

SEMIOTICS AS A MEDIUM TO CONVEY THE PHILOSOPHY AND PSYCHOLOGY OF EVIL IN THE XITSONGA TRANSLATION OF MACBETH.

Professor N. Saule
Dept. of African Languages
University of South Africa

M.D. Ndove
Shingwedzi Education Multipurpose Centre

ABSTRACT

This article has made an attempt to epitomise the philosophy and psychology of evil as seen in the Shakespearean literary work, Macbeth. Semiotics has served as the basis of assumptions upon which various symbolic elements were debated. To be more precise semiotic elements such as kingship, coronation, throne and heirloom constituted the cog of this project. However, other semiotic instruments in the like of symbols, pictures, objects and language were alluded to in this scientific study. For this article, the bottom line of its argument should be on the Scottish fallacies of the mentioned semiotic elements against the Vatsonga beliefs on the activities of witchcraft and superstitions.

1. INTRODUCTION

The point of departure of this investigation, as indicated above, is based upon the Scottish's fallacies on the interpretations and functions of a

king, throne, coronation and heirloom. The practice became common in the 16th century as illustrated in the literary text of *Macbeth*.

Based on this argument, the Vatsonga have their philosophical and psychological beliefs on the afore said functions. According to the theories indicated in the research project, the king to be has to honour the beliefs thereof. Should the king-elect brush aside the belief, it is regarded as a violation of the rites of his forefathers. Therefore the belief is still in practised even to date.

2. KINGSHIP IN SCOTLAND OF THE 16TH CENTURY

The detailed analysis of this argument revolves around the play, *Macbeth*, wherein examination is based upon the philosophy and psychology of evil. The prologue of the play shows a sketchy background of the Scotland of Duncan versus that of Macbeth.

Feudalism of those days showed the king as a man to lead the country with all absolute powers second only to God. There came Macbeth with the influence of the witches. These prophets of witchcraft and evil inspired Macbeth to rise to kingship although he had no royal blood.

This argument is seconded by Sinfield (1986:63) who declared the functions of a king under feudalism as “ the one who held authority among his peers, his equals, and his power was often little more than nominal, authority was distributed also among overlapping non-

national institutions such as the church, estates, assemblies, regions and towns.”

In contrast to Sinfield’s ideas, Crapotta (1984:25) declared that “the king commanded the total respect of his subjects and that respect earned only by quickly avenging the slightest offence to his personal honour.” This power superseded the king’s personal egos and it was abnormally applied. The evidence of it in the play is when Macbeth’s murder of Duncan led to his rise to the office of kingship. The outcome became a fallacy to the neighbouring countries like France and Germany of that era.

Another fallacy of kingship during the Shakespearean period is the announcement of Malcolm into office by his father, Duncan, who was by that time still alive. Malcolm is given the reign of Cumberland. This idea inspired Macbeth to want more. Shakespeare (1978:40) has worded the ordaining of Macbeth by the witches prior to that of Malcolm in these words: “All hail, Macbeth, that shall be king hereafter,” which are evil words in the psychological thinking of any normal human being.

Duncan as a ruler is portrayed as a friendly leader of the country, one full of love for and trust in all his men and women, unlike Macbeth. Favila (2001:5) brings out the personality of Macbeth in a contrasted manner as she says: “our first view of Macbeth is seen as impressive as an adult would be. Rumour paints him as a legendary general and loyal Thane. His head, heart and hand defended his court from bloody broils of war. We as the audience, wait for Macbeth to enter, as do witches, Duncan, Scotland herself-like children waiting for their

favourite grown up to come and play with them and also to take care of them.” These are words with greater expectations. The opposite is the most hideous crime that faced Scotland later. Such expectations made the philosophy and psychology of evil to be the most interesting element of the research.

The clumsiness of the Scottish kingship reached a climax when Duncan’s horses underwent cannibalism as a sign of God’s displeasure of what befell the king. Such a practice is very common amongst the Vatsonga. They believed that there are those who go from house to house at night in the form of beetles, tortoises, bats, snakes, owls and many other creatures.

With particular reference to Xitsonga culture, a man becomes a king by virtue of birth rites. Such a person undergoes various ritual undertakings that must be accepted by the spirits of the dead kings. The success depends upon the acceptance of the recent dead king in collaboration with the status of the royal family.

