incidents which occurred during the mother's pregnancy. If there was too much rain that year, the baby will be called Mapula (mother of rain), if there is starvation he would be called *Tlaleng* (famine). At times the child is named after famous people in the family. A child who is born with a large head may be called Rahlogo or Ratsebe (with large ears). A family with boys only named the lastborn *Kebaabetšwe* (I have been given boys only).

Then, with this name, the child will be introduced and initiated into his father's group on the day of "*Ngwana o tšwa ntlong*" (The child comes out of the house), which is a special feast. As the people are feasting on vast quantities of meat and beer, the men will be dancing (*Ba itia kati*) and the women will also be doing a particular dance of approval (*Ba hlakela*). Many relatives will say *Tlou* (elephant), *Noko* (porcupine) *Kolobe* (pig) etc, in praise of the new-born infant. It is at this stage that a gifted performer will, on hearing the name, start composing the first sort of praises for the child. If the child was named after its famous grandfather, uncle, aunt or greatgrandfather, then the owner's praises would be showered on the new-born baby. In that way the child will have been formally introduced into the normal family life.

During the research it was surprising to come across four or five or even more people sharing the same name. Upon enquiring about the name-giving, it was found that they belong to the same lineage. In other words, one comes from the uncle's side, one from the *Rakgadi's* side, and one from the mother's side. Although it is no longer practised, in earlier times one never married outside this lineage. The researcher also learnt of a group ceremony called "*go rela leina*" (giving a name). At a certain time in the life of the child this ceremony is organised for all the children of the appropriate age of a particular lineage. At this ceremony the children are given new names which communally and publicly elevate them to the status of member of a corporate patrilineal group. These are the most important names. They are praises. The Bapedi, like the



Basotho and Batswana, consider the name of a person to be far more than a mere appendage by which a person is addressed. According to Kunene (1971: 13),

In naming a child, the Basotho did not, as a rule, choose a name simply because the parents liked it, but for its relevance to a given situation, or for a certain purpose that the name was supposed to fulfil, this in addition, of course, to naming the child after someone, usually a relative.

This, of course, is an integral part of the person, a reflection of his personality and of his whole being, and is coloured with his spirit. A name is given according to its relevance to some situation. This name would help to influence the child to grow up observing the qualities inherent in that name. At "*go rela leina*" the child is also introduced to the community before he/she can join a significant group which will lead him/her to the third stage of initiation.

During the major rites of passage in life, a person is given a new name, at birth, or upon entry into the patrilineal group, or upon initiation into the tribe. The third stage will, offer him a collective regimental name in addition to the new name. This will be dealt with under praises of initiates. This name is symbolic of the collective responsibility of initiates to the tribe in their new status and role. Each name has a corresponding praise-name, for example if the regimental name is "*Matuba*", he may be "*Katiši*" which will be commonly known and always used when speaking to or about a person.

### **3.2.2. Praise names**

In the previous discussion it was pointed out that a child may be named after an ancestor who was greatly honoured. This implies that at all times the child

is expected to behave towards that name as if he were, in fact, the person after whom he had been named. In this way the child will be praised accordingly by that name. Lestrade, (Schapera 1965: 24) defines praise names as:

Laudatory epithets referring to some quality for which the person is remarkable, or some deed or prowess or cunning which he has done.

While this definition limits the use of praise-names to persons only, Bryant (Cope 1968: 26) also bases his praises on history. According to Bryant, these names are simply short sentences commemorative of notable actions and events in life. With reference to praise names, Malepe (1966: 53) says:

Every Tswana tribe, besides having its proper name, has a praise name associated with it, which in many cases is the name of the animal or object which it venerates, its totem, and which serves as a more or less formal and polite mode of salutation or address towards any member of the tribe.

According to Malepe, each praise name consists of a single word or even of compound words.

Finnegan (1970: 128) seems to expand on the above definitions by saying that praise names can be either category terms, as in the praise of a cock referred to as "the aggressive one", or individual terms, as when a particular bull is "the largest in the herd". These names are sometimes expanded to occupy an entire line regardless of the precise nature of a line. Expanding upon the definition it can be said that a praise name is a form of greeting which is highly symbolic or even what we may call an equivalent name for the person, animal,

object et cetera. Northern Sotho abounds with such praises. According to Msimang et al (1992: 30),

When men who serve and protect the citizens of the country come back victorious, they are baptized with new names which are coloured with melodious and memorable praises. They thus emerge like Jacob who became Israel, Saul who became Paul etc.

To give a name to a person is also synonymous with showering praises on that person. Thus, all people with the name Sekwati will be addressed as Phaahle, Morewane'a Bauba, Kgobe as Mothokoa, Serudu as Mokoena, Bopape as Kgomo, and Boshego as Kolobe, Kgoloko as Ngwato.

The praise name may be expanded so that it occupies an entire line, and prominent people are praised with a string of names. These names are praises but, in terms of their length can be classified differently. Some are short whereas others are of a great length to the extent that they can be regarded as praise verse, praise stanza or even as praise poems.

### **3.2.3 Praise verses**

With regard to praise verses it may be deduced that they are merely extended forms of praise names and that they express complete thoughts which are independent of any other thoughts. Sekwati is known as "*kgatswatswa ya mabjana*" (leader of the Mabjana regiment). This is complete and understood. A tiger or leopard is known as "*Tolodi ya mabala*" (the yellow one with spots). Referring to the divining bones, we say: "*Marapo a tše hwilego*" (bones of the dead ones).

Lestrade regards a praise verse as a single phrase or sentence. It is important to note that a praise verse in Northern Sotho praise poetry may not be perceived in the same light as a verse of Western poetry. While in Western poetry a verse is a line of metrical writing with a symmetrical pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, Northern Sotho praises are not controlled by strict and rigid patterns. The speed with which the poet performs would not allow for middle notes to be noticed. If the poet's fresh emphasis at the beginning of a line and the slight fading which occurs with the end-word are taken into account some conclusion could be reached about a verse. However, a sense of the flow is a guide when determining a praise verse. Suffice it to say with Malepe (1966: 54) that a praise verse may be a single phrase or sentence.

### **3.2.4 Praise stanzas**

Abrams (1971: 183) defines a stanza as

... a grouping of the verse-lines in a poem,  
set off by a space in the printed context.

Stanzas in a poem are usually uniform in the number and length of the component lines, but this is not the case in traditional poetry. Since the conveyance of thought and action, embellished in various stylistic ways, is uppermost, there is no logical or systematic sequence as is required in Modern poetry. Special attention will be given to whether or not the modern praises or the prototype have a stanza or verse that is logical and metrical.

Lestrade (1935) defines a praise stanza in terms of its composition:

A praise stanza is made up of a succession  
of such phrases and sentences knit together,  
loosely enough, it is true, but still forming  
some sort of unit meaning.

Guma (1967: 159) concurs with this view, but unfortunately does not distinguish a praise verse from a praise stanza:

Each separate thought is made up of several lines at the end of which there is a pause in its onward flow. Such a pause constitutes what may be called a verse or a stanza in *dithoko*.

For him, a praise verse was a phrase, a line or a sentence, which means that a few of these lines or verses make up a praise stanza. The following stanza from *Kgoši Sekwati* serves as an example:

*Xomme marole a a tšwaxo Tswetla xa  
Ramapulana, xa se marole a dikxokonyane,  
ke marole a batho.*

And the dust coming from Tswetla of Ramapulana, is not the dust of cattle, it is the dust of human beings.

Another example of a stanza from the poem of *Kxoši Sekhukhune* is:

*A o Lepelle Mašile ampo o Tubatse,  
A re aowa Mašile, ke noka Mašile ke noka,  
Ke noka Mašile a ga Rakabu Theledi  
Manyama.*

Are you Lepelle or Tubatse Mašile,  
He said no, Mašile I am a river, I am a river,  
I am a river Mašile of Rakabu, Theledi of  
Manyama.

Damane and Sanders (1974: 44) are almost in agreement with what Guma advocates about a complete thought or idea in that they define their stanza as having a statement, development and conclusion. In the second example above, a question is asked, developed and answered, which fits in well with Damane's idea of a stanza.

Kgobe (1989) shows from recorded and collected poems, that in Northern Sotho traditional praise poetry the idea of stanza was unknown. In fact, no single poem has displayed this feature other than separating them by their independent thoughts.

True traditional poets recite without any consciousness of stanza. The little help in separating them comes from pausing to take a breath and these could be mistaken for a stanza.

Milubi (1988: 80) maintains that it would be worthwhile to look at Venda praise poetry not in terms of foreign concepts such as verses and stanzas, but according to the idea expressed and the deep-seated spirit that characterise the poem.

### **3.3 PRAISE POEMS OF CHIEFS AND WARRIORS**

Praise poems exist in many different parts of Africa and have been enjoyed by most peoples of the world. The most common purpose of the praise poem is to celebrate the role or achievement of the subject. In the praise poem, the hero is depicted as being strong and courageous. The milieu in the praise is that of a warrior elite delighting in hunting, feasting and often cattle-raiding. In Kunene (1971) we have an example of a praise poem of Moshweshwe who obtained the praise name "Moshweshwe" after his successful cattle-raiding at Ramonaheng.

In the light of the discussion of the praise name, praise verse and praise stanza, the praise poem may be viewed as being made up of a succession of praise-stanzas, linked together in their general application but not in their specific meaning. They also follow each other in sequences which vary greatly in different versions of the same praise-poem. The praise poem is an extension of the praise stanza. Two, three or four of the stanzas make up a praise poem.

These were generally recited by professional or semi-professional self-appointed poets, and towards the end were performed for entertainment, as in Yugoslavia, but an entertainment that achieved more than just killing time. The language used was also unique to the praises. The more primitive the language, the wider the gap between the language of prose and that of poetry. This is what led many people to maintain that their language was difficult with many obscure allusions. As a consequence of the praise poet being obliged to give a brief history of the deeds and events associated with the object of the praise poem during the poem's composition, the ordinary listener found praise poems very difficult to comprehend.

Many critics advocate that the praises are normally performed with elaborate and highly artificial diction, while maintaining their courtly connections. It seems, too, that the heroes of the day were aristocratic and that the heroic code was admired without question. According to Thompson (1974: 54),

This may have been because people liked a natural aristocrat to represent the human race when he went on a great quest, or because epics were formed originally at a stage when a tribe or group depended for its survival and success upon a good leader and the interests of leader and led were identical.

Similarly, praise singers were conformist, they voiced and supported the local ideal, and helped to form and sustain the local way of life. The heroic code, with prowess and honour as its main values, is fully accepted; there is never any rational debate. However, Guma (1967: 152) says:

And in view of the fact that they were recited in public, in the presence of his comrades in arms, whatever a man said regarding himself in such battles could easily be checked and verified.

With the use of hyperbole, poets could make their subject of praise larger than life, and still be able to protect the integrity of the event. Therefore praises, in addition to offering expressive form to human experience, beauty, pain, or admiration, could serve as valuable source material for the writing of history.

However, since these praises were not written, their preservation depended on constant repetition around the fire-place, at family, clan or tribal festivals, at initiation schools, in pastures, at the grinding stone, at wells and other places characterised by formal or informal gatherings. In 1935 Phala recorded many praise poems of the major chiefs and warriors of the Bapedi in *Kxomo'a Thswa*. In 1956 Ramaila also attempted to record some of the poems about these founders of the Bapedi nation in *Seriti sa Thabantsho*.

### **3.3.1 Praise poems of chiefs**

Northern Sotho chiefs and warriors are showered with many praises. These praises range from praise names to praise poems. At the induction ceremony, usually a chief or headman is given a praise name. This is extremely symbolic, and for that reason is only understood within the context of the prevailing condition prior to the coronation.



From poem 13 of *Ina la Kxoši Sekhukhune I*, Sekhukhune is referred to as "*Phaswa 'a Makwa*" (a leader of the Makwa regiment). History has it that "*Makwa*" was the name of the initiation school attended by Sekhukhune. Thus, being the son of the reigning chief Sekwati, in terms of the hierarchy, he was authorised to lead the Makwa which retained the name even after "*Lebollo*" (circumcision). The same occurred with *Kgoši Sekwati*, who is praised as Phahle the leader of Mabjana (*Phahle kgatswatswa 'a Mabjana*).

In another example *Kgoši Sekwati* is praised as the adamant one from Mošiane. He is also an elephant that stands firm at the place of Lekgolane. This refers to Mamone where the reigning chief is Chieftainess Mošopyadi Lekgolane. That is:

*Ke nna Mašišimale a gabo Mošiane tlou a  
Mabasa,  
Tlou ya Manaka ke eme Marutle  
gaboLekgolane,  
Ke šišimetše ke etša letlapa, lefsika lapeng  
laboMatobole.*

I am the adamant person of the place of  
Mošiane, elephant of Mabasa  
Elephant bull, I stand at Marutle, place of  
Lekgolane,  
I stand firm as a rock, in the family of  
Matobole.

No doubt much can be learned from this short excerpt. Sekwati is seen as someone who does not fear anything. He does not tremble and he is firm and steadfast. He can withstand any opposition like a rock. He is associated with an elephant and a rock.

In many examples various chiefs and warriors will be seen to identify themselves with wild animals and birds, such as *tau* (lion), *kwena* (crocodile), *nkwe* (leopard), and *lenong* (vulture). For instance, *Kgoši Sekhukhune* addresses himself as a lion (*tau*):

*Mola Sekwati a tswetše tau ya segafa, Tau  
ya Sekwati ke hlatša Marega.*

While Sekwati has fathered a mad lion, The  
lion of Sekwati, I breed in winter.

It is during winter, when people are sitting complacently around the fireplace, that he attacks them. He identifies himself with a fierce mad lion and also as the son of Sekwati.

As seen in the section on content, Sekhukhune is also identified with natural phenomena. He is the thunderstorm (*ledimo*).

### 3.3.2 Praise poems of warriors

The warriors also hold the same esteem as the chiefs. Having proved themselves with deeds of valour, they are also showered with praises. Like the chiefs, they identify themselves with animals, birds and natural objects. A poem of a warrior named Morewane (Phala 1935: 47) serves as an example.

*Kxomo' a thswa!  
E xama ke mang?  
E xama ke nna Morewane 'a pholo tša  
Matladi,  
Sefuana 'a Marota, ba rea ka nna nkwe  
Manganeng.  
Ba rea ka nna wa bo Lekgolane.*

The cow spits!  
Who milks it?  
It is milked by me Morewane of the oxen of  
Matladi,  
The small trap one of Marota, they trap  
leopards by me at Manganeng;  
They trap by me, of Lekgolane.

The praise names Matladi, Marota, Manganeng, Lekgolane are all associated with the Bapedi of Sekhukhune. Morewane is still regarded as a prominent figure by the Bapedi today. He is one of the leading counsellors at Tšate and Mohlaletse. Marota is a clan name of the Bapedi of Maroteng. Manganeng is the name of a prominent Bapedi village. The term prominent is used here because the people from this area regard other people from other areas as not being proper Bapedi. Lekgolane, everywhere in Sekhukhuneland, is associated with the queen Mother.

Another example is "*Ina la Mokxoma Marangrang*", (Phala 1935: 40). After the stereotype preamble the poet says:

*E xama ke nna Marangrang 'a ditsela-  
Mankwe,  
Mokgonyana 'a Phahla ma-nyala-a-hlala,  
A boela a y'o xapa, a boela Lepatšeng.  
Tša bo Batswe, tša bo Thakane ke xapile,  
Ke xapa le mafiša, ke a lomeletša;  
Namane ya kxomo ye e swana le namane  
ya kxomo yešo ya Maphokwaneng.*

It is milked by me Marangrang of the roads  
of Mankwe,  
Son-in-law of Phahla one who marries and

divorces.

And return to drive them back to Lapatšeng.

Those of Batswe and Thakane I took by  
force,

I even capture the cattle which have been  
loaned, I deprive them,

This calf is like the calf of our cow at  
Maphokwaneng.

Although Marangrang is normally regarded as a legend, in this poem we read of a real Kone warrior who could do things his own way. Even though he claims to have been the son-in-law of Phahla, this does not provide sufficient proof because it is followed by the statement "*Manyala-a-hlala*". He married many wives but could not settle with one of them. Characteristic of this warrior is the force he used when depriving the in-laws of the dowry head of cattle he had paid. Further in the poem he is called "*Ma-ja-a-sa-hore*" meaning he was never satisfied. From the excerpt the character of this warrior can be deduced. More excerpts are quoted in subsequent chapters and the collected poems appear in full in the appendix.

It is fascinating to attempt to analyse these remains or treasures of the ancestors. It was both entertaining and informative. To have traced some relationship to persons was a great honour especially after discovering these performances to be social institutions similar to what T.S. Eliot (1956) says of English:

The early forms of epic and saga may have  
transmitted what was held to be history  
before surviving for communal entertainment  
only ....

One thing is certain and that is that oral praise poems embodied much of the knowledge and all of the wisdom of the day, and so far from being mere entertainment they were historical and encyclopedic.

### 3.4 PRAISES OF INITIATES (*DIKOMA*)

Initiation plays an important role in the oral tradition of the Northern Sotho-speaking people. To the Bapedi, this initiation of the youth is a sacred institution. From it boys and girls graduate. It is from this initiation that they achieve the status of citizenship of the tribal community. It was at such institutions associated with rites of passage, which denote an abrupt change or transition to another stage of the life-cycle, that new praise names were given and praises were composed and sung. This, in itself, is a transition from puberty to adulthood. Monnig (1967: 111) says that the normal age of initiation is between twelve and sixteen. This puberty rite symbolises a change in age group status. The researcher discovered that adults who have not gone through the secret rite of initiation were not considered to be mature men and women in the society. Should a boy impregnate a girl before attending initiation school, he is mocked and at the school while others are operated on by *thipana* (one elected to circumcise) on a rock called *Sehlalo*, he is operated on separately on *tlaba* (rock). But, fascinatingly enough, when asked what this "*koma*" actually was, none could tell as it is considered a secret. In order to obtain the correct answer from experience, one has to attend the institution personally.

It was mentioned earlier that what followed after the ceremony of "*go rela leina*" was called "*koma*". As a result of the vicissitudes of life, age requirements are not adhered to closely. There are instances where individuals who are much older or younger are permitted to join any group attending the puberty school. The traditional roles of "*go bolla*" (to be circumcised) and "*go wela*" (attend the circumcision school for girls) to instruct initiates on the behaviour and relationships associated with manhood and womanhood have been maintained

in some parts inhabited by the Northern Sotho people today. The instructions at these schools are given in the form of singing and dancing, and sometimes through drum performances, especially with girls. For men, the instruction includes the depiction of hunting, farming and other activities of daily life which are important for young men and women of an age group in order for them to develop an understanding of social roles:

Before examining the songs, praise names and praises, it should be mentioned that poems in this category are extremely difficult to acquire. The main reason for this is that things done at the initiation schools of both boys and girls are not to be revealed to the uninitiated. Consider the following interview at Maloma a jurisdiction of Schoonoord and at Madihlaba a district of Jane Furse.

Interviewer:	Na koma keng?	What is koma?
Informants:	Ke sephiri	It's a secret
	Ke mmutla	It's a hare
	Ke moila	It's a taboo
Interviewer:	Ba ra eng ge ba re o a šogwašogwa	What do they mean by tanning a boy or girl?
Informants:	Go fa molao	To be given a law.
Interviewer:	Na go thopa bonna ke eng?	What is to capture manhood?
Informants:	Ke koma	It's a secret.
(others)	Ke go humana molao	Is to get the law.
Interviewer:	Ka ge le boetše lentšung lela la koma, keng? Molao wona ke ofe?	Now that you repeated the word "koma" what is it? what is this law?
Informants:	Ke sephiri fela ka gore o a gapeletša sepela thabeng	Because you are forcefully pursuing to be answered go to the

	banna ba tla go araba.	mountain, men will answer you.
Interviewer:	Na lešoboro keng?	What is <i>lešoboro</i> ?
Informants:	Yo a sa tšwego komeng	A person not initiated.
Interviewer:	Ba re, ge o ka sepela le mašoboro wa utolla diphiri o tla gafa. Na o gona yo a kilego a gafa?	I hear that if you divulge these secrets to the uninitiated you will become insane. Has anyone ever suffered this?
Informants:	Ke nnete, fela go gafa aowa gobane ga se ba ka ba di utolla.	That is true, but no one has ever experienced this because they never divulged them.

From the various answers one realises that some are very intelligent and if they had attended school they could have been doctors and professors. They all adhere to their belief and would not budge.

Northern Sotho in tradition, however, a young man will be formally recognised as an adult after undergoing certain steps such as "*bodika, bogaola and bogwera*". Immediately after being circumcised one is known as a *modikana*, and after graduating for the first three years one is a "*mogaola*", then one is introduced to the men at the *kgoro*, at which stage one becomes a *Mogwera* (a friend). *Bodikana*, which is regarded as the first stage of initiation, features many praises. Kgobe (1985) asserts that there are songs that are sung for recruitment, songs for admission and songs sung during the period of initiation. Pitje (1950: 112) cites the following song which is intended to make the boys despise boyish and childish things and look forward to becoming men.

Boys: *Mma ke nya gae!*

Men: *O ka nya thokolo.*

Chorus: *Thlalotšana - thlalotšana, nawa-nawa etc.*

Mother I defecate here at home!

You may defecate round balls.

This tune mentions all grains used in their district and also serves to remind the people at home that their boys are ready to face the inevitable. At this time the master of the lodge (*Rabadia*) takes charge.

The first evening around the fireplace after recruitment is spent listening to a few hints on the rite of passage of the initiation, the knowledge which will ensure their admission into the institution. The instructor shouts, '*Madikana!*' The initiates reply: "*Macha*" (It is day) The chant continues:

1. *Banna ka kgoro ga re tsene,*
2. *Re tsena ka sebidibidi sa  
mmatsengwanaso-ngwana*
3. *Se se amušago ngwana se eme,*
4. *Re bitša bo-pelo-sokoe, ntšha  
merakabela,*
5. *A bo-mma ke raramele ngwana,*
6. *Ka pitšana e nyenyane, ka re tu,*
7. *Ka re keleketu, ka re le mpopa  
modiana na?*
8. *Moyantlong ya go tlola,*
9. *Ramoši o tšwile legonyana macha.*

1. We men never enter by the gate,
2. We enter by the backdoor of  
Mmatsengwanasongwana
3. Who allowed the baby to suck milk  
standing,



- Who stood like a fearful bull,
4. He stood and called them to proceed,
  5. In company of Maote to pelo-ea-sokoe,
  6. The one who is really black,
  7. I shall send them to call her mother to come,  
And boil me in a small clay pot,
  8. Then I shall say to her,  
'Do you think me a greedy man?'
  9. Anyone goes into the home, gives a cough.  
It is day.

With boys, amongst other instructions such as committing to memory incidents to be incorporated into their graduation names, every morning and evening throughout the duration of the school, before the great day, that is the day of killing an elephant (*lesolo le legolo*), the initiates sing:

1. *Mankekana, pudi e a lla mogageno,*
2. *E lla e bitša modiša e re, Modiša  
Nkgokolle!*
3. *Ke a gokolola ke le kae,*
4. *Ke diša dingwe di ngala di kgonwa ke  
botau le bonkwe.*
5. *Bagolo ba dingwe dibata,*
6. *Ba dutše mo kgathung ga tsela,  
Ba bona mpheti a feta,  
A feta le mpšanyana tšagwe,*
7. *Mpšanyana tša mafogotla,*
8. *Sa bommutla se se tshwanyana,  
Se re bothomo sa re bophaswa.*

1. (Mankekana-kekana, the goat is crying at your home,
2. It calls for someone to let it out and cries,
3. Shepherd, let me out!
4. How shall I let you out as I am looking after
5. The big ones of the beasts.
6. These lie along the highway to see a passerby with his dogs,
7. His fast running dogs.
8. His swift dogs, the rabbit's tail is black and white.)

According to Bapedi tradition, the initiates are allowed to bring at least one dog along to the school. This is why reference is made here to the swift dogs and the rabbit which often serves as relish.

At *bjale*, the initiation school for girls, after admission, in addition to other duties and instructions, in a monotonous voice they repeatedly sing:

1. *Ke a reta, ke a reta lentšakalana,*
2. *Ke retela ina laka.*
3. *Le apara kobo, le apara kobo ka pedi dingwe mathatha.*
4. *Makgushakgusha a ba a mo lokišetša,*
5. *Ba mo laile bja bopudi bonyamarokolo.*
6. *Bja bonku bo ile kae bothethamenyako,*
7. *Bo thethela metse ya rare le metse ya*

*bangwe?*

8. *Ke rile ke ya gagešo ka mo molapong,*
9. *Ka humana mokgopa wa tau bapologa,*
10. *Re bapana nkwe re bapa ka moutlwa wa mothono,*
11. *Wa bonoko o ile kae Mmapola kobo?*

1. I say the praise, the lentšakalana,
2. I say the praise of my name.
3. One who wears two garments, one who is in tatters.
4. Makgushakgusha was never well-trained in the law,
5. But was trained like a goat that brings out droppings.
6. Where is the good law, of the sheep that never goes far from the gates of our father's kraals,
7. They will never go to unknown kraals.
8. As I went out to the meadow
9. I found a lion's skin tightly stretched.
10. for we want to stretch a leopard's skin,  
And instead of pegs we use mothono thorns
11. Why not use the spikes of the porcupine?

The initiation school for girls is led by instructors who are old or middle-aged women. The researcher was shown the inside of a near-dark room next to the

large "Lapa" in which the girls are initiated at the royal kraal of Chief Maloma at Schoonoord. Because there was no school in progress, the researcher was allowed to peep in and saw musical drums and some animal hides hung along the wall. It was said that those contained charms for the coming school term. The *bjale*, like that of the boys, also has a great day and theirs is known as the day of the beast. Girls also undergo certain tests. When asked which tests they underwent, the researcher was told that the matter is "koma" (secret). Beside these tests and the singing of the above poems, they also learn the praises of their new names.

A few of their names were recorded at Mamone, Madihlaba and gaMaloma. These praises are heard for the first time when the initiates graduate. Earlier it was said that the boys and girls are supposed to give themselves names. Some names for boys are, Katiši, Kediši, Thupetši, Karabi, Thantshi, Lethabela, Thaloki. Girls also have specific names such as, Ledile, Raisibe, Seemole, Ramokone, and Sebolaiši. However, in some instances others are not good composers. According to Guma (1967: 136),

The weaker ones, who were incapable of such oral compositions, were assisted by the Mosuwe (leader), who did most of the composition for them.

But, even in the memorisation process, some do not go unscathed. The leader would use *moretlwa* (lash) to encourage them to learn quickly. But constant repetition and singing of these praises is more effective. People have often wondered where the formula;

'Kgomo e a tshwa',

originated. This stylized formula was started by the initiation institutions. Before the graduate (*sealogana*) can render his praise, he commences by

saying, "*Kgomo e a tshwa*," and if one is interested in knowing his new name from the institution, one will reply by saying, "*E gangwa ke mang?*" This is illustrated in a poem collected from the initiate known as *Kediši*:

1. *E gangwa ke nna Kediši dipatla ke swara mogwane*
2. *Ke swara dilo tša go hlabana ntwā.*
3. *Lerumo ke sware setšhoša masoganana.*
4. *Melamo ke swere gatinti ya molodi wa thoka.*
5. *Ka kgatša thoka ya wela bodibeng.*
6. *Ge e le bonna ke bo thophile.*

1. It is milked by me *Kediši* sticks I hold a switch
2. I hold the instruments of battle.
3. Spear I hold the one that frightens the boys.
4. The stick I hold the fast one like a kerie
5. I throw a kerie and it falls into a pool.
6. I have captured manhood.

Amongst the many informants interviewed, only a few could remember their full praises. Usually the praises of *bale* (girl initiates) were longer than those of men. Many appear in the appendix. Another example from a man was "*Madima*":

1. *E gangwa ke Madima thaka tša kgogo e tala ya Madima a Setumong*
2. *Koma e tšwele Mmulane gaboRašiko*

*makgolo'a dikgoši*

3. *Mphato wa mošate ga o kibelwe  
mošito diputswa.*
4. *Kgwadi o bethile phala ka mahwibi  
hlwayang tsebe Madima.*

1. It is milked by Madima the age group of the blue fowl of Madima from *Setumong*.
2. The initiation is declared at Mmulane at Rašiko the grandfather of the chiefs.
3. The initiation lodge of the chiefs is not disturbed
4. Kgwadi has sounded the flute at dawn, listen you Madima.

