THE NATURE OF PROSE NARRATIVE IN NORTHERN SOTHO: FROM ORALITY TO LITERACY.

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that **THE NATURE OF PROSE NARRATIVE IN NORTHERN SOTHO: FROM ORALITY TO LITERACY** 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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DEDICATION

To the memory of my late brothers, Thomas and Franz, and my late father, Matome Norman. May their souls rest in peace.

SUMMARY

The basic aim of this study is to investigate the nature of the narrative, concerning itself with the structures inherent in a system of signs which reveals the communicative function of literature. The general aim is to interpret the meaning of the narrative against the cultural background.

The study makes a synthesis of formalist and structuralist points of view on the relations between story and discourse. A comparison of the oral and written narratives reveals that the discourse of the latter displays more artistry than that of the former.

An examination of the problems of theme selection and development in the Northern Sotho prose narrative, from the point of view of African literature, is made. This reveals that the South African censorship laws have caused the emergence of sophisticated writers with a highly developed artistic way of portraying the South African situation sensitively by making it speak for itself.

The study also examines some aspects of character in the narrative, analyzing the actions of characters in the story rather than psychological essences about them, and showing how these characters help the reader to understand the narrator's moral vision of the world.

A comparison of the narrative techniques in the oral and the written narrative shows that in the former, the narrator is limited by tradition to the actions and the events that can be seen or heard, while the narrator in the latter can even describe what his characters are thinking or feeling.

The study finally examines the relationship between symbolism and culture in the Northern Sotho narrative to reveal the general African philosophy in which life is perceived as a perpetual journey undertaken by the hero from the natural to the non-natural world, whence he returns to the original world after experiencing moral lassitude and frustration.

In the conclusion it is observed that both the oral and the written narratives deal with the intricacies of life as series of patterns and developments. The functional nature of the traditional African aesthetics reflected in the narratives prescribes the study of their meaning against the African cultural background.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aims and Objectives

In this study we intend to examine some formal features of prose narrative literature (from oral to written) in Northern Sotho. The Northern Sotho prose narrative will be subjected to various contemporary theories of literary criticism seeking not necessarily to explain what individual works mean, but to discover a system of figures and conventions that will help critics like ourselves to explain the forms and meanings that literary works often have; help us to find the authority for meaning in the very world we experience or in the world we aspire to.

The basic aim of this study is to investigate the nature of the narrative in Northern Sotho as a literary artefact. This investigation will be made in an attempt to answer the question, "What does the reader look for in literature?" As the answer will more often than not involve a communication or message, the investigation will be made bearing in mind that the communicative act of literature involves a signifier (the sound-image or the written shape) and a signified (the concept or meaning). In such an investigation, we cannot overlook the fact that the signifier is created by a sender (narrator/author) and intended for a recipient (audience/reader). It is the basic aim of this study, therefore, to examine the Northern Sotho prose narrative, concerning ourselves with those structures that are inherent in such a system of signs.

This examination should enable us to put the oral and the written narrative in juxtaposition to reveal that, to a very great extent, the two are morphologically compatible, and may thus be similarly defined in the concept of the Northern Sotho prose narrative. To make this point clear we may take the psychology of the folktale as a starting point: In the folktale the course of the hero's maturation and growth, the repeated theme of parental struggle, and the search for the "core of the true personality" are recurrent (Rosenberg, 1978:155). We can see a recapitulation of modern life cycles (on which most prose narratives are written) in the following movement which the folktale is commonly concerned with: Starting with a villainy or lack, there usually follows the quest to the outer world, the struggle with hostile forces in accompaniment, and the eventual (usually) successful and safe return of the hero, usually involving the establishment of a new family (wedding).

In undertaking this enterprise, we intend to focus on the conditions of meaning in the narrative, relating the oral prose narrative to the written, treating them not as sources but as constituents of a genre whose conventions we shall attempt to infer. We shall, for example, be interested in such conventions as govern the production and interpretation of character in the narrative, conventions of plot structure, of thematic synthesis, and conventions of symbolic condensation.

We do not only intend to focus on similarities between the oral and the written prose narrative, but on anomalies as well. For example, unlike during a reading "performance" of written narrative, when the work becomes the reader's experience during those minutes (or hours) of "intersubjectivity" as a result of the connection made between the mind of the author and the mind of the reader, there is no constant authorial state of mind during the performance of oral tradition.

literary works' (Selden, 1986:3). The cause for such reader's and critics' concern might lie in their observation of the academic obsession with theory which is clearly noticeable among contemporary literary critics. Such obsessed critics usually recommend methodology for its own sake without any textual support. Harari (1980:10) finds the greatest problem for the student of literature to be how to avoid being weighed down by insurmountable methodological problems. On the same problem, Harari (*op.cit.*) quotes Roland Barthes who maintains that such researchers turn method into law, with the result that everything in their reading takes place inside the method, leaving nothing to the "writing".

Harari (*op.cit.*) rightly identifies the need to remind those critics obsessed with theory that theory itself is most useful insofar as it serves the criticism of specific works of literature. What is important is not the indulgence in abstract theorizing, but exercise in applying theory to literary texts. In recent years the critics' concern with literary theory has taken rather well, and the signs are that it may remain intact for the foreseeable future, especially if we do not allow it to become law. If we are serious with literature we cannot "ignore the deeper issues raised by the major literary theorists in recent years" (Selden, 1986:3).

This brings us to the necessity of examining the development of literary theory in recent years. According to Terry Eagleton literary theory has seen many transformations since 1917, the year in which the Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky published his pioneering article entitled 'Art as Device'.

> Since then, and especially over the past two decades, there has been a striking proliferation of literary theory: the very meaning of 'literature', 'reading' and 'criticism' has undergone deep alteration. (1986:vii.)

1.2 Research Methodology and Procedure

To be able to realize the aims and objectives set out above we shall need narrative material to analyze. For oral narrative material, several folktales have been collected from traditional singers of tales in a cross-section of the Northern Sotho-speaking area. These tales have been recorded verbatim from the storytellers with the least (if any) intervention from the researcher (Makgamatha, 1987:3), and subsequently made available for publication in book form. The researcher, in the published folktales, only found it necessary to standardize the spelling of words in those tales simply for purposes of unity, as the tales themselves were recorded in various Northern Sotho dialects. However, no attempt was made to tamper with either the form or narrative style of the tales. For this reason the tales should provide authentic material that will be useful in an examination of the nature of the oral prose narrative.

To enable us to put the oral and the written narrative in juxtaposition for purposes of this study, several folktales, especially those narrated by skilled tradition bearers and with a reasonably complex plot will be sampled from the collection referred to above. For written narrative material, more of the earlier works of this art than the later or contemporary will be studied for possible oral narrative influence. The selection of this material will thus be guided by their dates of publication more than any other merit. For purposes of this study, therefore, novels of the 1940's, 1950's and the 1960's will be sampled on a representative basis.

In our search for the nature of the prose narrative, we intend to subject these works to literary theories. We are aware that many readers feel comfortable in their contemptuous dismissal of literary theory, claiming that it undermines reading as an "innocent" activity and consequently deadens 'the spontaneity of their response to

> As a constant behind each performance is not the mind of an author but an ideal performance, an aspect of the tradition that is shared by performer and audience alike. (Kellogg, 1973:58).

The performer in oral tradition is thus not analogous to an author, but to a skilful reader of written narrative.

This leads us to our attitude towards the place of the author in this study. Although our inquiry will not be predominantly author-oriented we intend (at least in written narrative) to attempt a criticism of the author's experience as it may be conveyed in a text, as well as the possibility of his active consciousness at the moment of creation and perception.

And, finally, it is the general aim of this study to interpret the meaning of literature against the cultural background of the people for whom it is written. We note that although oral and written narrative may be formally distinct, they are not culturally distinct in any meaningful way. In fact, it is the knowledge of a people's customs and traditions that will enable any researcher, or reader for that matter, to appreciate the literature of the people fully. The study of the Northern Sotho prose narrative, from oral to written, may help in the intended investigation of the possible place the mythic and the historical elements as well as elements of the contemporary have in the Northern Sotho novel. In this way an attempt will be made to investigate the relationship between literature (in particular prose narrative) and culture in Northern Sotho.

As can be expected, the various literary theories that have emerged since Russian Formalism (and even before it) raise different questions about literature. The theories do not define literature according to whether it is fictional or imaginative, but because of the fact that literature uses language in peculiar ways. Consequently, the effect of the communicative function of language comes into play. Just as the linguistic communication involves the **addresser** sending a **message** using a particular **code** and within a particular **context** to an **addressee** there will also be theories asking questions about literature from the point of view of the author (addresser), of the text (message), or of the reader (addressee). Although we do not intend attempting to draw a comprehensive picture of modern literary theory, for purposes of this study we shall look into some of the main theories (from a historical perspective) such as Formalism, New Criticism, Structuralism and Post-Structuralism, limiting ourselves to remarks of a general character without the least pretension of exhausting the subject.

1.2.1 *Formalist Theory*

Other schools of criticism existed, even in Russia, before Formalism. For them the most important issue in literary criticism was the "what" of a literary work of art. In order to understand this "what", the literary critic usually looked beyond the work itself, into the life of the author, or the philosophical systems that might underlie the work, or even the socio-political events that might have influenced the composition of the work. This "what" was traditionally generally referred to as the content of a literary work and juxtaposed it to the "how" of the literary creation, namely its form.

When they did this, these traditional critics did not aim at being perversely unscientific, but were convinced that a literary work was an expression of its author's mental life, a document of his time, or even his philosophical meditation. Quite clearly, then, literary criticism before Formalism revolved around other branches of knowledge other than literature itself.

The Formalists provide literary criticism with its own centre of gravity, its particular object of inquiry, namely literature itself, and not anything else. They see literature as an autonomous reality which is governed by its own regularity and independent of other contiguous spheres of culture and knowledge. The vital issue for literary criticism is no longer the investigation of other realities that might be reflected by literary texts, but the description of that which makes literary texts literary reality. Formalist criticism concentrates on the study of literary works themselves.

> The writer's 'personality' and in particular his empirical, biological personality, his human - all too human - psychology are thus excluded, as well as the study of the milieu that educated and formed him. (Steiner, 1984:73).

In other words, the author simply fades into the background in Formalist analysis. The material being analyzed is deprived of any emotional, cognitive, or social significance. A literary work of art is seen as nothing more than "pure form" - a relative of materials.

The essence of Formalism, then, lies in the reversal of the importance (value) of content in literature. The "how" of the literary work (its form) assumes primacy in importance, and the focus of literary interest shifts from **external** considerations to the **internal** organization of the literary work itself. For the Formalists, the main goal of literary criticism is to discover and describe the "literariness" of literature, i.e.

discern from within an object what makes the object to appear as literary (Steiner, *op. cit.*). For them literature is a kind of writing which uses language in peculiar ways and thus represents, in the words of Roman Jakobson, an 'organized violence committed on ordinary speech'. (Eagleton, 1986:2). The language of literature, then, deviates quite systematically from everyday speech, according to the Formalists, who include in their ranks Roman Jakobson, Viktor Shklovsky, Yuri Tynjanov, Osip Brik, Boris Ejchenbaum and Boris Tomashevsky.

Terry Eagleton (1986:2) refers to the Formalists as

> A militant, polemical group of critics, (who) rejected the quasi-mystical symbolist doctrines which had influenced literary criticism before them, and in a practical, scientific spirit shifted attention to the material reality of the literary text itself.

For them a literary work is made of words, and not objects or the expression of the author's feelings or ideas. A literary work is not a reflection of social reality either. It is a material fact in itself, which can be examined in the same way one could examine how a machine works.

Their point of departure is to see each textual system as an assemblage of 'devices' or interrelated elements which include sound, imagery, rhythm, syntax, narrative techniques and the plot of the work. What all these devices have in common is the function or effect of transforming extra-aesthetic material into the work of art by providing it with literary form. The devices change extra-artistic material into art by forming (or 'deforming') it anew and in this way 'estranging' or 'defamiliarizing' it.

Among the Opojaz members in Russia ('The Society for the Study of Poetic Language'), Viktor Shklovsky is generally recognized as the **spiritus movens** of the society and the Formalist publications. His main work *On the Theory of Prose* (O teorii prozy, 1925) which deals with fiction, poetry and non-fictional prose, contains many insights into the forms and laws of poetic fiction (Thompson, 1971:26). In this work Shklovsky delineates a good deal of terminology that has come to be identified with Formalist discourse. Among these are such terms as **priem** (strategy, or device), **ostranenie** (defamiliarization), **zatrudnenie** (defacilitation), **zamedlenie** (retardation, or slowing down) (Thompson, *op. cit.*). These terms will be clarified further when we apply the Formalist method to the Northern Sotho narrative in the next chapters.

For the moment it should suffice to say that the Formalists find literary language to be distinguished from other forms of discourse in that it 'deforms' ordinary language in various ways.

> Under the pressure of literary devices, ordinary language (is) intensified, condensed, twisted, telescoped, drawn out, turned on its head. It (is) language 'made strange'; and because of this estrangement, the everyday world (is) also suddenly made unfamiliar. (Eagleton, 1986:4).

In Shklovsky's "defamiliarization" the Formalists have found a critical formula that will not only define the difference between literature and non-literature more precisely and more generally than has been done before, but also, at the same time, state the purpose of literature. According to Shklovsky (1965:4-11), the purpose of art is to force us to notice things, for normally our perceptions of and responses to reality in the routines of everyday speech become stale, blunted, habitual or as he

would put it, 'automatized', which is another way of saying that they are minimal. Art develops a variety of techniques to call attention to itself by impeding our perception. A novel point of view can force a reader to perceive by making the familiar seem strange. In his own words, the purpose of art is

> to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar", to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object: the object is not important. (1965:12).