The argument is supported by Ray (1991:74) who says: “ when the king has died, the kingship temporarily ceases to exist, and it had to be reinstituted through a series of rites in which the new king and his chiefs enacted the founding deeds of the early kings.” This practice is not the same in the play. Macbeth is led to the throne without observing a moment of silence as to who is to succeed Duncan.

According to Vatsongas, after the death of a king, his royal chair is hidden away from possible disappearance and anointing of superstitious herbs that can weaken the king elect until the king elect

has swallowed the *ndzalama* (gem). Should *ndzalama* (gem) fail to stay in his stomach, it will mean that he is not a legitimate child of the deceased king. Then it is passed on to his younger brother. This is followed by the knitting of *xitshungulu* (amulet), which is sealed with strong herbs prepared by Inyangas from outside the king elect's villages. This amulet is to protect the king and to predict anything bad that may befall the king while living with his people.

For the sake of keeping this gem (*ndzalama*) a secret, many Vatsonga chiefs die in their huts. Chiefs are not allowed to die in hospital for fear that people can snatch this gem, which would lend to the chieftaincy going away forever. As the king or chief wrangles between death and life, the *indlovukazi* (first wife), waits in agony in order to see where the gem shall fall out of the chief's mouth. As soon she gets it, announces his death to the councillors and the family.

This gem (*ndzalama*) is believed to be a weapon for the chief in many ways. While it is in his body, it commands respect, fear, prosperity from his forefathers and strength against other nations.

The supplement to the chief's strength is an amulet (*xitshungulu*). It is knitted by very strong inyangas in witchcraft wherein fats of different and fearful animals are mixed. The most preferred animals are crocodiles, lions, mambas, tigers and eagles. The eagle's fats are believed to give him sight to see witches beforehand. The amulet could be tied around his arm during the day and kept in the pillow at night.

This is a belief that is cherished by Vatsonga chieftaincies. Even at the time of writing this article, the practice is still in use. However, it is secretly kept so that people may not know. It is feared that if people know about it, some may try to bewitch their chief. Therefore, most of the Vatsonga chiefs are highly respected, honoured and idolised.

3. THE SOVEREIGNY OF CORONATION

The sovereign's consorts in Scotland as depicted by Shakespeare differ completely from those in neighbouring countries. Barthes (1973:35) says the following in support of this argument, "coronation is to acknowledge that the king is king by the divine right." By "divine right" Barthes tries to compare coronation to how the Bible proclaims it. God chooses the king by His divine rights in the form of dreams with a mission to be entrusted upon the chosen one.

The striking difference from what Barthes describes and the Scottish practice, is that Macbeth by virtue of subterfuge, does declare. Meanwhile, all the Scottish kings of the 15th and 16th centuries were sworn to the throne at the same place. In other words, the Scottish people regard Scone the most sacred place where their kings accepted the throne. As for now, it is a fallacy since Macbeth is not from the royal family to rule the Scottish people.

The philosophy behind the coronation is that the one who is sworn into office must be closely brought to his forefathers who will acknowledge him to the throne. On the other hand, the psychological part of it is that appearing before the forefathers' graves shall have an

impact on the king elect as far blessings, prosperities and strengths are concerned. Macbeth's coronation is seen as a mockery of the real one that is normally ordained to other kings.

According to this research, coronation of Shakespeare's era lost ethics and code of morals. The coronation is set against the burial of king Duncan at Colmekill, a place where all Scottish kings are buried. Just like other kings, Duncan follows as the most appropriate person to rest there forever. At the end of the play, where and how Macbeth is to be buried is not confirmed, just to make his kingship a fallacy.

According to Vatsonga cultural beliefs, the time prior to coronation is considered to be the most appropriate moment for direct contact with the kings' ancestors. Daily activities such as tribal assemblies, hunting, ploughing, contact with women, especially for the councillors, are forbidden for a week. It is taken as a peaceful time where their gods should move freely around the kraal.

As mentioned before, *xitshungulu* (amulet) is knitted and wrapped around the king's waist. The cutting of the king's skin is done with a sharp object in order for *muti* to enter into the king's body. For nearly seven days, the king shall undergo daily vapour bath known as *xixambo*. This is to cleanse him from all possible witchcraft.