Something interesting about this poem is that the allusions point to the son of either *Kgoši Sekwati*, Thulare or Sekhukhune. The name Madima is a royal name that was used by Malekutu the son of Thulare. Malekutu and Sekwati were brothers. It is also said that all the previous chiefs were initiated at Madima institution. This name was again used in 1938. The names of the initiation institutions, which are usually known as regiments of the *Bapedi*, are *Madima, Mabjana, Mangana, Matuba, Makwa, Madikwa, Mankwe, Mapitsi, Makgola, Matau, Magasa*, and those of girl regiments are *Masoka, Dibuka, Mapogo, Maputla, Matloša, Matlaatša, Maratawa, Masenya* and *Medibu*. These names are often used in their praises. One example of a girl's praise is *Raisibe*:

1. *Raisibe mošiši serobamasogana-  
mmele melala.*
2. *Sebotsana kgaetšedi ya masogana' diepe.*

3. *Mmalo mmalo Raisibe o reng wa roba  
masogana melala*
4. *Dipheta o apere dibenyetša-  
masogana.*

1. Raisibe the beautiful one who breaks  
the young men's necks.
2. The beautiful one the sister of the  
young men.
3. Gosh! Why do you break the young  
men's necks?
4. The beads you wear those that shine  
to the young men.

The male child has thus evolved through the stages of *lese*a (infant), *mošemane* (boy), *lešoboro* (youth), characterised by obnoxious behaviour, *modikana* (circumcised youth), *sealogana* (brief transitional period) which is the last stage of initiating him into a man (*monna*). He can marry, he can also participate in the politico-jural activities of men. With female children there is *lese*a (infant), *mošetsana* (girl), *lethumaša* (youth) here they also play at make-belief marriages, *bale* (initiated youth), *sealogana* (brief transitional period) *mothepa* (derived from the long apron "*nthepa*" of married women) and lastly they are *makgarebe* (ladies) who are ready to get married.

### 3.5 PRAISES OF ANIMALS

Animals are found in all parts of the world and share the land, water and air with man. It is believed, however, that man once shared common ground with the animals and birds. It is well-known that they could talk to each other, solved common problems and lived harmoniously together until the fall of man.

During their life together with man, man gave the animals names. Observing their characteristics and behaviour, he started composing praise poems for them. In these praises admiration and a simple love for the beautiful were mingled with sentiment and intense attachment to these animals. Many animals, were praised in vivid and captivating language. Even after the fall man continued to praise some of their peculiar idiosyncrasies. By that time, animals and birds had become popular subjects for the creation of aesthetic thoughts. Like all the people of the world, the Bapedi spent a great deal of time observing the natural features of these marvellous creations. According to Milubi (1988: 89),

The praises for animals may have been made when it had made an indelible impression on the praiser. This could be the reason why most people's totems find realization in certain animals.

These praises were composed for wild and domestic animals, thus indicating that the praisers were intrigued by them and their habits. Many of their characteristics and habits, such as their movement, their methods of running, their fighting skills, their fierceness or their colour, were observed and included in the compositions. In *Tšwelopele* Maibelo (1987: 9) says:

*Re re re di ena goba re sa di ene diphoofolo,  
digagabi, dinonyana le tše dingwe gotee le  
diruiwa, ra ipapiša natšo. 'Tshomoko o  
bogale bjalo ka tau, Mmamolatelo yo ke  
nkwe, ba bangwe bona e ba tšona dimpša  
ge ba bona dijo tša batho, diphiri le  
mahlalerwa re sa bale.*

We say when we venerate these animals



birds, reptiles and others or not, we associate ourselves with them. *Tshomoko* is as brave as a lion, *Mmamolatelo* is a leopard, others are like dogs when they see other people's food, not counting wolves and hyenas.

Whether we associate ourselves with them or compare their characteristics or their actions, we can still say "*thaba ya monna*" (a mountain of a man) "*thutlwa ya mosadi*" (a giraffe of a woman), and "*lehlokwa la ngwanenyana*" ( a blade of grass of a girl) that constitute praising according to the appearance of a person. However, the characteristics of that animal have gained entry into the praises of men. We know how huge a mountain is, how tall a giraffe is and how thin a blade of grass can be. Through simile, metaphor and personification these strange features have stimulated man to compose praise poems about them.

It is true that the agrarian society composed praises mainly for the animals they loved and cherished most. In Lebowa, man's survival depended on cattle and their multiple uses. In Lesotho, the horses for climbing the Maluti mountains are favourites. Perhaps the springbok became an object of praise because of its ability to leap away from a leopard or lion, or because it was popular for the biltong it yields. This remains the secret of the people who like it. Observing all these features and qualities, man was encouraged to admire and desire these qualities for himself. Many images were used in these praises. That is why those who like the lion are called *Tau* (lion), *Tlou* (elephant), *Kwena* (crocodile) and then became a people of *Batau*, *Dinare*, *Bakwena*, *Dinoko*, *Dikolobe* and so on. When a clan chooses to venerate these animals, it is because they admire their qualities. In the search for these poems it was intriguing to discover the praise poem of a snake. From Biblical days man has become an enemy of the snake. This then, explains why a Mopedi can praise almost everything that he can see.

It is unfortunate, however, that as some of the animals were deliberately separated from man and others became extinct, these oral creations have also disappeared and for some reason, only a few poems have been preserved. Sincere thanks to those who were able to commit these poems to paper.

In view of the fact that every animal, domestic or wild was given a name, these names were praised along side the qualities described. According to Pretorius (1989: 67), the following habits and characteristics of animals and birds are said to be the basis from which the aesthetic utterance originate.

- (1) colour
- (2) physical characteristics or abilities
- (3) specific habits

A cow may be praised for offering milk or for pulling a plough or wagon, or for its black and white colour. It may be praised for being beautiful like "Sebotse" (Mashabela 1973). A cat may be praised for being a friend of man or for driving away snakes and mice. The lion or leopard may be praised for being king of the jungle or for its colour. The poems are impressionistic, but the composer's personal feelings are not reflected.

### 3.5.1 Praises of domestic animals

The following is an example of praises of cattle (Molebowa 1974: 5):

*Mmakadi*  
*Mmakadi sepudutswana*  
*Kgomo ya raga mokgalabje*  
*Maswi a tshela ditedu*  
*A re ke a latswa,*  
*A be a latswa le nta.*

Mmakadi the grey cow  
That kicked an old man  
Throwing milk on to his beard  
Trying to lick it off,  
He licked off a louse.

Interesting is the following cow named "Kgaša" which is given the characteristics and personalities of a beautiful lady. Observe the imagery and allusions used. Her other relatives are also mentioned. Her physical characteristics and qualities are mentioned. According to the composer in (Molebowa 1974: 5),

1. *Kgaša hunela mosese o kwatle,*
2. *Koša e tla ema kgorong ka mahwibi a basadi,*
3. *Kgaša o apara diala koša e tsena kgorong*
4. *Ba mo sekaseka masogana bangwe ba eme ka mebotwana*
5. *A tšwa Kgaša a boMosima kgopana ka etapele.*
6. *Setswatswa sa boMosima sehlapa le ge a eya nokeng*
7. *Kgomo ya re ke lethari le eya košeng.*
8. *Kgaša o se ipone bosadi o sa na le matutukgareng.*
9. *Wa ikanya le rena mešiši bontšhadi ga re šetše.*
10. *Ke kgarebe nkokonono ke etša lena mešiši.*
11. *Le se nnyatše moriti ke kgaufsi le go thewa leina*

12. *Sa mosela wa seripa ke seo le tla anegela bankane.*

1. Kgaša tie your dress tightly
2. A song will be sung at the kgoro at dawn,
3. Kgaša will be crowned with a song at the kgoro.
4. They look at her with admiration, the gentlemen with others standing by the walls,
5. When *Kgaša* of *Mosima*, the short one goes out, she takes the lead.
6. The dandy one of *Mosima*, the one who washes even when going to the fountain.
7. The cow says I am a young woman going to a dance
8. Kgaša do not think you are a woman, you are still a child.
9. And behave like us the old ones who do not care.
10. I am a full fledged lady like you old one.
11. Don't despise me because of my short stature, I am about to get a new name.
12. I will stop here, that's the end of the tale, you will tell your friends about it.

One cannot refer to any rhyme scheme because it is not regular. However, it would seem the composer had an idea of European rhyme scheme in mind

when this poem was composed. Internal rhyme, which is a feature of African poetry, abounds. Linking and parallelism are features of this poem.

Other names of cattle are; *Mpedi, Kgwara, Motsomi, Sekgai, Mmethiša, Khwinana, Sebotse, Phantla, Motšere, Tinki, Sebethi, Matšhela, Manthwešeng*. Goats, sheep, donkeys, dogs, horses and cats are also given names according to their characteristic behaviours. It was surprising to hear a herdboyc saying the following about one of his cattle:

*Manthwešeng diala, kgomo ya mošate ke  
tlou, mabele e ja dihlogwana.*

Mother crown me, the cow of the royal kraal  
is an elephant, it prefers the heads of corn.

Some cattle become so accustomed to these praises that they even give sounds of approval, such as bellowing, when their praises are sung. At Bochum, in the early fifties there was a fearful and ferocious bull named *Mmanthumole*. It terrorized the bulls of the surrounding *Mokumuru* area. Its owner loved it so much that after every fight he praised it as, "Agee ke *Mmanthumole mohlogo madi a tšame a ntšhela!*" (Indeed! It is *Mmanthumole* the destroyer the blood continually pours onto my body). In another example, praising the dog (*Mpša*) van Zyl (1949: 146) says:

*Tsomiša mpša phetello,  
Lehu la mpša ga le kgole,  
Motšhaki mošebetša batho  
Motšhaki a tšhakela dibatana.*

Hunt with the fastest dog,  
The death of a dog is not far off.  
The attacker that works for man,

The attacker that attacks small animals.

The dog is a faithful servant of man. It provides for his owner by catching small animals. The composer is also impressed by its speed. However, he warns that it should not run at full speed all the time because it will die.

### 3.5.2 Praises of wild animals

With wild animals, the same behavioural patterns were observed and praised. SehloDIMELA (1962: 51) gives us the following composition of a Leopard (*Nkwe*):

*Ke nna nkwe,  
Nkwe thaladi ya dithaba,  
Ke mmabotsana, magana-go-šupša.*

I am the leopard  
The leopard that roams the mountain  
I am the beautiful one who hates to be  
teased.

The "ke" personifies the leopard and puts it in the first person. It is praised as the beautiful one that inhabits the mountains. In 1949, van Zyl collected the following poem about the Baboon.

#### THŠWENE

*Thšwene ya nko ya phaphathi  
Ke sefoloxa thaba ka sa moraxo,  
Ka bona bose ke tsotsometša ngwana,  
Tlaa ke xo rone dintu motho towe  
Nna thšwene sefoloxa thata.*

Baboon with the flat nose,  
I am the descender of the mountain going  
backwards,  
When I see nice things I push my child  
forward.  
Come let me search your lice you fellow,  
I, the baboon, descender of the mountain.

This poem is a self-praise by a baboon which has a flat nose, although the first line seems to be a line uttered by a praiser. It is common knowledge that the baboon only sends children forward when it is old. The children go forward only where there is danger and when they scream, the big baboon comes bellowing in order to frighten the enemy away. But, in the poem, it is the one that pushes the children forward where there are nice things. This is symbolic. It is the one that descends the mountain going backwards. The poems discussed above are written in their entirety and appear in the appendix.

### 3.5.3 Praises of reptiles

Lekgothoane (1938: 198) gives the following account of the crocodile:

*Kwena ke moroka meetse a pula*  
*Ntsho ya bodiba ...*  
*Ke kwena e ntsho ya bodiba*  
*Kwena e tsene le kgomo bodibeng ...*

The crocodile is the invoker of the water of  
rain

The black one of the pool ...

It is the black crocodile of the pool.

The crocodile that drags down a beast into  
the depths.

The reciter presents a vivid picture of how fearful and vicious the crocodile is. Its habitat is alluded to. Repetition is a feature of the poem. It is a dangerous powerful and merciless beast. The poet uses images to describe this animal. When praising a snake, Lekgothoane (1938: 208) says:

*Ke mpokopoko a Mma-mphokwana.  
Xa ke bonwe ke banana (or bašemane)  
Ke bonwa ke dithsa dikxolo tša metse  
Nna manyedi-nyweke a se iphithla  
Moiwa-motho*

I am the long monster of Mother kid  
I am not to be seen by mere boys  
I may only be seen by the deep pools of the  
villages  
I, the zigzagger which hides itself  
I who am an abomination to man

This is true of a snake about whose dangerous poison adults inform children. A snake is a killer. Children must run away when they see it. The hatred between man and the snake began with Adam and it will continue to bite the man's heel, while man will crush its head.

### **3.6 PRAISES OF BIRDS**

Birds, like animals, are also praised. They also become the subject of praise poems and are described according to their habits and characteristics. The colour of their feathers plays a prominent part in the praises. These are indicated with striking images. Praisers, in their revelation of what is in their hearts, have come out with many wonderful compositions on wild birds. No traditional praises about domestic birds have been found so far. Only in modern times there have been poems on the rooster and hen. In describing



the finches (*Dithaga*) and their behaviour pattern, van Zyl (1949: 136) says:

*Tswi-tswiri. 'nna motho ke a gononwa  
Ge o gononwa o kwele eng?  
Ke kwele go bolelwa mabare-bare a dithaga,  
Tša ja mabele tšhemong ya Lesiba tša a  
fetša.*

Tswi-tswiri. I the person, I suspect  
What have you heard that makes you  
suspicious?  
I heard about rumours spoken of weaver-  
birds,  
They ate corn in Lesiba's field and finished it  
all.

Here, the finches prove to be treacherous by eating people's corn in the fields. While the poem has some linking, it also displays internal rhyme through the use of the same words. They fear people, but they finish all the corn in Lesiba's field. The secretary bird is also praised as:

*Nonyana kopelwa magofi ke batho,  
Phepela re bone, bokwala ke bja'go  
Botse o filwe ke bona badimo,  
Tlopo ga ke tsebe o beotšwe ke mang?*

Bird, we applause you,  
Dance, let us see, you are an expert at it.  
The beauty you are given by the gods,  
The protruding haircut, I do not know, who  
decorated you?

The same features as those indicated for the animals are highlighted. The secretary bird is a good dancer and very beautiful. The tuft of feather that protrudes from the crown of its head is also alluded to.

Herdboys know many of the birds that are found in their grazing areas. To these birds such as *Peolwane*, *Pekwa*, *Modiša*, *Mogolodi*, *Mmalegodī*, *Mokowe*, *Kgoropo*, *Hlame*, *Lenong*, *Kgaka*, *Legokobu*, *Kgwale*, *Sekhwiri*, *Dihlanhlagane* (*dihlagahlagane*), *Leeba*, *Thaga*, *Leribiši*, *Mašianoke*, herdboys have offered praises sometimes simply a single sentence. For instance, the owl (*leribiši*) is praised as "*Manyela phagong*" (the one that defecates in a treehole.) The hammerhead (*Mašianoke*) is praised as "*selwana seagantlo bodibeng*" (the lonely hammerhead the builder of a house at the pool). It is a pity that the researcher could only obtain one or two lines of the poems of birds from the old people. The new composers have attempted some new compositions which will be discussed in the following chapter. As natural forests are being destroyed, some species of birds are also nearing extinction. When people narrate a folktale about "*Phiri*" or "*Lenong le ja dipholo*" (vulture, eater of oxen) to their children, they can only imagine a doglike animal or how large this bird must be to be able to finish eating an ox.

There is no continuity in the composition of praises of animals and birds. It was even difficult to obtain poems about the very cattle that are considered a black man's wealth. Moloji (1968: 13) says that cattle are the very body and soul of a Mosotho. Yes, in the days of yore, any man who had no cattle was considered poor and inferior. At that time men also stayed at the cattle posts, hunted and knew many species of animals. Today, as a result of the actions of avaricious exploiters who dispossessed the Bapedi of everything that they used to praise, we are only told of the names of these animals that once roamed freely and provided meat for relish. Again, the adoption of money as a means of economic exchange by the African has greatly affected man's love for animals.

### 3.7 DITAOLA/ DIKGAGARA/ DIHLAKO (DIVINING BONES)

Traditional healers or medicine men, previously known as witchdoctors, also compose praises when they interpret "Mawa" (the fall or position) of their divining bones. The Bapedi had *dingaka* or seers who were usually the best poets, not because they were familiar with the state of trance and the inspiration coming out of the trance, but because they, more than anyone else, were experienced in the composition of words. Certainly, they had on call a stock of magic formulas and a special seance language in which everything was called by a different name or by circumlocution.

Despite the presence of these formulas, because these praises are handed down orally, their texts are never fixed, which means every traditional healer is free to manipulate and compose new praises, and he is only too glad to show his artistic ability in that kind of poetry.

However, the first question that arises concerns the nature of these divining bones. These are bones that have the power to help traditional healers to detect illness or cure a patient. These are the most important divining paraphernalia in the life of a professional healer. They are an exact collection from the various bones and horns of dead animals. Nowhere has an animal ever been killed in order to collect these bones. The alleged healer wanders about at ceremonies, festivals and family parties collecting these bones. As soon as a collection is assembled, they are known as *ditaola*, *dikgagara* or *dihlako* in Northern Sotho. The number of these bones in a set ranges from twelve to any maximum. A well-known traditional healer, Katata at Mamelodi uses only twelve of these bones. Despite his use of only the minimum number of bones, he is renowned for his divine messages and cures.

Another well-known Mmaleetse at Jane Furse uses as many as fifty-two bones. Many she claims to have inherited while others she buys as their colour becomes faint and wears off. At Marulaneng, a district of Jane Furse, a

Mrs Makofane, a healer and seer with drums, has as many as forty-two. At Lephepane, a district of Lenyenyane, a widely-known and renowned traditional healer, Moagi also has as many as fifty. At Riverside, a district of Jane Furse, Mphela, another versatile young traditional healer, was asked why so many divining bones and answered by referring to only four principal kinds that are grouped in threes to total twelve as the major bones. The rest were complementary. They gave weight to the divine message and also helped in giving direction to an alternative cure. What matters is the message they give when they fall. The number is not relevant because the message comes from the spirits.

Collectively, *ditaola* have many praises. In 1965 Machaka composed the following poem: *Ditaola*

1. *Ke diwabawaba, ke ditšhaga-tšhaga,*
2. *Ke marapšana a go hlwa merabeng*
3. *A oretše sekhutamoya leng le leng,*
4. *Ke ditaola tša seala sa phukubje,*
5. *Le marapo a makeke a tswakile.*
  
6. *Ke marapo a tše hwileng kgale,*
7. *Tšona di kokonwa ke mpša le petlo,*
8. *Di hwile fela di laola di phelang,*
9. *Marapo a pudi-mme le nku ye swana,*
10. *Ke diphekola, di re botša madireng.*
  
11. *O di tšere a di re ka moya huwee!*
12. *A di lahlela fase tša katankana,*
13. *Tša phatlalala tša re botša diphiri,*
14. *Tša buša tša re šupa tše di tlang,*
15. *Ke ditaola mašupa pele le morago.*

16. *Ga le a re marapo ga a thebathebe?*
17. *Ga le a re ditaola ga di lebalebe?*
18. *Wa e buela leopong di a go bona,*
19. *Wa bolela ka pelo di go theeeditše,*
20. *Ditaola ke diutolla tšohle diphiri.*

21. *Ditaola ke diutolla bomenemene,*
22. *Ke marapo a bomatanya-a-tanyolla,*
23. *Ke tšona ditshwa-dikhupamarama*
24. *Wa gakanega batamela mararolla*
25. *Ka ditaola o tsebe mo o gatileng.*

(1965: 47)

1. They sound hwabahwaba and tšhagatšhaga.
2. They are the small bones that are in a pocket all the time.
3. Always being subjected to suffocation all the time,
4. They are the divining bones in a bag of the skin of a jackal.
5. Even the bones of termites are mixed.
  
6. They are bones of dead animals
7. Those that were chewed by a dog and a carving instrument,
8. They are dead but they control the living,
9. Bones of a goat and black sheep,
10. They diagnose and tell us the news.
  
11. He took them and breathed in some air!
12. He threw them down and they rolled,
13. They scattered and told us the secrets,
14. And even focused on the future,
15. They are divining bones that point to and fro.

16. Didn't you say the bones do not wink?
17. Didn't you say the bones do not see?
18. You worry too much they are listening to you,
19. The divining bones reveal all secrets.
  
20. Divining bones are revealers of deceitfulness,
21. They are the bones that trap and untrap,
22. They are the ones that spit out all secrets.
23. If confused come nearer to the unraveller,
24. With divining bones you know where you went wrong.

The poem defines these bones. In the first line, reference is made to the sound they make, then follows a description of where they are stored. The poet says that they remain suffocated in a bag made from the hide of a jackal. Even the bones of termites are mixed. The references in the other verses will become clearer in the discussion. It is surprising that as early as 1965 Machaka was already influenced by the division into stanzas.

The size of these bones also differs. Depending on the animal and the type of joint from which the bone was taken, some are very small compared to those of the knees of an elephant or a bull. Those from the hoofs also differ in size. However, most are cut to size. In many of the divining bones, those made from horns are comparable because all of them must be cut to size and decorated on one side which will help indicate whether they are dead or alive. Otherwise many are left as they were found or tied with a string to distinguish them from others which resemble them.

The researcher overcame his fear of the traditional healer and his apparatus. We all know and believe that the bones can talk. In verse three, line thirteen, Machaka says; "*Tša phatlalala tša re botša diphiri*" (scattered they tell us the secrets). The truth is, they only talk or see as indicated also in lines seventeen and eighteen, when interpreted like a game of cards. If one has ever played

a game of scrabble, wherein words are built in specific directions, then one would understand how these bones convey a message. This very message is the one that is praised.

Guma (1967: 148) has also observed that there are praises for "*mawa*" of the divining bones. Stayt (1931 : 287/90) has also recorded sixteen "*mawa*" of the Bavenda together with what he calls "formula uttered". This concept "formula uttered" is incorrect, and neither should we agree with Guma who stated that this should be called a praise. In Schapera (1946: 237) Hoernle endorses this opinion by saying:

Each combination has its own special praise name which gives the general principle, as it were, of prognostication, good, bad, or indifferent, as the case may be. Each position has, in addition, its own special set of archaic verses from which the diviner will get some hint of what he must tell his inquirers what lies before him.

In the quoted poem of Machaka, stanza three, lines thirteen and fourteen he says:

*Tša buša tša re šupa tše di tlang,  
Ke ditaola mešupa pele le morago.*

Then they focus on the future, the divining bones that indicate the future and past.

As far back as in 1946, Hoernle tells us that they tell the inquirer what lies before him, regardless of whether it is a secret that they reveal. This is also emphasized by Machaka in lines 18, 19 and 20. He says:

*Wa e buela leopeng di a go bona,  
Wa bolela ka pelo di go theeditše.  
Ditaola ke diutolla tšohle diphiri.*

You skin it in a donga, they see you,  
You worry too much they listen to you,  
Divining bones are revealers of all secrets.

In similar fashion to European qualifications, where every doctor has his own stethoscope, every traditional healer has his own divining bones. But, it should be noted that no parent forces his children to inherit the bones or to follow after him (Laydevant 1933: 341). Mostly it is a calling. Many say that it came from the *Badimo* (gods) that they should become healers. It could still be the result of an interest in the art. The divining bones are normally kept in a small bag made of the skin of a jackal. Surprisingly, amongst the bones there is no bone belonging to a jackal. Why specifically the hide of a jackal? According to Mphela, the divining bones were to remain as cunning and clever as a jackal. The bones together with the drugs are known as "*dithokgola*" or "*dithebele*".

The trainees or those who have received a calling which to others comes in a form of a trance, go to an experienced traditional healer for apprenticeship in the profession. This apprenticeship is paid for with a cow. Then a professional healer will teach the apprentice the different kinds of medicines or herbs. According to Milubi (1988: 94),

When a calamity strikes a homestead or a disease that is beyond the understanding of man, the Muvenda would go and consult a traditional medicineman.

Upon consultation, whether for illness, lost money, livestock, plans for travel or marriage, seeking employment or the possibility of keeping it, being consulted



by a chief or tribe about the likelihood of rain, for the smelling out of culprits, the diviner brings forth his *dithebele* and commences with his punctilious ceremony. The patient is required to sit flat on the mat and take off one or both shoes, (with some the shoes are left outside at the door of the hut in the superstitious belief that the solution to the problem, wherever it is, will also relax and not travel further out of reach). At Schoonoord, before consulting the informant Mmanonyane Mokgwadi, the researcher was requested to leave his shoes outside even before approaching the consulting room.

Before the divining bones can focus on the illness or the cure or the cause, the patient is obliged to surrender his payment, called "*phuthollamoraba*" or "*phuthollathebele*" (one that opens the bag containing drugs and divining bones). Today, it is anything from R5 to R50, depending on the exploitation by the diviner or seer. It is a recommended payment for the opening of the *ditaola* pouch. The patient is then able to state his problem and the medicine man will instruct or ask the bones to tell the cause and the cure.

The bones are then shaken repeatedly while asked to tell the truth. In bygone days, these could not be scattered on a goat skin before the patient had breathed into the pouch. A goat skin is used because amongst the African people a goat is closely associated with the gods (*Badimo*). This skin is placed face down to allow for liltng. Their fall on the skin is called "*lewa*" from the verb stem - *wa* (fall).

In their fall, what is significant is the message inherent in the praise rather than the individual bones. Coming from the animals, those that come from *ditau* (lions) will focus more on *Batau*, that is those who venerate that animal. Also in their fall, three in each of the leading principal bones will consist each of a man, woman and a daughter. For instance, those that focus on danger (*Mohlakola* or *Morarwana*) may come from the hoof of either an ox, and will be called *Mokgalabje* (old man), or a cow (*kgadi*) or *nnyane* (daughter). Divining bones made from the shell of a tortoise will have *monna* (man) *mosadi*

(woman) *mošemane* (boy) and *ngwanenyana* (girl).

Their names range from snakes, wolves, baboons, cows, pigs, goats, buck and sheep. Among these divining bones from other objects, such as seashells which represent water, may also be found. When the big shell has fallen upside down, the message is "*Mohlakola moswana*" (There is some wrong being perpetrated).

The content of "*mawa*" is in the message they focus. This is also true of the significance of the various falls of the divining bones. They alone understand them. The same applies to their praises, which tend to heighten this secrecy and mystery by occasionally employing a special vocabulary that is intelligible only to members of the profession. While at Mamone, the chieftainess Lekgolane took out the divining bones belonging to the royal court, and a few diviners were requested to interpret their fall. One old man had to run away because they could not agree on the leading message. When praising them, the leading "*mawa*" are "*Mohlakola*", *Morarwana*, *Thwagadima* and *Mpherefere*". To these could be added Legwame and Selumi. While there are four principal "*mawa*" represented by *dihlako*, *manaka*, *meetse* and *dikhudu*, *Mphela* at Jane Furse has added a fifth, which is represented by *ditšhwene*. At the commencement, the general bones are usually praised as:

*Di wele makgolela,*

*Go šetše boMalope le boMalopiana.*

They have fallen,

Malope and Malopiana are remaining.

After the above praise to activate them has been rendered, the traditional healer will start praising them according to the divine message given. The "*lewa*" may focus: *Mpherefere* -

*Lehlake la Mmankurana a Tšate*  
*Hleng lehlake ga ke hlake fela,*  
*Nna ke hlaka selo ke se tseba.*

The struggling one of Mmankurana of Tšate  
I am not just struggling there is a cause,  
I struggle knowing the cause.

If those *astragali* from the horns are facing different directions and there is no agreement whatsoever, their message becomes *Mpherefere*, which means they are at war.

If the "*lewa*" message comes from those made of baboons, tortoise (which are normally known as the elephants) or water from the sea shells, and in their fall they face upside down, their message is *Mohlakola*.

*E re Mohlakola matšwadiba e hlakotše*  
*mogatša kgoši ditšwaro a šala a ponapona*  
*teng ba re taba tša ka ga di nkgake ba a*  
*nkgakiša.*

It says not all is well they have robbed me,  
and even robbed the king's wife of her  
clothes and she was left naked.

And they say my case I am aware of it,  
The only thing is they make me forget?

The researcher could not deduce anything as the people were praising. But from the position of the bones on the mat, some light was shed. Because in their fall "*Legwame le legolo*" (the bigger shell) had fallen upside down, the message was "*Mohlakola*" (big trouble). Being upside down and big, it represented the first lady being naked. She had no clothes and the inside of the shell could be seen.

It is indeed, surprising that so little is known about this subject. Since a diviner has to learn and remember a great number of ritual chants, he must complete an exacting course of training before he is allowed to practise. Some incidents are recalled in many parts of Southern Africa where many people have died because they were given incorrect prescriptions by a traditional healer. It is said that when a pupil is slow to understand or make his mind responsive, he is normally offered magic medicines to drink, of which "*theri* or *pelotheri*" is the most important. Again it was interesting to find the representation of male, female and children by these *astragali*, and the representation of totemic clans by bones from each totem animal.

### 3.8 CONCLUSION

Thus far it has been seen that Northern Sotho praise poems are largely composed of a series of praise names and praise verses or stanzas. The praise poem is generally built up of these smaller units which are often loosely linked together into stanzas.

In the composition, the hero is associated with an animal, often the animal symbolic of his particular clan. This is the animal they venerate. It is fascinating that this association is carried on into divining bones. A bone from cattle, whether a cow or a bull, will focus on those people whose totem is "*kgomo*" (cattle), and a bone from a lion or an elephant will focus on those who venerate a lion or an elephant. This means that, in a praise poem about a cow by those who venerate it, the cow will have the characteristics of those people and vice versa.