Just as habitualization makes works, objects, even emotions such as love and fear, to disappear, defamiliarization helps us see and feel things; it renders objects more 'perceptible'; it makes, as Shklovsky puts it, "the stone stoney". To sum up, the work of art as a product of an intentional human activity, has as its purpose the changing of the mode of our perception from practical to artistic; and Shklovsky coined the word defamiliarization to account for this special nature of artistic perception.

In Shklovsky's view, the source of defamiliarization in the literary form is the deformation not of language alone, but of events and happenings as well, in the process of their verbal representation. The literary form here obviously refers to works of literary prose - the main field of Shklovsky's expertise - for the literary devices he studied most closely were those pertaining to prose composition and narrative (Steiner, 1984:51). In his view, the difference between literary narrative and the events it narrates is simply the difference between device and material. The corresponding term for device in the sphere of narratology is "plot", whereas for material it is "story".

Story is understood by the Formalists as the series of events ordered according to their temporal-causal succession, as they would have occurred in reality. Its formula, which is capable of infinite extension, is always "because of A, then B" (Lemon & Reis, 1965:25), i.e. the pattern of the story is such that the events are bound to each other in a cause-and-effect relationship - the very familiar way of telling something which, precisely because it is familiar, cannot be the artistic way. On the other hand, plot is the liberation of events from temporal contiguity and causal dependency and their teleological redistribution in the literary text (Steiner, *op.cit.*). In other words, the story, which is equated with material for narrative composition, served the artist as a mere pretext for plot construction. Plot becomes the story as distorted or defamiliarized in the process of narration. In brief, the story is "the action itself" and the plot, "how the reader learns of the action".

Shklovsky shows, in his study of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, that there are innumerable ways of making a story into plot; but all of them involve some kind of disarrangement of what could be regarded as the natural real-life sequence of events. This disarrangement is characterized by continual interruptions, displacements, transpositions, and digressions which are often unrelated to the basic narrative.

1.2.2 *New Criticism*

If a comparative study of some literary theories ever became necessary, the juxtaposition of Russian Formalism with Anglo-American New Criticism would not only bring forth their differences (which appear to be very minimal), but also their complementary qualities, thus giving the student of literature a good insight into the problems and directions of contemporary literary criticism in general. An English or American reader going through the Formalists' works may not feel that, despite

differences of names and details of argument, he is on alien ground. He may recognize in Formalism, with the necessary adjustments, some of the concepts and arguments of the New Critics, their strategies, and even their rebuttals.

New Criticism originated in England in the 1920's and came to full flourish in the United States in the 1930's. However, although they originated in different countries and at different times, Russian Formalism and Anglo-American New Criticism use strategies that parallel each other. They first attack previous scholarship and then defend the narrow limits they impose upon literary study. Both assume that the traditional academic approaches to the study of literature (which are more interested in the causes of literature and the place literature occupies among other human activities than in pointing out the architectonics of literary ambiguities) are invalid. They regard them as invalid because they avoid literature as their sole object; they disregard the notions of the autonomy of the literary work, the importance of demonstrating its unity and the requirement of the 'close reading' of the literary text (Culler, 1983:3). Both the Formalists and the New Critics advocate a critical theory which will separate literature from history, sociology, and philosophy.

Thompson (1971:60) aptly sums up the minimal differences between the two theories as follows: While the Formalists militantly declare that "art has nothing to do with the pragmatic transmission of ideas", on the one hand, the New Critics, on the other hand, insist on "the autonomy of aesthetic experience". But, we must emphasize, as we have mentioned earlier, that there are more parallel than tangential arguments between the two theories, to the extent that critics like Wilbur Scott discuss them as if they were one and the same theory. Scott finds the most influential critical method in contemporary criticism, which can boast so many brilliant practitioners; to be "the formalistic" and adds:

> Other names are frequently used: aesthetic, textual, ontological, or most frequently, the "new criticism" (1962:179).

The phenomenon New Criticism has received a great deal of commentary in English and American literary publications since the 1940's. It owes its popularity as a discussion subject to its elusiveness. Its commentators can exercise freedom in singling out its characteristics and defining its boundaries as it has never been a school in the sense Russian Formalism has. (Thompson, 1971:33). It is thus interesting to observe how the emphases in describing New Criticism vary.

The common point between the New Critics (who include among their ranks I.A. Richards, William Empson, T.S. Eliot, Yvor Winters, Cleanth Brooks and Charles Morris) is their concentration on the literary work instead of other spheres of human activity, when they profess to be talking about literature. They advocate the high place of art as art, rather than an expression of social, religious, ethical, or political ideas; they advocate the close study of the texts of the literary works themselves. Eliot's dictum (he is a major figure in the development of this criticism) pronounced in "Tradition and the Individual Talent", that the artist escapes from emotion and personality into his work of art, encouraged the New Critics to move away from biographical study into the scrutiny of the craft of the artefact (Scott, 1962:179-180).

Through his influence they are concerned to engage in a criticism that is free of the pursuit of extrinsically historic, moral, psychological, and sociological interpretations, and concentrate on the aesthetic quality of the work. In short, they shun all "extrinsic" material such as the personal or social conditions that might have

influenced the composition of a work of art, and concentrate on the structure of the work, or on the relation of the elements of the structure to the total literary experience.

The development of New Criticism was, then, very clearly a

> reaction against the Victorian and Neo-humanist emphasis on the moral uses of literature, the academic interest in historical and literary tradition and the biography of the author, ... It is also likely that there was some reaction against the Marxist's stress on social values, and the psychological stress on the neuroses of writers. (Scott, 1962:180-181).

In their analyses, the New Critics are preoccupied with showing the unavoidable ambiguity of language, the interrelation of the logical and the non-logical. They examine the cross-linkages of all elements of the artefact, pointing at the appropriateness of words and phrases which are otherwise not grasped fully by the conscious mind, with hardly a reference to the author's biography or to the historical moment in which the text was written. For them it is not surprising if certain implications that are drawn by the critic might have escaped even the eye of the writer. In support of this reality Immanuel Kant feels there is nothing unusual in analyzing written works, to understand the author better than he understood himself

> inasmuch as he may not have sufficiently determined his conception, and thus have sometimes spoken, nay even thought, in opposition to his own opinions. (1956:62)

The basic concepts of the New Critics and their followers (obviously from I.A. Richard's influence) derive from the thematic and interpretive orientation that the literary work is not simply a series of sentences, but

> it is spoken by a **persona** who expresses an **attitude** to be defined, speaking in a particular **tone** which puts the attitude in one of various possible modes or degrees of commitment (Culler, 1983:4).

According to Richards, then, one can distinguish four 'basic kinds of meanings' that appear in any discourse in different proportions: sense, feeling, tone and intention (Thompson, 1977:44). Sense is the referential, or indicative, content of the text, while feeling represents the author's attitude towards that sense. His attitude towards the reader is termed tone, and intention relates to his conscious or unconscious aim in producing a given text.

After a thorough examination of language and its functions, and of poetic language and its characteristics, Richards came to the conclusion that human speech has two functions: referential and emotive (Thompson, *op.cit.*). The former is a domain of science, i.e. language can be used to refer to objects and situations, and the latter, of poetry, i.e. language used for the sake of emotions and attitudes.

It is this inclusion of the 'emotive' function of language that caused Richards to be opposed with absolute refutation by other (American) New Critics. They found that his theory would be true for certain works or for certain readers, but it does not account for other types of poetry, especially those which employ the symbolic function of language. For these New Critics the function of language is referential and differential, and they are intent on "decentralizing the subject", i.e. on excluding

the author in any analyses of his texts. On the other hand, they themselves do not seem to realize the emotive function of language on the reader and not necessarily as used by the author.

To show further how the emphases in New Criticism vary, we may mention another group of New Critics who differed entirely with Richards on the question of the author's intention. For these New Critics (such as Wimsatt, Beardsley and Frye) the quest for the author's intentions has nothing to do with literary criticism. Knowledge of the author's intentions is 'neither available nor desirable' (Belsey, 1980:27). Where a knowledge of the author's intention is assumed by the reader, it is most likely to mislead. These New Critics even declare that the intentionalist position is a Romantic fallacy, which was consistent only with the conviction that poetry is to be approached as the efflux of a noble soul. Northrop Frye (1957:87) goes beyond the New Critics in rejecting entirely the quest for even implicit intention. He finds that when the text is thus freed from the tyranny of the author, and made available for interpretation by a systematic criticism, it is inevitably plural, open to a number of readings. He thus refutes the New Critics' concept of the 'close reading' of the literary text mentioned above (See p.13).

1.2.3 *Structuralism and Semiotics*

In his article, "Structuralism: The Anglo-American Adventure", Geoffrey Hartman (1970:137) refers to Structuralism as a complex and many-faceted movement which, unlike Formalism and New Criticism cannot be associated exclusively with certain countries. According to him, it was born in Russia and Switzerland, confirmed in Prague, sowed a wild seed in France, but respected the separation of disciplines and kept to linguistics in America. For Structuralism as for the numerous other movements, its coming into prominence (and perhaps its later fading into oblivion)

was the question of new movements winning out the old by their purity, or simplicity, by removing what could be regarded as the burden of unnecessary assumptions (c/f Post-Structuralism below).

It is necessary to commence this discussion by attempting to answer the question: What is Structuralism? But, then, no description of Structuralism is possible without a prior consideration of the underlying notion of 'structure', what the term 'structure' itself stands for in language and literature. The notion of 'structure' arizes out of the etymological basis of the word from the Latin **stuere**, meaning 'to build'. A structure can thus be described as a set of any elements between which certain relations are definable. Jacques Ehrmann (1970:ix) quite rightly sees it as

> a combination and relation of formal elements which reveal their logical coherence within given objects of analysis.

But, for our purpose, structure can also be defined as reality and as a concept of research, as originating from events and from the everyday behaviour of individuals, originating from the solution of practical problems encountered by living beings.

To return to the notion of structure in language (and literature) we refer to the views of Ferdinand de Saussure, to whom all modern proponents of structuralism acknowledge allegiance as the founding father of the method. He sees as the key principle of the structure of language, that it forms a system (foundamentally) of contrasts, distinctions, and eventually oppositions, from the fact that the elements of language never exist in isolation but always in relation to one another (Lane, 1970:28).

Although we agree that no simple or single definition will apply to Structuralism except in very general terms, it may be quite reasonably safe to describe it as a method of analysis which examines objects, works as wholes, totalities in terms of the relations that exist between the parts. In such examinations, it studies not the elements of a whole, but the complex network of relationships that link and unite those elements - i.e. the relations of episodes to one another and to wholes.

Structuralism seeks these structures not only on the surface, at the level of the observed (the manifest, surface structures), but also below or behind empirical reality, beyond a pure description of the perceived or experienced, to the latent structures which underlie the phenomenon being analyzed (deep structures). Thus, the structuralist method also extends to the structures of the unconscious, as they are apprehended in psychoanalytical discourse. To sum it up, then, Structuralism attempts to uncover the internal relationships which give different languages (**langages**) their form and function.

Initially Structuralism was concerned with the structure of languages (**langues**), an area explored by linguists. Later, in the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, it 'invaded' first social anthropology, then the neighbouring disciplines; it was applied to the study of myths which are of the nature of a language (**langage**). These myths do not simply consist of organizations of concepts, but are also works of art which arouse profound aesthetic emotions in those who hear - or study - them. For Lévi-Strauss, these myths are codes which transmit information, which express beliefs and provide explanation of certain patterns of social behaviour, while they at the same time mediate the paradoxes which social life inevitably creates. But first, it is necessary to look into some of the characteristics and aims of structuralist analysis, especially those that will suit our type of inquiry.

Although a structuralist narrative model cannot be either exhaustive or definitive, it presents a picture of possible narrative discourse, in such a way that, as far as possible, all existing narratives appear as particular instances of a general - in any case variable - hypothetical model. It formulates a set of rules or regulations which describe (and perhaps prescribe) the operations to be performed upon any narrative (and, in the case of Lévi-Strauss, the social behaviour of "primitive peoples") with the aim of ordering it and understanding its workings (Lane, 1970:13).

The structuralist analysis attempts the study of the grammar of narrative without any attempt to explain the meaning of a text. Instead it may attempt to specify the possibilities of meaning in a text, for what is in question in structuralist inquiry is not primarily the truth of a text, but its plurality (c/f Northrop Frye, p.16 above). The task of literary Structuralism is, then, not to discover the meaning of a text, but to constitute the rules governing the production of meaning. Rather than assign completed meanings to the work, the structuralist method seeks to find out how and by what means meaning is possible (Barthes, 1972:218).

In literary Structuralism we see another confirmation of the massive shift on the critical terrain from the traditional criticism whose interpretation was organized around the author. In structuralist analysis the problem associated with the figure of the author as well as other criteria exterior to the text are bypassed, and instead, attention is focused on the text. The Structuralist rejects the traditional search for 'the truth' about an author or his work, and instead, finds it necessary to speak about a work in terms of the validity and coherence of its language.

The application of the structuralist method to ethnological material sprang from the recognition that social systems might be considered in the same terms as language, as language was itself a social system. Ferdinand de Saussure sees language as a coherent, orderly social system susceptible to understanding and explanation as a whole. Similarly, for Lévi-Strauss, social reality is coherent and orderly, and may be understood and expressed as binary opposition, each element, whether it be an event in a myth, an item of behaviour or the naming and classification of natural phenomena, being given its value in society by its relative position in a matrix of oppositions, their mediations and finally, their resolutions (Lane, 1970:32).