On the day of coronation, the councillors and the elderly women shall lead the king to his forefathers' grave at dawn. There, ceremonial rituals in the form of pouring down of home made beer and snuff take place. The philosophical and the psychological beliefs thereof are that the ancestors shall enter into him throughout his ruling period. It is

then that the symbolic objects such as axes, spears, leopard skins, headgear made of ostrich feathers, knobkerries and an assegai are brought to the fore in order for the ancestors to hand them over to the king elect.

This visit to the graves is believed to have interdependence between the palace and ritual commoners. The forefathers in the graves shall ensure that there is productivity and security on the land and for the king to attain these, he should co-operate with the council elders. It is also being seen as the authority bestowed in the king and shall be seen as a collective entity that involves all ritual and control over his subjects.

At around ten o'clock of that particular day, the king is led to the throne to be sworn into office. Normally, the installation is conducted in the presence of other kings and the king's witchdoctors seated in the centre. Ululations, beating of drums, singing and dancing while one of the king's orators is reciting a praise poem, precede the march to the throne.

4. THE POWER OF THE THRONE

The throne of the Shakespearean time can be said to be the throne of blood as seen in some of the literary works. Therefore, labelling the throne, as "throne of blood" is to make it more shaded with hideous activities as seen in the play Macbeth.

Zambrano (1974:269) sums the throne of Macbeth's period as follows: "the world of Macbeth is one in turmoil where the supernatural power

battles the natural and where social order becomes chaos.” These words show how the deeds of Macbeth are seen as a blow against God and also against the Scottish people.

It is believed that the king is the representative of God on earth. The king is chosen and ordained by God to take on the throne as God’s co-ruler on earth. In contrast to the Shakespearean’s throne, the devilish power took control of Macbeth and by way of shedding of blood, advanced him to the decent seat of the Scottish rulers. This made it a fallacy, as it is not the rightful way to attain the throne.

The argument above is echoed by Brown (1982:22) who says: “Macbeth has passed beyond the point of no return, and, terrible deeds no longer shock or disturb him.” These words signify Macbeth’s philosophical and psychological being in terms of his desires to be the king of Scotland. This is another belief that the examination has attempted to reveal.

However, the collapse of time in the play that is, ‘tomorrow’, the future and ‘yesterday’, the past, symbolize the end of the throne of blood that would be replaced by the throne of members of the royal family. This is a psychological belief that turned real after the killing of Macbeth by Macduff. Eventually the throne returned to Macduff who is of Duncan’s lineage.

The argument is supported by Horwick (1978:365) who says that: “it is the royal family that occupy the throne...” This definition assists to clarify to the readers in general that the forces that were against the

joint leadership between Malcolm and Macbeth shall inherit the throne.

In the literary form, the throne is a chair. According to Briggs (1989:1055) it is not like an ordinary one, for it is a “ chair of state or seat is of a high dignity”. It is likened to the chair of the divine God, where every Christian believes to see Jesus Christ seated beside God. It is an elevation of oneself from the lowly hierarchy to the highest.

As a state property, it is a conspicuously flamboyant chair, one that in many African cultures is covered with different skins from fierce animals like lions and leopards. It differs from other chairs because no one is allowed to sit on it except the king, and only after his coronation.

It holds all the required elements of perfection in the sense that it elevates the king to the most absolute state of being a ruler, and also, God’s second in command. However, it can be seen and touched by the subjects but not in the presence of the king.

According to Vatsonga traditional beliefs, all tribal assemblies summoned by the king are held while their majesty is seated on the throne. There is but only one councillor who is entrusted with the care of this stool. Such a councillor looks after it and sees to it that nothing is smeared on it for it might be witchcraft and superstitions.

Should the king attend family bereavement, the throne is hidden until seven days have elapsed. It symbolizes the king’s dysmenorrhoea and must wait for ritual cleansing. Such cleansing is followed by some

ritual ceremonies whereby homemade beer and snuff are used, possibly the slaughtering of black and white corks with their blood being sprinkled all over the throne.