It is very difficult to acquire praises of initiates since the ritual is considered a secret. Should this trend persist, very soon the praises of initiates will be lost forever. The institutions are also closing down because the surgery is proving a health hazard.

Praises of animals and birds have been lost because of the extinction of these creatures. Apart from what Lekgothoane (1938) and Van Zyl (1949) have compiled, many are found only in texts. An attempt to subdivide the praises of birds into domestic and wild proved to be a failure because of a lack of traditional praises for domestic and wild birds.

## CHAPTER 4

### MODERN PRAISE POETRY

#### 4.1 THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN NORTHERN SOTHO PRAISE POETRY

To discuss modern Northern Sotho praise poetry first requires a definition of the term "modern" which is primarily a state of the mind in which there is expectation of progress, propensity for growth and readiness to adapt to change. The Bapedi became attuned very early to a variety of modernising influences such as the printing press, missionaries, Christianity, colonisation, European administrators and their schools. While these influences laid the foundation, they did so alongside a natural evolutionary process of social, economic and political change. Quoting the Russian formalist Shklovsky, Nyiro (1979: 112) says:

Every new literary school is a revolution  
reminiscent of the rise of a new class of  
society.

This is sufficient proof that, although the process of growth in African literature is stimulated from the outside, a normal development process is also in operation. The change in spirit of the period gives rise to a new taste, a new style. This accounts for the new literary development.

However, before the age of reading, contact with poetry involved hearing it everyday. The ordinary man heard verse spoken on every occasion or situation, in folksongs linked with occupations, in proverbs and mnemonics, and on other occasions throughout his life. Poetry was a communal art.

When books replaced the spoken word as a medium, a new relationship developed between poet and audience. In this way new kinds of poets, poetry

and readership emerged. Reading poetry became a matter of conscious choice. The communal atmosphere was lost. Reading has always been a solitary activity, deliberately undertaken by that part of the population able to read and determined enough to use the ability. Poetry, in this way, became the profit from a contract between the poet and his reader, and not everyone took steps to reach the point of such considered choice.

However, many writers of traditional poetry have noted that respect for the printed word caused the living versions of oral poetry to be ousted by stereotyped editions. According to Muir (1965: 232),

Unlettered people, especially when they are given authoritative scriptures feel reverence for all that comes their way; they begin to think that the printed version of an orally transmitted song must be correct and that the fluid rendering of an orally transmitted song is somehow full of incorrect deviations.

These correct versions certainly froze the life out of oral poetry, and inferior literary work began to replace it. Face-to-face contact between poet and audience and co-operation between them, came to an end, and poetry lost much of its substance: the effects of sound and gesture that were part of its meaning. Communities that neither use writing nor know of its use elsewhere will both attend to and tend their speech with greater care than literate people are likely to do. When they wish to preserve utterances that have to do with such important community concerns as religion and social life, they will invent elaborate gestures to assist the memory and resist the ever present drift towards change.

Western scholars tend to assume that the spread of literacy was in the past and in the present is always a clear gain. But what is literacy? According to

Salcedo (1971: 629),

Literacy is the degree to which an individual possesses mastery over symbols in their written form.

Of course there were gains in the form of poetry of greater range and power. But against this it can be argued that, except in recent de-traditionalised Western societies, literacy is always purchased at the price of traditions. By this is meant, among other things, the gradual loss of the ability to construct long, coherent narrative in verse. Narratives that unite teller and hearer, and the ancestors whose deeds are celebrated. The well-intentioned teacher of the written word may unwittingly, and therefore all the more unremittingly, be demanding nothing less than a surrender to the larger global narrative of encroaching civilization.

The static nature of print precludes the dynamic performance without which oral poetry would not exist. This point is repeatedly made by collectors of traditional poetry and sometimes by the singers themselves. According to Thompson (1974: 174),

When Sir Walter Scott printed some of the songs sung by the mother of James Higg, the ettrick shepherd, she reproved him: "There were never one o'my songs prentit till ye prentit them yourself, an ye hae spoilt them awthegither. They were made for singing and not for reading, but ye hae broken the charm now, an' they'll never be sung mair".



However strenuously the exceptionally competent silent reader tries to recreate for himself the performance demanded by a poem, his internal pronunciation must often fail. Most readers probably never achieve much in the way of inner pronunciation, so that communication is only partial. Though the provision of a permanent form for a poem was an enormous gain, enabling a reader to re-read and absorb it and later generations to enjoy it, the lack of a physical audience seems at first to have been felt by writers. According to Hawkes (1972: 45),

Much of the writing of the Elizabethan-Jacobean period proves to be a pale shadow of notions previously expressed orally with more powerful and ruthless realism in medieval vernacular proverbs and sermons.

Literacy moved literature from the world of voice into that of sight. Language lost much of the multi-dimensional resonance it enjoyed when myth and proverb and wise sentences typified the utterances of oral culture and every word was a poetic world unto itself. The understanding of a poem became an exercise in following a linear sequence rather than a matter of three-dimensional grasp, whereby a poem was heard and felt and experienced by a man's whole being. So little of a person is called into play by an ordinary silent reading. According to Ong (1971: 293),

The mental consciousness induced by print has no use for the creative, highly-charged language of poetry and imaginative literature, language that has always formed part of being human, and seems essential to our balance and well-being. Thus suffer from emotional and imaginative malnutrition, and "the semi-educated cling to the fixity of

typographical space as a substitute for the living permanence of truth.

Pre-literate poetry that tended to be the voice of the people uttered to the rhythms of a basic pattern is no more. To a certain extent, people were poets and there was a reciprocal relationship between audience and performer. The one individual was only known as an expert who had learned the rules and practised his craft for the benefit of society. Often his utterances were practical and clearly prescribed. Until the poet was withdrawn from his hearers by the barriers of literacy, poetry could be regarded as the product of a community, and there was less individualising of personal experience. In their poetry and folksongs, they also had central themes besides the declamations. These ranged from themes of birth, courtship, marriage and work to war, illness and death.

The Bapedi, like most African nations, were severely affected by the coming of Europeans and missionaries to Southern Africa. They were drastically influenced and the importance of the traditional African poet for the communication of ideas in the society was completely paralysed. Furthermore, subjected to European colonial power, many kings and chief sent their princes to the white man's country to learn, partly because it seemed such a prestigious thing to do and partly because the future seemed to belong to those trained in the white man's culture. That was the starting point of the African slavery. The Bapedi had chained themselves to apartheid. In Lebowa, a school named Boaparankwe (clothed in leopard skin) was designated specifically for sons of chiefs. In *"Dibata tša Lebowa"*, Segooa (1972: 18) has the following composition about Boaparankwe:

## BOAPARANKWE

1. Ke ntlokgolo 'a boRamošweu maphuthaditšhaba,
2. Bodula'bata tša Lebowa diaparankwe,
3. Lebowa ditaba di rutwa go šoga matlalo.
  
4. Ke mahlasedi a letšatši ponegela ditšhaba,
5. Ke 'sedi la boRamošweu lefa la batšiekgalaka,
6. Ditaba mararankodi di rarollwa ka boleta.
  
7. Komaton'a boRamošweu hlabolla ditšhaba,
8. Dibasetona sa bomongmabu rragoditšhaba,
9. Lethebo mabesebese kobo 'a go tswalwa e aperwe.
  
10. O se re go bona di šenne meno 'batana tša Lebowa,
11. Wa hloma nke di ja dingwe dibatana,
12. Wa lebala gore di fatela diyamaleng.
  
13. Ya mabala e hlatšitše 'sorong labo Mokgoma,
14. Moo 'batana di rutwago go šoga matlalo,

15. *Gomme ge a pala a fiwa ba-thari-e-tšhwaana.*
16. *Ke bodiba bo-hlatšitše 'sorong labo Mokgoma,*
17. *Thojana di tšhaba meetse a Lepelle,*
18. *Bao ba tšwago ntshe ga go sa le lefšega.*
19. *Agee, motsemogolo wa batho le badimo,*
20. *Motsemotona wa Lebowa la boMarab'a Sekwala,*
21. *Go tswalwa ga gago go re tlišeditše lehlogonolo,*
22. *Ge nkabe bahu ba ka bowa bodulabahu,*
23. *Go be go ka bitšwa boSekhukhune mabitleng,*
24. *Ba tla go bona makatika faseng la Bapedi.*

1. It is the big house of the white, the gatherer of nations,  
The seat of the beasts of
2. Lebowa that wear leopard skin,
3. In Lebowa the beasts learn how to turn the hides.
4. It is the rays of the sun that give light to the nations.

5. It is the light of the Whites, the heritage of the Black of our people,
6. Complex problems are solved with ease.
7. True initiation of the White enlightener of the nations,
8. The big fountain of the owner of land, the father of nations,
9. The soft karross that he was born wearing.
  
10. Do not on seeing, the beast of Lebowa grinning,
11. Think that they prey on other beasts,
12. And forget that they are gathering food for themselves.
  
13. A multicoloured one has given birth at the gate of Mokgoma,
14. Where the beasts are taught how to turn the hides,
15. And when they fail, they are given to those of the white cradle.
  
16. It is a pool which has littered at the gate of Mokgome,
17. The heifers are afraid of the waters of the Olifants River,
18. Those who come from there have no more cowards among them.

19. Hail! the big village of people and the gods,
20. The main village of Lebowa of Maraba of Sekwala,
21. Your establishment (birth) has brought us blessings to us.
  
22. If the dead could come back from their graves,
23. Sekhukhune would be called back from the graves,
24. To come and see the miracles on the land of the Bapedi.

As the poem is self-explanatory, it is hoped that it was established in good faith in order to enlighten the sons of Bapedi chiefs, the sons who are born wearing leopard skins. The school was taken to be the light and wealth of the nation. It is also compared to a fountain where drinking water is drawn. From its content, the school was established after the death of the founders of the Bapedi tribe.

Missionary schools, such as Botšhabelo and Bethel, were also established in order to influence the Africans from an early age. Most youths were then forced to forsake their traditional way of life and accept a new one. They drifted slowly away from entertainments from which they used to derive much of their cultural education. They were then more attracted to European forms of education and culture. According to Milubi (1988: 112),

Conversion and baptism were the catch-expressions. The immersion of a person in water symbolized the birth of a new being. Such a person would sever his ties with the

old ways of life and assume a new life-style.

Their names from which praise poetry had developed spontaneously, were then discarded and another name from the Bible selected. In the Catholic Church, of which I am a member, selection was mostly made from the names of the saints or martyrs. Some of these names are (St) Steven, who was stoned for proclaiming the gospel, (St) John, (St) Charles Lwanga, (St) Barnabas and (St) Dominic, whose birthday is celebrated every year on the 8th of August by Catholics. The truth is we were given these names, converted, given the Bible to believe in, and the Westerners took our lands.

The hymns in the church were written in verse form. Our people then took this form to be the correct form for poetry. Being so attracted and some having secured a passage overseas to study in England, France or America, many came back to become pioneers of modern poetry, which had all the salient characteristics of European poetry. Many had seen the new culture into which they had been forced as naturally superior and were apologetic about their race. The oral poet, who was known as the society's chief whip, no longer appealed to the younger generation. Considering the European influences upon the development of African language and literature, Lestrade (1935: 23) says:

It is to be regretted that the natives themselves have made relatively so few contributions to the printed literature of their people, which is apt to be outweighed with the products of European minds writing for the Bantu, and to contain but relatively little written by the Bantu for themselves.

The British who colonised the Southern African region taught their language and their culture in schools run by the them, had two ways in which to measure

literacy (Salcedo 1971: 629):

- i. Can you read English?
- ii. A literacy test score. This involved handing the respondent a card and telling him to read aloud the following:

"He who cannot read is like a blind person who is being led lest he goes astray. He is dependent upon others. The book which he cannot read mocks him as a slave to ignorance".

No one would wish to be called a slave to ignorance. This meant every person would strive to at least be able to peruse a few English words, thereby giving the impression that English was better than any other language.

Although the missionaries discouraged certain indigenous African customs as "pagan", the colonial government did not force their culture on the Africans and certainly did not formally temper with the cultural identity of the African. But, in the middle of the 19th century in Southern Africa, the language was reduced to writing by the missionaries. First, they translated the Bible into Northern Sotho and thereafter Christian literature surfaced. Some of those are *Hosiana*, *thabelang Morwa David e a tlang* by Hoffman, *Mphago o abelwago badumedi ba Jesu Kriste* (Provision offered to Christians) by Hoffman and Trümpelmann, and *Thuto Thabeng* (Sermon on the mount) by Schwellnus.

The Northern Sotho literature from being purely oral was then committed to writing. Through this way of symbolically representing oral communication, all the tribal legends and some aspects of social and cultural life, including stories, songs and some fragments of the royal praises were recorded.



At first, the people collected poems and committed them to writing. Up to the present time many are still collecting them but not even acknowledging the producer thereof. Unfortunately, as Mashabela (1982: 36) observes, very little of the praises found their way into Northern Sotho written literature. The following are but a few of such collections:

Phala D M	1935	<i>Kgomo a tshwa!</i>
Ramaila E M	1953	<i>Seriti sa Thabantsho</i>
Ramokgopa E M	1965	<i>Mofolletši</i>
Machaka S R	1967	<i>Mehlodi ya Polelo.</i>

It is commendable that foreigners, like Johns and Shwellnus, took the initiative and included bits of tradition in their reader series *Puku* and *Padišo*, respectively. For a long time these readers were invaluable in African schools. Ramaila and Mphahlele-Phaladi also came up with a few tribal histories in *Setlogo sa Batau* and *Ba ga-Mphahlele*, respectively.

Then came what Lenake (1984) regards as the proto-form and transitional type. By "proto-form" Lenake refers to those poems that were written by individual poets with the particular characteristic that they are thematically and structurally a slavish emulation of the traditional poetry. Whether this should be accepted as a work of art or not, Iyasere (1975: 109) says:

I should take my unique poetic sensibility ...  
from the tradition that feeds my language ...  
because in my language there is a lot of  
poetry, a lot of music, and a lot of old literary  
art even though not written.

This statement simply avers that every mature artist achieves his best work when he attaches himself to his own artistic tradition. In the case of African writers, this tradition lies deep in the oral past. It is this traditional wisdom of

the forefathers, which informed and shaped Matsepe's poetic sensibilities and the vision of his poetry and allegorical novels. This implies that, to fully appreciate the works of modern poets, one must recognize the "pastness of their works, even though they are eternally present". This is not to suggest, as Iyasere does, that one must count every spot on the leopard, and number the streaks on the tulip, when determining the influences of the traditional on the modern poet. This in itself would be impossible and would constitute an exhaustive fallacy. But there are significant traditional influences in the artistry that cannot be ignored. The critic must possess what T.S. Elliot called "historical sense" and, as far as modern literature is concerned, this entails both a knowledge of oral influences and the presence of poetic devices, such as praise name formulas, traditional symbols, rhythm, and parallelism that belong to traditional poetry.

Proto-forms, must display signs of heroism as did the original forms, that is the proper traditional poetry. There are many examples of poems in this category and their common characteristic is the use of the stereotype preamble to traditional praise poetry:

*Kgomo e a tshwa!*  
*E gangwa ke mang?*  
*E gangwa ke nna ....*

The cow spits!  
Who milks it?  
It is milked by me ....

This stylized traditional introduction is a bold, masculine challenge which demands all the deeds of valour of which any truly masculine man can boast. On its own it can instigate and inspire a poet to present some men, even if imaginary men of prowess, who are brave enough to pick up the gauntlet (Mashabela 1982: 39). Poets, such as Tseke, Mogashoa, Matsepe, and

Segooa, have written poetry which is very close in its form, if not in its content, to the praise poems proper. Matsepe's praise poems create the entire atmosphere of traditional life, both in the references alluded to and the language employed. To gain more insight into this category a section of S.N. Tseke's poem entitled *Mafore* (The deceiver) from his collection **Ntlopuleng** (1981: 30) are given below. The remainder of the poem appears in the appendix.

### ***Mafore***

*Kgomo e a tsha!*  
*E gangwa ke mang?*  
*E gangwa ke Mafore ditšhaba*  
*Nna ga ke forwe ke se šathume motho wa*  
*lebole,*  
*Nna tlou e jago mere e sa ikapole*  
*dikolobeng,*  
*Ke tšhaba thopa di tšewa ke*  
*madingwanyan'a legola*  
*Ke tšhaba ntlo yešo e bonwa magalagapa e*  
*se sethala.*  
*Ke tšhaba go ba huane ke le motho wa*  
*ditedu.*

The cow spits!  
Who milks it?  
It is milked by the deceiver of nations.  
I am not deceived because I am not a young  
girl in a loincloth,  
I the elephant that eat trees and does not  
expose itself at the pig venerators,  
I am afraid that our secrets/ dance song can

be heard by the people of the plains,  
Fearing that the inside of my house will be  
seen although it is not a shelter.  
I am afraid of becoming a liar while being a  
bearded person.

The man is an artful liar, a deceiver of the first degree. While deceiving, he cannot be deceived since he is not an uninitiated young girl who is still wearing a loincloth. The lines ... *ke se šathume motho wa lebole* and *Nna tlou e jago mere e sa ikapole dikolobeng* refer to intolerable behaviour in a man and a woman, something that the community would not accept. The implication is, he even grabs the very young and engages in sexual activity with them. This he does secretly without many people knowing about it.

The above poem was composed in 1981. In 1968 Matsepe gave a poem with similar connotations, that is *Tšhwahledi* (The gate crasher) in *Molodi wa Thaga*: 25. Like the deceiver, he never ask permission. In his movements he knows no limits. Because the poem is very short, it is quoted in its entirety.

#### TŠHWAHLEDI

1. "Kgomo e a tshwa!"
2. "E gangwa ke mang?"
3. "E gangwa ke rena batho ba  
bokgetha kgarebe ka lebole.
4. Ya hlatlaganya mabole le ge e ka ya  
megobo ke setudi
5. Seo kgorong ya gešu nama ya sona  
e ganwago le ke dimpša.
6. O se re o sega wa fela o nkgerula o  
tseba ke le sefowa,
7. Ditsebe ke thibadišwe ke sefako re

*etšwa merakeng-*

8. *Wa fela o nkgerula ke tla go buwa ka legakadima*
9. *Gobane ka thipa nka go fa serithi!*
10. *Tshelelang moše wono le tie le boneng mehlolo -*
11. *Ditau di kgailwe di bile di diša dikgomo,*
12. *Ge ke realo ke hlabana nyepo ke re e nyepoleng.*
13. *Lahlang direto go swana le ge le ile la lahla marumo.*
14. *Le ekwa motšhtšhi wa dinose go bobola,*
15. *La re re tla hlabana bjang ba iphetotše dinose.*
16. *Ka go realo la re segiša le mašimelakgano.*

1. The cow spits!
2. Who milks it?
3. It is milked by us, people who choose a bride according to her loin-cloth,
4. With the rider, she that wears her loin-cloth double is like a poor milker,
5. Whose flesh even dogs will refuse at our courtyard.
6. Do not laugh as you glance at me, for I am deaf,
7. As a result of the hail stone that caught up with me on my way from the cattle post,

8. Lest I cut your belly open with a sharp edged flint,
9. For the knife would leave you undisgraced.
10. Cross over to see wonders:
11. The lions are charmed to look after cattle.
12. This is a riddle: give the solution.
13. Leave your praises like when you throw away your spears.
14. When you hear the buzzing of a swarm of bees,
15. Saying how can we fight against them when they are turned themselves into bees.
16. By so doing making us laughing stocks of upstarts.

As in the previous example, the entire poem sounds incoherent. The expressions *Motho wa bokgetha kgarebe ka lebole* and *(kgarebe) ya (go)hlatlaganya mabole* refer to promiscuity in a man and woman, respectively, also something that society would not tolerate. The "*nkgerula*" (glances) referred to in line 6 alludes to the desire to disregard social censure, which culminates in the use of the sharp-edged flint to cut the belly - a subtle reference to sexual intercourse. This happened to Mafore in the previous example. Further on, in line 11 Matsepe presents an impotent young lad, the lion that looks after cattle. What typical imagery for this prolific poet? It seems to be a warning to young men and women to abstain from this intolerable behaviour and brandishes the horror of impotency or barrenness in their faces.

It is, however, some calculated deviation in the type of heroism. with deeds of valour where people are engaged in acts of prowess. This does not dismiss

the fact that perhaps the imaginary personalities were experts in their own right as far as sexual involvement was concerned. Certainly, the content is contemporary even though the characters do not portray real human beings. However, the praise poem is exploited and the entire atmosphere of traditional life where people still use loincloths as clothes is created.

In 1972 Segooa came up with many modern praises for chiefs and academics, and even ordinary people who have outstanding qualities. These are example of proto-forms. As in the case of traditional poetry, in *Dibata tša Lebowa*, the central theme is heroism or praise. The differences are in the motives and the division into stanzas. For example, in the praise of M.J. Madiba, the poet does not start with the common preamble, his poem is divided into stanzas of four lines each and the poem is not inspired by war, but by academic achievements or education. Many such examples will be discussed in 4.2.

Second to the proto-form we have the transitional praises which Moleleki (1975: 28) has termed 'marginal' because they consist of traditional poetic elements as well as European or Western poetic elements. They are distinguished on the grounds of thematic variety and of the actualising or negating of traditional poetic devices, such as parallelism, preliminary formulas, rhythm and a particular use of imagery.

The poem "Mafore" by Tseke also belongs to the transitional or marginal type. It is divided into three stanzas consisting of 8, 9 and 8 lines each. He has no pattern in the division into lines. Number seems to be controlled by the idea in the stanza.

However, E.M. Ramaila came up with *Direto* in 1956. In this anthology, Ramaila praises a cow (Kgomo 10) in the first person singular as follows:

KGOMO

1. *Mmuuu ...! Ekwa nna kgomo ya dinaka,*
2. *Ke nna kgomo modimo wa nko e meetse.*
3. *Ba re nna kgomo sebelega batho,*
4. *Ke nna lehumohumo la morw'a montsho.*
5. *Ke nna kgomo ke fula bjang.*
6. *Ke hola motho ka tša ka tše ntši,*
7. *Nama, marapo, bolôko, mokgopa, mafsi le makhura,*
8. *Go bala tšona ke go kwa mpa mokhoro.*
9. *Ngatha go kwala thwethwethe-thwethwethe ...!*
10. *Ge ke porotla, ke kgahlwa ke thêtô tša bašemane.*
11. *Ke nna kgomo ke lwa ka dinaka,*
12. *Ke rwele bogolo le bopoo ka magetla.*
13. *Ge ke befetšwe le ntlo ke a rutla ka lenaka.*
14. *Ngwako weee ...! Tshwiioo ... Tshwiioo ...!*
15. *Agee ...! Kgomo mabeleng e a borela!*
16. *Ke nna kgomo ke lema mabele, ka ja ka go utswa.*

1. 'Mmuuu ...! Listen to me the horned beast,
2. I am the cow the god with a wet nose.
3. They call me cow the carrier of



- people,
4. I am the wealth of the Africans.
  5. I am the cow who feeds on grass.
  6. I benefit man with many things,
  7. Meat, bones, dung, hide, milk and fat,
  8. To count them is to feel a full tummy.
  9. The hoofs we hear *thwethwethe-  
thwethwethe ...!*
  10. When I bellow I am inspired by the  
boys' praises.
  11. I am the cow I fight with my horns,
  12. I carry majesty and potency with my  
shoulders.
  13. When I am angry I demolish a house  
with my horns.
  14. *Ngwako weee ...! Tshwiioo ...!  
Tshwiioo ...!*
  15. Hail ...! cow in the field flattens the  
grain crops!
  16. I am cow that ploughs the corn, but  
only eats by stealing.

In the poem, the cow clearly identifies itself as the wealth of the Africans because of its meat, bones, dung, hide, milk and fat. Its physical appearance is also given as the one with horns. These horns it also employs in protecting itself from its enemies. The poem is divided into two stanzas of an equal number of lines. The cattle are praised for the benefits they offer in the life of man. Unlike the true traditional praise poetry, where the praise is inspired by war or heroism, this praise poem is motivated by the importance of cattle to man. Features such as parallelism and rhyme, especially internal rhyme, dominate the composition.

Another interesting example of a transitional type of modern praise poem is "Nkadingala" (a traditional doctor) by Mogashoa from a collection "Ngwanaka o tla gola" (1991: 33). Because the poem is very short, the whole poem is quoted. After the formal preamble, the manly deeds that characterise this traditional medicine man's claim to fame are as follows:

***Nkadingala***

1. *Kgomo e a tshwa,*
2. *E gangwa ke mang?*
3. *E gangwa ke nna pulamolomo  
tatagokhunollamoraba.*
4. *O se re hlobe diphofa ra tlo ja tšie le  
makoto.*
5. *Ke re tša gešo di kae Šatadi?*
6. *Go ba Mamatšhiri e thekgile  
megokgo,*
7. *Mosegare e hlwele e ithwele megono,*
8. *Kgwadi ya lešata ke galagala  
bohlabela.*
9. *Katološa lapa mmagoPodile,*
10. *E tle e be boahlolela ditaba,*
11. *Ke lekate la Marota kutwana 'a  
ditšhaba*
12. *Ke modumatau sekopanya-ditšhaba*
13. *Ke bana ba thari thupantlong tša  
basadi.*

14. *Bana ba dikokoto maunyane lebelong.*

1. The cow spits!
2. Who milks it?

3. It is milked by me the mouthopener  
the father of the opener of the  
divination pouch.
4. Do not cut out wings so that we eat a  
locust with its legs.
5. I say where are our belongings  
*šatadi?*
6. To be *Mamatšhiri* who wells tears in  
his eyes.
7. The whole day it was angry.
8. The clever one, I make noise in the  
east.
9. Widen your courtyard Podile's mother,
10. I should be the solution to problems.
11. I am the son of Maroteng, the main  
stay of nations.
12. I am the roaring lion that unites the  
nations.
13. The children of a family, the secrets  
of women initiation lodge,
14. The children of one man always in a  
hurry.

This is a Petrarchan sonnet that praises the traditional doctor. It comprises an octave and a sestet. It is an exception to the rule because it does not have the rhyme scheme *abbabba* and *edcede* or *ededed*, and indeed it is needless to speak of any rhyming at all. This poem is a true example of Western influence on praise poetry. While starting with the common stylized traditional preamble and having the compounded praise name formulas, it is a modern creation and a good example of a marginal or transitional type of praise poem. It resembles traditional praise poetry both in form and structure. The only difference is that it originated as a written and not oral form. The language used is traditional.

In the poem, the poet does not speak of any specific individual. "*Nkadingala*" can be anyone who practises the art of divination. From tradition *khunollamoraba* is the first payment before the divination pouch can be opened. "*Pulamolomo* and *khunollamoraba*" are synonymous. In "*Pulamolomo*" the traditional doctor, on accepting this first payment, can start focusing on the fall of the divination bones. Simply it means "to open the mouth" (of the traditional doctor). In the poem, he calls *pulamolomo* the father of *khunollamoraba*. There is a play on words. Compound words are also used for accurate descriptions. However, somewhere towards the end allusion is made to women. He refers to the secrets of the women, that is the act of giving birth to children. While we said earlier that modern poetry is fed by tradition, in some poems by Mogashoa, Tseke, Matsepe and others, their imagery seems far deeper than those found in traditional praises.

In conclusion the exposition of the developmental process of modern praise poetry, which had its source in the traditional oral literature, will highlight a few differences, despite the similarities and borrowings. It should not be surprising that the first poets to put their thoughts down on paper adapted the techniques of praise poetry to their everyday experiences. According to Mashabela (1982: 37),

Praise poetry was thus gradually weaned from its services to the haughty feats of arms of yore. Heroes in social and educational spheres were lauded in praise poetry.

However, some of the differences are not really fundamental ones, but are due mainly to the fact that the writer exists in different social and political climates from those in which the oral poetry has traditionally had its place. The practice of self-praise, highly favoured in the traditional culture, is extremely rare in modern poetry, perhaps because these days it is considered awkward for one to praise oneself openly. Again, Western expression has made its mark with the belief that "self praise has no merit."

Then there is the critical element of performance. Since the oral poet's livelihood depends on his performance, he prefers to please rather than offend. Whatever criticism there is in the poem or song is usually subdued, or else offered in the spirit of benevolent cautioning. By contrast, African poetry since the colonial period is mostly critical or combative, and the modern poet, who does not have to praise anyone to survive, uses even an opportunity to praise in order to start an argument. This is the Northern Sotho world of poetry into which Mamogobo ushered *Leduleputswa* in 1951. Puleng (1981: 9) praises Mandela's commitment to liberation. No doubt in "*Homola Ngwanaka*" the nobility of the liberation struggle, his release and inevitability of its success are depicted:

*Khunologo yago e tseleng;  
O tlo buša o tlo rena o mmušiši;*

Your release is coming,  
You will rule, you will reign, you are a ruler.

One notable characteristic of traditional praise poetry is hyperbole, which renders the subject larger than life. With the exception of poems which consciously echo the oral tradition, the tendency to exaggerate is weak in modern praise poetry which, at any rate, has little interest in the kind of material gains that motivate the oral poet.