Tzvetan Todorov (1982:125) sees literature as a kind of extension and application of certain properties of language, for a literary work is generally regarded as a "verbal work of art". Further, Ferdinand de Saussure distinguishes between, on the one hand, **langue**, the institution of language, and, on the other, **parole**, the particular and individual acts of linguistic expression. Together they both constitute **le langage**. In agreement to the two critics, Roland Barthes, the most outstanding and original of the structuralist school, sees literature as 'simply a language, a system of signs', with its being (**être**) not in its message, but in this "system" (Lane, 1970:37). The role of the critic, then, is not to reconstitute the message of a work, but only its system, just as the linguist does not concern himself with deciphering the meaning of sentences, but establishing their formal structure, to explain according to what rules their elements combine and contrast to produce the meaning those sentences have.

This brings us to the Structuralists' notion of semiotics, or semiology. Semiology (from the Greek **semeion** - "sign"), as opposed to semantics, is a study of signs as signifiers, which does not ask, in language, 'what' words mean but 'how' they mean.

One important feature of structuralist literary criticism in recent years has been, then, the growth of interest in signs and their modes of signification. The way to recognize a Structuralist is, for Roland Barthes, by a certain vocabulary of signification. One merely has to look for **signifiant** and **signifié** or **syntagmatic** and **paradigmatic**, and by these signs know the Structuralist (Culler, 1983:vii).

To sum up, the semiotics of literature does not interpret works **per sé**, but tries to discover the conventions which make meaning possible. The semiotician attempts to discover the nature of the 'codes' which make literary communication (between the text and its reader) possible. The underlying goal of semiotics is to develop a poetics which would stand to literature just as linguistics is generally accepted to be able to stand to language; develop it by discovering the nature of narrative codes or techniques. This project has been carried out in France since the 1960's, and earlier in Germany and the United States, although today the semiotics of literature is very much an American and European phenomenon (Culler, *ibid.*).

1.2.4 *Post-Structuralism*

Like semiotics, Post-Structuralism (also referred to as deconstructive criticism) is also concerned with a reflection on signs, although with different ambitions. Deconstructionalists are sceptical of the Structuralists' close reading of the text as well as the possibility of mastering the conventions of meaning with a comprehensive system or discipline, and thus set forth teasing out 'warring' forces of signification within a given text. The plurality of the text is agreed upon by both Structuralism and deconstruction, although this plural spelling is not commonly used by them, as we shall attempt to illustrate and explain.

Historically, as we have shown in 1.2.3 above, Structuralism was born of linguistics, and all the fields covered by it have to do with signs as signifiers. For the deconstructionalists (among whose ranks are Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, *et al.*), however, Structuralism, like linguistics, relies on idealist presuppositions which are never questioned, which are reflected in their conception of the sign as a closure. Putting in question the possibility of a coherent, noncontradictory account of the narrative, they stage a confrontation of sorts between a semiotics that aspires to produce a grammar of narrative and deconstructive interpretations which, in showing a work's opposition to its own logic, suggest the impossibility of such a grammar.

Deconstruction, therefore, confronts Structuralism, using the very tool furnished by the latter in order to prove that Structuralism's use of the sign has been too restricted (Harari, 1980:29). The shift from Structuralism to Post-Structuralism on the critical terrain can partly be seen as one from 'work' to 'text'. It can be seen as a shift from the narrative text as a closed entity, equipped with definite conventions of meaning which the critic has to discover, to approaching the text as irreducibly plural, as an infinite play of signifiers which no critic can finally nail down to a single centre, essence or signification (Eagleton, 1986:138).

The 'plural' text has no determinate meaning, no settled signified, but is an inexhaustible galaxy of signifiers open to any critic's personal or individual interpretation. Derridean deconstruction consists of a critic's tracing of a path among textual strata in order to stir up and expose what may be seen as forgotten and dormant sediments of meaning which might have accumulated and settled into the text's material. By so doing, deconstruction allows what was already inscribed in the texture of the text, but which text concealed from the first glance, to surface

and be taken notice of. For Derridean deconstruction, then, to examine a work of art is to attempt to discover not only what the work includes, but also, and especially, what it **omits.**

Even if Structuralism and deconstructionism may be seen to be radically opposed to each other, they should also be seen to be exhibiting a certain complementarity. For the denunciation by deconstructionalists of the concept of representation is necessarily based on the structuralist institution of the sign. It uses the structuralist premises in order, paradoxically, to demonstrate that Structuralism has not pursued the implications of those premises to the full. Therefore, the deconstructionalist enterprise would not have been possible without Structuralism. We cannot understand the post-structuralist Roland Barthes apart from the first, 'high' structuralist, Roland Barthes, who is quoted in a 1971 interview with Raymond Bellour in *Le Livre des Autres*, Paris: "If I have changed .... it is a question of displacement, not of rejection ... " (Harari, 1980:30).

We should note, at this point, that it is not Structuralism alone that contemporary deconstruction confronts and subverts. In the words of Leitch (1983:ix),

> ... it subverts everything in the tradition, putting in question received ideas of the sign and language, the text, the context, the author, the reader, the role of history, the work of interpretation, and the forms of critical writing. In this project a past crumbles and something monstrous emerges: a future.

This enterprise leads Haydon White (1977:87) to refer to Post-Structuralists as "Absurdists", who, unlike the Formalists, New Critics and phenomenologists, do not represent a reform movement within the critical community, but, on the contrary,

attack the whole critical enterprise where "Normal criticism" in all its forms is most vulnerable, namely the language theory. It brings the status of the text , textuality itself, under question, and thus calls the practices of "Normal criticism" into doubt.

For White, deconstructive criticism is programmatically "abnormal" in that it brings the very concepts of the normal and the normative in modern society under question. It does so by insisting that those very values which normal criticism takes for granted are "abnormal". And the boldness of its enabling postulates makes interest in deconstructive criticism, especially among younger critics, to continue to grow.

Viewed more objectively, deconstructive criticism is merely a logical extension of dominant but unacknowledged principles that have resided at the heart of Normal criticism itself since its crystallization in the period before and after World War II (White, *op.cit.*). However, as the critic is then tempted and expected to defamiliarize criticism, to mystify the text, reading, under deconstruction, is busy taking on magical qualities, and fast becoming a privilege that will be enjoyed by a few with exceptional literary awareness.

1.2.5 *Choice of Approach for this Study*

Whatever their persuasion or point of view, all critics engaged in literary criticism find themselves engaged in a pursuit of signs, attempting to grasp, comprehend, and capture their signifying structures. What makes criticism possible is the fact that the signs of literature are never simply and directly given as such in the text, but must be pursued by the critic. Thus different modes of criticism are distinguishable by the different accounts they give of this pursuit.

Most of the approaches discussed above are agreed on one characteristic of literature: the text is inevitably plural, and thus open to a number of readings. The evidence of this plurality or heterogeneity of art is the almost simultaneous development of a number of schools of critical theory, each one laying emphasis on different elements in the text, each making discoveries of distinct patterns of significance. What we may observe about this plurality of the text is that its plural meanings are not necessarily in conflict with one another, but rather complementary, and thus collectively contribute towards our understanding of the work as a (single) whole. It is like approaching the text from various angles and distances and seeing different elements of its total organization.

Similarly, then, distinct critical approaches, viewed as complementary rather than contradictory, will most fruitfully be found to be contributing to a cumulative and eventually comprehensive understanding of literature, offering a whole series of contexts in which to place the totality of the work of art. We agree with Frye's (1957:87) view that it is advisable for a critic, whatever his persuasion, not to exclude any critical approach, but to "break down barriers between approaches", for, opting for a single critical pattern would be unnecessarily narrowing the possibilities. Any critical commentary that does not do that will obviously miss some of the potential meanings of the text by isolating only those aspects of its meaning which are intelligible and valuable to it at certain times. It will fail to avoid the danger of excluding valuable points of view which happen to lie outside the particular critical creed. No critic, then, is required to limit himself to a single approach, for literary facts cannot be exhibited without comment, and "comment involves the generality of the mind" (Scott, 1962:323).

We agree with many critics of this century, in this inquiry, who have argued against excessive faith in a single approach and thus allowing it to become a rut, against what has been referred to as "critical monism". Even Ejchenbaum had declared for the Formalists in 1922: "Enough of monism! We are pluralists. Life is diverse and cannot be reduced to a single principle" (Steiner, 1984:259). For that reason, in this inquiry, we shall entertain provisionally any point of view that may enable us to approach a work of literary art with illumination. The utility of a given approach will depend upon our recognition of the limits (of scope, degree, or relevance) appropriate to it. We may not always find it necessary (especially after the general discussion of what the schools of critical theory stand for above) to lay out the limits, as they may then still be determined by the readers of our criticism.

1.3 Scope of Research

The critical models discussed above will form our starting point, our point of view, in our attempt to examine the nature of the narrative in Northern Sotho, from oral to written (or from traditional to modern). Our inquiry, whether explicitly formalist or structuralist, or an oblique pursuit of the sign as it is in some works of Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, *et al*, will attempt to discover the nature of the narrative codes in both Northern Sotho oral and written narratives. Rather than attempt an exposition of criticism of the critical models outlined above, and others that will be outlined whenever their application becomes necessary, (see Chapter III), rather than engage in a discussion of the tools of these critical models, this inquiry will concentrate entirely on the application of those tools to the Northern Sotho narrative (from oral to written). Only in this way can we discover a poetics for the study of the narrative, without attempting to draw an exhaustive picture of the nature of the narrative.

In the next chapter we shall attempt a sort of synthesis of formalist and structuralist points of view on one aspect in the field of narratology, namely the relations between story and discourse in the narrative. Although each theory has concepts and categories of its own, most of them are agreed, if on anything, that the narrative theory requires a distinction between 'story' - a sequence of events, viewed as independent of their manifestation in the narration - and 'discourse', the narration or discursive presentation of events. It requires a distinction between what the Formalists have termed the **fabula** (the story as a series of events) and the **sjužet** (the story as reported in the narrative).

Although the American tradition does not explicitly formulate this distinction, they are inevitably concerned with the distinction between actions or events and the narrative presentation of those actions, in their involvement with the problems of point of view. Jonathan Culler, to stress this point, says:

> For the study of point of view to make sense, there must be various contrasting ways of viewing and telling a given story, and this makes 'story' an invariant core, a constant against which the variables of narrative presentation can be measured (1983:70).

In the third chapter we shall examine the aspect of thematics in the Northern Sotho narrative. We believe, like some Russian Formalists, that a literary work of art, like the narrative in this study, is unified and made coherent by a theme which runs through it. For any author, the selection of a theme might prove a crucial aesthetic problem, for, to interest men, the narrative should deal with their interests. A study of this aspect in the oral narrative in juxtaposition to the written may help us to reveal that some works are merely topical, and, because of their topicality, they last

no longer than the temporary social interest in the topic. Their themes, to have staying power, should be able to meet the changing, day-to-day interests of the addressee (Tomashevsky, 1965:64).

As the development of theme in a narrative involves the interrelationship of **characters** at any given moment, i.e. in a **situation**, some attention will also be devoted to character in the narrative, in the fourth chapter. We shall examine, for example, how characters can be functional in the oral narrative, in comparison with "type" characters in the written narrative.

A study of the stylistics of the narrative in the fifth chapter will help us to observe different (and sometimes similar) characteristics of the orally based thought and expression on the one hand, and written narrative structures on the other hand. Following the New Critics, the craft of narrative art will be examined in the stylistic devices that are used in both the oral and the written narrative. This examination should enable us to study the referential and differential functions of language in the narrative, which help to reveal the plurality of the text, i.e. a text open to a number of readings. In the same chapter we shall consider the status of the narrator (author) in the narrative, without any preoccupation with the author as in Romanticism.

As literature is sometimes regarded (by some Structuralists, Marxists and Psychoanalysts) as a reflection of society, the Northern Sotho narrative, from oral to written, will be examined in its social context in the sixth chapter of this study. A thorough understanding of the society for which the narrative was meant will help any critic to understand the work of art itself. An understanding of the culture of the Northern Sotho-speaking community will also help the critic to understand the symbolism in the narrative, either from a structuralist or from the post-structuralist

point of view. This possible relationship between symbolism and culture in the narrative (from oral to written) will be examined in the same chapter of this inquiry.

As our scope of research reveals, the narrative in Northern Sotho will not be subjected to any one critical model, but to a mélange of literary theories (cf. 1.1 above) which will complement rather than act in opposition to one another in our search for a poetics for the study of this artefact. For material for the analysis of primary oral narrative we shall select folktales recorded and preserved in Makgamatha's *Keleketla* (1990b) and *Maitišong* (1990a). For analysis of the written prose narrative the following novels have been selected for this study: Sehlodimela's *Moelelwa* (first published in 1940), Mamogobo's *Kgamphuphu* (first published in 1949), Senyatsi's *Maroba* (first published in 1953), Ramaila's *Tsakata* (first published in 1953), Madiba's *Nkotsana* (first published in 1955), Matlala's *Molato Mpeng* (first published in 1966), Mminele's *Ngwana wa Mobu* (first published in 1967), Maredi's *Tlala ya Mohlopi* (first published in 1969), and Matsepe's *Megokgo ya Bjoko* (first published in 1969).