Should the king lose one of his wives or children, the whole palace has to be cleansed. This follows a serious snuffing and body washing with the strongest herbal roots and leaves from the king's inyanga. Should the king ignore this practice; the witches shall weaken his authority in the form of losing respect, fame, and prosperity and also, his life may be in danger as he may have acted against the will of his ancestors.

Another philosophy that exists and affects the king psychologically is that all herbal medicine does last for a year. It means that after every twelve month, the king must set out to his inyanga to renew the rituals. Failing to do so may mean his loss of respect, strength and become the easiest target for the witches.

This is some of the information that is being exposed by this research. The information has more bearing on the philosophy and psychology of evil, a belief that every Vatsonga man and woman shall dote on.

5. ENTITLEMENT OF HEIRLOOM

Scotland of the period of feudalism as indicated at the beginning of this article, had a person entitled to continue as a predecessor of the deceased king. Such a person would come from the queen's sons, preferably, the first-born. Brown (1993:1213) claims that “ a person

receiving, or entitled by law to receive property or rank as the successor or legal representative of the former owner.” In this case, the person must be an heir, that is, one who is of a blood relation of the deceased king and not along the same lineage.

Some of the qualities of the heir that have a significant bearing as a future king are, a good bill of health, morality, and good and trustworthiness to the community at large. In Scotland of Macbeth's epoch, Duncan's son, Malcolm deserved the right to heirloom. The contradictory factor is seen from his failure to expose Macbeth's murdering of his father. Instead, he ran away to seek refuge in Ireland. This cowardly behaviour allowed Macbeth to take the throne.

Like in many African cultures, for Vatsonga, the heir has legitimate rights to inheritance. Elliot (1960:28) assumes that “the royal heir to the throne is far more importantly the king by reason of his royal character.” Philosophically, it means that the heir is the one entitled to property, money, land and all the wealth left by his father.

The philosophy as well as the psychology of inheritance in terms of Vatsonga people, is that the death of the head of the family results in the distribution of his wealth to the inheritors. The inheritors are his children, particularly, the sons. This practice makes a person to gain authority over possessions of the dead person's belongings. It is normally done a year after the owner has passed away.

A feast known as *ku hluvula* (removal of funeral clothing) is organized. Prior to the feasting week, the king to be is taken to the

inyangas for divine bones that will give direction. If it is not done, the feast will finish in chaos.

To date the issue of inheritance has been included in our statutory laws. These special laws and customs governing inheritance are always and everywhere part and parcel of the general structure of property relationships. When the king dies, his property if he has any, is dispensed to his children. The main reason behind this practice is that a clan does not die. Therefore there should be continuity.

According to Vatsonga people, what is known as the deceases personal things won't be handed over to another man. Things such as divine bones, weapons, tools, utensils are considered to be the extensions of the deceased's own personality and are burnt to ashes to disappear with him. It is commonly believed that the dead may need his things in the world of the dead.

Where the deceased had no child, the Vatsonga people have what is called, *ndzhaka* (legitim). This is inheritance, which is not given to the heir but to other members of the family. It restricts the right of bequest that would imply free disposal of property by will or gift. Those who benefit in this case are the deceased's brothers and sisters unless otherwise a will is signed.

6. RECAPITULATIONS

In accordance with the averred aims of this article as outlined in its abstract, the focus is on the semiotic variants as well as the philosophy and psychology of evil. Semiotics as ostensive signs at one stage has

been demonstrated in the study under kingship, coronation, the throne and the inheritor. It is aligned to the Scottish people and also the Vatsonga cultural group.

The greatest significance of the ostensiveness results from a mere belief in witchcraft. From Macbeth's point of view, witchcraft and superstitions dealt with the seen and unseen forces within his universe. For him to believe in it, required his personal credulity and scientific conception that incorporated into cause and effect.

On the other hand, the Vatsonga people hold the belief from their forefathers that to honour and fear the spirit agencies induced by human malignancies and magical forces, may bring death to a man. There are beliefs that are rooted in their hearts and minds that witches enter the human blood in the form of tortoises, snakes, beetles, rats, and also in the ordinary tone of a wizard or witch.

The study revolves much around the royal family as the centre of attraction in any tribal enclosure. Once the royal family believe in witchcraft and superstitions, it means the whole community shall do the same. This is one of the reasons why this study bases the philosophy and psychology of evil along those imaginary lines.