Most modern African poetry differs from the traditional in tone, largely because it concentrates more on the problems of present-day social and political life. This is not to say that the traditional poet has no worries about or grudges against his society. In societies marked by widespread oppression, such as the society in South Africa, a good deal of oral poetry is still directed against the general situation. Who thought that Puleng was referring to Mandela's bravery, self-sacrifice and dedication to the liberation struggle when he says,

*Ikhomolele samma,  
Ntwa o e hlabane o mogale*

Hush hush my mother's child,  
You have fought a good battle, you are a  
brave man.

This extract exhibits a true praise motif. With the transition to modern poetry, various stylistic elements of the oral tradition have been largely ignored. In very few recently published anthologies does one find introductory formulas such as "*kgomo e a tshwa!* or *Agee ...!*" Even the closing formulas such as, "*Ke tšhaba mediti*" are seldom incorporated in written poetry today.

There are many differences and similarities between traditional praise poetry and modern praise poetry. Now it should be indicated whether one is better than the other. The storage of linguistic cues in books and other records has made possible delayed communication and therefore extraordinarily complex communication. It should be remembered that no communication can take place until the reader processes the recorded linguistic cues through his or her brain, thus employing many of the neural areas used in the understanding of spoken language. In other words, one must first convert the recorded linguistic cues into a form of speech, silent, subvocalised or fully projected. In this process the literate scholar and scientist are at one with the illiterate keeper of oral tradition.

This has been a revelation in the development of modern praise poetry and examples of some available modern praise poems of chiefs, imaginary people, outstanding personalities in the community such as leaders, academics and praises of animals and divining bones.

## 4.2 PRAISES OF CHIEFS AND WARRIORS

Most studies so far of African praise poetry have indicated that poets concentrated on praises professionally sung for chiefs, warriors and outstanding leaders in the community. Even where it is recognised that ordinary persons also composed their own poems, these have generally been neglected, sometimes even dismissed. But a major aim of this discussion is to investigate whether praises of chiefs and warriors, of no tribal wars, invasions and cattle raids, are still composed by the modern poets. Modern poets are those whose poetry originates in written form, which means a modern poem is an individual creation and, in most cases, the poet is known. The few praises still in existence have been influenced from traditional poetry. Many of the stylistic features characteristic of traditional poetry have been retained. But others have forced into Northern Sotho poetry unfamiliar poetic techniques like rhyme which did not previously feature. These features do not adapt very well to the structure of the Northern Sotho poetry.

Illustrating that the key to successful modern poetry writing is dependent on traditional elements, Moleleki (1975: 29) says:

If one were to point out the direction for our modern poetry, one would not hesitate to encourage Basotho poets to keep as many of the stylistic features characteristic of traditional poetry, as possible, for in them lies the future as well as the potential for development of our modern poetry.

Many of the examples which follow are a mixture of traditional and western poetry. Where common techniques of repetitions are actualised, they are following in the footprints of traditional poetry.

A poem that qualifies as a proto-form will:

- (1) identify the hero
- (2) have heroism as the theme.
- (3) express the first person narrator's view point.
- (4) consist of paragraphs which carry a central idea instead of stanzas which sometimes have a predetermined number of lines.
- (5) feature imagery which is overwhelmingly eulogistic.
- (6) use compounds for accurate description
- (7) repeat patterns.
- (8) make use of allusions
- (9) use obsolete words (archaism)
- (10) address an imaginary audience (reader)

Not all the features will be represented in all the poems. For instance, archaic words which often mark traditional praises may be absent; the audience may not be addressed directly; some may be arranged in stanzas of an equal number of lines. In the examples, where the poem is very long, only one to three verses, a stanza or a paragraph will be quoted. The entire poem appears in the appendix. The first example "*Kgoši Sekhukhune*", comes from *Naledi*, a collection by S R Machaka (1967: 72/3).

#### *KGOŠI SEKHUKHUNE*

1. *Re a lotšha, motho wa Bopedi  
bopepabatho,*
2. *Matsogo a phuphuthela wena letsogo  
la bogale,*
3. *Matolo a kwatamela wena therešo ya  
marumong.*
4. *Thari e swana e reng e go bitša  
Sekhukhune?*



5. *Gobane o hlabane nabo o se a ba khukhuretše;*
6. *Wena Theledi 'a Marota, wena kgoši Sekhukhune!*
7. *Theeletša lentšu la Noko le kgeremoša dithaba.*
8. *Re le bone le pshikološa maswika a Thaba-Leolo,*
9. *Morwa-Motšhe ke kgoši ya go kwewa ke maswika,*
10. *Ge ntw'a e befile Mpedipedi o hlafa mahlong;*
11. *O fetoga lejapela a roba dihlare le meetse,*
12. *Madira ka moka a hlaname a tumiša Sekhukhune.*
13. *Bangwe Bopedi ba mmitš'a Tau ya ka maweng,*
14. *Bangwe ba re ke noga ya Leolo morw'a mokopa,*
15. *Kgoši Sekhukhune o bopa gohle a lokologile,*
16. *Ge o okomela teng ya Lepelle ga o mo hloke,*
17. *O hwetš'a a efa dikwena le dipolomeetse molao;*
18. *Ke mang bjale a sa tsebeng motheo wa Bopedi?*
19. *E sa le a tla mo lefaseng ga ešo a*

*katakata,*

20. *Yena re bone a sepetša dikgoši  
santlautlau-*
21. *O kwele lentšu la madira le llela  
tebalelo,*
22. *A re tsebang Maroteng mokgalabje a  
hlabana.*
23. *Le tla mo reng wa go thunya bogale  
ka gohle!*
24. *Ka mo a sekamelago madira a wa  
makanakana.*
25. *Ke Thalakubu ya Bopedi, Noko ya  
Thaba-Leolo,*
26. *O sopagane le meetse a Lepelle a  
leba Leboa,*
27. *O tsene Tswetla a retwa ke batho le  
mekokolome;*
28. *O rile ge a boela Maroteng a khunela  
maphego,*
29. *Ya tsena Noko ya thuthupa ya pšhatla  
Matsutsa;*
30. *Sekhukhune o tseba go ikokotlela ka  
meetse.*

1. We greet you the foundation of  
Bopedi the carrier of people
2. We clap hands for you with a brave  
hand,
3. We go down on our knees for you the  
true one at battle,
4. Why do the blacks call you

Sekhukhune?

5. You fought directly against them  
without stalking,
6. You the slippery one of Marota, you  
*Kgoši* Sekhukhune.
  
7. Listen to the voice of Noko rumbling  
in the mountains,
8. We saw it rolling down the stones of  
Leolo Mountains,
9. The Son of Motšhe is a *Kgoši* who is  
obeyed by stones,
10. When the battle intensifies  
Mpedipedi changes his face,
11. He changes to a mysterious mountain  
snake and breaks trees and water,
12. All the soldiers change and give  
praise to Sekhukhune.
  
13. Some in Bopedi call him Lion of the  
caves,
  
14. Others say he is a snake of Leolo  
mountains and a son of a Mamba,
15. Chief Sekhukhune roars freely  
everywhere,
16. When you peep into the belly of  
Lepelle you will find him,
17. You find him giving advice to the  
crocodiles and the leguans;
18. Who does now not know the  
foundation of Bopedi?

19. Since he was born he never retreated,
20. We saw him ill-treating other chiefs-
21. He heard the voice from the soldiers pleading formerly,
22. Know that at Maroteng old men are fighting.
23. What will you do to him for his anger oozes from all sides?
24. The side to which he leans, soldiers fall upside down.
25. He is the swimming hippopotamus of Bopedi, the Porcupine of Leolo mountain,
26. He twisted along the waters of Lepelle on his way to Leboa,
27. He entered Tswetla and was praised by people and roosters,
28. When he went back to Maroteng he folded his wings,
29. Noko entered with a cracking noise and smashed the Matsutsa (Matebele);
30. Sekhukhune knows how to lean upon the water.

The poem is written in a Western stanzaic form of ten stanzas of six lines each, yet the spirit is traditional in nature and a crafty reflection of the praise aesthetic is discernible.

The poem does not start with the common preamble of "*kgomo e a tshwa!*" The speaker or poet starts by greeting the founder of the Bapedi nation with due respect. This is evident in his clapping of hands for the brave one. He also

kneels before the true warrior. The poet is surprised by the people who call this hero, Sekhukhune, for the name refers to someone who goes about creeping like a hunter stalking game. The fact is, the people all saw when the hero was directly engaged in battle. Noko is the totem of the Bapedi. It happened that when they were crossing the Leolo mountain, they picked up a spine of a porcupine. This looked very beautiful and they decided to adopt this prickly animal as their totem. He is also associated with a variety of snakes and a lion. Like a lion, he knows no boundaries and his voice can be heard everywhere.

Even though the poem does not start with the usual stylised traditional introduction and is divided into stanzas, it has retained the traditional spirit. In this poem someone else is praising the hero. This poem is a true individual creation. The poet has selected words from the word store of the Bapedi such as Leolo mountains, the porcupine (*Noko*), *Marota*, *Lepelle*, *Morwa' Motšhe* and *Ngwaritsi*.

However, today not many such poems are created. What is found in this category is people adapting the old praises to suit the present spirit. Others go to the people, record their rendition and then transcribe them into their collections.

It seems evident that as far as praises of chiefs and warriors are concerned, even the most up and coming poets cannot make headway without using adaptations in which they use the same motifs, but eliminate archaic words, add embellishments, or even go to the extent of changing the punctuation.

An interesting comparison can be made between "*Kgoši Thulare*" by Mogashoa (1988: 38) and poem 1 of *Ina la Kxoši Thulare wa l*, by Phala which was written in 1935. During Phala's time poems were rendered on the spur of the moment and there was no time to arrange the poem into stanzas or paragraphs. Mogashoa has divided this poem into three paragraphs. The first paragraph

consists of six lines, the second of eight lines and the third of ten lines. The poem has been simplified and is easy to understand. The division was also done according to the central idea in the lines. This poem complies with the three phases advocated by Pretorius (1989: 61) of statement, development and conclusion which is also nearer to the ring and the envoi.

### *KGOŠI THULARE*

1. *Ke thuu 'a phalakgatha Mangana.*
2. *Mogwerake o robetše gare ga mohlape,*
3. *Go robetše Mogwerake Kgabo selema sa Morwakoma,*
4. *Koma ga di tšhabe Moseitla Mokone,*
5. *Ke ngwana 'boMatlaule 'a Ledimolo Mohube,*
6. *A mantlhanyane a bohlole bja Tubatse.*
  
7. *Ledimo le tšhuma batho.*
8. *Naga ka mphagane wa kopo.*
9. *Hlahlarulela Lebotša la gabo le senya mahlong,*
10. *Nthete Lebotša,*
11. *Ke be bjalo ka kgomo ye tšhungwana ya marumo,*
12. *Ke be bjalo ka kgomo ye tšhungwana ya marumo, se ya mabukubukung,*
13. *O bone bontši bo e letše tlala nageng,*
  
14. *Ke yena Kgaletlole ya marumo.*

15. *Mogwerake ke Sethele mpšanyana  
tša ka tša na tša mo raka,*
16. *Tša mo raka tša mo hlahlela leopeng,*
17. *Ka Mokaditši ga ka mo raka,*
18. *Ke hweditše mogwerake a tšhabile,*
19. *Sehlola sa gaRatau matolo ke  
matšahla,*
20. *Ke Ngana la ga Mosenyamahlong,*
21. *Ke matsogakaditšu tša boMošiane,*
22. *Ke Nape ga ke tšhoge lehu,*
23. *Ke tšhoga bošaedi*
24. *Ke tšhoga le ge ke letša naka fela ke  
leletša bothakga.*

1. I am the shoot of Mangana that  
suddenly appears.
2. My friend is sleeping amongst the  
herd of cattle,
3. It is my friend Kgabo who is sleeping  
Selema the son of Morwakoma,
4. The initiation institution is not afraid of  
the grey one of Mokone,
5. He is the son of Matlaule of Ledimolo  
of Mohube,
6. Of Mantlhanyane the first one to  
emerge from Tubatse.
7. The storm is setting people on fire.
8. The land that is overhanging like a  
hare's tail.
9. Roof your hut Lebotša, it is getting  
spoilt in the eyes,

10. Praise me Lebotša,
11. So that I should be like a white-faced  
ox of the spears,
12. That is going to the wrong side,
13. You saw many sleeping hungry in the  
field,
14. He is *Kgalatlole* of the spears.
  
15. My friend is Sethele who was chased  
away by my dogs,
16. They chased him and he was trapped  
in a donga,
17. By Mokgaditsi I have not chased him  
away,
18. I found my friend having run away
19. Outcast of Rakau, the knees are  
creaking,
20. He is Ngana (lengana) of  
Mosenyamahlong,
21. I am the aggressive one of Mošiane,
22. I am Nape, I am not afraid of death,
23. I am afraid of carelessness.
24. I am afraid of playing a flute even  
when I do it for good.

*INA LA KXOŠI THULARE WA 1*

*Kxomo 'a thswa!*

*E xama ke mang?*

*E xama ke nna*

1. *A re thuu! A re phalaxxathaa! Wa  
Mangana a*



2. *moxwer'axwe a tsoxile mahlape; Xo  
tsogile*
3. *moxwer'axwe Seleme sa Morwa'  
Koma.*
4. *Koma xa di thšabela Thšahile,  
Madika-dikana, Di thšabela Mose-tla-  
Mokone.*
5. *Ke ngwana bo Matlaule a Ledimo, a  
bo Mohube a*
6. *Manthlanyane 'a bohlole bya Tabane,*
7. *Ledimo le thšuma-batho,*
8. *Naxa ka Mphaxane, wa Kopo*
9. *Hlahla-rulela ka Kxoši Lebotša la xa  
bo Lesenya-mahlong.*
10. *Nthepeng, Le tlotše motaxa,*
11. *Nke ke kxomo e thšungwana ya dira  
Se-ya-Mabukubukung*
12. *Wa bona butši bo letše le tlala  
naxeng;*
13. *Ke yena Kxalatlole ya marumo,  
Mabuša  
Yena moxwer'ake Sethele.*
14. *Xomme mpyanyana tša mo raka, tša  
na tša mo hlahlela leopeng*
15. *Ke Monoka ka Mokxaditsi xa ke mo  
raka;*
16. *Ke hwetša Sethele a thšabile.*
17. *Ke Sehlole sa xa Rakabu, se tšofetše,  
matolo ke mašahla.*
18. *Ke ngana la xa Ma-senya-mahlong*
19. *Ke Ma-tsoxa-ka-ditšu tša Mošiane.*

20. *Ke Baube, xa ke tsoxe.*

The cow spits!

Who milks it?

It is milked by me!

1. The shoot! That suddenly appears!
2. Of Mangana of my friend who woke  
up amongst the herd of cattle,
3. My friend Seleme the son of Morwa'  
Koma.
4. When the initiation ran away in  
circles,  
Running away to Moseitla-Mokone.
5. He is the brother of Matlaule, the  
storm, of Mohube
6. the first one of the origin of Tabane,
7. The storm, that puts people on fire.
8. The land at Mphaxane of the young  
one,
9. Roof your hut with the chief,  
Lebotša of the spoiler in the eyes.
10. From the young girls remove the  
brightness,
11. Like the white-faced ox of the soldiers  
approaching from the wrong side.
12. You saw the hungry sleeping when  
you came to the field,
13. He is *kxalatlole* of the spears, the  
governor my friend Sethele.
14. And the dogs chased him away, and  
he was trapped in a ditch,
15. I whipped him with Mokxaditsi when I

- sent him away.
16. I found Sethele had run away,
  17. the outcast of Rakabu, the old, with  
knees creaking,
  18. He is the wormwood of the spoiler-in-  
the-eyes.
  19. He wakes up by the elbow of  
Mošiane.
  20. I am Baube, I don't fear.

In the original, the words which are not underlined are either written in the new orthography or synonyms are given. In other cases they have been omitted by the poet. For instance, he did not use the preamble used in the original. In line 2, instead of waking up (*go tsoga*) he has put in the opposite, which is sleep (*-robetše*). In the fifth sentence he has changed the punctuation to start the sixth sentence with the last word of the fifth in the original. The word "Tabane" at the end of line 6 is replaced by the name of a well-known river "Tubatse" in Sekhukhuneland which helps him retain the context of the poem. His friend is "Sethele" and in some sentences instead of this name he only says "*Mogwerake*" (my friend). Even though this is a slavish imitation, Mogashoa has given a simpler composition which is easy to follow. This comparison of these two versions of the same poem illustrates some of the similarities and differences which exist between them.

#### 4.3 PRAISES OF IMAGINARY PEOPLE

When it comes to poetry about imaginary people, Matsepe is the foremost of composers. According to Pretorius (1989: 80),

An important exploiter of the traditional  
praise poem for people is the famous author,  
O.K. Matsepe.

In some of his poems on imaginary people, human characters are portrayed in totality. The compositions create the entire atmosphere of traditional life in its varied facets. It is difficult to draw any line of demarcation between Matsepe's praise poems and traditional poems. The only difference is that Matsepe's poems are a result of individual, imaginative creation and do not belong to any specific person. His presentation is enigmatic. Poems like Tšhwahledi, Lemetša, Tsemiši, Kgoroši, Ntšhiringeng appear authentic even if they treat imaginary heroes. Tšhwahledi is a gate-crasher, Lemetša is one who swallows, Tsemiši is one who pegs into the ground, Kgoroši is one who brings cattle or people home and lastly Ntšhiringeng refers to "going out of my way". The references and allusions are also superbly annotated. Tseke can also not be left out. His treatment of praise poems such as Mphempe, Mafore, Kgomokgwana, Maribolle is also fully acceptable. The only difference is that he has a twist in the themes which would not be acceptable in traditional life.

Traditional poems are all based to a large extent upon reality. The character portrayal was based on the actual personal experiences and actions of the protagonist. Many of the modern praise poems that originated as written poetry are not from the oral heritage of any specific community. An example of this is "Kgoroši" (Matsepe 1971:37),

#### KGOROŠI

1. *"Kgomo e a tshwa!"*
2. *"E gangwa ke mang?"*
3. *"E gangwa ke nna Kgoroši wa  
masogana*
4. *Yo a hweditšego diphala di eme  
sekgobotho,*
5. *Lerumo la gagwe la hlaba tše pedi di  
bobetše*
6. *Lethebo la tšona ka le iša ka mošate.*

7. *Le be le ile kae ka ntwā ya maloba,*
8. *Mo ke amogilego manaba dikgomo le mathopša*
9. *Nna serokolwana se sennyane se ikoketšago ka monkgo?*
10. *Bagešu ba re ke nna mohweleretshipi*
11. *Wo o paletšego dilepe di kgobokane.*
12. *Ke ile ke tsena bogwe lekope la ka le lla mahlomola*
13. *A bongwana hlokapelo tšholla megokgo o fokotše moro wa hlogo*
14. *Ka hwetša ba bogwe ba betšana ka dirumula -*
15. *Ba re e lego gona le sa potološwa ke eng le tseba go etla kgakgatha?*
16. *Tlogelang mahufa, baagelani, gobane a yona pula ke marumo."*

1. The cow spits!
2. Who milks it?
3. It is milked by me Kgoroši of the young men
4. Who found impalas standing in a herd,
5. Whose spear killed two while they were still resting.
6. Their kaross I took to the royal court.
7. Where were you during the war of the other day,
8. Where I captured cattle and captives from the enemy
9. I, the small medicinal herb that is

- helped by its smell?
10. My people call me the Red Iron-bush.
  11. Which could not be chopped by numerous axes.
  12. When I arrived at the in-laws, my lekope sounded grief
  13. Of the children who are not strong and who shed the tears to diminish the gravy of the head
  14. I found the in-laws fighting-
  15. Saying why do you still beat about the bush when you know the great one is coming?
  16. Forget about jealousy my neighbours, because its rain is made of spears.

The title "Kgoroši" refers to someone who brings either cattle or people home. The name comes from the verb "goroga", which means to arrive. The significance of this name is revealed in line 3 which identifies him.

... *Kgoroši wa masogana.*

... Kgoroši of the young men

This identification indicates that he is a leader of initiated boys. That is why they are called "masogana" young men. Then follows a hyperbole: Kgoroši was able to kill two springboks simultaneously with one spear. Having made the kaross from their hides, he takes the blanket to the chief. Then he involves his audience or readers by asking them where they were when he was engaged in battle. All these are praise motifs. Who can doubt that this is a purely traditional poem which refers to a leader of the initiated young men. Later he captures cattle and captives from his enemy. Then he refers to his

stature in which he is associated with *Serokolwana*, a kind of medicinal herb popularly used for many ailments. When used, its smell lasts for a long time. Small people often talk a great deal in order to equal the robust. That is why even in folktales the hare tricks the lion, elephant and hippo. His people associate him with *mohweleretshipi* (Red Iron-bush), whose wood when dry, is very tough. He sees cowards actually shedding tears before they start to cry, which implies that he has no time for cowards.

This is an example of a prototype which marks an important tendency in the development of Northern Sotho poetry.

Tseke, like Matsepe, has written many poems about imaginary people. His poems are also not easy to differentiate from traditional praises. His language is deep and sometimes difficult to peruse and he coins words as he composes. An interesting example is *Maribolle* (Tseke 1981:26/7) which refers to someone who uncovers something:

#### MARIBOLLE

1. *Kgomo e a tsha!*
2. *E gangwa ke mang?*
3. *E gangwa ke nna Maribolle a magat'a*
4. *Batho kua gagešo thiting ya  
Ntsweletau,*
5. *Moo ke pipilego bana ba tshehlakgolo  
tau*
6. *Ya mariri, nong-sehloka diphego,*
7. *Phego tša tau ke dipolai mafagwana  
bohloko,*
8. *Dinala ya ba mphaka magale mabedi  
mararo*
9. *Ka sega ke beletša ba malapana a*

*mannyane*

10. *Ka sega ke lahlela molete  
motšwalentšu swiswing*
11. *Ke re marwale ka dimpa o a ithwalela*
12. *Mola setseka segolo ke loba  
ntlopuleng ya botšha.*
  
13. *Katakatang ka morago kgomo di šia  
maribe,*
14. *Di tšhaba nna Maribolla ka šedi  
makakara*
15. *A bona-dikhubedu monna mapeša  
mantši,*
16. *Mapeša ga ke apare a magotlo-  
mankga pelabelela,*
17. *Ke apara la phaga phukubje ya  
marinini a mahubedu*
18. *A hubadišwe ke mabete a batho  
ntlheng ya rumo*
19. *Le thata mahwidingwa ka go  
phaphasetšwa*
20. *Ke motsebi wa kgati seitia-sentsokela.*
21. *Koša ga ke bine ya mathumaša ke le  
mogotla.*
22. *Šoboro la phokgo Maribolle a kgong-  
dithata.*

1. The cow spits!
2. Who milks it?
3. It is being milked by me, Maribolle of  
the skulls
4. Of the people there at home on the



- bottom of Ntsweletau,
5. Where I covered the children of the grey lion
  6. The male one, the vulture without wings,
  7. The wings of a lion are its teeth the instiller of pain.
  8. The nails are like a double edged knife
  9. I cut throwing to those of small families.
  10. I cut throwing into my mouth in the dark
  11. I say the one who carries with his belly is carrying provisions.
  12. While the big piece I pay tribute to the royal family.
  13. Go backward the cattle are afraid of Maribe;
  14. They are afraid of me Maribolle who exhumes craniums carefully.
  15. With red feet the man with many breech clothes
  16. I don't wear drawer of ratskin - the stinking rock-rabbit
  17. I wear that of the wild jackal with red gums
  18. They were coloured red by the blood of people on the tip of my spear.
  19. The hard one that is carefully used.
  20. I have knowledge of hitting expertly

with a cane

21. I do not sing songs of young girls  
while I am a strong one.
- 22.. The strong uninitiated one Maribolle  
of hard woods.

The stereotyped preamble to praise poetry which consists of lines 1 to 3 is a characteristic common to most of Tseke's praises. Maribolle, although a hero as the content demonstrates, is an imaginary creation and does not refer to any specific person. The poem is divided into two paragraphs. In the poem, Maribolle comes from the verb "ribolla", which means to unearth. He is pictured forcing open the skulls of his people at the bottom of Ntsweletau. There he has covered the children of the grey lion, which is associated with a vulture that has no wings. The lion's wings are his teeth and the nails are his multi-edged knife which he uses to cut pieces of meat for his family and himself.

The second paragraph alludes to his fierceness when he refers to cattle that are afraid of the man with red feet and many loincloths. "A hubaditšwe ke mabete a batho ntlheng ya rumo" is pregnant with imagery. *Bobete* refers to blood that comes from a slaughtered animal and this is then cooked by an expert and consumed by men. The line is also highly exaggerated. This hero, if he were a real person, could do well at "Kgoro" in the punishment of those convicted of some wrong. While he does not sing a song of girls as he is a guy, he is uninitiated and a leader. This is contradictory because, according to tradition, an uninitiated person remains a boy for life.

#### 4.4 PRAISES OF OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY LEADERS

Pretorius (1989) refers to this type of praises as the prototype. Even some schools such as Boaparankwe, have such praises. Some Whites who have lent a helping hand among the Bapedi have also earned such praises. In Dibata tša Lebowa Segooa, has poems praising chiefs, ministers in Lebowa

government departments, seconded men who were in an advisory capacity in Lebowa such as Ngaka Eiselen, Ngaka van Zyl and academics such as Morena Madiba and Makwela. Other poets have also had a share in the praises of other outstanding leaders in the community.

These praises are thematically and structurally a slavish imitation or simulation of traditional poetic types and originate as poems written by individuals. Viewed closely and juxtaposed with traditional praises, there is an important shift in perspective. While the traditional praises drew their inspiration from combat, hunting expeditions, rituals, political and social circumstances, the modern traditional praises are inspired mainly by academic achievement or education in a new or changed society. The praises may also arise in response to the good leadership qualities shown by some people in the community. Until 1987, academics at Unisa always praised their institution, the achievers from the institution and their tutors. Unisa became a springboard for many universities such as the Universities of Zululand and the North; for example, "*NgeUnisa eminyakini eyikhulu*" by Msimang.

In *Moso ke Legonyana Mogashoa* (1990:18), outlines the great and versatile Phatudi's genealogy. He tries to show the connection between the Marota and the people of Kekana at Moletlane, and begins by portraying himself as "Sepharara sa Manyama Letlemetlu la meetse a pula a boMabuse" (The big one of Manyama of the bullfrog of rain water the relative of Mabuse).

Segooa (1972:33) portrays the achievements of Phatudi as follows:

*Šatee! yo a sa rego šate o a lla o rokame,  
O akometše 'diba tša thuto morwa' Phatudi  
Ke mmeakanyi wa ditaba hlotlo la ba  
tšiekgalaka,*

Hurrah! He who does not extol is as good  
as dead,  
He is elevated, and watches fountains of  
education, Son of Phatudi,  
He is the organiser of affairs, the staff of the  
Blacks.

Appealing imagery is used. Phatudi is raised high above everybody and is administrator of the affairs of education in Lebowa.

Malebana (1991:30) gives Professor Chris Barnard well-deserved praise as the repairer of hearts and lungs:

*Ke sekwankwetla sa koloni a kapa,  
Mothudi wa dipelo le maswafo.  
Morulagadi wa dikgorogoro tša ka teng,  
Yena Phaswamanaila a mmakgodì'akgokgo.*

He is the strong man from the Cape Colony,  
The repairer of hearts and lungs,  
The organiser of the ailing parts of the  
inside,  
He, the true doctor.

These statements cannot be disputed. Professor Chris Barnard made history when he became the first doctor to successfully transplant a human heart.

Tseke (1987:54) praises Maje Serudu for his well-deserved achievements. He begins by extolling him as belonging to Magatle, a district of Moletlane and then proceeds to extol his achievements and the great contribution he makes to society. Serudu is portrayed as someone who is burning with a great deal of information to offer to the nation.

*Kgomo e a tsha!*

*A kgongwana kgomo ye e gangnwa ke mang?*

*E gangwa ke nna kgomokhulong khulong,*

*Namane ye e boago Kgobadi Moletlane*

*Ye e boago Magatle a dikhungwane*

*E tlogo e šankiša mokaka motseng*

*Go amušā bathobatho ba moriri wa hlogo.*

The cow spits!

And who milks the calf of this cow?

It is milked by me the brown cow

The calf that comes from Kgobadi of Moletlane

That comes from Magatle of dikhungwane

That comes back to the village with a full udder

To come and feed the real people.

Just like Sekhukhune in the traditional praises, Maje is associated with the river. He is said to be the tributary of the Gompies River, a river that offers life. Without drinking water, nothing can survive. He himself is the fountain where many come to draw water.

*Hono ga ke serokolwana ke serokolo.*

*Se se kgengwago ke merole le merojana.*

Today I am not the small herb but the real herb

That is used by the old and the young.

This poem is encouraging and appealing since it praises the qualities of a man worthy of such high praises.