CHAPTER II

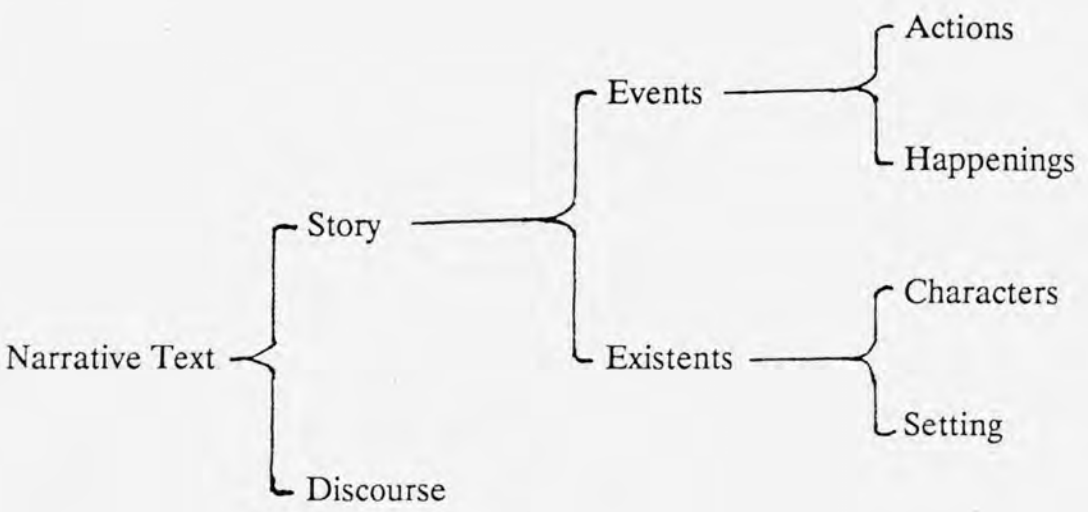
STORY AND DISCOURSE IN THE NARRATIVE

2.1 Introduction

There is considerable variety among the Russian Formalists (in particular Propp and Shklovsky), the French Structuralists (Barthes, Todorov, Bremond, Greimas, Genette) who undertook the development of narrative grammar as well as a description of the relations between story and narration, and the American tradition, running from Henry James, through Lubbock and Booth to Seymour Chatman's modern attempts at synthesis, which has been especially concerned with problems of point of view. The variety is caused by the fact that these theorists have concepts and categories of their own in the field of narratology. Consequently, it would be a massive task to attempt any sort of synthesis of their theories, identifying areas of fundamental agreement and the main issues in dispute. Even if their concepts may be variable, on one thing these theorists are agreed, namely the fact that narrative theory requires and prescribes a distinction between 'story' and 'discourse'.

For the Structuralists, each narrative has two distinct parts, namely a 'story' (**histoire**) which stands for the content or sequence of events or actions or happenings together with characters and items of setting, and a 'discourse' (**discours**), that is, the means by which the content is expressed or communicated. Seymour Chatman (1988:19) suggests the following diagram to illustrate the representation of the distinct parts of the narrative:

FIGURE 1.



The Russian Formalists are in agreement to this distinction, although they use only two terms: **fabula** (story), the sum total of events that are related in the narrative, and **sjužet** (plot) the actual representation of the story by linking the events together. For them story is the sequence of events linked together which are communicated to us in the narrative, what might in effect have happened in the fictional 'reality'; and plot (or 'discourse') is the order in which the events appear in the narrative itself, that is, whether they appear in a 'normal' order (ABC), flash-back (BAC), or the narrative is begun **in medias res** (BC). For them story is the fictional 'reality' in which the characters are supposed to be living and in which its events are supposed to take place. These narrated events are abstracted from their disposition in the narrative text and reconstructed in their chronological order, together with the participants in those events. Plot (or discourse), on the other hand, is the spoken or written narrative which undertakes the telling of the succession of events found in the story, although this time the events do not necessarily appear in chronological order; the characteristics of the

'existents' are dispersed throughout the narrative. Although both story and discourse include the same events, in the latter the events are **arranged**, or better still, **re-arranged**, and connected according to the orderly sequence in which they are represented, or rather, **re-presented** in the narrative text.

The American tradition, unlike the Russian Formalists and the French Structuralists, has not shown any inclination towards formulating the distinction between story and discourse explicitly, for it has been primarily concerned with the theory of point of view, that is, identifying and discriminating narrators, both overt and covert, and describing what in the text belongs to the perspective of the narrator. In order to achieve these identifications, discriminations and descriptions, however, one still has to posit a 'distinction between the actions or events themselves and the narrative presentation of those actions' (Culler, 1983:170). This makes a distinction between story and discourse inevitable even for this group.

The multiplicity of theorists on the study of narratology, even in a single country, inevitably leads to different formulations whose terms can easily cause confusion. Among the French Structuralists, for example, **récit** is sometimes **fabula** (Bremond), and sometimes **sjužet** (Barthes). The only consolation is that the basic distinction is always between a sequence of events and discourse that orders and presents those events. Genette (1980) even goes further and distinguishes the sequence of events (which he terms **histoire**) from the presentation of events in discourse (which he terms **récit**), and also from the enunciation of the narrative (**narration**). His introduction of this third aspect is probably influenced by the premise that since the text

> **happenings**, where the existent is the patient. An existent, in turn, is either a character or an element of setting, a distinction based on whether or not it performs a plot-significant action (1988:32).

Chatman's **stasis** event may also state whether something simply existed in the story. One might also add that when a character does something, or when something happens, the **situation** usually changes. Granting this premise, an event, then, may be said to be a change from one state of affairs to another within a story.

Insomuch as it refers to **actions** or happenings, the event is identical to Propp's **function**, whose meaning, for Propp (1968), is an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of action in the story. Propp's method of defining the functions of the **dramatis personae** was to have each function summarily defined, then abridged into a single term, and finally given a coded sign in the form of a letter symbol. Since any event in a narrative involves one or more participants, the alternative method suggests that instead of merely naming an event or giving it a label it would be much better to paraphrase it as a simple sentence, called a narrative proposition; these simple sentences are, however, different from the sentences of the narrative discourse (Rimmon-Kenan, 1988:14).

The description of a story-paraphrase as consisting of event-labels (c/f Propp) or narrative propositions constructed around events implies that the events themselves are the constituent elements or units of the story. Whether it consists of event-labels or of narrative propositions, a story-paraphrase arranges events according to a chronological principle. However, descriptive or expository propositions are not bound by this principle, since they are distinct from narrative

propositions in that they are thought of as simultaneously valid according to some **spatial** or **logical** principle which is relatively independent of temporality (Rimmon-Kenan, *op cit.*).

We should observe here that the story-form or story-paraphrase is abstracted from a text (discourse) and arranged or organized according to chronological principles in an analysis of a written narrative. This procedure is not always necessary in the study of oral narratives, since the events appear in the narrative (discourse) in the same order as they do in the story. The following story- paraphrases represent the order in which the events appear in the narrative of the particular folktales:

1. "MOGATŠA NOGA" [WIFE OF A SNAKE] (*Keleketla*,1990b: 85-90)

   A. Two sisters wish to marry a handsome, wealthy husband.
   B. The younger sister leaves home in quest of a husband.
   C. The younger sister passes three tests (Propp's Difficult Task).
   D. The younger sister wins a husband and livestock.
   E. The elder sister leaves home in quest of a husband.
   F. The elder sister fails three tests.
   G. The elder sister returns with nothing.

2. "MOŠEMANE WA DIŠO" [THE BOY WHO WAS FULL OF SORES] (*Keleketla*, 1990b:76-80).

   A. The boy with his sister are left with a large herd of cattle.
   B. Strange people capture them with their cattle.
   C. The boy uses magical powers to escape with the cattle.
   D. The boy with his sister are made outcasts in a land of drought

E. The boy uses magical powers to make rain for his cattle.

F. The boy is requested to make rain for the tribe.

G. The boy and his sister are brought back to society.

3. "TŠELANA LE TEMANKGOLO" [TŠELANA AND THE OGRE] (*Keleketla*, 1990b:134-143)

A. Tšelana's parents decide to move to another place.

B. Tšelana remains alone in his parents' house.

C. His mother brings Tšelane food regularly.

D. Tšelana is captured by the ogre.

E. Tšelana herds goats with the ogres' children.

F. The ogres' children discover Tšelana's plan to escape.

G. Tšelana kills the ogres' mother.

H. Tšelana flees with the ogres in pursuit.

A close examination of these story-paraphrases reveals that the order in which the events appear in the narrative (discourse) is similar to the order in which those same events in effect might have appeared in fictional 'reality'. Put in simple terms, the discourse is equivalent to the story in temporal order. A closer examination of the tale "Tšelana le Temankgolo" will illustrate not only the linear chronological sequence of its events, but also their causality:

Event (B), for instance, not only succeeds event (A), but also necessitates event (C). Event (C) in turn creates an opportunity for the orgre to find and trick the hero, and is therefore a direct cause of event (D). It is logical that the ogre should take home whatever he captures; hence the suitable position of event (E) following after event (D). It is while Tšelana is herding the goats with the ogres' children that his plan to

escape is uncovered; hence this event (E) sets the stage for event (F) to take place. The little ogres reporting Tšelana's plan to their parents, and their parents' plan to kill Tšelana are overheard by Tšelana who prepares to kill the ogres' mother (G). The most logical action that should follow this action (killing the ogres' mother) is Tšelana 's flight (H), which constitutes a fine closure for the story. The story starts at zero point with Tšelana at home with his parents; the sequence of events that follows causes a change in several situations (Tšelana's capture, Tšelana the herdsman, Tšelana the trickster, and Tšelana the fugitive) until the story is brought back to zero point once more - Tšelana is reunited with his family. This gives the story the conventional narrative symmetry that characterizes the narrative, both oral and written.

This analysis should not erroneously lead us to the conclusion that all three aspects, temporal succession, causality and closure, are the basic requirements without which a group of events would not be regarded as a story. On the contrary,

> while granting that causality and closure (i.e. a sense of completion) may be the most interesting features of stories, and the features on which their quality as stories is most often judged, I would like to argue that temporal succession is sufficient as a **minimal** requirement for a group of events to form a story (Rimmon-Kenan, 1988:18).

Following this view, the present inquiry stresses the structured character of story (both oral and written), its being composed of separable components with the potential of forming networks of internal (and external) relations; we do not see story as being merely raw material, undifferentiated material awaiting to be used in discourse.

Events do not have only a logic of connection and succession, but also a logic of **hierarchy,** for, in a narrative some events will be found to be more important than others. According to Chatman (1988:53) only major events form part of the chain or 'armature of contingency', with the minor events having a different structure. Thus, events in a narrative can be classified into two main kinds: those that advance the action, advance the plot by opening an alternative, or by raising and satisfying questions - Chatman calls these **kernels,** translating Barthes' **noyau** - and those that expand, amplify, maintain or delay the kernels, namely **catalysts** (Chatman's term for these is **satellites**).

Unlike the kernels, the satellites do not open an alternative, but 'accompany' the kernel in various ways. Kernels, on the other hand, are narrative moments that give rise to cruxes in the direction taken by events (story-line). Like nodes or hinges in the structure, they act as branching points which make movement of the story into one of two (or more) possible paths. As kernels are units of the structure of the story, deletion of a single kernel would disturb the logic of the story. The same is not true for satellites; deletion of a satellite would only impoverish the narrative aesthetically, as it were, for their main function in the narrative is that of supplying the workings-out of the choices made at the kernels, that of filling in, elaborating, completing the kernel by forming the flesh on its skeleton.

In the tale "Mabutle le Tau" [Hare and Lion] (*Keleketla*, 1990b:1-5), the following propositions can be constructed around events of the narrative:

A. Hare helps Lion to catch animals of prey.

B. Hare and Lion roof a hut together.

C. Hare nails Lion's tail to a pole.

D. Lion dies hanging from the roof by his tail.

E. Hare terrorizes the baboons in Lion's skin.

F. Baboons discover the identity of Hare.

G. Hare escapes.

These seven propositions form the skeleton of the narrative, form the kernels around which the story is woven. The satellites, which are not crucial to the logic of the narrative have been excluded. They constitute the details and elaborations of the kernels. For instance, kernel A, which opens two possibilities (Lion may succeed or fail to catch the animals), is in the actual narration accompanied by the following satellites:

A1. Hare and Lion dig a hole.

A2. Lion is covered in the hole, leaving only his teeth.

A3. Hare calls the animals to come and see the miracle.

A4. Lion leaps from the hole and kills all the animals.

The next kernel B also opens two alternative directions the story may follow: Lion might work from the ground or on top of the roof. There is only one minor event that accompanies this major event, and we shall number it B1:

B1. The cooking of meat near the hut.

This event is followed by kernel C which also opens two possibilities: Hare's nail may secure Lion to the roof, or Lion might jump with pain and discover Hare's villainy.

This kernel is accompanied by the action of Hare eating the meat while teasing Lion, which we can represent thus:

C1. Hare teases Lion.

C2. Hare eats the fattest piece of meat.

Kernel D opens the following choices: Lion might rip off his tail and kill Hare, or the nail might hold him until he dies. The following actions accompany this event:

D1. Hare skins Lion.

D2. Hare wears Lion's skin.

Kernel E also opens two alternative choices for the story-line: Hare may succeed in impersonating Lion, or the baboons may not be convinced. This event is accompanied by the following action of minor detail:

E1. 'Lion' makes the baboons scald their hands in hot sorgum.

Kernel F opens the following two possibilities: The young baboon may think 'Lion' has been transformed into a hare, or he may realize Hare's trickery. This kernel is accompanied by the following actions of minor detail:

F1. The baboons leave 'Lion' at home and go to the fields.

F2. Hare feels too hot in the lion's skin.

F3. Hare takes off the lion's skin.

F4. The baboons remember the baby's sleeping mat.

F5. The baboons send a young baboon back home for the mat.