In modern praise poetry, unlike in the case of traditional praises, the protagonist does not speak for himself, but is actually put on a stage and described as Segooa did for Phatudi or Tseke for Maje. These are not the only academics to be praised. Professor Mokgokong, Barena Kgatla, Makwela, Ngaka Madiba, O.K. Matsepe and many others have been praised for their good deeds.

#### 4.5 PRAISES OF ANIMALS AND BIRDS

Although many praises centred on animals and birds, today such praises are only composed in a few instances. With the cutting and destroying of the natural environment, many animals and birds have disappeared and some have already become extinct. For instance, the pangolin (Scaly Anteater) is an endangered species. A curious looking animal with funny characteristics, the pangolin's scales protected it against most enemies, and when alarmed it rolled itself into a tight ball. For this reason many people call it "Kgwara", which refers to something that cannot be solved. Being a tight ball, it was impenetrable and this made it impossible to keep in captivity. With such characteristics it deserves a praise poem.

No new poems have been composed. Slavish imitations are found, such as those which characterised the previous categories. They are adaptations with embellishments here and there. Even praises of cattle are no more. African cattle are no longer given names from which praises used to emanate. No longer can one speak of *tshehla ya mariri* (lion), *tolodi ya mabala* (leopard), *manyela phagong* (owl), *nonyana ya go bitša pula* (rainbird), *nonyana sekgona-go-betla* (woodpecker), *morwa masekana* (hare). Children can only see these in the zoo and no longer in their natural habitat.

Many modern poets have tried their poetic skills on compositions of animals and birds. The most interesting compositions of praises of animals, birds and insects are those by Matsepe. He decided to try his imaginative creation on the praise sonnet. Matsepe has tried his skill on end-rhyme which is not uniform to show that it is not an aspect of traditional praise poetry. These animals and birds do not praise themselves, but are the narrator. One such praise sonnet is *Mmutla* (hare).

#### MMUTLA

1. *Ge e ka ba a go rerešetša o  
sehvirihwiri,*
2. *Dinonyana di mpoditše di na le yona  
tswiri;*
3. *Boradia o bo rutilwe ke mang, wena  
thuri*
4. *Ge diphoofolo o di gogiša boima ruri?*
5. *Tlou le tau ka leopeng o di weditše,*
6. *Phukubje le tše dingwe ka nose o di  
boloditše.*
7. *Nna go mpotša di šetše di mpoditše -*
8. *Bjoko go bo lootša o bo looditše.*
9. *Nna ena go ntšeletša o ka se ke,*
10. *Diphoofolo ka bohlae go mphala di  
ka se ke;*
11. *Kgorong le go go seka ke tle ke seke-*
12. *Mabutle o moganyaganyane go  
mphala o ka se ke!*
13. *Ka mpša go go saseletša ke tla dira,*
14. *Go šeba ka wena gomme ke tla dira.*

(1977:7)

1. If they are saying the truth about you,  
you are a crook,
2. The birds told me and they were with  
a tswiri,
3. To be cunning who taught you, you  
zombi
4. When you make the animals to suffer  
so much?
5. Elephant and lion you made them fall  
into a ditch,
6. The jackal together with others you  
punished severely.
7. Me they have already told
8. The brain you have sharpened.
9. Me you can never outwit,
10. The animals will never outwit me in  
wisdom;
11. At the Kgoro even to look for you I  
won't -
12. Mabutle, you are too small to outwit  
me!
13. With a dog I will chase you,
14. To take you as a relish I will.

Matsepe, a traditionalist, has drawn ideas from the world of folklore and folktales. The hare is considered a trickster in most folktales. He has emerged as the villain more often than any other animal. Mr Hare has often led many large animals into trouble and then escaped unpunished. In the story of "hare and lion", he tricked lion into climbing on to the roof of a hut then nailed his tail to a pole and started eating the fattest pieces of meat from the cooking pot. The hippo and elephant were also tricked into a tug-of-war by the hare. The poet argues that the hare cannot outwit him because he is still small. The



words "-o moganyaganyane" refer to a young and inexperienced thing. The imagery strengthens the argument and emphasises the small stature of the hare. But in turn, Matsepe adds clarity to this imagery by using it in a context which brings out its full meaning.

Another example of a praise poem of an animal is "Kolobe" by Tlooke (1987:33).

### KOLOBE

1. *Ke ja tša bošaedi nna.*
2. *Ga ke hlalle selo ke kwametša fela,*
3. *Ke metša makwate a go feta a sejato  
nna;*
4. *ke nyaka le tšeo ba rego ke mafeela*
5. *Ge ke eja ke ja le tša go nkgā tša go  
lepologa,*
6. *Ke ja kudu gore ke none,*
7. *Meetse ke a tšwanya go fihla ke  
lapologa,*
8. *Sa go nona go swana le nna o ka se  
se bone.*
  
9. *Ge ke robetše o tla re ke hwile,*
10. *Ke pompala letšatši ka moka,*
11. *Ke tlo tsoga fela ge di gwaile,*
12. *Ka fsiela dijonyana tšela ba mphago  
ka moka.*
13. *Maraka le digwere ke a ja ge ke le  
bjalo.*
14. *Ke kwa bose ge ke a pšhatla ke  
metša,*

15. *Ga o bone ke hlagahla makhura  
bjalo?*
  16. *Ga ke dupe dijo ke no di metša.*
- 
1. I eat the dirty things myself.
  2. I don't select anything I just swallow
  3. I swallow lumps bigger than that of a  
glutton;
  4. I need even those that are nothing to  
others
  5. When I eat I eat stinking things and  
things which trickle down,
  6. I eat voraciously so that I become fat,
  7. Water I drink in excess until I am  
refreshed.
  8. A thing as fat as I, you will not find.
- 
9. When I am asleep you will think that  
I am dead,
  10. I sleep the whole day,
  11. I wake up only when I am hungry,
  12. I swallow off the food they give me.
  13. Vegetable marrows and carrots I eat  
as I am.
  14. I enjoy it when I crush and swallow  
them,
  15. Don't you see how fat I am?
  16. I don't sniff the food I simply swallow  
it.

This poem about the pig consists of four stanzas of eight lines each. While Tlooke was describing the actions and characteristics of a pig, he placed it in

the first person singular, which makes it a self-praise poem. A pig is known as a filthy animal. It is filthy because it does not care where it sleeps and what it eats. So says the poem. "Die boere sê; 'Hy eet alles vir soetkoek op'. Everything that comes its way as long as it can fit into its mouth, it will swallow. In Northern Sotho there is a saying, "se se nontšhitšego kolobe ga se tsebje" (That which has fattened a pig is unknown). As long as it is not hungry, it will sleep all night and all day. It can also eat all night and all day. At the end of the poem the pig complains about people who like its meat but are fond of insulting it.

In **Mahlo ke Diala**, Mphahlele (s.a.) has also observed some peculiar features and characteristics of some animals and birds and then created a composition about them. One bird that could not escape Mphahlele's eagle eye is Hlahlamodupi (the rain-bird)

#### HLAHLA-MODUPI

1. *Nonyana ya go bitša pula,*
2. *Molodí wa yona o llela mašaba.*
3. *Ke nonyana ya go galagala selemo.*
4. *Ntšu la yona le phafoša balemi,*
5. *Ba e kwa la nonyana ya go bitša  
pula.*
6. *Nonyana ya go fofa mola batho ba  
robetše.*
  
7. *Nonyana ya go hlola madiba-maso,*
8. *Nonyana ya go aga mašohlo-šohlong.*
9. *Hlaga sa yona ga se bonwe bonolo.*
10. *Se bonwa ke mootodi wa naga*
11. *Se bonwa ke mangaka a magolo.*

12. *Se tsebja ke ba go tsena madibamaso.*
13. *Mohla o mongwe ba e biditše kwediitata,*
14. *Ke ba go se tsebe nonyana ya bopula.*
15. *Ba ba e tsebago ba e kwa ka mokgoši,*
16. *Mokgoši wa go kwala mola go robotšwe,*
17. *Hii! Hii! Hii! Tlwe! Tlwe! Tlwe! Tlwe! Tlwe!*
18. *Ke lešata la go kwala bošego.*

1. The bird that calls the rain,
2. Its whistle is for the multitude.
3. It is the bird that echoes in summer.
4. Its voice wakes up the farmers,
5. Hearing the bird that calls the rain.
6. The bird that flies when people are asleep.
7. The bird that causes deep pools,
8. The bird that builds in dense forests,
9. Its nest cannot easily be seen.
10. It is seen by those who inhabit the land
11. It is seen by renowned doctors.
12. It is known by those who enter deep pools.

13. Sometimes they called it *kwediiata*,
14. These are the ones who do not know  
the rain-bird.
15. Those who know it hear it by its cry,
16. The cry that is heard when we are  
asleep,
17. Hii! Hii! Hii! Tlwe! Tlwe! Tlwe!  
Tlwe! Tlwe!
18. It is the noise that is heard during the  
night.

The poem is divided into three stanzas of six lines each. Rhyming is not uniform. There are, however, many instances of repetition through parallelism and linking. For example: line 5 links with 6 through "*nonyana*", and 7 with 8 through "*nonyana ya go*" and 10 with 11 by "*se bonwa ke*".

In the poem, the poet praises this bird for causing rain. It makes all people happy, especially the farmers who start to prepare the planting materials or instruments. It is a bird that flies in the night and can cause torrential rainfalls. Its nest, which is found only in dense forests, can only be found by famous traditional doctors. Its nest is used by the doctors in the healing of certain rare and uncommon ailments. This bird is just as important to the traditional doctors as the hammerhead (*Mašianoke*). Some of them often spend sleepless nights in the forests looking for the nests of these birds.

Praising the Owl (*Leribiši*), Matsepe (1971:31) says:

*GO LERIBIŠI*

1. *Go wena leribiši o rego huhu!*
2. *Naa o a lla goba o tagiša mokhora?*
3. *Huhu ya gago e ntshetla pelo,*

4. *Go nna o ka re o matshwenyegong.*
5. *A fa bašimanyana ga ba go pšatlela*
6. *Mae goba ba go bolaela mafotwana?*
7. *Ge go le ka mokgwa woo gona jo nna  
joo ...!*
8. *O tshwenyegile bjang sebopiwa sa go  
swana le nna?*
9. *Go nna ke go kwa o sa lle,*
10. *Eupša o bega go Mong gore o  
kgopišitšwe.*
11. *Homola, wena mohloiwa wa ba geno  
ka moka,*
12. *Se iše pelo kgole O go kwele.*
13. *Homola hle, o tla be wa fiwa gape.*
14. *Gobane Yena ke mafa-a-amoga!*
15. *Le ge lehono o sa amogwa ke Yena*
16. *O go kwele, O tla go fa.*

1. To you the owl who says huhu!
2. Are you crying or praising an  
abundance of food?
3. Your singing worries me.
4. To me it seems you are in difficulties.
5. Didn't the boys break your eggs
6. or killed your nestlings?
7. If it is like that then we don't know ...!
8. How troubled you are my fellow living  
being?
9. To me you are not crying,
10. But you are reporting to the Creator  
that you are worried

11. Be quiet, you are hated by all your people,
12. Don't worry too much He has heard you
13. Be quiet, you will receive again
14. Because He is the One who gives and takes away!
15. Although today He is not the one who has taken from you -
16. He has heard you. He will give you again.

Not surprisingly Matsepe brings God into this praise to an Owl. In all his poetry and in his novels he cannot refrain from making Biblical allusions. Although one does not know this, Matsepe was probably a true church man if not a Christian. He worried about the persistent hooting of this nocturnal bird of prey. Interestingly enough, he recalls that great moment when all the birds called a meeting to choose a king and the owl was asked to guard the smallest species of bird (tangtang) and it escaped while the owl was asleep. From that day on all the birds hated the owl because of its foolishness. From that day it slept during the day and hunted food by night.

But, Matsepe takes a twist when he consoles the owl by saying that God was there and that whatever worries him, God would again provide. He interprets the hooting as a prayer to God.

Another interesting composition is that of Mphahlele (1989:41), who associates the crow with a priest because of the white collar around its neck. That is good thinking and good poetry.

Some poets praise these animals and birds, while others personify them and allow them to praise themselves. For example, Ramaila (1956:7) allows

"Kolobe" (the Pig) to praise itself

*Ke nna kolobe seepa naga ka nko,  
Ke phoofolo ya bohlale le makoko.*

I am the pig that digs the earth with my nose  
I am the animal that is clever and proud.

Machaka (1965:53) also allows the baboon to praise itself.

*Ke mang yo a mpitšang sekobo?  
Nna Modimo o mpopile a thabile.  
Yena o mphile seriba sa makopi,  
Ka sona ke khupetša matlakala,  
Ka sona tšatši ga le mphahle.*

Who says I am ugly?  
God created me and was happy  
He gave me the protruding eyebrows.  
With which I protect myself from dust.  
With it the sun does not blind me.

Nearly all the poems pay particular attention to the habitat, specific habits and physical characteristic of the animals and birds they praise. With certain animals (e.g. the lion, and the leopard) and some birds (e.g. the crow and the owl), colour also plays an important role. While Matsepe worries about the persistent hooting of the owl, Mphahlele praises the singing of the rain-bird because it focuses on the abundance of food because of the rain it brings.



#### 4.6 PRAISES OF DIVINING BONES

As long as there are illnesses that are undefined, such as Aids with its uncertain origin, there will always be magicians and traditional doctors claiming to be able to cure such diseases if Western doctors would approach them. Incidentally, they receive their messages for curing such ailments from the spirits. Thus, divining bones which are a vehicle for these messages, will always be showered with praises to indicate the order in which they have fallen on the ground. These bones all have names and among them there are males and females and together or collectively they give the required message. However, this message is often only known to the artists. As a rule, diviners are known to be extremely secretive and a special vocabulary, which is only understood by the doctors, is used.

At Jane Furse a certain Mrs Mokoena, commonly known as Mmaleetse was more difficult to grasp than most other traditional doctors. She had some drum accompaniments and the "siyavuma" (we agree) reply added to the problem of understanding her. The speed with which they recited added fuel to the fires of bewilderment.

In poems such as *Mabonešapo*, *Di eme lewo mang*, *Ditaola tša ka*, *Ditaola*, *Diphoko* and others, the poets employ a special vocabulary which is much simpler than the vocabulary used by *boNkadingala* (traditional healers) themselves. For example Ramatja(1991:7) says:

##### DITAOLA TŠA KA

1. *Šogošogo! huu! Tšhwahlaa ..!*
2. *Ke makokonwakempša,*
3. *Ke marapo a tše hwilego,*
4. *Bahu ba hwile ba di reta*

5. *Ge e se tša ka nka di ngala,*
6. *Nka di lahlela Lepelle,*
7. *Bomankgodi ba ithopela,*
8. *Ke morerešane kgorong tša mošate,*
9. *Ditšhwene di eme ka maoto -*
10. *Mola dikwena di seleganya tsela,*
11. *Basadi ba itia metswiri.*

12. *Ke lešagašaga la molapo,*
13. *Mosadi wa pelompe re mo agela  
thabeng,*
14. *Re mo thaola monwana wa leoto,*
15. *Bohwirihwiri ra bo lahlela mollong,*
16. *Tshebi ya dira ya hwa le molodi,*
17. *Rena dingaka ntšhotšhonono,*
18. *Ra šala re kurumiša batho mala.*

1. Šogošogo! Huu! Tšhwahlaa...!
2. They were gnawed by a dog,
3. They are bones of the dead.
4. The ancestors died praising them.
  
5. If they were not mine I would ignore  
them,
6. I would throw them into the Olifants  
river,
7. The small grey hawks would pick  
them,
8. They are the truth at the Royal Kraal.
9. The baboons are standing on their  
feet-

10. The crocodiles are crisscrossing the road,
11. The women are making sounds of disapproval.
  
12. It is the tumult of the valley,
13. A wicked woman we build for on the mountain,
14. We cut one of her toes,
15. Deceitfulness we throw into the river,
16. A backbiter died whistling.
17. We the good diviners,
18. We continue to make people suffer from gastronomic disorders

The poem is divided into three paragraphs, each with an unequal number of lines. The first paragraph starts with the sound made by the bones and the second word is the sound made by the patient when he/she breathes some air into the pouch before they are thrown on the ground. *Tšhwah/aa!* is the sound they make when they fall down. This is the most important stage when the diviner has to read and talk to the bones by means of praises in order to obtain the correct focus.

The poet says that they are the bones of dead animals which have been gnawed by the dogs. Many people have died praising them. It is also characteristic of all the diviners to utter the statement that if they were not his, he would ignore or throw them into a river where they would be picked up by birds. Among them there are baboons, crocodiles and women who may disagree with the divination message.

One who is found to be bewitching others is driven away to stay on the mountains. But before that they instill some pain in her by cutting off one of

her toes. Crooks are thrown into the fire while backbiters will be made to go about talking of the evil they have done. The poem is a prototype which contains most of the requirements for a traditional praise poem. The difference is the division into paragraphs and the content and vocabulary which has been simplified.

Another simple and interesting praise poem of astragali is "Ditaola" by S. R. Machaka (1965:47).

1. *Ke diwabawaba, ke ditšhagatšhaga,*
2. *Ke marapšana a go hlwa merabeng,*
3. *A oretše sekhutamoya leng le leng,*
4. *Ke ditaola tša seala sa phukubje,*
5. *Le marapo a makeke a tswakilwe.*

6. *Ke marapo a tše hwilego kgale*
7. *Tšona di kokonwa ke mpša le petlo,*
8. *Di hwile fela di laola di phelang,*
9. *Marapo a pudi-mme le nku ye swana*
10. *Ke diphekola, di re botša madireng.*

1. They are wabawaba and  
tšhagatšhaga,
2. The bones that remain all the time in  
a bag,
3. Being subjected to suffocation all the  
time,
4. They are the divining bones in a bag  
of the skin of a jackal,
5. Even the bones of termites are mixed.
6. They are the bones of dead animals,
7. Those that were gnawed by a dog

- and a curving instrument,
8. They are dead but they control the living,
  9. Bones of a goat and a black sheep,
  10. They diagnose and tell us the news.

Instead of calling them by common names, his are named according to the sound they make when one prepares them for a focus. A jackal is a clever animal, its skin was used by traditional doctors to make pouches for their astragali. Interestingly, even bones of termites are among the divining bones. Do termites really have bones, or is this statement a mere exaggeration? In the Contemporary English Dictionary the white ant is referred to as a wood-worm, therefore it cannot have bones. Although the astragali consist of bones taken from dead animals, they control the living.

#### **4.7 PRAISES OF MAN-MADE OBJECTS AND CERTAIN NATURAL PHENOMENA**

Some Northern Sotho poets have written poems on nature and natural phenomena, and on manmade objects and other esteemed objects of beauty. Some of these are self-praises while others are praised by the poet. Rain is praised by many as a source of life. Other poets have ridiculed the rain for prematurely ending human and animal life when it comes down by way of torrents and thunderstorms. In this type of poetry the concern is with the object as meaning and not on the action as meaning as is the case with traditional praises. These poems are usually descriptive. Some anthologies include compositions on beer, dagga, fire, aeroplanes, trains, rivers and other natural phenomena.

A list of examples follows.

- (1) Beer: Ramaila M.E. (1956:12) Bjalwa  
Mphahlele D.M. (s.a. :23) Bjala

- Dolamo E.R. (1969:15) Kgapa ya bjala  
 Masola I.S. (1983:25) Bjala  
 Nkadimeng A.P. (1989:3) Meetse a banna  
 Lentsoane H.M.L. ((1988:10) Bjala  
 Malebana F.J.R (1991:50) Madila
- (2) Trains: Machaka S.R. (1967:89) Legokolodi la leboa  
 Mphahlele D.M. (s.a. :21) Setimela  
 Dolamo E.R. (1969:7) Tšhutšhumakgala  
 Bophelo bja Sereti (1990:12) Setimela sa mohlagase
- (3) Money: Ramaila M.E. (1956:25) Tšhelete  
 Bopape/Ratlabala (1968:21) Tšhelete  
 Lentsoane H.M.L. (1988:29) Kgomo ya potla  
 Tlooke A.M. (1989:45) Tšhelete
- (4) Fire: Ramaila M.E. (1956:11) Mollo  
 Mphahlele D.M. ( s.a. :25) Mollo  
 Lephaka (s.a. :36) Mollo  
 Mathale R. (1985:19) Mollo
- (5) Aeroplanes: Bopape/Ratlabala (1968:39) Sefofane  
 Dolamo E.R. (1969:9) Nong ya Makgowa  
 Mathale R. (1985:21) Sefofane
- (6) Dagga: Maebela-Mohlala H.M.C. (1987:42) Mabelemabutšwa a  
 thaba tša leolo  
 Bophelo bja sereti (1990:28) Dikata  
 Bophelo bja sereti (1990:44) Tša mmoto wa Leolo

Praising money (Tšhelete) M.E. Ramaila (1956:25) says:

1. *Ke leswika le lešweu setšwa-  
meepong,*
2. *Tšhelete kgomo ya bana ba mosadi  
wa ditsebe.*
3. *O a ratega, o botse wa go hupela  
moya.*
4. *Ke wena kgomo seila go fula,*
5. *O kgomo sesepetšwa-ka-matsogo*
6. *Kgomo sehloka-mmala.*

1. It's the white stone that comes from  
the mines,
2. Money, the cow of the children of the  
woman with ears,
3. You are loved, your beauty is  
devastating.
4. The cow that abstains from grazing,
5. You are the cow that is circulated by  
hand
6. Cow without colour.

Money is everything. Today many nations fight against each other because of money. In the following stanza, line 9 says, "Ke kgomo sephuma ditšhaba" (it is the cow the destroyer of nations). Everyone loves money. A man without money is not respected. Bopape and Ratlabala have the same ideas about money: while it builds, it can also destroy.

1. *E aga dinaga,*
2. *E phušula dinaga,*

3. *E tšwetša ditšhaba pele*
4. *E lohlanya ditšhaba.*

1. It builds land,
2. It destroys land,
3. It advances many nations
4. It causes fights between nations.

Lentsoane (1988: 29) sees money as a chief that governs without counsellors. It governs even the governors. They quarrel in order to agree.

1. *O a buša kgoši sehlokamotseta,*
2. *O a buša, o a buša.*
3. *O a buša, o buša le babuši*
4. *Ge ba eya tlase le tletlolo,*
5. *Ba swara makgotlakgotla,*
6. *Ba fapana, ba fetše ba kwane,*
7. *Tabakgolo go rerwa wena.*

1. You are reigning the king without a counsellor,
2. You are reigning, you are reigning
3. You are reigning, you reign over other governors.
4. As they go up and down,
5. Holding several meetings,
6. Fighting, they end up agreeing,
7. The big matter being you.

Lentsoane, however, calls money "kgomo ya potla" (the cow in the pocket).



Tlooke (1989:45), shocked over the origin of money, says:

1. *O ngwana mang nke o mpotše?*
2. *Yo a tsebilego go hola ditšhaba ka wena,*
3. *Yo a go lesago go uthwauthwa wena,*
4. *O tšwa o le kae ngwanabatho nkgopotše?*
5. *O lebile kae ntshebele ke go felegetše.*

1. Whose child are you tell me?
2. Who knew how to benefit nations through you,
3. Who leaves you to be roughly handled,
4. Where do you come from child of the people, remind me?
5. Where do you go, tell me, I will take you halfway.

These are some of the views from the Bapedi modern poets about money. Men used to go to the cities to make a living. Mothers used to go to the "kitchen" as Senyatsi (1987) indicates, also to seek a better livelihood. At that time their only means of transport was the train. As an exceptional mode of transport, the Bapedi composed praises about the train. The Basotho, Batswana, Bavenda, Zulu and Xhosa all have such praises. The train surprised so many people that some had to associate it with the millipede.

Having seen the train in the North, Machaka (1967:89) calls it "Legokolodi la Leboa" (The millipede of Leboa). Shocked by what he saw, he says:

1. *Tšeo nna ke di boneng di a thabiša,*
2. *Mahlo a kgahlilwe ke bothakga bja  
Modimo,*
3. *Gona mo tseleng ye e re išang  
Bokgalaka.*
4. *Ke bone dithaba ka tshelela legoleng,*
5. *Meedi le meboto ke e bone ka reta  
Morena.*
  
6. *Le hlabile mokgoši lesogana le  
lesoleso,*
7. *Batho ba lebelelana mahlong pitsi e  
kata,*
8. *Yona e gopotše Leboa nageng ya  
dirokolo;*
9. *Le kuakueditše meši Legokolodi la  
leboa,*
10. *Ntsho ya ema ya rola, ya sepela e  
rwala.*

1. What I saw is pleasing,
2. My eyes appreciated the handiwork of  
God,
3. On the road to Rhodesia.
4. I saw mountains and crossed to the  
plain,
5. Valleys and hills I saw and praised  
God.
  
6. Hooting loudly the black gentleman,
7. People facing each other while it was  
travelling,

8. Go to Leboa the land of herbs;
9. Puffing a lot of smoke the millipede of Leboa,
10. The black one stopped and off-loaded, and loaded as it travelled.

To Machaka, the train belonged to Leboa. It is also personified as "Lesogana le lesoleso" (the black gentleman). Impressively he sees all these signs of wisdom as the mysteries of God. It is through God that man was able to build a structure which resembles a millipede.

Mphahlele sees the train as the property of the Whites:

1. *Legokolodi le leso la Makgowa,*
2. *Ntshororo se kibela mosaneng,*
3. *Sa rwala mathutsi se rwele.*
4. *Moši wa go tšhatšhameletša bothakga.*
  
5. *Pula ya sefako ke a thokgetša,*
6. *Se-bina-mogwaša, se-binela-theko,*
7. *Koša ya go tsebja ke masogana a diepe*
8. *Koša e kgolo ya selala-seeme.*
  
1. The black millipede of the Whites,
2. The long thing that stamps on the railway line,
3. Putting on the wheels is for good,
4. The smoke that rises in appreciation.
  
5. Through the hail I pass,

6. The dancer all over, the dancer to the side,
7. The song known by real gentlemen.
8. The big song that is sung throughout the night.

His train is also associated with the millipede. This poem is replete with imagery. There are implicit and explicit associations. It is also associated with the honeycomb. The stanza following these two is most beautiful because it carries the topic. With a body like the honeycomb, the train does not stop but travels all night going to the land of gold. Its song as it twists about is well-known to the miners.

Not only trains are praised. Aeroplanes are also praised. Dolamo(1969:9), like Mphahlele, calls the aeroplane "Nong ya Makgowa" (Vulture of the Whites). This is not surprising because everything used to belong to the Whites. Dagga (Mošwang wa Matuba) is also praised as "Mabelemabutšwa a thaba leolo" (Mature corn of the Leolo mountains). Many other natural phenomena and objects are also praised.

#### **4.8 CONCLUSION**

One may mistakenly conclude that praises cover a very limited field as a consequence of their being a subdivision of traditional poetry. This is not so for praises are said to almost everything. Praises, for that matter, must also not be considered as only what was composed in the remote past. The fact that for everything we can see, hear and imagine, a praise can be composed, implies that praises can still be composed. Praises by modern poets on recent inventions will, of course, show differences and a shift in perspective.

The appreciation of modern poets and their creations is necessary in order to reveal the differences and the present-day combinations of European poetic

techniques and their influence on African poetry. While in some of their works the traditional spirit flow and depth is retained, many modern poets employ European techniques in their poetry; for example, the use of rhyme scheme, length of verses, division into stanzas and paragraphs, and attempts at foreign metrical patterns. While a search for a system which will perhaps express inner experiences and convictions in a fascinating way is justified, this technique must take into account the structure of the Northern Sotho language and the importance of accent which may give the language its peculiar rhythmic pattern. Poetry is the language of the soul, therefore, it must not be foreign to the idiom of the people for whom it is intended. If there are innovations in it, they must not be so glaring as to make the compositions grotesque imitations of European poetry.

## CHAPTER 5

### STRUCTURAL COMPARISON OF ORAL AND WRITTEN PRAISE POETRY

#### 5.1 WHY A COMPARISON?

Why study traditional and modern praise poetry? Many old critics maintain that there is a vast difference between traditional and modern poetry in tone, message, interpretation, salutations, subject matter, the beginning and ending, as well as the basic background. But, both traditional and modern praise poetry are indisputably primarily poetry and parts of culture, produced and created by cultural beings. The only difference is that one is written while the other is circulated by oral means.

The study of these different poetic forms expands our knowledge of their creators and possessors, their creative processes and strategies, and the poet's material function. Together they point out their shared roots in a cultural tradition. Their content, style, structure and strategy, will now be examined and the relationship of their literary editor and oral performer to the received cultural traditions highlighted. Secondly, are they in fact parallel? Is enough known about the sources or processes of either the oral or literary editors to answer this question? A comparison of the two (that is, oral or traditional and written or modern praise poetry) raises important questions about creativity, change, communication and the organisation of the work, thus suggesting the ultimate value of studying them together.

This study, will examine whether there is any continuity and relationship between these two forms of art. On the one hand, this study may reveal a conscious creativity of the author revealed in his or her changing of specific material, thus providing insight into variation and stability which may be true of all literature, oral or written. On the other hand, and perhaps more importantly, a study of the two simultaneously may reveal parallels in content and themes,

form and structures.

This chapter, then, will first, define the concept "structure". This will be followed by the characteristics which are common to both traditional and modern praise poetry, addressing the implicit and explicit characteristics such as allusions, imagery, repetitions and archaism. Since a comparison involves references to both similarities and differences, the differences between these two types of poetry will then be considered. Much has been done on the structure of traditional praise poetry. The previous chapter on modern praise poetry alluded to much concerning the form of the praises. Therefore, a detailed annotation to some items will not be necessary. Features that were not considered when traditional praises were adapted and also characteristics that came into African poetry as a result of European influences will be discussed. Features such as paragraphs, rhyme, the beginning and the ending of a praise poem will be addressed.

### **5.1.1 Structure or form**

Although structure cannot be isolated from other components of a poem, such as content and form, and because content was discussed in chapter 2, structure and form will be used interchangeably in this chapter.

No matter how interesting or perfect imaginings may be, poems can have little effect upon the listener or reader if they are not presented in a form which is in itself impressive and appropriate. But, when oral poetry is involved, it is not easy to analyse the form of oral poetry according to Western poetic norms. But they are not confused, they have recognisable shape and adhere to certain conventional patterns.

Whatever difference may be found between these poems and Western poetry, two unmistakable qualities link them together, namely beauty of language and discipline of form, and the combination of these in such a way that they are

capable of evoking emotion. According to Skelton (1977:91),

Form does not lie simply in the correct observance of rules. It lies in the struggle of certain living material to achieve itself within a pattern.

While many folklorists have maintained that praise poetry does not have form, the question arises. How was it organised into a genre if it does not have form?

According to Simpson (1970:400), structure is

... the underlying logic or arrangement and movement in a literary text, its skeleton or paraphrasable content. The term "structure" usually refers to the organization of the elements other than words. For the latter term "style" is used.

Cuddon (1977:662) says that structure is:

... the sum of the relationships of the parts to each other, thus, the whole. Even as the Germans speak of "Gestalt," we can speak of the structure of a word, a sentence, a paragraph, a chapter, a book, and so forth ...

Clearly, then, the form or structure of a poem refers to its structural patterns. These patterns, as evident from Cuddon, contribute to the meaning of the whole and also differ from poem to poem. Some will include building blocks, such as parallelism, linkage and alliterations, while others will be content with forced rhyme, rhythm or refrain.



Another important factor worth mentioning is that traditional and modern poetry arise from differing compositional techniques. In oral composition, which is simultaneous with performance, the structural patterns will be affected by the particular audience, mood and atmosphere, while in modern composition, perfect tranquillity is the set norm.

Praise poetry often assumes a musical form. It is also not uncommon for praising to culminate in music. In Mogobo (the war chant), for instance, someone from the audience will run up to the front gesticulating wildly as the others sing in unison, and start praising. It is also true of the praises that during the praising, one would start a chorus and others join in unison as a back-up. Thus, from these different forms, it is rather difficult to talk of form or structure in their performance.

Vilakazi (1938:119), attempting a structural analysis of Zulu poetry, did not have to struggle to find the origins of such a pattern. On reading a primitive poem, when he came across a gap, he discovered the end of a stanza.

In spite of these deviations, recent scholarship has firmly established basic structural patterns at the root of the composition of oral and written poetry. These structural patterns afford a standard of comparison.

## **5.2 SIMILAR STRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS**

### **5.2.1 Theme**

No one has ever written or writes in a vacuum. A novelist, a poet, a playwright, a performer, or a narrator have all at some or other time experienced a burning sensation which propelled them to want to share that sensation with other people. A certain period of time, such as the present one in South Africa, a certain type of society, such as warlike societies that are negative or always preaching civil war, or certain rulers in the day of a poet may influence him. If

sufficiently inspired, he will leap up in an oral situation and start pouring out his emotions, and in a modern era he will look for privacy and then commit his ideas to paper. By so doing he will be transmitting his central idea or theme to the reader or listener. According to Brooks (1906; 888) theme is

... the special view of life or special feeling about life or special sets of values that constitute the point or basic idea of a piece of literature.

This implies that theme can be regarded as the underlying idea in a poem. It is something that ties or unties the materials of a piece of literature. It either becomes a good theme or the author could be said to be unable to portray his theme. As Kennedy (1979: 90) points out,

... a theme is like a length of a rope with which the writer, patently and mechanically trusses the story neatly (usually too neatly) into meaningful shape.

Reeves (1956: 42) maintains that theme is

... the central concept developed in a poem. It is the basic idea which the poet is trying to convey and which, accordingly he allows to direct his imagery.

Imagery, in other words, is designed through the use of images to present the central theme or main idea of the poem. The theme is therefore the poet's reason for writing the poem in the first place. It is usually an abstract concept which becomes concrete through the use of idioms and images. In simplified terms, Scott (1965: 42) alludes to theme as

... the subject on which one speaks, the term is more often used to indicate its central idea.

In any literary work, the theme is the centre, the moving force, the principle of unity. Thus, the importance of theme in a literary work, particularly poetry, is to reveal the meaning of that particular literary work. The central themes of poetry are also familiar topics since they deal predominantly with everyday experiences. All experiences which form part of social life are envisaged. In this section the main theme is heroism. Even in all protoforms, since they are slavish imitations, heroism will be seen to be the central theme of the poems. The inciting cause or purpose of action is inspired by war. According to Scott's definition, theme derives from the subject which in this category is usually chiefs, warriors and other individuals, such as initiates or hunters, who are praised for their brave engagements. In Matsepe's and others' literary creations, fictional characters also praised. Furthermore, animals and divining bones are also showered with praises. Actually praising is the central theme of these poems.

## **5.2.2 Obscure allusions and archaic words**

### **5.2.2.1 Obscure allusions**

In the language of poetry, which is often emotional, certain references are implicit, the meaning of which is difficult to discern. Moloji (1968: 7) says that there is always a complaint that praise poems are replete with archaic words and obscure references, and that, therefore, they are meaningless to the reader. This is not the reason for their meaninglessness, however, because the allusions do not destroy the rich images and ideas which have been successfully moulded together. These references are found in both traditional and modern praises.

Obscure allusions are hidden, indirect references. According to Cuddon (1977: 31) allusion is

... usually an implicit reference, perhaps to another work of literature or art, to a person or an event.

What this implies is that often anything that is not understood is categorised as being obscure since it is unknown to the listener or reader. Guma (1967: 165) says that these references are an outstanding characteristic of *dithoko*. Such sentences or passages are often extremely difficult for the modern generation to comprehend as a result of the lack of any historical continuity in the texts which are available. It is true that the older the praises, the more difficult they are to understand in all respects. In these allusions reference is made to historical events, people, deeds and events associated with the object of the praise poem. The following stanza from Ramaila's *Seriti sa Thabantsho* gives a good exposition of obscure allusions: Stanza IX of the poem Kgoši Sekhukhune I:

1. *Nokan'e ya Bakgatla ke nokana mang?*
2. *Ke nna ke Moretele 'a noka ke retetše,*
3. *Ke reteletše Maburu a ga Jubere,*
4. *Ke tlo retelela le mašole a Ramapantana.*

1. This rivulet of Bakgatla what type of rivulet is it?
2. It is I, I am the Moretele river, I am furious,
3. I was furious with the Boers of

Joubert,

4. I will be furious even with the soldiers  
of Ramapantana (i.e. Sir Theophilus  
Shepstone)

It is true that before one can understand what is implied here, one must revise one's knowledge of history. Originally it is alleged that the Bapedi are from the Bakgatla (Batswana). They are the descendants of the Bakgatla. However, for emphasis, Sekhukhune has decided to exaggerate this band by calling himself the small river (rivulet) which is normally a tributary of a larger river. Moretele is the Pienaars River which, together with the play on the word "*retela*", indicates a sense of defiance. He defied the Boers under the command of General Piet Joubert. Still he promises to show the same stubbornness to the fearful English commander, Sir Theophilus Shepstone (Ramapantana).

Ramapantana is an interesting nickname which became his praise name amongst the Bapedi. It was among the Bapedi that the fear of Ramapantana is derived from the manner of dress of the English soldiers under Shepstone, that is the wearing of the baldric. Note that the use of the diminutive Ramapantana instead of Ramapanta is indicative of contempt.

Allusions such as these are still found even in modern compositions. The following example from *Toro ya Sereti* from the poem of Kgoši E Mathebe (Malefahlo, 1990) illustrates this.

1. . *lwuuu...! kgabububu ... kgabububu  
...!*
2. *Le galagetše la tholo mellwaneng ya  
Moutse,*
3. *La kwewa le ke nong tša Lebowa tša  
boa,*
4. *Tša fihlišetša magoši a Lebowa*

5. *Ka le le tšwago Moutse Lentšu.*
1. lwuuu ...! kgabububu ... kgabububu  
...!
2. The horn of the kudu is heard over  
the boundaries of Moutse,
3. It is heard even by the vultures of  
Lebowa and they came,
4. They informed the authorities from  
Lebowa
5. The word that came from Moutse.

This poem was written in praise of Kgoši Mathebe, who had opposed the incorporation of the Bantwane people into KwaNdebele. Those who were witnesses to this will remember the event as a result of the fierce fighting that took place between Mbokotho and the Bapedi of Moutse. Only Lebowa came to the rescue of Kgoši Mathebe and his people. This stanza is not easy to understand if one is not in possession of the facts as experienced by the people of Moutse. The Bantwane venerate a kudu, that is why the piercing word is from the kudu and not from Kgoši Mathebe, even though this reference is actually to him. The stanza is replete with metaphor.

#### **5.2.2.2 Archaic words**

Sometimes the language of traditional poetry is referred to as archaic. Guma (1967: 166), referring to *dithoko*, says that they are also characterised by a smattering of archaic words. According to Boagey (1977: 128) archaism refers to

a word that is no longer commonly used in speech or in writing, an out-of-date word.

These words are not similar to modern words or common in the people's language. Although not found in everyday language, poets continue to make use of such obsolete words in their recitations. To many modern readers these words are extremely difficult to understand and this is why only a few are still employed. However, according to Guma (1967: 166), as a result of their small number, they are not as great a handicap in the understanding of *dithoko* as the obscure allusions. However, true archaic words are still found in both modern and traditional praise poetry because of their association with the past. According to Moloji (1968: 7),

They give form to beauty, pain, conflict,  
shame, doubt, loyalty and love. They reveal  
the human soul struggling for perfection and  
self-realization.

Many of the compound words and self-coinages that some poets use, try to recreate the spirit and atmosphere of past victories. The following stanza from the poem "*Tšhwahledi*", a fictional character by Matsepe (1968: 25) serves as an example. The poem itself is not divided into stanzas. This division was made as a result of the sense and thought in the verses.

*O se re o sega wa fela o nkgerula o tseba  
ke le sefowa  
Ditsebe ke thibadišwe ke sefako re etšwa  
merakeng-  
Wa fela o nkgerula ke tla go buwa ka  
legakadima  
Gobane ka thipa nka go fa serithi!*

Do not laugh as you glance at me, for I am  
deaf,  
As a result of the hailstone that caught up

with me

On my way from the cattlepost; lest I cut  
open your belly with a sharp edged flint, for  
with a knife I would give you status.

The stanza is a display of vivid images. There are two words which are archaic: "*thibadišwe*", which means to be stopped by (the correct word is "*thibilwe*") and "*legakadima*". This is really obsolete because it refers to a prehistoric stone weapon. He did not want to spare him. A knife would spare him while his aim was to tear him to pieces. Another example of a traditional praise which contains a fair number of archaic words is the following one about Kgoši Sekwati by Phala (1935: 10/7):

*Ka Motswako ntwā ke a xononwa;  
nna Sešišimale sa morwedi wa Mphaka,  
Ke šišimetše, ka etša lefswaka,  
Ke sefadi phalo ya morwedi wa Mphaka,  
'a Mokitlana 'a Tšatši.  
Ke a fala, ke šī'o thula kobo maroba.*

By Motswako I suspect war,  
I the steadfast one of the daughter of  
Mphaka,  
I stand firm as a rock,  
I am the potscraper, scraper of the daughter  
of Mphaka, of Mokitlana of Tšatši.  
I scrape, I am afraid of piercing holes on the  
blanket.

Firstly, the writing is obsolete. Secondly, the underlined words are no longer commonly used or used at all. "*Motswako*" is a name of a place commonly known as Tswako. The sentence could be "*Ka mo Tswako*" (Here at Tswako).



Today a rock is no longer called a *lefswaka*. In fact, if one talks of "*Lefswaka*", people will not understand what one is saying. Using the lid of a shoe polish tin as a potscraper was not unusual for older people while younger ones use a spoon. This resulted in many spoons losing their shape. Today, the only thing African children know that is used in the cleaning of pots is a potscourer or steelwood. Sekwati, in the poem, calls himself "Sefadi" (potscraper), a concept unknown to the modern generation. "Thula" is commonly used to refer to knocking against, striking or colliding with something, such as in the case of a head-on collision between two motor vehicles. In the example "thula" refers to making holes or piercing through something, which in this case is a blanket. "Maroba" are the holes pierced through the blanket.

These two examples from modern and traditional praise poetry are not the only ones. When perusing many poems, some historical knowledge is required as reference is often made to places, events and family names.

### **5.2.3 Totem praises**

The Northern Sotho-speaking people, besides having their proper names, have praise names associated with the names of animals or objects which they venerate as their totem. These totems more or less serve as formal and polite modes of salutation or address to any member of the tribe. Ethnic groups are proud of their totems. Maibelo (1987: 7) elaborates on the animals people often venerate. Chapter 3 pointed out that by saying to a Mopedi, "Mokwena", which is derived from the animal *kwena* (crocodile), one is praising that person. This implies that addresses such as *Kgomo*, *Tlou* or *Mothokoa* are not merely special forms of salutation or address, but a means of praising one another more highly than using such defamatory terms as "*Lepedi*", which is discrediting and belittling, "*Leburu*", which is normally said when one is angry or "*levenda*" (belittling of the Bavenda).

People at formal gatherings have been heard addressing each other by their totem, such as the venerators of *tlhantlhagane* as "*Bakone*", which creates the warmth of acceptance at such occasions. When a person has done a good thing, to show appreciation of the deed, the Bapedi normally address him by his totem and say "*Tlou*" (elephant).

However, today's generation can no longer answer the question, "*O bina eng?*" (lit. what are you dancing - what is your totem?) The mistake or problem can be traced back to the parents. In both traditional and modern praises, the practice of addressing a person by his totem is a great honour and the Bapedi are proud of the totems. In *Tšwelopele* Maibelo states how the people chose a lion, leopard, *noko*, and *kudu* as their totem animals. Chapter 4 also touched on the porcupine, which is the totem of the Bapedi in Sekhukhuneland. The totems can also be termed praise names because, in using them, the people praise one another for belonging to a particular tribe. A few examples of such totem praises follow.

The Bapedi (Ntwane) people of Moutse under *Kgoši* Mathebe venerate a kudu (*Tholo*). It is alleged that Mathebe was an artful hunter and from the stripes on the back of a kudu, he is praised as

*Tshwarang dithebe le tiišeng,  
Le ikgohleng ka thaba a Mmaleoko.  
Mminatholo ga a bolawe,  
Baipolai ba ithwala megono  
(1987: 9)*

Hold fast to your shield,  
And lean against Mmaleoko mountain.  
The one who venerates a kudu is not killed,  
Those who kill themselves will regret.

Here there is no talk of traditional or modern totem praises because those whose totem was a kudu in 1910 today still venerate it. The only change might be as a result of cross-marriages or cross-raids where people are taken captive. It is alleged that Maibelo the author of the article in *Tšweelopele*, was previously a "Motlokwa" and venerated a leopard (*Nkwe*), but because of battles, today he is a "Mokone" and venerates the small bird "*Tihantihagane*" (siskin)

Other people venerate the Buffalo (*Nare*). Among the Bapedi this beast is known as "*kgomo*". The *Bahwaduba* venerate this animal and it is often showered with the praise

*Ahee! kgomo, Ahee! Nare kgodumo e lerole*  
*Ya Mmamatlape a Nape,*  
*Ya barwa kgomo e tswalla motlhaleng*  
*Motlhana wa jewa ke difirijokwane tša naga*  
(1987: 9)

Hail! the cow, Hail! The buffalo with the  
bellowing noise  
Of Mmamatlape of Nape,  
Of the sons of the cow that calfs along the  
way  
And the placenta is consumed by wild  
animals.

#### 5.2.4 Imagery

Imagery is a significant poetic device for intensifying, classifying, enriching and giving the listeners or readers an insight into what is being described. Ntuli (1978: 221) considers it the hallmark of good poetry, which means that any poetry without imagery has a shortfall. According to Bloom *et al* (1961: 13),

Imagery is the use of specific and concrete (but not necessarily literal) language for the purpose of creating in the mind a vicarious sense impression.

This means that meaning and emotion in poetry are established not only by separate words, but also by clusters of words chosen to evoke a sensory image in the mind of the reader.

Cuddon (1977: 322) emphasises that the terms, images and imagery have many connotations and meanings. As a general term, "imagery" covers the use of language to represent objects, actions, feelings, thoughts, ideas, state of mind and any sensory or extrasensory experience. Furthermore, an image may be visual, olfactory, tactile, auditory, gustatory, abstract and kinaesthetic.

This is characteristic of traditional and modern praise poetry; it is found throughout the collected poems and assists the development of theme. Cope (1968: 39) says that an image is at once the richest and the most concentrated method of description. Imagery covers any use of language that is figurative. It embraces all uses of metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, symbolism and other figures of speech. The following stanza from the elegy on the death of *Kgošigadi Mmamorake Rammupudu* (Malefahlo 1990) is an example.

*Lefase lebone pono la fifala mahlo,  
Ngwedi wa fifala bokamarago a pitša,  
Dinaledi tša tšhoga mogopolo wa timela,  
Tša ikhupetša la kobo ya sellomaru,  
Tša hlola lefase ka mosela' leihlo.*

The earth saw a sight and was blinded,  
The moon darkened like the bottom of a pot,  
The stars were frightened and lost their

imagination,  
They were covered by a blanket of tears  
from the clouds,  
They peeped at the earth with the corner of  
an eye.

In the first sentence the earth is personified and given eyes to see the sorrowful sight, which is the death of *Kgošigadi Rammupudu*. The moon and the stars also share in its grief. And raindrops cover the sky and prevent them from seeing the earth. Using a simile, the poet says, "*Ngwedi wa fifala bokamarago a pitša*" (The moon was darkened like the bottom of a pot). Only living beings can take fright. Yet, note that the stars were so frightened that they lost their sanity. What a personification! There is also abundant use of hyperbole. In using the word "*sellomaru*" which refers to raindrops, but referring to tears shed by people, the poet has achieved great effect. In the stanza imagery is seen in its totality. Imagery is also brought about by the following figures of speech:

#### **5.2.4.1 Metaphors**

Metaphor is a form of comparison wherein two things are implicitly identified. It is an implied comparison. Hawkes (1972: 01) defines metaphor as:

A word which comes from the Greek word *metaphora* derived from "*meta*" meaning "over" and "pherein" (to carry). It refers to a particular set of linguistic processes whereby aspects of one object are 'carried over' or transferred to another object, so that the second object is spoken of as if it were the first.

The metaphor, like the simile, is based on a point of similarity between two things. Whereas simile states that one thing is like another, metaphor identifies them completely.

Metaphors are drawn from every sphere of life: animals, natural phenomena, and religion. Metaphors are evidence of the continuing vitality of the Northern Sotho language. The Bapedi can speak of *ledimo* (storm) or *tau* (lion) referring to Sekhukhune. In some paragraphs *Kgoši* Mathebe was referred to as *tholo* (kudu). This sustains the vitality of the language and still testifies to the richness of invention and imagination which have been at work over centuries of linguistic development. In fact, most metaphors are aligned with totem praises.

Shiple (1970: 197) says that metaphor is considered by many as the basic poetic figure. This is true of Northern Sotho poetry, traditional or modern praise, as the following examples show. In *Kgoši Sekwati Mampuru*, the hero is referred to as *tlou* (Elephant).

*Ke nna mašišimale a gabo Mošiane tlou a  
Mabasa,  
Tlou ya Manaka ke eme Marutle gabo  
Lekgolane,  
(1959: 16)*

I am the steadfast one of the place of  
Mošiane, elephant of Mabasa,  
Elephant-bull, I stand at Marutle, place of  
Lekgolane.

In strength and size, the elephant is the king of the wild. Thus, Sekwati is compared to it in order to indicate his strength and physique.

In another traditional example, *Sereto sa Kgoši Sekhukhune I* (Ramaila 1961: 15/6), Sekhukhune is referred to as "Tšhukutšwana 'a mphantana" (a small rhinoceros).

In 1972 Segooa also referred to *Kgoši Frank Maserumule Matlala* as follows:

1. *Re a go leboga hlanhlagane 'a ga  
Matlala.*
2. *Pelong tša bafsa le diputswa*
3. *Go tletše malebo le tlotlišo,*
4. *Ge go gopolwa tša mohlamonene,*
5. *Mohla o thoma go kgatha lehwiti,*
6. *O na le 'bata sa thab'a Mogodumo,*
7. *Le leka go buša Lebowa matimelo*
8. *Mo e sa leng le eya bogologolo,*
9. *Gore e be bohwa bja ba thari e  
swana.*

(1972: 24)

We thank you siskin of Matlala  
The hearts of the young and the old,  
Are full of thanks and praise,  
When we think of the olden days,  
The time you were embarking on a new  
venture,  
Together with the Predators of Mogodumo  
mountain,  
Trying to retrieve the lost Lebowa  
Where it had since gone into the unknown,  
So that it becomes the inheritance of the  
black nation.

Once again the totem referred to under totem praises comes to the fore. Matlala is referred to as a siskin, the little bird the Bakone venerate. Kgoši Matlala was in the forefront when Lebowa was first declared a self-governing territory and required tireless effort to rebuild. Lebowa enjoyed strength during the reign of Dr C N Phatudi. No poem has been written about *Kgoši Matlala* or Dr Phatudi without mentioning "*Le leka go buša Lebowa matimelo*" (Trying to retrieve the lost Lebowa). When mourning the death of O.K. Matsepe, Mashilo (1991: 16/7) says:

5. *O be a le gona modingwana wa  
dipuku,*
  6. *O be a le gona modingwana wa  
mangwalo,*
  7. *A katanela wena ngwana' thari ye  
ntsho,*
  8. *Go mo hlwaiša merulana ka  
ditsebeng.*
- 
5. He was there the god of books,
  6. He was there the god of letters,
  7. Doing it for you the black child,
  8. To make you to listen carefully.

In the poem, Mashilo refers to Matsepe as the god of books. Many people feel that he was the man who knew how to put Northern Sotho words together to make sense. Whatever word he chose, he employed meticulously. Therefore it is not surprising that he is called the god of letters. In the same poem he is also referred to as "*tau*".

13. *E phuhlame tau ya lehlakano  
magetleng,*
14. *E thenkgolotšwe ke bolwetši*



*masenyeletša;*

15. *Gobane bo sentše phekokgolo ya bangwadi,*
  16. *Khuduthamaga ya polelo ya šala e itshwere ditedu.*
- 
13. It has fallen the lion with the reed on its shoulders,
  14. It's overturned by sickness the spoiler,
  15. Because it destroyed the real charm of writers,
  16. The Language Board remained shocked.

Here Matsepe is associated with the lion and a real herb. The lion with "*lehlakanoka magelleng*" is the one larger than all others with pronounced shoulders. Even today, when studying Northern Sotho, the true tradition of the Bapedi is found in Matsepe's books. Matsepe never aspired to imitate Hadley Chase or Wilbur Smith, but delighted in exploring his mother tongue. Speak about traditional healers, read Matsepe's novels, think of the way chiefs resolve their cases at the *kgoro*- read Matsepe's novels. Many still try to imitate some of his motifs.

In stanza 1, "*Maje*" (S.N. Tseke 1987: 54) is referred to as "*kgomokhulong*" (a brown ox), in stanza 2 as "*noka*" (a river), and stanza 3 as "*phororo*" ( a waterfall). This is the world of metaphor still employed by modern poets.

#### **5.2.4.2 Similes**

Similes are used in many poems and can be seen as an explicit comparison as opposed to the metaphor where a comparison is made between two things which may differ in all respects except for one characteristic that unifies them.

According to Shipley (1970: 304) a simile is;

The comparison of two things of different categories .... because of a point of resemblance and because the association emphasizes, clarifies or in some way enhances the original ....

Kgobe (1989: 98) recognises that there is a very close affinity between similes and metaphors, which are but two of the many subdivisions of what is understood as "imagery".

The Northern Sotho language is full of comparisons. Strange, unexpected, amusing, vivid comparisons that make conversation or a section of poetry more colourful and comprehensible. In the Queen's English, these comparisons are usually introduced by "like" or "as".

However, from Shipley's definition, it may be deduced that in a comparison in the first instance, the tenor and vehicle must be from dissimilar categories; for example "*Motho le Mmutla*", that is, a person can run as fast as a hare. Secondly, the vehicle must serve to emphasise speed/size, clarify and enhance the tenor. In Northern Sotho, this feature is recognised by the use of conjunctions such as "*bjalo ka*", "*ka ka*", "*boka*", "*swana le*", "*nkago*". This feature is predominant in both modern and traditional praise poetry.

The poems of Kgoši Sekwati have the following formula:

*Ba re: Ke yena yela wa kala ya puane,  
Nkego ke thaka ya tšhimane 'a marole*

They say, There he is with a blossoming  
twig,

*like* the peer group of boys playing in the dust.

An examination of the compositions of Phala, Lekgothoane and van Zyl reveals that the simile was not as common as the metaphor. However, in the modern compositions, there are some examples of it. Mamadi (1970: 52), in praising the crest on the head of a secretary bird, says:

*Tlopo ga ke tsebe o beotšwe ke mang?  
E go dula botsana bjalo ka lešira.*

Crest I don't know who cut you?  
It fits you beautifully like a veil

Matsepe (1969: 19), also worried about the behaviour of a crocodile which does not allow people to draw water, says:

1. *Re nwe eng gore bophelo re bo thekge?*
2. *Bojato bja gago bo swana le lewatle.*
3. *Le hupilego diphiri le gana go di utulla,*
4. *Mereba ya gago e swana le ya dithaba ga e kgahle.*

1. What should we drink to support our life?
2. Your greediness is like the sea
3. That has a mouthful of secrets and does not want to divulge them,
4. Your stubbornness is like that of mountains its not pleasant.

From the tone it is apparent that the poet is not impressed with the stinginess of the crocodile. He compares it to the sea that has a multitude of secrets but does not want to divulge them to mankind.

Mamadi also compares the crest or hairstyle of the secretary bird to the veil that is normally used by a bride on her forehead. He sees the crest as being as beautiful as a bride's veil.

#### **5.2.4.3 Personification**

Cuddon (1977: 501) defines personification as

... the impersonation or embodiment of some quality or abstraction, the attribution of human qualities to inanimate objects. It is a figure of heroic poetry.

This is simply a way of writing about something obviously not human as though it were a person. Personification has a long history. The ancient Greeks and Romans used personification when they created their mythical gods and goddesses to represent forces of nature and in man. For instance, the ocean is personified by Neptune.

According to Cuddon, personification is inherent in many languages through the use of gender, and appears to be very frequent in all forms of literature, especially poetry.

It is a special form of comparison as identified by Ntuli (1984: 171). It is a figure of speech in which the poet begins with an abstract idea, or a non-human force or object, and makes it concrete or human by endowing it with human or animate qualities. According to Mokgoatšana (1993: 19),

Because oral poetry is mainly concerned with human affairs, it predominantly contains a vast range of personification.

That is true, for even the rise of modern poetry did not escape the influence of the traditional style. Kgobe (1989: 99) says that instances of this device abound in Bapedi oral poetry. However, it is not only found in traditional poetry. It is found in both modern and traditional praise poetry.

Under imagery, an excellent example of personification was given. It was on the death of Chieftainness Mmamorake Rammupudu that Malefahlo wrote an elegy which abounds with personification from beginning to end:

*Lefase le bone pono la fifala mahlo.*

The earth saw a sight and was blinded.

The earth has been personified. The question could be asked whether the earth has eyes.

In 1938 Lekgothoane used personification to the fullest when he praised animals. Another good example is found in the poem Phiri (1938: 194):

*Morwa Madumane a Phiri o dumaduma,  
Mphiri o boneng?*

Son of Madumane of Phiri, when you groan  
Master hyena, what have you seen?

The hyena is portrayed as the son of Madumane. It is also referred to as a master. Personification is a prominent feature of Northern Sotho praise poetry.

#### 5.2.4.4 Symbolism

According to Abrams (1971: 195),

... the term symbol is applied only to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event which in turn signifies something, or has a range of reference, beyond itself.

Concurring with Abrams, Shipley (1970: 322) defines symbolism as

... the representation of a reality on one level of reference by a corresponding reality on another.