The last kernel G also opens two alternatives: The baboons may lose all trace of Hare, or they might catch him, thus creating an extension of the story through Hare's another attempt to escape (trickery). In the actual narrative, this event is accompanied by the following actions as satellites:

G1. Hare flees with the baboons in pursuit

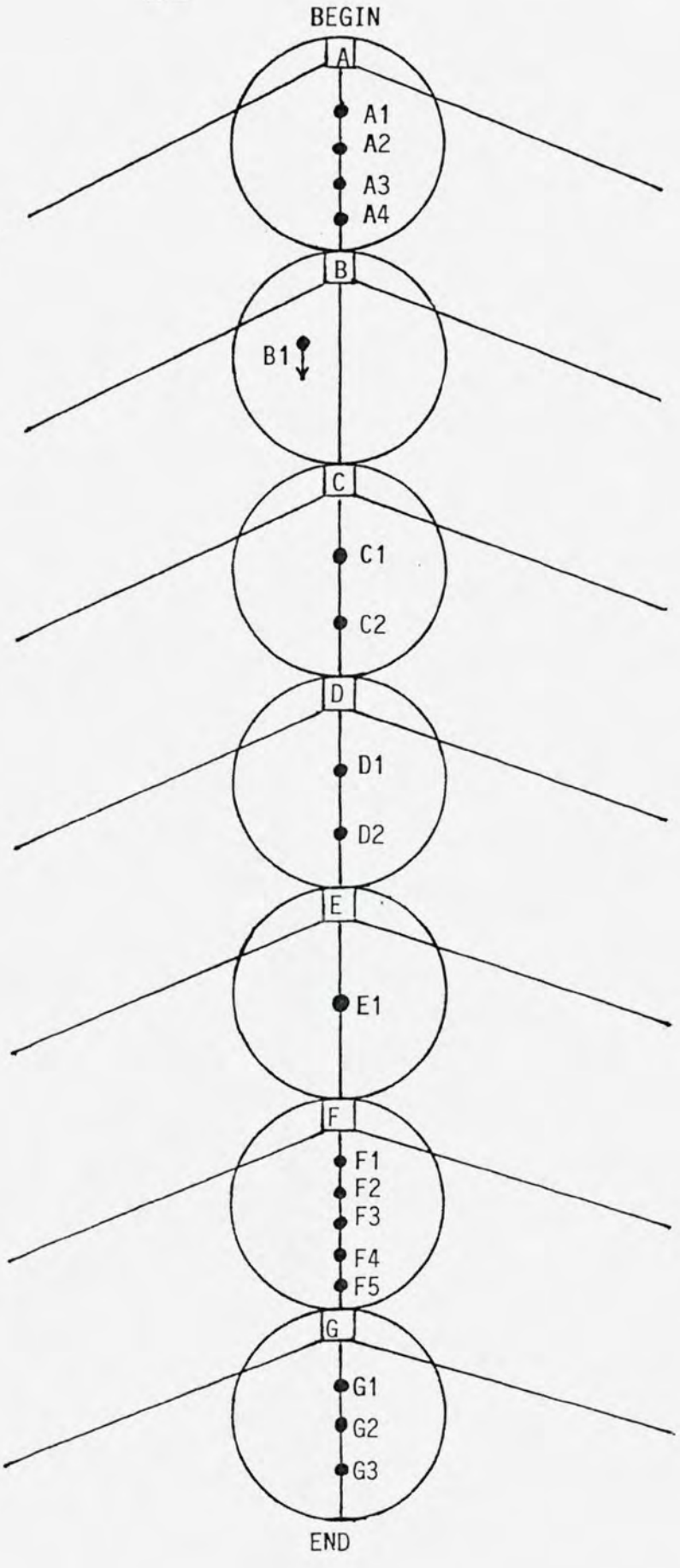
G2. Hare tricks Mr Protruding-eyes into leaving the hollow of the tree.

G3. Hare impersonates Mr Protruding-eyes and sends the baboons on a false track.

Following Seymour Chatman's model, the relations of the kernels and satellites of this narrative can be represented schematically as in Figure II below:

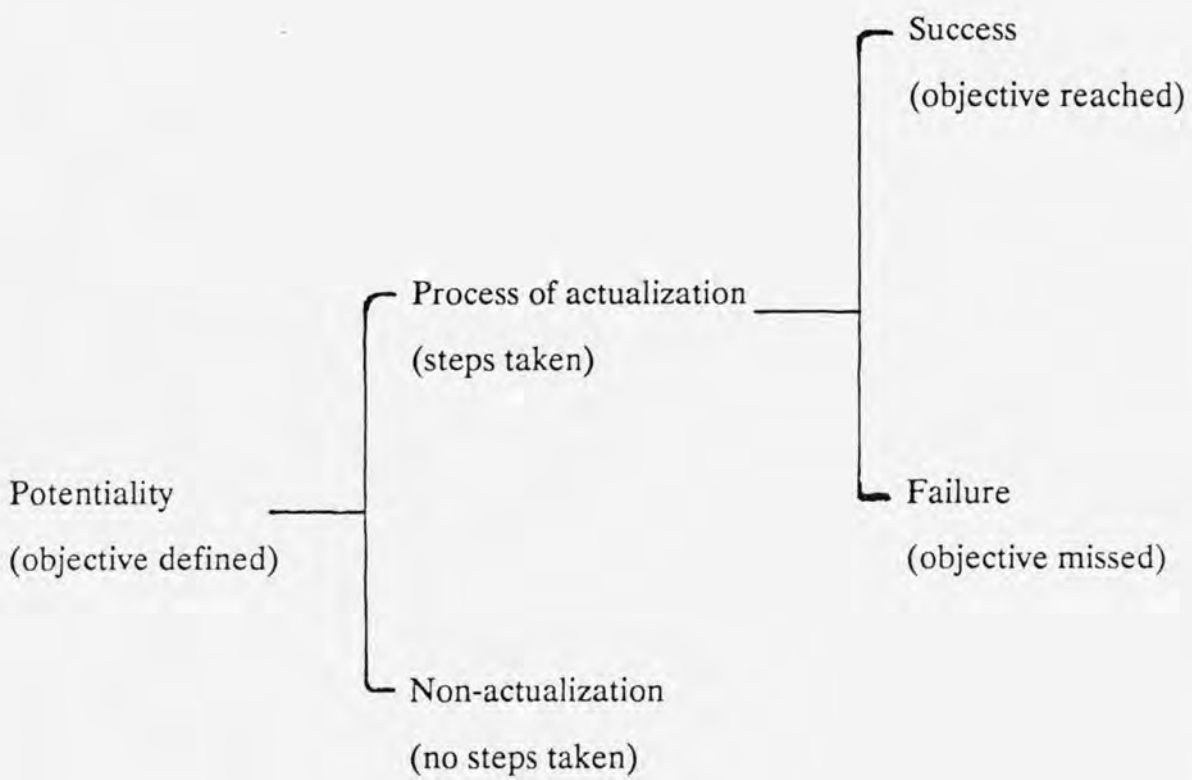
The squares at the top of each circle represent the kernels, the circles themselves the complete narrative block; the vertical line connecting the kernels indicates the main direction of the story-logic. The oblique lines indicate the possible narrative paths opened by the kernels, but not followed. All the dots represent the satellites of the kernels as follows: those on the vertical lines indicate events following the normal sequencing of the story, while those outside the lines, with arrows, are anticipatory or retrospective of later or earlier kernels (depending upon which way the arrow points). Satellite B1, for instance, which represents the action of cooking the meat, is anticipatory of kernel C, around which we have Hare's action of teasing Lion.

FIGURE II


BEGIN
A
A1
A2
A3
A4
B
B1
C
C1
C2
D
D1
D2
E
E1
F
F1
F2
F3
F4
F5
G
G1
G2
G3
END

This analytic model is almost in line with the one outlined by Claude Bremond in his 1966 "La logique des possibles narratifs" (Rimmon-Kenan, 1988:22). Following Vladimir Propp, Bremond regards the function as the basic unit of the narrative. For him every three functions in the story combine to form three logical states, namely, possibility (or potentiality), process, and outcome. Unlike Propp's functions whose sequences are fixed, Bremond's function does not lead automatically to the next function, but opens two alternatives (compare Chatman's 'kernel' above), that is, two possible directions the story can subsequently take. This structure can be schematically represented in the form of a sort of horizontal tree as follows:

FIGURE III.



These only represent elementary sequences of the functions which have the potential of combining into complex sequences with the possibility that the story can continue **ad infinitum**. These elementary sequences combine in one of the following three ways:

1. *Enchainment* or 'back to back' succession.

In this combination, the outcome of one sequence of functions, that is, function 3, amounts to the potential stage of the next sequence, function 1. If we take the positions abstracted from the tale "Mabutle le Tau" above to be functions, then A, B and C would form the first stage of the story-logic thus: Hare's offer to help Lion (A) is merely setting the stage for the trickery through which Hare should find food. (B) creates the opportunity for Hare's trickery; and when Hare nails Lion's tail to the pole (C) the task (trickery) is accomplished. This function creates a new potentiality for the next sequence, namely the skinning of Lion when he dies and terrorizing the baboons in his skin (sequence CDE).

2. *Embedding* (Bremond uses the term 'enclave').

Here we have a combination of sequences with one sequence inserted into another as a specification or detailing of one of its functions. For example, the first sequence (ABC) has another sequence embedded into it, namely the means the two use to catch the animals (A1-A2), putting the means into operation (A3), and the success of the means (A4).

3. *Joining*

This combination has the same triad of events in a sequence bearing a double narrative relevance, and it must be redundantly ranged under two character names (Hare and Lion in our example). Each stage is then matched against its counterpart to reveal that what is an improvement in the state of one character, say Hare, may be **ipso facto** a deterioration in the state of another (Lion).

It should be noted here that these two models, or a synthesis of the two is applicable to both the oral and the written narrative, as far as their story is concerned. The notion of temporal order here involves a convention which identifies it with ideal chronological order, what is often called 'natural chronology'. Strict succession of events appears to be found mostly in stories with a single story-line, or even with a single main character - an obvious characteristic of most oral narratives.

2.3 Relation between Story and Discourse

Since Aristotle the events of a story have traditionally been taken to constitute an array called 'plot' (our discourse). Aristotle's term was **mythos**, and his popular definition of plot as the "arrangement of incidents" still holds today. This arrangement, structuralist narrative theory argues, is precisely the operation performed by discourse. Discourse, the modus of presentation, turns the events of a story into plot. Although discourse may be quantitatively similar to its story, it has an internal structure which is qualitatively different from any one of its possible manifestations, especially in modern narratives. The order of presentation in discourse need not be the same as that of the natural logic of the story, for in it there is the need to 'emphasize or de-emphasize' certain story-events, to interpret

some and leave others to inference, or even to focus on a certain aspect of an event or character (Chatman, 1988:43). Thus historical plotting, like plotting in traditional oral narrative, is regarded as less artistic than modern fictional plotting.

Discourse in narrative became dominated by temporal arrangements, or re-arrangements, with the coming of the twentieth century:

> First the old chronological formulas of the various kinds of historical narrative were given their most thorough employment yet in non-historical narratives; then plots began to be developed which were based on re-arranging time so that the resolution became not so much a stasis of concluded action as a stasis of illumination, when the missing pieces of the temporal jigsaw puzzle were all finally in place and the picture therefore complete.
>
> (Scholes & Kellogg, 1968:235)

A study of temporal order of a narrative, according to Gérard Genette (1980), entails a comparison between the order in which events or temporal segments are arranged in the discourse and the order of succession these events have in the story, to the extent that story is explicitly indicated by the narrative itself or inferred, abstracted from the narrative presentation.

Genette distinguishes between normal sequence, where story and discourse have the same temporal order (123), and "anachronous" sequences, where the temporal order of the story is rearranged in discourse (213 or 132). The 'normal sequence' is found in most of the folk narratives studied in this inquiry (refer pp 35-37 above). A cursory study of the earliest Northern Sotho novels (1940's and 1950's) reveals an indication towards following a normal sequence in their narrative discourse.

One can follow the life of Moelelwa in *Moelelwa* (1985, first published in 1940) in the same way one follows the adventures of folktale characters. In the 'complete' account of many narratives, which is never given in all its detail, the ultimate argument, or **logos**, is that the character must first be born. However, the discourse, in both traditional oral narrative and modern written narrative, need not mention his birth. It may elect to take up his history at any age that suits its purpose. Thus the story of Moelelwa is a continuum of events presupposing the total set of all conceivable details, that is, those that can be projected by the normal laws of the physical universe.

In this narrative, the first five pages deal with Moelelwa's laziness and irresponsibility, and we number this narrative subject A. Then Moelelwa turns down the offer of marriage from an old medicineman and rejects Nakampe's attentions, B. This is followed by her courtship with Janaware, C, which culminates in her elopement with him to his home in Swaziland, D. Moelelwa, now with son, Makezi, fails to cope with her household chores, E, and is subsequently sent back home - she loses her husband, F. The events ABCDEF, then, are the constituent elements of the entire narrative according to the order of their appearance in the narrative. The chrono-logical (use of the hyphen to indicate the **logic** of time) positions they occupy in the story can be given as 123456; hence the sequence of the events in the narrative remains the same as the sequence of those same events in the story: A1-B2-C3-D4-E5-F6.

In Senyatsi's *Maroba* (1964, first published in 1953) we have a discourse woven around the acts of two sets of characters, namely Maroba and his daughters, and Maroba and his son, Khutšo. We have here a multilinear rather than unilinear narrative which requires us to disengage some intermediary units which may be

referred to as **story-lines.** Rimmon-Kenan (1988:16) defines story-line as being structured like the complete story, but, unlike the latter, restricted to one set of individuals.

We can thus distinguish, in *Maroba*, two story-lines; one involving Maroba and his attitude towards educating his daughters (Tšhidi and two others), and the other concerning Maroba and his son, Khutšo. In this narrative, although we may select the succession of events involving Khutšo's upbringing and education as the **main story-line**, this succession does not clearly establish itself as the predominant story element of the text. Our choice may simply be influenced by the fact that it has a longer **duration** in the narrative than the succession involving Tšhidi's upbringing and education, which we shall call the **subsidiary story-line.**

Although the two story-lines intersect frequently in the discourse of this narrative, it is easy to follow the succession of events along one story-line. For instance, the main story-line begins with the birth of Khutšo (A). Khutšo grows up to be very naughty (B). He is sent to Pretoria for 'better' education (C), where he drops out of school and goes to work in Cape Town (D). Khutšo changes his name to Jowie McCorkindale (E). He dies and is buried by acquaintances in Cape Town (F).

The subsidiary story-line commences with Maroba voicing his reluctance to educate his daughters beyond standard six (a). Maroba is later pressurized to send Tšhidi to college (b). Tšhidi completes her diploma and teaches at a local school (c). Tšhidi assists Maroba financially in Mmamolatelo's education (d). Tšhidi is appointed her father's heiress (e). Tšhidi marries a teacher (f).

daughter's hut; (H) he kept his mouth shut and said nothing. Pitšeng and Seopela's journey was void of happiness because of Seopela's silence.

(I) In his daughter's hut Seopela had found wonders; what surprises us is (J) why he should still be undertaking this journey to town (K) after such a sad event. There was no option; (L) Seopela was bound to go to town because (M) he had agreed two days previously to meet the Thamaga's in town; they were to go without him, as he would come by his own means].

Following the numbering with alphabetical letters in the translated text above, we have recognized thirteen narrative segments distributed among six temporal positions in the following chronological order: (1) the agreement with Thamaga to meet in town; (2) violence (we assume it is what Pitšeng did not want to witness as Seopela was breaking a door to a hut); (3) the shock inside the hut; (4) Seopela leaves the hut; (5) the silence; (6) the journey to town. The formula of these temporal positions in this text, then, is as follows:

A4-B2-C6-D5-E6-F5-G3-H5-I3-J6-K3-L6-M1.

A comparison of the ordering of the events in the story and that in the narrative discourse reveals a difference between the two sequences. In fact, a temporal analysis of the discourse shows that the narrative moves in a zigzag manner between two temporal positions. We may designate these positions 1 (before - the past) and 2 (now-the present). A will be given position 2 (it denotes the starting point of the narrative), B position 1 (violence - the breaking of the door - was done before the event A), C position 2 ("Let us go".), D position 2 ("said nothing"), E position 2

("sped towards town"), F position 2 (the same "silence" in D), G position 1 ("what he had found" before leaving), H position 2 (the same "silence" in D), I position 1 ("he had found", before leaving), J position 2 (they are still on their way to town), K position 1 (refer to the shocking event in the hut before he left), L position 2 (this position is given for the convenience of the analysis, for it explains what is happening 'now' in terms of what took place 'before' and therefore traverses the two positions), M goes in position 1 ("he had agreed two days previously"). These positions, then, appear in the following formula in the narrative:

A2-B1-C2-D2-E2-F2-G1-H2-I1-J2-K1-L2-M1.

After picking out the temporal positions of the events in the discourse and relating them to their positions in the story, we are now, following Genette, left with determining the status of the dispositions, the anachronies, in order to illustrate the relationships connecting the segments to each other.

Section A assumes the status of the starting point of the narrative, and will thus form the pivot of relationships of the other segments in relation to time. Granting the autonomous position of A, then B is **retrospective** in relation to A, is temporally subordinate to A. C continues the movement of the narrative with a simple return to the initial position without any subordination; the same applies to D and E. F is a return to D for purposes of emphasis. Although G is syntagmatically connected to F, it evokes a moment retrospective of A, and is thus temporally subordinate to A. H, like F, is a return to D for emphasis. I is another return to earlier events than the starting point, and thus retrospective and subordinate to A. J is a simple return to 2 (i.e. the starting point) without any subordination. K is a simple return to I for emphasis, is also retrospective to J, and subordinate to it.

We may regard L as not merely a return to the present (the journey to town), but an **anticipation** of the present from within the past - or, in Genette's words, 'the present is envisaged as emerging from the past and "from the point of view" of the past' (1980:39). M is retrospective to L and subordinate to it. The new formula for this narrative, showing subordinate and coordinate relationships between the narrative segments as well as recognizing connections and interlockings is:

A2 [B1C2D2E2(F2)G1(H2)I1]J2[K1]L2[M1].

The dynamic relationships (retrospections and anticipations) are placed at the openings of the brackets or parenthesis, while the 'simple returns' are placed at their closings. By merely looking at the formula one can clearly see the difference in status between segments A, J and L on the one hand, and B, I, K and M, on the other. The former group are clearly autonomous or coordinate to one another, while the latter are subordinate to the other segments.

2.4 Defamiliarization of the Story

The most important distinction that can be made between story (**fabula**) and discourse (**sjužet**) seems to be that between the natural and the artistic. In fact, the main concern for Russian Formalists like Shklovsky and Tomashevsky in the narrative is discourse, for that is where artistry lies, rather than in the story, the background against which elements of the discourse are studied (Lemon & Reis, 1965:61). The key logical principle by which mechanistic Formulism organized its basic concepts was disjunction. This principle splits art decisively from non-art, and expresses their mutual exclusivity in the following set of polar oppositions:

art	**byt** (everyday life)
defamiliarization	automatization
teleology	causality
device	material
plot (**sjužet**)	story (**fabula**).

If story is in any way taken as narrative **material**, then discourse is the **device** that enables the artist to tell the tale artistically. This is done when the artist continually interrupts the action, repeatedly goes backward or leaps forward, or sometimes even makes digressions which are unrelated to the basic narrative. When we have the events of the story intentionally displaced and transposed in this fashion, then one can say that discourse is the story defamiliarized, or made strange (Shklovsky's **ostranenie**). The aesthetic function of this type of discourse is to bring this arrangement (or disarrangement) of events to our attention, for

> if a story breaks off and begins again, switches constantly from one narrative level to another and delays its climax to keep us in suspense, we become freshly conscious of how it is structured at the same time as our engagement with it may be intensified (Eagleton, 1986:4).

In this way, narrative discourse, through defamiliarization of the story, becomes a wholly artistic creation. (Tomashevsky, 1965:68).

According to Genette (1980:36) folklore narrative habitually conforms, "at least in its major articulations" to a chronological succession of events, but the Western narrative literary tradition, in contrast, is characterized by anachrony. Some of the narratives begin with a plunge **in medias res,** getting immediately to where the action is - which came to be thought of, in the literary tradition, as a typical "epic" device in Western literature (Scholes & Kellogg, 1968:209). The oral narrative epic as a source of this device is affirmed by Genette thus:

> this beginning **in medias res,** followed by an expository return to an earlier period of time, will become one of the formal topoi of epic, and we also know how faithfully the style of novelistic narration follows in this respect the style of its remote ancestor, even in the heart of the 'realistic' nineteenth century (1980:36).

Having started in the middle of things' the narrative may take us back into the past or move us forward into the future (Genette's **anachrony**).

The main types of discrepancy between story-order and text-order are traditionally known as 'flashback' or 'retrospection' (Genette's **analepse**) on the one hand, and 'foreshadowing' or 'anticipation' (Genette's **prolepse**), on the other. In the former the discourse breaks the story-flow to recall an earlier event, that is, narrate a story-event at a point in the text after later events have been told; and in the latter, the discourse leaps ahead by narrating a story-event at a point before earlier events have been mentioned, that is, moves to the event subsequent to immediate events, recounting these intermediate events themselves at some later point. If they are not recounted, then the leap forward simply constitutes an **ellipsis**. As 'flashback' and

'flashforward' are "only media-specific instances" limited to the specifically cinematic-visual medium (Chatman, 1988:64), we shall adopt in this study Genette's **analepsis** and **prolepsis.**

In the opening of *Megokgo ya Bjoko*, Matsepe (1969) takes us right towards the end of the first sequence of story-events, on the macronarrative level, thus plunging **in medias res**, or as Genette would venture to say in a case like this, **in ultimas res** (1980:67). We are at Lefehlo's tribal court (*kgoro*) where Leilane's case is being tried. The case has been on for some days when we are introduced to the **first narrative** ("the temporal level of narrative with respect to which anachrony is defined" - 1980:48), **Leilane's case of assault.**

> "... *ke matšatši (megopolo ya bona) e le leetong la molato woo, le ge la mathomo o be o sa abula, lehono o šetšego o ithuta mmemi le go katiša".* (1969:1).

> [... (their minds) have been on the journey of that case for days; although it was crawling like a baby initially, today it is attempting to stand and toddle (like a growing baby)].

The only essence of this case that is revealed at this stage is that Leilane has assaulted his father-in-law and his own wife because the food he (Leilane) was eating caused the latter to vomit.

Only when our attention has been fully drawn to the discourse by this beginning **in medias res**, when the discourse itself has raised and failed to satisfy a few questions, does the discourse return to the events that led to the assault in some detail: One of Leilane's cows in calf which is almost dying of hunger is slaughtered, and the meat

(together with the dead foetus) is carried home. We have here what Genette calls an external **homodiegetic** analepse, that is, an external analepse that provides past information either about the character, event, or story-line mentioned at that point in the first narrative (the term **'diegesis'** being equivalent to our 'story'). It is also 'external' because it evokes a past which precedes the starting point of the first narrative. This analepse fills in the earlier gap in the narrative caused by beginning **in medias res.**

The gap is filled in only partially, however, for, even before the actual assault event, this account is interrupted by a **digression** to another narrative that has not the slightest relevance to the first narrative: A mere appearance of the term '*mehlamu*' (conversations) later when the men and the boys are sitting at the *kgoro* evokes the full narrative of how Huwane and Sohlang once quarelled, told by Huwane himself. This narrative is completely embedded in the first narrative like "embeddings ... which allow the narrator to **position his voice**" (Genette, 1980:46). At the same time it constitutes another characteristic of defamiliarization (**ostranenie**), namely the constant movement of the narrative "from one narrative level to another", and the delay of its climax to keep us in suspense, yes, the "impeding" or "delaying" device to retard or slow down the action (Shklovsky's **zamedlenie**), to make the form "prolonged" and "difficult" in order to hold our attention.

Then we have a return to the first narrative where Leilane's case is heard by the clan court - in essence a continuation of the external homodiegetic analepse which was interrupted. Leilane prepares and cooks the foetus himself, but his wife vomits when he tells her what he is eating. Leilane assaults his wife, who flees to her home for help, where she finds only her mother - her father having gone to visit friends.

The narrative then proceeds to the hearing of Leilane's case by the elders of his wife's family - the clan court. Leilane is adamant that the case should proceed to the tribal court.

Instead of proceeding to the kings' *kgoro*, the narrative takes us one step backwards to fill in details of Morara's absence from home when his daughter, Mohlatša arrived to seek refuge. Before the account of the family hearing, dealt with above, begins, his absence from home is merely hinted at as if it is of no significance, thus:

> "*Ka yeo nako ke ge monnamogolo wa lapa a sa tšwele*", (1969:10)
> (At that time the old man of that family was not at home).

It is only after the family members have heard Leilane's case, in the presence of Morara, that we are given details of where Morara was visiting when Mohlatša arrived. He was attending his friend Ntlhobeng's celebration of his initiate. This time we have an internal homodiegetic analepse with the narrative openly and explicitly retracing its own path (Genette's **repeating** analepse).

Although the account of Morara's visit is given as a whole sequence of micronarrative events, it does not advance the action, advance the plot in any way, for it does not open any alternatives. As a narrative unit, this account can be given Chatman's term, **satellite**, for it merely accompanies the first narrative, fulfilling aesthetic functions of 'filling in, elaborating, completing the kernel'. The details of this analeptic second narrative end with Morara returning home to find his wife in a hysterical state because of their daughter's assault, whereupon he summons the family meeting to hear the case - thus resuming the first analepse of the first narrative and moving towards the starting point of the narrative (the events at the king's *kgoro*).

We are almost, but not yet quite at the starting point of the first narrative, for here the discourse handles Morara and his family's first visit to the king's *kgoro*, where they learn that Leilane has already lodged his complaint against them. This finally prepares the scene for the trial of Leilane's case at the *kgoro*.

Just before the trial, the narrative introduces another analeptic discourse, the account of Mohlatša's unauthorized treatment by Nthumule's (Lefehlo's neighbouring king) medicineman, Tšhidiyamotse. Although this account is temporally analeptic in that it is narrated later than its actual position in the story sequence, it also prepares us for, or hints at a future occurrence (the quarrels of the two kings, Lefehlo and Nthumule, caused by Leilane), thus:

> *"Ngaka yeo ... ya se begele Nthumule ka ge e be e le mogwera wa Morara, anthe ke gona ge a fehlile maru ao meetse a ilego a tšholla madi"*. (1969:20).
>
> (That medicineman did not inform Nthumule as Morara was his own friend; in this way he stirred up the clouds so that later it rained in blood).

This in Genette's terms is **amorce**. Although it alludes to the future, this event does not constitute the narration of a future event before its time (Genette's **prolepsis**), but serves as a mere preparation of subsequent events, the significance of which will only be grasped in retrospect.

The narrative eventually returns us to its starting point, where Leilane's assault case is heard at king Lefehlo's *kgoro*. He is found guilty of assaulting the two people, fined a total of four head of cattle, which he is only too hasty to pay. This brings us to the end of the opening of the novel.

Thus, from the very beginning of the complete narrative, we find displacement of time, with the causes following the consequences. This device, in conjunction with the others like digressions, returns and foregroundings, helps to make the form of the discourse difficult, defamiliarized, and thus change the mode of our perception from practical to artistic.

2.5 Anomalies between Oral and Written Discourse

Many followers of Aristotle on the study of the narrative agree that plot requires a beginning, a middle and an end.

> And so does the life of a single man provide a neat formula for plotting. What more perfect beginning than birth or more perfect ending than death? This is simply the old epic formula pushed well into the domain of empirical narrative. This kind of plot can also be idealized and adapted to the uses of fictional narrative ... organized along biographical lines. (Scholes & Kellogg, 1968:211).