It is a form of indirect metaphorical speech intended to convey or suggest a hidden reality. A symbol is a sign which is generally accepted as representing something which possesses similar qualities or properties by association. To call a cow (*kgomo*) "*modimo wa nko ye meetse*" (a god with a watery nose) does not mean the cow is immediately transformed into a deity. One is merely thinking of multiple functions that cattle fulfil.

In 1969, Matsepe, a true Christian, wrote a creative sonnet to the Donkey (*Go Pokolo*). Does Matsepe really praise a donkey? Think of the last entry into Jerusalem of the Lord Jesus. Was it not a donkey that triumphantly carried Him on his last journey of fulfilment, where the Lord's redemption would be concluded? When he looked at the donkey, Matsepe saw the Lord's cross on its back.

In his poem, "The Donkey" G.K. Chesterton in his thematic discussion symbolised a donkey. To Chesterton, a donkey was not just another domestic animal. It is associated with the cross. We also see a similarity in European

and African themes.

### GO POKOLO

1. *Go go makala go fetša nka se ke,*
  2. *Gore sefapano o se belegetše eng.*
  3. *Naa se lebetšwe go wena e seng*
  4. *Neng ka ntle ga letšatši lela ke se seke?*
  5. *O dungwa ke nna, maaka ga a botse,*
  6. *Ka sona o tla tsena le nna ke a bona.*
  7. *A ke go amogetše, le nna o tla mpona,*
  8. *Go Mo khunamela go nkweša bose.*
  9. *Magetleng le nna a ke se rwale,*
  10. *Kgopolong ke be yo ke hlatswegilego.*
  11. *E sego gore go go tsebafele ke se ke se dirilego,*
  12. *A ke sepedišane le wena ke be wa gago o nthwale.*
  13. *O phate ya O mogolo,*
  14. *A ke go rete ka bjago bogolo.*
- (1969: 7)

1. I cannot cease to be amazed by you,
2. That you are carrying a cross.
3. Was it perhaps forgotten on you
4. Except on that day if I don't err?
5. I envy you, truly speaking,
6. With it you will enter I can see.
7. Let me help you, and you will see me,
8. To adore Him makes me feel good.

9. Let me carry it also on my shoulders,
10. In thoughts let me be cleansed
11. Not that I am jealous of you,
12. Let me travel with you and be yours.
13. You are the kaross of the Great One
14. Let me praise you for your greatness.

This is symbolism expressed at its best. This feature is a philosophy of creation, it is also life itself. It started with man and it will continue to endure as long as man himself exists. To Phala, in the following example, tau (lion) is both a presentation and a representation of Sekhukhune:

*Mola Sekwati a tswetše tau ya segafa,  
 Tau ya Sekwati, ke hlatša marega,  
 Selemo se tlogo ke a gafagafa,  
 Ke thopa dikgomo bašemane ba dišitše.*

While Sekwati has fathered a mad lion,  
 The lion of Sekwati, I litter in winter,  
 When Summer comes I rave,  
 I capture cattle, while the herdboys are  
 looking after them.

The lion represents Sekhukhune and is therefore, a symbol. Madness is also a symbol of his cruelty and unpredictability. Metaphorically, the lion is a strong animal and king of the wild similar to Sekhukhune, king of the Bapedi.

#### **5.2.4.5 Hyperbole**

Hyperbole is a figure of speech that contains an exaggeration for emphasis. It is an exaggerated description, the attribution to people or things of a value or quality far beyond the actual state of things. According to Abrams (1971: 75),



The figure of speech called hyperbole is bold overstatement or extravagant exaggeration of fact, used either for serious or comic effect.

Stated simply, it is an overstatement magnifying things or situations beyond the truth. Kgobe (1989: 101) says that its use is deliberate and sometimes outrageous for comic or ironic effects. Examples of this figure of speech abound in both modern and traditional praise poetry. In a literary work the writer exaggerates to sustain the interest of the reader. By means of hyperbole he finds a way of bringing certain visual images to the mind of the reader. Modern as well as traditional poets put overstatement to use in their poems. The following example comes from Phala's poem Kgoši Sekhukhune.

*Marole alee! Le a bonago molaaa! xa se a dikgomo, ke marole a batho.*

That dust, you see there! It is not dust made by cattle, but dust made by people.

Sekhukhune, as Kgobe (1989: 102) shows, was returning from a successful expedition with his large army which made a cloud of dust as if it were a herd of cattle driven by herdboys. The impression created is that he had captured many people and his army was literally driving them home. The expression gives a vivid description with the language meticulously chosen to give us a picture of a large number of captives and the brave warriors that were accompanying them.

Such overstatements were not only used in the olden days. In 1971, writing in commemoration of the death of Kgoši Frank Maserumule Matlala, Lentsoane (1971: 22) says:

*Dihlagahlagane o di pšhatlagantše dihlogo*  
*Ditau o di robile mekokotlo*  
*Diphuti o di tlapirigantše*  
*Dinoko o di thokgile meotlwa*  
*Ditlou o di robile maoto*  
*Dinkwe, dikwena, diphiri le ditšhwene di*  
*tsetsetše.*

The siskins - You have crushed their heads  
The lions - you have broken their backs  
The Duikers - you have pulverised  
The Porcupines - you have broken their  
spikes.  
The Elephants - you have broken their legs  
The Leopards, the Crocodiles, the Hyenas  
and the Baboons have wailed.

Many people from far and near grieved over the tragic death of this chief. The people are addressed according to the different animals the tribes venerate. Death, according to Lentsoane, did not merely render the tribe powerless but also crushed: "*o di pšhatlagantše dihlogo*" (crushed their heads). He uses exaggerated terms such as "*robile*" (broken), "*tlapiraganya*" (crash) "*-thokga*" (break) and "*tsetsetše*" (whimper) which reinforce the idea of desolation caused by the death of Kgoši Matlala to his dependants and friends alike.

Incidentally, Lentsoane (1981: 23), commenting on the cruel death that has usurped the life of Matsepe the prolific author, says:

*Lehu o ka fepela tau ya tswetši*

Death, you really can venture to babysit for  
a lioness.

Death to Lentsoane is so brave and ruthless that it can look after the lion's cubs. No one dare attempt to babysit for the queen of the wild. Remember that even in hunting, she takes the leading role. Only during the folktale era could Hare or Baboon look after the lion's cubs and end up eating them all. What an exaggeration! One can imagine what happened afterwards!

#### **5.2.4.6 Idioms**

A feature that is mostly found in Northern Sotho poetry is the use of idioms. In fact, they are the language of poetry, and are used extensively in both traditional and modern praise poetry. According to Cuddon (1977: 321) an idiom is:

... a form of expression, construction or phrase peculiar to a language and often possessing a meaning other than its grammatical or logical one.

According to Guma (1967: 166),

Idioms are characteristic indigenous expressions, whose meanings cannot be ordinarily deduced or inferred from a knowledge of the individual words that make them. Unlike proverbs, idioms do not have a fixed and regular form to which they adhere at all times. They are changeable and are seldom, if ever, used in their basic form.

Idioms, according to the above exposition, unlike proverbs, do not have a fixed form, however, from proverbs too it is clear that the word order may be

changed. Idioms never express any fundamental truth which has a bearing on life. Note the following use of idioms in the praises. In praising "Seputle", Matsepe (1977: 9) says:

*Kgomo e a tshwa!*  
*E gangwa ke mang?*  
*E gangwa ke nna Seputle sa*  
*marobadikotelo,*  
*Seputle le se mmoneng bofšega ga a itire -*  
*O jele pelo ya sehlong o a tsagatsaga.*

A cow spits!  
Who milks it?  
It is milked by me Seputle of marobadikotelo.  
Do not criticise Seputle for being a coward.  
It is not his fault.  
He has eaten the heart of a hedgehog and is  
apprehensive.

The excerpt shows that Seputle is a coward. Matsepe openly says that Seputle is a coward. However he asks the reader not to criticise Seputle for being a coward. The poet uses the idiomatic expression "*o jele pelo ya sehlong*" to shield him from criticism. It is euphemistic expression. In nature, people do not always call a spade a spade and say that someone is a coward. The poet uses this expressions for a polite rendering of Seputle's cowardice. This is further emphasised by another expression "*o a tsagatsaga*" (he is shivering). Cowards are normally apprehensive when confronted by impending trouble.

Such expressions were also used by Ramaila in praising Sekhukhune (1959: 15),

*Ke Mantsana 'a Lehlokwa Sehvirihwiri se*  
*maano,*

*Mphiri moloma serethe, ke tatagoNgwan'a  
Mohube.*

I am Mantšana of Lehlokwa, the wily one,  
The copper anklets that bites the heel, I am  
the father of *Ngwan'a Mohube*.

This is a praise in honour of the Ntšana people who trained Sekhukhune in his artful warfare tactics. By means of the imagery of the copper anklet and the idiomatic expression "*go loma serethe*" (pursue persistently), the danger of his guide is underscored. He is like a beautiful copper anklet worn as an ornament but secretly smeared with poison to cause death.

#### **5.2.4.7 Proverbs**

Authors' definitions of a proverb vary according to the different angles of approach and also words used to frame these definitions. Nyembezi (1963: XII) defines the proverb as "a people's experience" While for Guma (1967: 65) the proverb is

... a pithy sentence with a general bearing on life. It serves to express 'some homely truth' or moral lesson in such an appropriate manner as to make one feel that no better words could have been used to describe the particular situation. Various proverbs apply to various situations and are an embodiment of the distilled and collective experience of the community on such situations.

Seitel (1972: 14) alludes that the proverb is a metaphorical representation or description of the situation about which it is spoken.

The proverb is a product of the people and is used by the people to communicate vividly their thoughts on a variety of subjects and situations. Its meaning is always figurative and sometimes metaphorical. Take for example, "*kgomo ka mogobe e wetšwa ke namane*" (lit. a beast is drawn into the well by its calf), which metaphorically means that the parent is responsible for his child's deeds.

According to the definitions, proverbs are representative of the people's everyday life experience since they are said by different people at different times and in different situations. Various patterns can be observed in both modern and traditional praise poetry, but, they are not as widely used as the idiom. In the examples it will be seen that not many poets make use of the full structure of the proverb. Sometimes a well-known proverb is alluded to in passing. There is a well-known proverb, "*sekhukhune se bonwa ke sebatladi*" which means metaphorically there is no place to hide. In trying to show that Sekhukhune was able to see everything because of his creeping behaviour, Phala (1935: 73) says,

*Ngwana - Mosadi 'a Phala sebolai*  
*Sebata ke a kukuna*  
*Moka boditsi ke hlahla le phoka*  
*Ka Borwa o lle sehlana a xafela dinong.*

The child of the wife of Phala Sebolai,  
The carnivorous one I creep,  
Yet the hair of the tail drags in the dew,  
In the South he ate the placenta and offered  
it to the vultures.

The word order in the proverb is changed. In 1981 Tseke wrote the poem, "*Mphemphe*" (give to me give to me). In this fictional praise, Tseke seeks to warn those who go about begging from other people. He wants people to work

hard for their self-esteem. The full proverb is:

*"Mphempe e a lapiša motho o kgonwa ke  
sa gagwe"*

(lit. give to me give to me is tiresome, a  
person is satisfied by his things. i.e. laziness  
does not pay)

Unlike Matsepe, who may alter the word order or shorten the proverb, Tseke has employed the whole proverb in its usual form.

In the poem "Seputle", referring to a fictional character, Matsepe (1968: 9) has employed the proverb as follows:

*Seputle le se mmoneng bofšega ga a itire-  
O jele pelo ya sehlong o a tsagatsaga!  
Kgomo ka mogobe ga e wetšwe ke namane  
le a forwa:*

Do not blame Seputle for his cowardice, he  
does not act on his own.

He has eaten the heart of a hedgehog he is  
afraid!

The beast is not drawn into the well by its  
calf you are deceived.

Traditionally, it is commonly known that cowardice is often referred to as having eaten the heart of a hedgehog because this little animal normally rolls itself into a ball at the slightest sound. Matsepe seems not to believe those who say that the beast is drawn into the well by its calf. He has married a beautiful wife with black eyes and she takes very good care of them. This was done through no

influence as the proverb indicates. In another poem "Kgarudi", Matsepe (1968: 8) employs the following proverb:

*Mpšhe, nkadime mabinakošana ke tšhabele  
kgole -  
Maloba nong e nkadimile diphego ka wa,  
Ke lebetše ge go akalala ga bonong go e!la  
le go wa!*

Ostrich, lend me your feet I must run far  
away -  
Yesterday Vulture lent me his wings,  
I had forgotten that even if you fly high you  
must come down.

In this poem, Kgarudi is well aware of pride and pompous behaviour. One does better to rely on what one is and what one has than to chase empty dreams. The Ostrich is known to be one of the fast running birds. Rather than asking for the Vulture's wings which will not stay in the air for good, he should ask for the ostrich's legs which could carry him far. The real form of the proverb is:

*"O se bone go akalala ga bonong, go wa  
fase ke ga yona".*

(Pride comes before a fall.)

In the last example, Mphahlele (s.a. 14/5) in his poem "Pitsi" praises the Zebra by referring to its black and white stripes. There is a proverb which says:

*Re tla re re tla re ke dipitsi ra bona ka  
mebala.*



Seeing is believing  
You can only conclude that this is a zebra if  
you see its colours.

The poem says:

*Phoofolo e botse ya mebala ya go putla,  
E hlathwa ka yona e sa le bolelele,  
Ya tsejwa ke tau ya mariri.*

The beautiful animal with black & white  
stripes,  
It is recognized by them from far,  
It is known by the lion with a mane.

The proverb has been juggled around. In the first sentence there is "*mebala*" (colour). In the second line he tells us that the Zebra is known by its colours. In the third, he alludes that when the lion is hungry, looking for the fat Zebra, it recognises it by its colours. So, it may be accepted that the proverb is a feature of praise poetry.

### **5.2.5 Repetition**

A common structural element of poetry, especially African poetry and music, is repetition. According to Wainwright (1987: 199),

In assessing the structure of Nguni poetry,  
both written and oral, one is immediately  
struck by the high incidence of repetition in  
the poetry.

Various types of repetitive techniques are also found in Northern Sotho traditional and modern praise poetry.

Many schools of thought argue that repetition is found in traditional praise poetry more than in modern poetry. When adapting the *Oxford Dictionary's* (1984: 632) definition of the concept repetition as a "repetition or being repeated", one is inclined to regard the views of these schools of thoughts as embracing only a portion of the true state of affairs. While not refuting the statement that repetition is a fundamental trait of the oral genre, it is also true that it is found extensively in the written form.

To repeat is to go over something again. Listening to almost all African music, we find that its melody and rhythm come from repetition. Having listened also to the rendition of many praises, oral or written, we found that assonance, rhyme and refrain are all the products of repetition. Words or phrases in poetry usually recur in the same form. Repetition may occur at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of lines. The repeated phrases, mainly carry the motif-the message of the poem.

Quoting Gray, Milubi (1988: 99) says that repetition creates a sense of pattern and form. It seems also that Africans are very fond of repeating for the sake of emphasis as this element is common even in their everyday language.

Poetic repetition can take many forms and while it often involves a recurrence of sounds (alliteration) or repetition of syllables and words (linkage), it may also include the occurrence of formulaic expressions, or a paralleling of ideas. *Kgoši Sekhukhune* by Ramaila opens as follows:

*Ke maphikološa 'a matswaka le mabu*  
*Theledi 'a Marota,*  
*Theledi ka Borwa o tšo senya, Theledi 'a*  
*Marota*  
*Ke masenyeletše 'a Matuba,*  
*Masenya magadi a batho.*  
(1959: 15/6)

I am the one who tumbles others and make  
them one with the soil, I Theledi of Marota  
clan,

In the South Theledi has wrought  
destruction, Theledi, of Marota clan.

I the spoiler for others (i.e destroyer of  
others' chances) I of Matuba regiment,  
(I am) the destroyer of other people's  
marriages.

The poem has opened with imagery at different levels of meaning emphasised by the repeated words. In lines 1 and 2 the victor, Sekhukhune, is the one who causes his enemies to roll over and become one with the soil while he, Theledi, can slip away, pun with "*go thelela*" when attacked. The name Theledi is repeated thrice, and Marota twice. The word *-senya*, in line 2, is taken up again in lines 3 and 4, with the implication in the latter that Sekhukhune destroys not only his enemies but their wives and children - future generations - as well as their homesteads (*magadi a batho*). "*Marota*" is a clan name of the Pedi of Maroteng, derived from the regimental name Marota of Chief Thulare's full brother, Mothodi. *Matuba*" is also a Pedi regimental name. There is also the typical repetition of the prefix *ma-* throughout the stanza for the sake of musical effect.

#### 5.2.5.1 Parallelism

In poetry, parallelism can be described as linguistic similarities observed between certain successive lines. Parallelism is an integral part of traditional and modern praise poetry in which it is effectively used to create aesthetic effects. Guma (1967: 159) defines parallelism as

... a certain similarity between two parts or  
members of a sentence whose words

correspond to one another.

It is the building up of a sentence or statement using repeated syntactic units. This correspondence of words or phrases in successive lines may occur at the beginning of lines, and thus be referred to as initial parallelism. It is sometimes encountered at the end of lines and this helps in the manifestation of rhyme. However, it should be pointed out that in Northern Sotho traditional and modern praise poetry, both initial and final parallelism need not always occur in successive lines. As in examples of linking, parallel lines, phrases or words may occur in the first and third or fourth lines as the following examples indicate. In stanza 4 of *Kgoši Sekhukhune* (Ramaila 1953: 15/6) parallelism occurs as follows:

*Ke sebolai sa Matuba ntšee ka manaka di a  
lla,  
Theledi'a kgalatlola 'a mešito,  
Theledi 'a kgalatlola 'a Makwa.*

I am the killer belonging to the Matuba  
regiment, drag me by the horns when the  
bugles blow.

I the active Theledi of tumult (i.e. battles)

I the active Theledi, champion for the Makwa  
regiment.

In this stanza, stress is laid on the fact that the laurels for the achievements of a regiment are usually laid upon its leader. Sekhukhune is praised for being the leading killer in the Matuba regiment, especially in times of fierce fighting. Note that the word "*mešito*" in line 3 does not refer to musical rhythm but to activity in battle. Sekhukhune has engaged in warfare for the safety of the people of Maroteng. This thought is accentuated by the repetition of "Theledi" and "kgalatlola". The parallelism in the stanza is initial.

Another interesting example of parallelism is taken from "Direti tše Nne" by Mojalefa (1991: 61). Its focus is the divining bones and it is entitled "Di eme lewo mang" (which fall are they focusing on).

1. *Di eme lewo mang tša matšhotšho?*
2. *Ka re ke lewo mang leo la mongaka?*
3. *Di reng di tloge di eme mošianyane?*
4. *Di reng di tloge di eme taro?*
5. *Khudu še le yona e eme hlo!*
6. *A na ruri di reng di hupile?*
  
7. *Di wele moraro wa mongaka;*
8. *Ke re sa morarwana ga se kgole,*
9. *Se kgathe ga nko le molomo.*

1. Which fall are they focusing on those belonging to the diviner?
2. I say which fall is that one of the diviner?
3. Why do they focus on lightning that would strike?
4. Why do they say lightning would strike?
5. Here is the tortoise standing on its feet (upright)!
6. And why do they say there is something wrong?
7. They are focusing on the trouble of the diviner;
8. Trouble that is not far to seek.
9. It is between the nose and the mouth.

In the first paragraph, the poet is attempting to emphasise the fall of the divining bones with parallel phrases. Because they did not give a positive focus, in the third line, the poet makes a surprise remark about the trouble that is focused on. Twice he says, "*Di reng di tloge di eme ...*" (why do they say ...). This reiterates an introductory remark that occasionally parallelism is not consecutive but alternates. "*Di reng di ...*", from line 4 is again repeated in line 6. This is parallelism at its best.

#### **5.2.5.2 Alliteration**

This is the process by which similar sounds of consonants or vowels are repeated in one or more lines. According to Milubi (1988:104) alliteration is

.... the repetition of speech sounds in a sentence of nearby words.

Cohen (1973:54) writes that poetic style includes more than conciseness and imagery. Most poetry, he maintains, depends heavily on patterns of sound or musical quality. The poet is usually more sensitive to sound.

The technique enables the poem to obtain a particular sound effect. It is the repetition of sounds in the syllables of words, in phrases, in a passage or stanza. The repetition of vowels is termed assonance while that of consonants is referred to as consonance. The technique appears to be equally prominent in both oral and written praise poetry.

##### **5.2.5.2.1 Assonance**

This is sometimes referred to as vocalic rhyme and consists of the repetition of similar vowel sounds, usually close together to achieve a particular effect of euphony. The following example is taken from Phala's *Kgoši Sekhukhune*:

Marole aleeee! Le a bonago molaaa! xa se  
a dikgomo,  
ke marole a batho. (1935:19)

That dust! you see there! Is not the dust of  
cattle,  
It is the dust of people.

In the example the "a" is repeated 12 times.

"e" is repeated 8 times.  
and "o" is repeated 8 times.

In 1986, when praising *Phiri*, a warrior from Maramage, a place under the jurisdiction of Chief Tisane, Soane made extensive use of assonance.

*Ipshineng ka manaba a Phiri ditšhošane,  
Dulang komana madulaabapilwe ke a fihla.  
Lefase le le na le Mong wa lona.  
(1986:30)*

Be happy with the enemies of Phiri the ants,  
Be on the alert I am coming,  
This earth has its Creator.

In the second line alone, the vowel "a" is repeated nine times.

#### 5.2.5.2.2. Consonance

This is a repetition of a sequence of consonants, but with a change in the intervening stressed vowel. The following example is taken from Kxoši Sekhukhune (Phala 1935:22) ,

*E lexo molao o moswa le fele ke mang,  
Moja maloba re le laya Moxokxomeng.  
Gomme lehono molao o moswa le fele ke  
mang?*

In fact who gave you new laws,  
While the day before yesterday we were  
instructing you at Moxokxomeng.  
And today from whom did you receive the  
new law?

The "m" and "l" have been distributed equally in the three lines to give an interesting sound effect.

The following four lines come from the second stanza of Segooa's poem about Kgoši Frank Maserumule Matlala:

*La kgale lebowa le boile o le lebeletše,  
Le bothile marena bakgomana le mantona,  
Le tlile le rwele tihabologo le tšwelopele,  
Ditšhiwana le bahlogadi la ba phumuła  
megokgo.  
(1972:24)*

The old Lebowa returned whilst you were  
looking,  
Having united chiefs; councillors and  
counsellors,  
It brought with it civilization and progress,  
Orphans and widows it wiped their tears,

Matlala was among the first chiefs to attempt a clean administration in Lebowa.



He was also the first chief minister before Dr C.N. Phatudi took over. That is why in the excerpts mention is made of the bringing together of chiefs, warriors and counsellors in order to show them the way forward. This description is presented superbly. In the first line alone the "l" is repeated eight times to give the desired sound effect.

### 5.2.5.3. Linking

Actually the technique of linking does not differ substantially from parallelism. According to Milubi (1988:105),

Linkage is another device that characterizes many praise poems. The idea in one line is carried over to the next.

It is a process whereby a part of the first line or a word or idea is repeated or echoed in the second or third line. Sometimes this linking is done by commencing the next line with the last word of the previous line. Ntuli (1984:192/5) discusses vertical and oblique linking. He says that vertical linking usually happens when similar words (or stems or roots) appear at the beginning of successive lines (initial linking) or at the end (final linking). Oblique linking can be presented with lines having a start from one side to the other. This technique has been employed with great success in both traditional and modern praise poetry. Kgobe (1989:66) discusses this technique exhaustively. The following examples will illustrate the use of linking. Note that although it is used in both oral and written praise poetry, it is predominant in traditional poetry. The following example comes from the poem about Kgoši Sekhukhune (Phala 1935:99):

Xomme Makxalaka a re: Rena kxopa xa re  
nayo,  
Xomme ba re ena le Mmamabolo 'a Byatladi;



### 3. Mmamabolo

Oblique linking is diagrammatically illustrated with many examples in Kgobe (1989:69).

It was asserted earlier that linking is a feature that is still used even in written praise poetry. Mojalefa (1991: 61) in "*Direti tše nne*" praises the divining bones employing linking as follows:

1. *Di eme lewo mang tša Matšhotšho?*
2. *Ka re ke lewo mang leo la mongaka?*
3. *Di reng di tloge die eme mošianyane?*
4. *Di reng di tloge die eme taro?*
5. *Khudu še le yona e eme hlo!*
6. *A na ruri di reng di hupile.*

1. Which fall are they focusing on those belonging to the diviner?
2. I say which fall is that one of the diviner?
3. Why do they focus on lightning that would strike?
4. Why do they say lightning would strike?
5. Here is the tortoise standing upright!
6. And why do they say there is something wrong?

This poem was discussed under parallelism. In this stanza, for emphasis, line 1 links with line 2, line 3 with 4 and 6, and line 3 with 4 and 5. In others, the linking is consecutive while in some it alternates.

### 5.2.6 Eulogues

Eulogues are a feature of reference. Kuse (1979:208) says that research on poetry in the Southern African languages has revealed that the eulogue is the central feature of heroic poetry. Kunene (1971:XXII) defines eulogues as

... the different kinds of praise reference:  
names ... describing the hero according to  
his actions; or metaphorical names  
comparing the hero to natural phenomena;  
... praise by association of the hero with  
some other person, whether himself (or  
herself) praiseworthy or not.

Kings and warriors have been referred to by using many names. Divining bones have also been referred to by many different names by different diviners. One outstanding example of a name of a certain type of divining bone is "*dipetlwa*." It refers to bones carved from the horns of cattle, tusks of elephants and thigh bones.

Anyone who has revealed outstanding or meritorious qualities deserves to be praised. A king whose character appears satisfactory to his people is praised or given a name. Many teachers, especially those with peculiar qualities, earn a name other than their own from the students.

Koopman (1987:40) states that a person's love of girls (and vice versa), the ability to attract girls and the methods of courting also earn a person a courting praise. In his article he refers to dancing praises, fighting praises, descriptive praises, football praises, boxing praises and so on. For example, recently "The Rose of Soweto" lost his world title to the number one contender. "The Rose of Soweto" refers to Dingaan Thobela and is his praise eulogue. This is proof that eulogues will continue to dominate the Northern Sotho people's praises.

Kunene (1971:35) distinguishes two types of eulogues: naming eulogues and eulogues of associative reference. These are further subdivided into various subtypes and are extensively discussed. This study will follow Damane and Sander's approach and merely give examples of metaphorical, descriptive, associative and deverbative eulogues. According to Pretorius (1989:52), deverbative, metaphorical and descriptive eulogues are actually also naming eulogues. With regard to the oral examples, the first four stanzas of the poem about Kgoši Sekhukhune (Ramaila 1953 and included in "Seriti sa Thabantsho") will be used.

*Sereto sa kgoši Sekhukhune I*

- I.
  1. *Ke maphikološe 'a matswaka le mabu Theledi a Marota,*
  2. *Theledi ka Borwa o tšo senya, Theledi 'a Marota.*
  3. *Ke masenyeletše 'a Matuba,*
  4. *Masenya magadi a batho.*

---
- II.
  5. *Tšhukutšwana 'a mphantana lena madira tšhabang,*
  6. *Tšhabang mantsokodi a etla.*

---
- III.
  7. *Ke Mantšana 'a Lehlokwa sehvirihwiri se maano,*
  8. *Mphiri moloma serethe, ke tatago Ngwan'a Mohube.*

---

IV. 9. *Ke sebolai sa Matuba ntšee ka manaka di a lla,*

10. *Theledi `a kgalatlola 'a mešito,*

11. *Theledi `a kgalatlola 'a Makwa.*

---

I. 1. I am the one who tumbles others and makes them one with the soil, I  
Theledi of the Marota clan,

2. In the south Theledi has wrought destruction, Theledi of the Marota clan.

3. I the spoiler for others (i.e.) destroyer of others' chances) I of the Matuba  
regiment,

4. (I am) the destroyer of other people's marriages.

5. You armies beware of the puny rhinoceros,

6. Beware, the whirlwind is approaching.

III. 7. I am (one of) Mantšana of Lehlokwa, the wily one,

8. The copper anklet that bite the heel (i.e. persistently in pursuit), I am the  
father of Ngwana' Mohube.

IV. 9. I am the killer belonging to the Matuba regiment, drag me by the horns  
when the bugles blow,

10. I the active Theledi of tumult (i.e. battles).

11. I the active Theledi, champion of the Makwa regiment.

**(a) Deverbative eulogues**

According to Kuse (1979:214),

... with deverbative eulogues we come, poetically, to man's cognition and identification of himself as being who moulds history.

Deverbatives objectify the consequences of man's decisions and register the effects of his actions. In that way an individual is now named as a consequence of his actions or the actions of the other people towards him. From the excerpt the following are examples of deverbative eulogues:

*phikološa* > *maphikološe* (one who tumbles)

*tswaka* > *matswaka* (one who mixes)

*Thelela* > *Theledi* (The slippery one)

*Senya* > *Masenyeletše* (The spoiler for others)

*Senya* > *Masenya* (The destroyer of other ..) fourth stanza.