However, a narrative does not necessarily have to relate the full story of all the events in a man's whole life. Although a man's real life may provide material out of which a plot may be constructed, this is done by elimination of all but a few carefully highlighted incidents. (Ong, 1987:143). While the traditional epic tendency was to present the life of a hero in terms of his most heroic achievements,

the biographic (perhaps even the romantic) narrative, oral or written, focuses on those episodes which are most revealing of the character of its subject. Hence a fictional narrative shows the tendency to focus either on a single episode in the hero's life, or a single sequence of episodes.

If we take this as a basis on which to compare the oral and the written narratives, the former shows a greater tendency to focus on a single episode than the latter. In contrast to written narrative, which loves to entangle the various threads of the discourse amongst each other, folklore narrative holds the individual strand fast; it is "always **single-stranded (einsträngig)** Olrik, 1965:137). The folktale "Tšelana le Temankgolo" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:134-143), for instance, deals solely with the hero's tribulations in the world of ogres. In "Ngaka Rabodiba" (*Maitišong*,1990a:43-46) all the events relate the tribe's desperate attempts to fetch the snake healer in the pool for the ailing prince. Even if a tale may relate more than one episode, it handles these episodes in an additive, rather than subordinative manner, giving the beginning, middle and end of the first episode before moving on to the next. In "Moselapše" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:48-55), for instance, the events of the first episode involve the theft of the man's guinea-fowl and its solution, while those of the second concern the girl's adventures with Moselapše. Often the second episode is so unrelated to, or independent of the first that it may be separated from it and told as a complete story on its own, or attached to another episode in a different tale.

The tendency of the written narrative is to give

> a single sequence of episodes, such as the interminable interruptions which separate lover from beloved in Greek romance, all of which are interpolated between the moment of falling in love, at which the story proper commences, and the consummation of this love in marriage, where the story inevitably ends (Scholes & Kellogg, 1968:212).

Such are the episodes in Mminele's *Ngwana wa Mobu*, which centre around Phankga's several attempts to replace Lahlang as headmaster: using the influence of his uncle, Mokhura among members of the School Committee; using beer to corrupt members of the community; using the school pupils themselves through classroom instruction and choral activity; using corrupting associations with members of the School Board, especially Mokgonoana. All these are interpolated between Phankga's assumption of duty as a teacher at Rethuše, where the story proper begins, and his ensuing transfer from the school, where the story ends.

The events or episodes in the narrative, both oral and written, are arranged in an order that allows the narrative action to move from a moment of conflict to that of its resolution, for "all plots depend on tension and resolution" (Scholes and Kellogg, *ibid.*). However, the two genres (oral narrative, especially the folktale, and written narrative) differ in their structures. The written narrative, on the one hand, is characterized by the presence of loose organization and uncertain action in the plot structure. It accounts for two levels - the "disposition" or temporal sequence of events, and the "composition" or narrative sequence of these events, with the pair not precisely coinciding with Shklovsky's opposition of story and plot (Steiner, 1984:85). In the folklore narrative, on the other hand, both the number of events and their sequence are fixed. Propp (1968) found the number of functions in all

the Russian wondertales to be limited to thirty-two, and because of the fixed nature of the sequence (only the appearance of the performers of those functions can vary), Propp was able to present a single sequential formula for all wondertales.

> The basic function formulaic sequence thus seems to remain similar in a cross-section of the tales, namely, the contender lacks something (Lack); a task is set (Difficult Task); the task is accomplished (Solution); and the initial lack is liquidated (Lack Liquidated) (Makgamatha, 1987:119).

In a number of the folktales the movement of the action is clearly from a state of disequilibrium to one of equilibrium. Thus, in contrast to the written narrative, the oral narrative is "formally regulated to a far greater degree than one would think (Olrik, 1965:139).

On this basis, one can talk about the "artless plotting" of folklore narrative versus the consciously artistic or consciously empirical plotting of written narrative. The former plots, which are characteristically episodic, present the deeds of a hero in some chronological sequence, while the latter are typically designed in a climactic linear plot often diagrammed as the well-known 'Freytag's pyramid' (that is, an upward slope, followed by a downward slope): An ascending action builds tension (for example, Phankga's campaigns for support in the community and at school, as well as his defiance campaign against Lahlang in *Ngwana wa Mobu*), rising to a climactic point (the planned failure of the school choir excursion to Pretoria), which consists of a recognition or other incident bringing about a **peripeteia** or reversal of action (the parents' meeting with the education authorities) and which is followed by a **dénouement** or untying (the desolate Phankga's transfer from the school).

Walter Ong accounts for this discrepancy very beautifully:

> A narrator in an oral culture ... normally and naturally operated in episodic patterning ... We must not forget that episodic structure was the natural way to talk out a lengthy story line if only because the experience of real life is more like a string of episodes than it is like a Freytag pyramid. Careful selectivity is implemented as never before by the distance that writing establishes between expression and real life (1987:148).

For Ong, then, and we fully agree, the episodic structure, or the episodic technique was the only way, and the totally natural way of imagining and handling lengthy narrative (granting that oral culture has no experience of a lengthy novel-size climactic linear plot) in the folklore narrative tradition.

This leads us to juxtaposing (for comparative purposes) the actual process of writing a narrative by an artist, to the performance of the singer of tales. While the author relies on elaborate analytic categories that depend on writing to structure knowledge, the oral performer has to conceptualize and verbalize all his knowledge with more or less close reference to the human lifeworld (Ong, *op. cit*). The singer of tales, unlike the author, is utterly dependent upon his tradition in that what he learns, and later narrates, the various episodes with which he elaborates the plots, are traditional and in the broadest sense "formulaic" (Scholes & Kellogg, 1968:20).

The singer remembers these episodes, or Harold Scheub's (1977:40) core-images by means of a 'complex, free-associational cueing-and-scanning process'. He remembers them in heavily rhythmic and balanced mnemonic patterns and other formularly expressions, in standard thematic settings (the assembly, the meal, the

published in 1953), although it makes use of some anachronies in places, is a whole sequence of episodes depicting Tsakata leading a life of crime in the cities, lying temporarily low in the Eastern Transvaal to cool things off, as it were, and returning to Johannesburg where he continues to break the laws of the government of the day until he is finally brought to book. Similarly in *Nkotsana* (Madiba, 1955) the narrative follows Nkotsana's escapades as a growing boy, follows him to Bokgalaka where he mixes with the wrong crowd, relates his friend Maseroka's several attempts to turn him into a better person, until his return to his old ways lead him to his death.

2.6 Narrative Macrostructure and the Typology of Discourse

Our intuitive skill in processing stories, that is, our ability to re-tell them, to recognize variants of the same story, to identify similarities of stories in different media, probably corresponds to the theoretical possibility of abstracting story- form from a discourse. This intuition probably led many narratologists following in Vladimir Propp's footsteps to formulate a claim that an immanent story structure may be isolated for all narratives, at least for the sake of description. These narratologists might have also been encouraged by the linguist's ability to take note that there are remarkably **recurrent** characteristics in the narrative structures, which allow for the recording of distinguishable **regularities**, which in turn lead to the construction of **narrative grammar** (Rimmon-Kenan, 1988:9).

The morphological Formalists note three similarities between the biological organism and the literary work: (1) both are complex wholes composed of heterogeneous elements; (2) both are characterized by holism; (3) the constitutive elements are hierarchically differentiated in both. These Formalists proceed from the premise that the narrative was, like an organism, a functional system in which

struggle with the adversary, the hero's 'helper', and so on). In a curiously public way, therefore, the singer remembers the themes and formulas (and not a memorized text nor any verbatim succession of words) that he has heard other singers sing (Ong, 1987:145-6); and thus a tale is the remembrance of tales told.

Berkley Peabody (1975:172-179), who brings out a certain incompatibility between linear plot along the lines of Freytag's pyramid and oral mnemonic patterns (and quite happily too), makes it clear that the orally based thought of ancient Greek narrative epics dwells in the remembered traditional formulaic and stanzaic patterns rather than any conscious organization or plotting of the narrative by the singer. Folklore narrative has nothing to do with creative imagination as is the case in written composition, for the traditional singer does not find himself in the same position as the 'author' who

> can read the stories of others in solitude, can work from notes, can even outline a story in advance of writing it .... can subject the unconscious inspiration to far greater conscious control than the oral narrator. The writer finds his written words accessible for reconsideration, revision, and other manipulation until they are finally released to do their work (Ong, 1987:148).

Before we leave this point, it may be appropriate to observe that although the episodic 'plot' is clearly a characteristic of folklore narrative, as has been seen above, and the most primitive form of plot employed in the written novel, it has retained its validity and flourished for many years in Northern Sotho (especially the 1940's and 1950's). Thus the narrative discourse of *Tsakata* (Ramaila, 1981; first

Aristotle himself distinguished between fortunate and fatal plots according to whether the events led to the improvement or decline of the protagonist's situation, and the result was a possibility of six types of plot thus:

In the realm of fortunate plots: (1) a villainous protagonist succeeds; (2) an unqualified good hero succeeds; (3) a noble hero miscalculates, but only temporarily, and his ultimate vindication is satisfying.

In the realm of fatal plots: (1) an unqualified good hero fails; (2) a villainous protagonist fails; (3) a noble hero fails through miscalculation.

Bearing in mind the different contexts in which these characters appear, as well as the cultural contextual variability of the attributes "good", "noble" or "villainous", we agree with Chatman, in the present study, that

> this categorization will accommodate only a small number of narratives, those in which notions like "good" or "succeeds" are absolutely clear (1988:85).

Leilane in *Megokgo ya Bjoko*, for instance, is clearly a "villainous protagonist" who causes trouble wherever he goes, for, by all cultural values, anyone who sows hatred in people's hearts and sets neighbours at each other's throats, cannot be regarded as "good" or "noble". But whether he "succeeds" in his campaign of war and hatred is questionable, as the situation returns to peaceful neighbourliness in the end, with the kings paying homage to one another and intermarrying with one another.

each element acquires a specific position according to its function. They were probably following Johann Wolfgang Goethe, who accepted the holistic nature of the organism and the functionality of its parts as premises in his morphology. Vladimir Propp and Michail Petrovsky were the most prominent Formalists to apply Goethe's morphology of the organism to the literary form in *Morphology of the Folktale* and "Morphology of the short story" respectively (Steiner, 1984:80-81). Thus Goethe's search for the archetypal plant or animal (**Urpflanze** or **Urtier**) is paralleled by Propp's and Petrovsky's search for the archetypes underlying all the actual form of the wondertale and the short story, respectively.

Propp, for instance, whose definition of the function as a minimal unit of the folktale treated it teleologically in terms of its role within the whole, conceived of the folktale as a narrative about the actions of certain characters. These actions are defined from their point of view of their relevance for the course of action. Furthermore these functions do not exist in isolation, but are interlocked in a configuration, an identical sequence - Propp's compositional scheme of the folktale. It is by comparing the schemes of various tales that Propp arrives at the invariant - the **Ur-Typ** of which all folktales are transformations (c/f Goethe's archetypal plant or animal). A study of the Northern Sotho folktales reveals that it is possible to group many tales under one basic function formulaic sequence (Makgamatha, 1987:119-122) - the 'narrativity' or macrostructure of the oral narrative (a theory of plot typology accounting for the general designs of plots, that is, how plots group together according to structural similarities).

The problem is whether the same can be said of the written narrative, taking into consideration that several attempts have been made, since Aristotle, to account for macrostructures of the literary narrative. Many of these have based their analysis of plot macrostructures on the vicissitudes of the protagonist.

Tsakata, in *Tsakata*, would pose an even more complicated problem. His apparently "villainous" acts on the Reef may tempt some to regard him as a villainous protagonist as he earns his livelihood through illegal means, and also concede his "failure" as he is eventually brought to book, thus agreeing that

> *'bohle ba swanetše go tseba gore ga go "lefadi" le le kgonang go thoma la be la fetša le sešo la swarwa la otlwa'* (1981:133).
>
> (All should know that no trespassers of the law can succeed from beginning to end without being arrested and punished).

But others may disagree on the grounds that Tsakata is only a victim of circumstances who cannot help but break the unjust, discriminatory laws of the government of the day. For just as a given event cannot be classified separately from its context (for example, a killing may be an act of mercy, or a murder, or a patriotic deed, or a sacrifice, or an accident, or several more others), cultural values attached to a single event will vary from community to community. Thus classification of plots into macrostructures and typologies requires a very extensive understanding of cultural codes and their interplay with literary artistic codes of ordinary life.

Attempting to group plot typologies following Propp's model also raises a new set of questions. The world of modern fiction is not two-valued, black and white, as are the folklore narratives, on the one hand. Modern culture at large (and we live in a heterogeneous society), on the other hand, does not provide stereotypes of character and action for most narratives that may be said to have literary quality. The written

narrative, as an art-narrative, is valued precisely because it cannot be reduced to a formula like the folklore narrative, thus comparing the **'art'** of the literary narrative with the **'non-art'** of the oral narrative.

Plot typologies of the literary narrative thus place us in something of a dilemma; but Seymour Chatman, after a scholarly consideration of attempts to analyze macrostructure and typology by Aristotle, Northrop Frye, Roland Crane, Propp and Todorov, as well as Claude Bremond, offers a kind of solution for us, and quite happily too:

> For the present, the notion that all narratives can be successfully grouped according to a few forms of plot - content seems to me highly questionable. Work should proceed genre by genre, for much is to be learned in comparing narratives from a content-formal point of view. We are not ready yet for a massive assault on the question of plot macrostructure and typology (1988:95).

However, by agreeing with Chatman, we are not simply ruling out the possibility of future research on this important aspect of narratology.