*bolaya* > *sebolayi* (The Killer)

Analysis of another example entitled "*Tau*" (The lion) (Lekgothoane 1938:192) has the following:

1. *Motau mogolo*
2. *Sepopoduma a malekwa*
3. *Mmôtlana morapa pitsô*
4. *Phaxa mangana maxolo*
5. *Ke phaxa ya mangana a magolo e  
jang bohwa le bya dingwê.*
6. *Oa baba oa baba lešokxa tau ya  
dilêpê*

7. *Le mampya le manonyana a tšhaba  
xo mo tlhakhuna*
8. *Tau ya mariri a maxolo*
9. *Sepôtla ka kodu, maphôôfôlô a mo  
tseba*
10. *Tlhôgô ke mathlathlakgome*
11. *Dinala ntswêrêrê*
12. *Letswalô la diphôôfôlô*
13. *Ledimo ropo rakweleta.*

1. Mr. Lion, the Tremendous
2. Awful Roarer, the Attacked-by-all
3. Poor body that summons together a  
gathering
4. Wild cat with the broad side whiskers
5. It is a wild cat with fat cheeks that  
also eats the heritage of other  
animals
6. It is bitter, it is very bitter this little  
plant of the lion that calls forth axes
7. The dogs also and the vultures fear to  
attack him
8. This lion with the huge mane
9. This roarer with his deep throat, that  
all the animals know.
10. His head is a wild and shaggy mass  
of hair
11. His claws are long and sharp
12. The diaphragm (fear) of all animals
13. Predatory devourer, father of  
cannibals.



2 *popoduma* > *Sepopoduma* (awful roarer)

2 *leka* > *malekwa* (the attacked-by-all)

3 *rapa* > *morapa* (summoner)

9 *potla* > *sepotla* (The roarer)

### (b) Metaphorical eulogues

It is common knowledge that various heroes and chiefs are often given the names of numerous ferocious animals and fearful and dangerous natural phenomena. They are eulogues of identification. For example:

*Tšhukutšwana* (puny rhinoceros)

*Mantsokodi* (whirlwind)

*Mphiri* (the copper anklet)

4 *Phaxa* (wild cat)

13 *ledimo ropo* (predatory devourer)

12 *Letswalo* (diaphragm)

### (c) Descriptive eulogues

Occasionally the poet may give a graphic description of the chief or warrior engaged in war or in the process of going into battle. According to Damane and Sanders (1974:40),

These are simple descriptions of the chief's character, condition or physique, unadorned by any figures of speech.

It is common knowledge that leaders always send their subjects to the forefront. This was not Sekhukhune's *modus operandi*, which is clearly described in the third and fourth stanzas. In line 7 he is called the wily one (*sehvirihwiri se*

*maano*). This is true because one would never find him stranded. He always kept his options open. In the fourth stanza, lines 10 and 11, he is both active and a champion of the Makwa regiment.

2 *Malekwa* (the attacked-by-all)

3 *Motlana* (poor body)

4 *Phaxa mangana maxolo* (wild cat with broad side whiskers)

5 *Mangana maxolo* (fat cheeks)

8 *Tau ya mariñ* (with the huge mane)

9 *Sepotla ka kodu* (with the deep throat roar)

11 *Dinala ntswerere* (with long and sharp nails)

#### (d) **Associative eulogues**

Sometimes the individual is associated with other people, such as relatives or friends. According to Damane and Sanders (1974:42),

These link the chief with relatives, his friends  
and the places of his home.

Kunene (1971:47) identifies eulogues of associative reference and subdivides them into association with relatives, association by genealogical reference. From the poem about Kgoši Sekhukhune the following associations may be derived: In the first stanza, Sekhukhune is associated with "*Marota*". The third stanza tells more about his relatives and his daughter. He could never cease being proud of Mantšana who had trained him in the tactics of warfare. Sekhukhune is the father of Ngwana' Mohube (discussed in detail in chapter 3).

Regimental names, have not been mentioned although they are also included in a subdivision of naming eulogues. However, because of a few relevant references to these names in the example cited, this section should conclude by indicating such regimental references. (Regimental names were elaborated

upon in chapter 3.) In the first stanza, Matuba is the regiment whose leader was Kgopotšo; first in 1904, according to Monnig (1967:120). In the last stanza mention is made of "Makwa" another name of a regiment whose leader was Morw'a Motšhe. This we learn, was the most interesting initiation institution of the time.

Modern poets have also made their mark on the above-mentioned eulogues. In their compositions metaphorical, deverbative, regimental, descriptive and associative eulogues are to be found. In the poem "Kgoši M.E. Mathebe" (Malefahlo 1990:12/3) the following eulogues are found: in the first stanza, the chief is referred to as "*tholo*" (kudu), which is metaphorical; in the same line reference is made to geographical location, that is "*mellwaneng ya Moutse*" (at the borders of Moutse), which is associative; when the chiefs from Lebowa arrive, they say; "*O mong wa rena Mokwena*" (you are one of us Mokwena), which is a reference to a clan name.

In another example, Dr C.N. Phatudi was praised by Mogashoa (1988:68/9) as

*"ke Sepharara sa Mangana letlemetlu la  
meeṯse a pula a boMabuše."*

(He is the big one of Mangana the bullfrog of  
the rain water of Mabuše.)

In this sentence alone, four eulogues are found: "*Ke sepharara*" (He is the big one) is descriptive. "*Mangana*" is a regimental name of a regiment whose first leader, according to Monnig (1967:120), was Sekwati who was chief in 1899. He is also referred to as "*letlametlo*" (the bull frog), which implies that when he croaked the people shivered and it is metaphorical. Yes, his voice was heard and heeded by young and old people, not only in Lebowa, but around the world. In the same example his relatives are alluded to. He is the relative of Mabuše, which is a eulogue of association. In other examples, Dr C.N. Phatudi

is referred to as "*sefahlošadifofu*" (one who makes the blind see), "*sealafaboroko* (one who cures the sleeping sickness). As the Minister of Education in Lebowa, he was highly competent and as an educationist, he left his mark. Sekgale (1991:50), in an anthology by D.M. Mampuru, endorses this by saying: "*Leswiswi le aparetše palamente ya Lebowa*" (Darkness has covered the parliament of Lebowa). "*Sefahlošadifofu* and *sealafaboroko*" are deverbative eulogues.

### **5.3 DIFFERENT STRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS**

#### **5.3.1 Theme**

In the foregoing section, the theme for both oral and written praise poetry was mostly heroism. But, as new and young poets developed, a shift from heroism has occurred. No longer do poets laud the heroic deeds of men in battle, hunting expeditions and casual encounters with beasts of prey. Men used to earn their names and eulogues through distinction in battle or a similar situation. As cattle raids are a thing of the past, there is a deviation in the content because of social, economic and political values that have taken the place of martial eminence. More and more emphasis is on the problems encountered and the vicissitudes of life. According to Wainwright (1982:112),

Nguni oral poetry can be narrative, laudatory or a combination of both whereas its written counterpart can treat themes never heard of by oral poets.

While the theme has remained praising as such, the emphasis has shifted from the praising of heroic deeds to praises of anything one can see and appreciate in nature. The section on the eulogue mentioned courting praises, dancing praises, boxing praises et cetera. Chapter 4 showed, among other things, Mandela being praised for his untiring struggle against apartheid. The Nobel

peace prize which he shared with De Klerk on 15 October 1993 is proof of the need to shower him with more praises. Today, man-made objects, such as trains, money, aeroplanes and cars, are praised. Praising the bread delivery van, Mathale (1985:30) says

*E wela tsela ka mahwibi a banna  
E potapota le metse e lebile dikgwebong,  
E rwele dinkgwa le dikuku dijo tša  
boramošweu  
E gopotše go fepa yohle merafe.*

It embarks on a delivery journey at dawn  
Via many places where there are  
businesses,  
Carrying bread and cakes, the food of the  
whites  
Thinking of feeding all the nations.

Natural phenomena such as rivers, mountains, rain and lightning are also praised. People are praised for their academic achievements; football teams and players are also subjects of praises; one may even be praised for being a good lover as opposed to a bad or incompetent lover!

### **5.3.2 Stanza or paragraph**

As mentioned, the stanza is a group of lines or verses, commonly four or more in number, often arranged and repeated to form a unit of thought. In this section, however, certain pronouncements will be made about the paragraph with a view to illustrating the differences between the stanza and the paragraph.

Cuddon (1977:480) has the following to say about a paragraph:

... originally a short, horizontal stroke drawn below the beginning of a line in which there was a break in the sense. Now for all practical purposes, a passage or section, or subdivision in a piece of writing. Usually a paragraph deals with one particular point or aspect of the subject presented. It may vary greatly in length.

While there is agreement as far as the unit of thought is concerned, the stanza differs from the paragraph in the number of lines that makes up a unit.

Where stanzas are used, they are divided into equal number of lines or verses, each comprising a stanza. Since, as Cuddon has shown, a paragraph is not restricted to a demarcation of lines, paragraphs may differ greatly in length.

In the praise poem about the fall of divining bones, B N Tseke (1988:28) has divided the poem into five paragraphs of varying length, determined according to the number of lines in each paragraph. All paragraphs start with "A we/e ...", and the first has seven lines, the second five lines, the third four lines while the fifth and the final paragraphs consist of seven lines each.

These are not features of oral poetry. Oral poets knew nothing about such divisions although, as seen in the discussion of eulogues where the poem of Kgoši Sekhukhune was divided into stanzas, this was done with the help of the unit of thought contained. Implicitly, the stanzas and paragraphs are present.

According to Cuddon, a paragraph is a subdivision of a passage, or simply a passage, a section or subdivision of a piece of writing. It is mostly controlled by a break in the sense. Kunene (1971:53) opines that a paragraph is

determined by the break and by the sense. The limits of a paragraph are defined by the central idea it contains. In Kunene's opinion, these are structural considerations which are adhered to in the demarcation of paragraphs. Normally at the beginning there is an expository paragraph which introduces the hero by naming him and then describing his actions and their context. Some, often the stylized traditional introduction, will begin with the name of the hero, place of origin, praise motif and so on. This format is found in both modern and traditional praise poetry. The only difference is that in written poetry, there is a deliberate demarcation into paragraphs. Kunene (1971:54) engaged extensively in the detailed paragraphing of *dithoko*, an activity which is also relevant to Northern Sotho praise poetry.

Although many poets have divided their poems into stanzas, Mogashoa, Tseke B.N. and Malefahlo have not been strict in their divisions. For example, B.N. Tseke (1988:28) divided his poem on "*Mabonešapo*" (Divining bones) into five paragraphs containing a varying number of lines. In praising Kgoši Sekhukhune, Mogashoa (1988:48/9) divided the poem into four paragraphs of 8,11,12 and 11 lines each. In another poem on divining bones, Mogashoa (1988:52) divided the poem into two paragraphs of 6 and 5 lines each.

### ***Diphoko***

1. *Di wele makgolela tša Phaswana  
marumo go fahlela,*
2. *Di wele moraromogolo,*
3. *Tšhwenekgolo ya sepela ka lešika,*
4. *Ekwa tša ngwana' mosadi yo moso,*
5. *Meetsemagolo di hupile ditlou,*
6. *Ditau tša ema mpherefere maphetlwa.*
  
7. *Ditlhaka ke hlabela swiswing,*
8. *Mešukutšwane ke anega tšatšing,*

9. *Ke seša seremadingaka ge se re kwiti  
teng sa meletša,*
  10. *O se re go rema mokabi wa re ke a  
lomeletša,*
  11. *O sa tsebe mahlogedi a bomokabi.*
- 
1. They have fallen those of Phaswana  
assegais of protection
  2. They are focusing on a large problem,
  3. The large baboon is walking  
sideways,
  4. Listen to those of the child of a black  
woman,
  5. The large body of water is expressing  
the elephant,
  6. The lions are indicating great trouble.
- 
7. The cicatrices I make in the dark,
  8. The herbs I spread out in the sun,
  9. Its a protecting root axing the doctors  
when I swallow I endure.
  10. Do not after cutting willowbush think  
you are depriving.
- 
11. While you do not know the offshoots  
of willowbush.

The divining bones are focusing on a great problem. Their message in the first paragraph is simply that because of the problem one is facing, one's body must be fortified. In the second paragraph reference is made to the herbs and the medicinal incision applied for fortification or protection. It is a simple process, not unlike vaccination against certain infectious diseases. However, the



difference is that this is never done in public.

### 5.3.3. Rhyme

This is another characteristic of poetry. Most people are of the opinion that what makes poetry different from other genres is the fact that poetry rhymes. This statement, is not true of indigenous African poetry, however. Traditional poets were free to give expression to their inner feelings as they arose without any consideration of rhyme. It is also true that Northern Sotho poets who have written memorable rhymeless poems have produced good poetry.

According to Kgobe (1989:78),

Rhyme is one of the most obviously aural aspects of poetry and contributes much to the musical quality of verse. It refers to a similarity in the sounds of words or syllables, usually those coming at the end of a line of verse.

Although rhyme refers to a similarity in the sounds of words or syllables, this has been found not to be a feature of traditional poetry. Rhyme was introduced into African poetry as a result of the example set by hymns and Western verse.

Rhyme might be the most enjoyable feature of poetry as the sounds of words are echoed one after the other at more or less regular intervals. According to Vilakazi (1938:129),

Rhyme is justified because it offers aesthetic pleasure to both the writer and the reader.

This emphasises the point that rhyme is a feature of written poetry. Traditional poets had no opportunity for working out a scheme whereby the endings of the verses or lines could be similar. Lenake (1984:122) says that rhyme is:

... the correspondence of sounds at the beginning, or in the middle or at the end of verse lines.

According to this, rhyme is exactly one-to-one correspondence with linking.

Suffice it to say that rhyme is a feature that implies agreement of sounds at the beginning, middle or end of lines. In many examples a rhyme pattern was not successfully employed. In fact there is a total deviation, even in the sonnets, which may acquire either the English or the Italian rhyme scheme.

Lenake (1984) substantiates emphatically that African languages, with their different syllabic structures consisting mainly of a consonant vowel combination, the rhyme possibilities are more restricted than in a language such as English. He maintains further that there are only seven basic vowels with four variants, a fact that limits the possibilities of rhyme to a considerable extent in comparison with European languages where words may end on almost any consonant or vowel.

However, many modern poets have attempted the use of rhyme without success. Looking at the terms initial, internal and end rhyme without any strict patterning, some have succeeded. In the poem "*Diphoko*", for example the end rhyme is:

Paragraph 1. a b a b c a  
2. d d a a e

The type of rhyme scheme employed here will surely never be determined. Looking closely at the example, line 1 links with lines 2 and 10 with 11, which makes them initial rhyme. Another example by Mojalefa reveals the following rhyme scheme: line 1 rhymes with line 2 in the middle and line 3 with line 4 at the beginning. In addition, in most of Matsepe's praise sonnets there is no uniform rhyming. It could be suggested then that those who are able to should improve on the skill and those who are unable to should completely avoid the use of rhyming, which is not a feature of African poetry.

#### **5.3.4 Rhythm**

According to Moloji (1968:5),

The beautiful rhythm and the rich figurative language distinguished our poetry from ordinary speech and made it something more than an attempt to impart knowledge and facts. The rhythm, a product of a regular succession of stressed and unstressed syllable, was in the melody, his high pitched voice, his peculiar arrangement of ideas.

This excerpt reminds one of the methods of composition and performance, where in oral poetry as a consequence of the absence of stanzas and paragraphs rhythm emanates. The oral poet, through gesticulations, knew by heart which words to emphasise and which not to stress. Everything changed with the mood of the reciter, hence the flow of the praise poem was not uniform. The poems, in most cases, were intended for a listening audience and not for a reading public.

According to Van Rooyen (1990: 9), rhythm can best be described as

... a sense of moment created by the writer's  
use of emphasis and tempo.

Rhythm is found in poetry to indicate physical movements, create a certain atmosphere and express feeling. Heese and Lawton (1979:4) define rhythm as

... an effectual movement or flow that is  
brought about by the poet's use of emphasis  
and tempo.

In Western literary criticism rhythm is always discussed alongside metre, which is irrelevant in the case of African poetry. African poetry has never bound itself to a rule or pattern resembling those used in Western poetry. Looking at children's songs, Kumbirai (1982:26) finds an equal number of syllables to corresponding lines of a poem. Since rhythm, like imagery, is an expressive feature in poetry, good sense does not allow regularity in the number of syllables as occurs in children's lyrics.

In modern praise poetry, like in oral praise poetry, rhythm is irregular and does not emanate from metre. The length of lines also varies, a feature which is mostly controlled by meaning. The lines may contain one, two, three, four five or even six stressed syllable. According to Damane and Sanders (1974:52),

The fact that each line is a unit of meaning  
is naturally reflected in the Seroki's chanting,  
for either he pauses between one line and  
the next, or else he conveys the sense of  
division through his intonation or emphasis.

Depending upon the meaning in a passage or sentence, some syllables will be strengthened more than others. For instance, the poet can lengthen the last syllable or place particular emphasis upon the first as he raises his tone.

While in writing, the poet will indicate lines and pauses by means of punctuation marks, Shole (1981:119) says that these need not be pronounced or cut off in reciting. They may run-on into each other if they are a group of lines forming a larger sense unit. However, in addition to length and stress, another determining factor of rhythm in a verse is a noticeable break or pause, often referred to as a caesura.

The speed with which the poet recites as well as the breathing process involved determine the breaks in a line of poetry. A distinction can be made between a half-pause (/) and a full pause (//) These, in written praises, are marked by punctuation: length, which also differs from reciter to reciter, may be distinguished by a half-length(.) and a full length (:). Kgobe (1989: 80) discusses strong beat and weak beat and stress, which is distinguished by (\) or (/), in full. Here examples of length and pauses only will be given. For example, two lines from the elegy, "Mohu Dr C.N. Phathudi" by Sekgale (1991:50):

*Mahloko/ bana bešo,//*  
*(Mahloko bana bešo,)*  
*Re timeletšwe/ Lebowa,//*  
*(Re timeletšwe Lebowa,)*

As far as length is concerned, they will appear as:

*Mahlo:ko / ba.na be:šo,//*  
*Re timele:tšwe/ Lebo:wa,//*

In another example from Lekgothoane (1938:192), Pretorius illustrates the caesura and length using lines from "Nkwe" (the leopard) as follows:

*Ke nkwe/ tolodi ya mabala,//*  
*Nkwe/tolodi ya dikgaga,//*  
*and,*  
*Ke n:kwe/ tolo.di ya maba:la,//*  
*N:kwe/ tolo.di ya dikga:ga,//*

One last example from Dolamo (1969:30) is about "Pela" (the rock-rabbit):

*Ke pe:la/ seja-ditlaka:la,//*  
*Ke pe:la/ seratha-ka-dika:la//*  
*Maroko:ng/ go tse.bja yo:na//*

With regard to rhythm in Northern Sotho, there is actually no balance around a particular caesura since there is no regulated patterning of stresses, although perhaps in modern poetry this may indeed be the case.

### **5.3.5 The beginning**

Oral and written praise poetry differ significantly as regards the manner in which a poem is introduced.

It is true, as Wainwright (1987:13) observes, that various stylistic elements of the oral tradition have been ignored in written praise poetry. In the published anthologies, introductory preambles that exhort listeners to be alert and quiet in order that they may hear what the poet wants to say are very rarely found. Stylized traditional introductions, such as "*kgomo e a tshwa!*" (The cow spits!), or an interjection, such as "*Ekwaa! Ekwaa! or Agee! or luuuu..!*", or the greeting phrase "*Re a lotsha!*", are no longer employed. This is an element that is lacking in written praises.

No longer does one come across poets who declaim in public and where the introductory formulas were necessary in order to draw the attention of the audience. However, there are modern poets who still use these formulas even though the poems are no longer declaimed. Matsepe as well as B.N. and S.N. Tseke use these formulas extensively in their praises of fictional characters and known individuals. Segooa (1972) uses "Šatee! and I....u!" Soana, Nkadimeng and Mogashoa have also recently used these stylized traditional introductions. What is fascinating is the method employed by Malefahlo (1990) when praising "Lenong" (the Vulture). He says, "Kgomo še." (Here is the cow) where as the normal formula is:

*"Kgomo e a tshwa!*

(The cow spits!)

And, after the question, "E gangwa ke mang?" (who milks it?), he does not answer in the usual way of "E gangwa ke nna ..." but immediately launches into the poem by naming the subject of praise. Those who persist in using these formulas are to be encouraged to continue to do so as this is a sign of continuity and relationship between traditional and modern praise poetry.

Recently, in praising P.M. Kgatla, the Principal of Makgoka High School in Lebowa, Mokonyana (1990:15) started by saying:

## **12. P.M. KGATLA**

1. *O hlatlegile tše kgolo dipitša,*
2. *Mollo wa gago oa rurumpana,*
3. *O a emaemela o nyaka dihlohletšana,*
4. *Gore go apewe tšona dijo tša  
bophelo.*

1. You filled up the big pots
2. Your fire is burning brightly,
3. You are going up and down trying to  
stir up the fire,
4. So as to prepare the food of life.

Those who know Kgatla will remember him as an academic. He is also a diligent worker. As an Administrator at the above-mentioned school, his Standard 10 results have topped all the schools in Lebowa for years in succession. As a modern composition, the stylized traditional introduction is not used because the poet had no audience to address directly. However, as alluded to earlier, Tseke (1981:30) has used the formula. Praising "Mafore" (The deceiver) he says;

*Kgomo e a tshwa!*  
*E gangwa ke mang?*  
*E gangwa ke Mafore ditšhaba.*

The cow spits!  
 Who milks it?  
 It is milked by me the deceiver of nations.

Many other poets have also used formulas to a great extent.

### **5.3.6 The ending**

Even more than the stylized traditional introduction, the ending has completely disappeared. Even amongst poets such as Matsepe, Tseke, Mogashoa and others who still use the stereotyped preamble, the ending is no longer used. Only in public declamation is a stylized ending still employed. Mostly it is used by boy-initiates. To modern praise singers, who sit individually and quietly in a room to describe what impresses them, this is of no value. The Northern



Sotho formula "ke tšhaba mediti" is no longer used. There is no continuity whatsoever between traditional and modern praise poetry as far as the use of this formula is concerned.

When completing the praise of P.M. Kgatla, Mokonyana (1990:15) says:

*Ga a fšege moditi o dita marega le selemo,  
O fa a file, ba amogelwa difarong,  
Dijo o rafolla maphaapha,  
Tše di lebanego bana, batswadi le batšofe.*

You are not afraid of the initiator in the  
winter and summer.

You give forever and they are admitted  
everywhere,

Food you give in plenty,

Suitable for children, adults and the aged.

Kgatla, as the poet says, offers tuition to young and old alike. He has no rest for in summer and winter he gives generously.

However, since it is associated with aesthetic identification, it would be good if the ending formula could be reinstated.

#### **5.4 CONCLUSION**

The exercise of comparing the structure of oral praise poetry and modern praise poetry is relatively straightforward, but does not reveal clear cut distinctions between the two since they have had and continue to exercise an influence on one another.

Traditional praises have influenced modern praises, while modern praises have improved traditional praises factors which represent a welcome development in Northern Sotho poetry.

The difference between modern praise poetry is that in the former type there are decidedly fewer oral formulas than in the latter. Modern poetry is more individualistic than its traditional counterpart, which is the work of a community.

A comparison reveals that there are more similarities than differences between traditional and modern praise poetry. This is accounted for by the fact that many modern compositions are simply embellishments of the oral poems. Again, while heroic or oral poetry is hero-centric, modern praises embrace the praising of anything, even natural phenomena, such as the rain or a locomotive. The difference in the themes stems from the fact that today there are no longer wars of the same calibre as those fought in ancient times, hunting expeditions, cattle raid or initiation institutions in which heroes become worthy objects of praise.

Simply the fact that modern praise poetry is a product of traditional praises makes the similarities more prevalent than the differences. The few differences stem from the Western influence, whose poetic forms appeared more beautiful and interesting than traditional Northern Sotho praises. From a structural point of view, the modern poems seem more organised and easier to read, especially considering their division into stanzas and paragraphs.

Imagery is clearly an indispensable tool in good poetry, even though some critics hold, quite correctly, that there are examples of excellent poetic composition without a single image. Metaphors, similes and personification are extremely prevalent in both modern and traditional praise poetry.

Repetition is a *sine qua non* of Northern Sotho poetry regardless of the kind. This occurs in both the oral and written genres. It is a feature that is utilised

extensively in praise poetry.

Although this is not an exhaustive study into the features of comparison, it is hoped that this introduction to these features will encourage further research into the similarities and differences between traditional and modern varieties of praise poetry.

## CHAPTER 6

### 6 GENERAL CONCLUSION

The objective of this research was to study the content, the technique and form of traditional and modern praise poetry. To accomplish this goal, it was deemed important first of all to adopt a comparative approach and consider oral as opposed to written praise poetry. However, the main aim was not to extol writing in order to minimise orality, as some literary enthusiasts tend to do nowadays. Clearly and simply stated, both orality and writing need to remain in and not be abstracted from their endogenous contexts. Sometimes, if not always, it is a gross scientific mistake to use writing to judge orality or orality to judge writing. In the light of the above, the following findings were made concerning oral praise and written praise poetry.

Poetry is an aspect of the uses of language, in this case the Northern Sotho language. Talking about language is seen as essentially talking about the culture of the group of people or country to which the language belongs. Poetry originated from praise singers, diviners, chiefs and poets and was then seen as a criticism of life.

Praise poetry is poetry because it uses language. It is the culture of the people. The Northern Sotho people, like all Africans, have praise poetry chanted to express the political views of the community. Whether traditional or modern, it conveys the spirit and attitudes of the Bapedi people. This is made possible by the powerful imagery housed in artistic and precise expression. The praises express the Bapedi's thought concerning themselves or their chiefs and heroes. The attitudes expressed are also not just of approval but of appraisal, and the poetry deals with both appreciation and deprecation.

Traditional praise poetry is handed down orally from generation to generation and is composed in a distinct, traditional style. Modern praise poetry is written,

and arises intentionally from the skill of a single individual. It has been said that true literature is the creation of a single individual, while true folklore is a communal composition arising as if by magic from the collective throat of the masses. This statement seems illogical and is not acceptable because it does not see anything of literary value in folklore. Many of the most sophisticated modern critics still rely heavily on a slightly modified version of the old communal theory.

The subject of the praise poem could be gratitude to the king for his protection of his domain. Praises could also praise individuals for their services to the community or could be concerned with an animal, nation, ancestors or ethnic group. A knowledgeable poet usually portrays the history, customs, and language of his community. This he accomplishes by describing events, embellishing his language with wit, idioms, proverbs, images, similes, and hyperbole. He also employs various techniques in his composition of the praises. Of prime importance to the successful poet is the necessary practical knowledge essential to exploit the aspects of composition, such as the formula, the audience, the ring composition, performance and style of delivery in a skilful way.

Praise poetry continues to play an important role in society. Its allusion to history continues to appeal to audiences. As a result it is recited at various gatherings and is often rendered on the spur of the moment.

Traditional praise poetry, as part of oral poetry, is a means of extolling human effort. Praise poetry is known in Northern Sotho as Direto, in Southern Sotho as Dithoko, and in Tswana as Maboko. Oral praise poetry is centred on the praises of chiefs, warriors, initiates, animals, birds and divining bones. It deals with aspects such as the praise name, praise verse, praise stanza and lastly the praise poem. Within these are found totem praises which are aligned with the social function of praise poetry. They address themselves to the good and ills of the society. Poetry relating to divining bones is seen not as praise, but

rather the fall or "lewa" of the divining bones is interpreted in a highly figurative and obscured style.

Modern praise poetry is poetry which is written down and has the marks of Western European influence. It may be divided into two categories: modern praises with the influence of the traditional spirit, and modern praise poetry that emulates and makes use of the Western conception of poetry. While modern praise poetry also centres on chiefs, animals, birds and divining bones, it has excluded warriors and initiates, but included academics, outstanding community leaders, man-made objects, such as money and locomotives, and natural phenomena. The praises are in stanzas and verses and some are largely rhymed albeit not very successfully.

Northern Sotho praise poetry and poetry as well has grown from oral to written poetry. This means that oral praise poetry has had some influence on written praise poetry. Such influences lead to the conclusion that there are, therefore, more similarities than differences between traditional and modern praise poetry. Among the similarities discussed are the theme, obscure allusions and archaic words, totem praises, imagery with its many facets, repetition and eulogues. However, they also differed in some themes. Modern praises are divided into stanzas and some have a rhyme scheme. Other differences are that while some modern poems have the stereotype preamble at the beginning, many have discarded this and the concluding formula is non-existent in contrast to traditional poems where these stylistic features are still present. This comparison has been straightforward although it does not reveal convincing results because of the influence both forms had on each other.

What has been written down of the oral poetry is a very small fraction of what can still be collected. There are volumes of oral poetry in the field. It is hoped that this study will encourage more scholars to collect this indigenous poetry and that those who have succeeded in marrying the oral and written texts will continue to do so.

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