2.7 Résumé

The comparisons we have made above (between story and discourse, oral and written narrative) all boil down to one truth: we can distinguish narrative from non-narrative texts by the presence or absence of a story, granting that non-story elements, for example, descriptions of objects, may be found in a narrative text just as story elements may be found in a non-narrative text.

As far as the comparison of oral and written narratives is concerned, we concede that it is not always easy to draw the line between fictional plotting and traditional or mythic plotting. However, there can be no doubt that just as historical narrative discourse tends to be less artistic than the discourse of traditional narrative epic, fictional narrative discourse, especially written, tends to be more artistic. By comparing the artistry of oral and written narratives we do not in any way suggest an evaluation of one narrative type in terms of the other. Oral performance should not be taken as a variant of written narrative. The two genres are formally distinct, and should be analyzed independently of each other. It should also be noted that in all the analyses above we make one simple distinction between story as a general term of character and action in narrative form, and discourse as a more specific term referring to action alone, with the minimum possible reference to character. Character as an element of the narrative receives our attention in the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER III

THE PROBLEM OF THEMATICS IN THE NARRATIVE

3.1 Introduction

So far we have concerned ourselves with generalizations with regard to the nature of the narrative. However, to begin an examination of theme (in this chapter) and character (in the next) in the narrative, we are compelled by the very nature of the Northern Sotho narrative to approach it from the point of view of African literature. This necessitates, at this point, a few comments on the criticism of African fiction against the background of Western fiction. But, first, what do we mean by African literature in the present inquiry?

A lot of arguments have been raised about what African literature is, but, so far we are nowhere near what one can call a universally accepted definition of African literature and who, in the case of prose narratives, is best qualified to be an African novelist. Perhaps at this juncture, it would be futile to attempt a dictionary-type definition of African literature. Rather, what could be preferable may be an 'existensional definition in which family resemblances are pragmatically employed' to decide which of those doubtful or borderline cases can also be called African literature (Ambanasom, 1985:27).

It is generally agreed that literary works done by Africans in African languages for African readership without doubt qualify as African literature. The debatable cases are usually those literary works done by Africans in foreign languages (English,

French, or Portuguese) and works done by non-Africans in African languages. These are among works for which some doubt has been raised about their inclusion or exclusion from the canon of African literary works.

> Some people insist that until the literature is written in African languages, it cannot be truly popular and authentically African. Others emphasize that the important thing is that the work should reflect the feelings, experiences and point of view of an African. A third group would say that it does not matter that a particular work may reflect more than the local color of a particular country or region of Africa than that of the whole continent. (Ambanasom; ibid.).

However, writers and literary critics seem to agree generally that to accept works written by Africans as African literature and reject anything by non-Africans would be providing a too simplistic definition. They would rather prefer, and happily so, any literary work with sufficient authentic African background as African literature, whether such work is written by an African or not. Certain characteristics would mark out such work as African literature, for there is always a certain peculiar feeling that comes out of work by Africans, which a non-African simply cannot achieve. Such work that can qualify as African literature will have its roots firm in the African soil, 'deriving its life from the African experience with its pulsation full of African feeling' (Ambanasom, 1985:8-9). Not only its theme should be African, but the work should be written from the point of view of an African.

Granted that it would be ideal for African literature to be written in African languages, the argument still holds that in view of the linguistic heterogeneity of many African regions, common sense would dictate that many works written by Africans would still be written in the colonial master's language to broaden the

scope of its readership. Thus Achebe regards African literature as a totality of national and ethnic literatures of Africa, defining national literature as literature written in English while ethnic literatures, to take Nigeria alone as an example, are written in Hausa, Ibo, Yoruba, Effik, Ijaw, etc. (Ambanasom, 1985:10).

3.2 The Non-African Critic and the African Narrative

The reception of the African written narrative in the West might more realistically be regarded as a problem of comparative aesthetics. The origin of the problem might be traced to the fact that non-African literary critics were the first to evaluate the African written narrative simply because there were no African critics. These critics found themselves consciously or unconsciously applying Western literary terms to an art which at base had its roots in Western literature, but which at the same time had a local colour of Africanism added to the "traditional" Western literary form.

Thus, through the years, the African written narrative has been confronted with the Western critic, and later with the African critic endowed with Western literary criteria, from the point of view of Western fiction. Consequently, very little attempt has been made to look at African writing from an African point of view, to establish, as it were, the reasons African writing is frequently different from Western writing. We shall attempt to look at some of the basic differences here, as well as to what they may be due.

It is true that for the most part the Western critic has found it necessary to approach the African written narrative with a sympathetic as well as condescending attitude as a result of looking at it out of perspective. Charles Larson (1978:12) quotes Keith Waterhouse, who pays tribute to Chinua Achebe's simplicity of style in *No Longer at Ease* as follows:

> ... I suppose the fact of the matter is that simplicity is all we ask for in the African novel. We want a lucid, uncluttered account of the way life is changing in these territories. We want sound, competent craftsmen to put up the framework; later when the chronicles of change are more or less complete, some very fortunate writers indeed will be able to fill the framework in, wallowing in the new luxuries of characterization, motivation, depth, psychology and all the rest of it.

The regard of African fiction as not good enough, as well as sympathy and condescending cannot be mistaken in this quotation. The "we" is obviously the Western literary world which is laying down requirements for African literature to fulfil in order to qualify as literature. Again and again one reads Western criticism of African writers and gains the impression that the critics have noticed that something is different in African literature, but always fail too frequently to put their finger on this "differentness". Waterhouse in the cited excerpt above, however, has pinpointed this "differentness". By implication, he finds African writing not very good at all and that the Western reader will simply have to put up with its lack of 'characterization, motivation, depth, psychology and all the rest of it' (Larson, 1978:13), which is what the Western critic expects to find in literature. But Waterhouse and the likes of him make no attempt to analyze why the African written narrative is often so distinctly different from the Western narrative.

What comes very clear from reading several Western criticisms on African literature is that a number of traditional techniques and conventions related to the Western narrative are often either missing or noticeably altered in the African written narrative. In Larson's words:

> Since the nature of the "typical" Western novel depends decidedly on the period in which the work was written, it may be more practical to make a number of generalizations and simply note ... that a number of aspects of the Western novel which have been identified in the last three hundred years are often noticeably absent in African fiction (1978:20).

This alteration of techniques and conventions in the African written narrative causes it to be received differently by, say, the anthropologist and the literary critic.

The anthropologists review the African written narrative favourably because they are interested in African cultures **per sé**, while the literary-trained critics (Western) review it unsympathetically because they attempt to force the African writer into a Western literary tradition to which he does not always belong. While the anthropologist wants to learn about African culture when he reads an African novel, the literary critic (Western) is more often concerned with such aspects of narratology as style, plot, and characterization (Larson, 1978:13-14). Thus Ronald Christ commenting on Chinua Achebe's three novels *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *A Man of the People*, finds that the first two of these 'were long on native customs and idiom, and short on narrative interest' (*ibid.*).

Of all the differences between the Western and the African written narratives (whether written in English or in any of the African indigenous languages) it appears the most striking difference immediately noticeable to the reader of African fiction is the often limited importance of characterization. This can possibly be ascribed to the influence of the African oral narrative, where the traditional African sense of respect appears to prohibit an author from 'staring another in the face like a river snake'.

> From a Western point of view, many African novels are almost totally devoid of characterization - especially character introspection and character development - and yet, these novels may still be emotionally gripping, fully capable of drawing in the reader (Larson, 1978:17).

The non-African literary critic may at times be blind to the fact that the African writers are over-communal and insufficiently individualistic in what they portray; they have been moving back to the traditional African perception of the artist and his role in society (Mutiso, 1974:9). They have in effect reasserted a traditional attitude towards art in general and the narrative art in particular as socially functional rather than aesthetically pleasing - which is a prime concern in the Western narrative. The study of modern literary works by Africans should thus be pursued as expressions of attitudes and values related to the African tradition, as well as contact with other traditions and change.

The idea of studying 'art for art's sake' is primarily Western and by no means African. But art, even the creation of character in an African written narrative, is regarded as functional.

> I still insist that art is, and was always, in the service of man. Our ancestors created their myths and legends and told their stories for a human purpose (including, no doubt, the excitation of wonder and pure delight); ... Their artists lived and moved and had their being in society, and created their works for the good of that society (Achebe, 1975:19).

This is not in agreement with what many Western novelists and critics believe to be the novel's prime concern: character.

According to Achebe (1973b:6) many Western literary critics still speak of 'the great African novel yet to be written' in this regard. They find the problem with what has already been written so far being that it has 'concentrated too much on society and not sufficiently on individual characters', (*ibid.*) and as a result they conclude that it has lacked "true" aesthetic proportions.

A cursory study of the African novel reveals some of the identifying aspects of several individual characters on the one hand, and the de-emphasis of characterization on the other, in a number of African novelists. Achebe, for instance, displays a tendency to rely on action for character revelation in *Things Fall Apart*; the works of the Onitsha novelists portray "type" characters (young adults and their parents) and the stagnant nature of characterization; and Tutuola shows a tendency to base characterization on the function of the person, creature or object in his tale. Many employ the situational plot wherein character often becomes secondary to the ideas or the historical patterns the novelist is working with (Larson, 1978:147).

The African written narrative further demonstrates its cultural continuity with folklore as "applied art", in its overwhelming thematic preoccupation with social and political issues. This is obviously a reflection of the considerable functionality of traditional African aesthetics. As such, any African writer who, like his average Western counterpart, concentrates only on aesthetic pleasures is considered unimportant. Again, in its thematic preoccupations, the African written narrative is bound to display differences with the Western narrative for, as Achebe would put it, some of the great issues dealt with in the African written narrative have never been issues at all or have since ceased to be important issues for the European.

> Take, for instance, the issues of racial inequality which - whether or not we realise it - is at the very root of Africa's problems and has been for four hundred years. It has become fashionable to beguile ourselves into believing that all 'reasonable' people accept the idea of human equality and that the minority who do not accept it are mentally sick, and will be cured in due course (Achebe, 1975:78).

Thus, according to Achebe, an African creative writer who tries to avoid the crucial social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant. It is the Western critic's unwillingness to accept the validity of sensibilities other than his own that has led him to dismissing the African novel on the grounds that it is "a peculiar Western genre".

But the anglicized Lewis Nkosi, a very severe critic of black South African novelists does not agree totally, for according to him the black South African novelists have sacrificed the written narrative form by exploiting

> ready-made plots of racial violence, social apartheid, interracial love affairs which are doomed from the beginning, without any attempt to transcend or transmute these given 'social facts' into artistically persuasive works of fiction (1983:132).

And elsewhere, as if to add insult to injury, he continues to apply Western standards to the African novel, for he writes:

> If black South African writers have read modern works of literature they seem to be totally unaware of their most compelling innovations; they blithely go on 'telling stories' or crudely attempting to solve the same problems which have been solved before - or if not solved, problems to which European practitioners, from Dostoevsky to Burroughs, have responded with great subtlety, technical originality and sustained vigour; and black South Africans write, of course, as though Dostoevsky, Kafka or Joyce had never lived (1973:109).

However, this will be rectified and clarified below, when we evaluate the thematic concerns of African literary artists in South Africa.

All said and done, the fact that stands out prominently is that the non-African literary critic has for too long looked at Africa through Western eyes, given only a superficial glance at African culture and African aesthetic values, thus missing the important point that even African poetry has often nothing in common with the effusions of the heart, but is functional and answers a specific need in the community.

All will agree that the African written narrative is often unfairly required (by the Western critic) to be the same as the Western narrative creative art, despite the different cultures that influence the two. In this regard, Charles Larson cites Jean-Paul Sartre's preface to Léopold Sédar Senghor's *Anthology*, where he questions how long the West will continue to 'look at Africa through jaundiced eyes'. The beginning of that preface is translated by Larson thus:

> What would you expect to find, when the muzzle that has silenced the voices of black men is removed? That they would thunder your praise? When these heads that our fathers have forced to the very ground are risen, do you expect to read adoration in their eyes? Here, in the anthology (Senghor's), are black men standing, black men who examine us; and I want you to feel, as I, the sensation of being seen. For the white man has enjoyed for three thousand years the privilege of seeing without being seen. (Larson, 1978:21-22).

The African written narrative, thus, being functional, predominantly deals with socio-political issues and is not bent, like its Western counterpart, on presenting a fictional world for the sake of aesthetics. This often leads the Western critic to feeling that it is presented with 'demands and expectations which could be fulfilled far better by the nonfictional registration of reality in historical research, in sociology; and in anthropology, [and is therefore] ... inconsistent with the real purposes of literary creation' (Stanzel, 1971:7).

For the non-African reader and critic of African fiction, it is therefore unrewarding to look at it solely from the perspective of Western literary criteria and terminology. It will be more rewarding to look at it not only for whatever its similarities with Western literary forms may be, but also for what is African, for African literary

artists are creating exciting new patterns in the traditional literary form (Larson, 1978:26). This can be beautifully summed up in the words of Terence Hawkes, in his preface to Catherine Belsey's *Critical Practice* (1980):

> In various parts of the world, new methods of analysis have been developed whose conclusions reveal the limitations of the Anglo-American outlook we inherit. New concepts of literary forms and modes have been proposed; new notions of the nature of literature itself, and how it communicates are current; new views of literature's role in relation to society flourish.

It is with the general views on the African written narrative expressed above kept in mind that we shall attempt an examination of thematics and character in the Northern Sotho narrative below.

3.3 Thematic Preoccupations in the Narrative

Although we subscribe to the Structuralists' reader-power theory in the present inquiry, especially its assertion of the role of the reader in relation to the text, its liberation of the reader, its rejection of the authorial tyranny in favour of the participation of the reader in the production of a plurality of meanings, we feel morally bound in this discussion of theme in the narrative to uphold the importance of the author, to uphold the expressive-realist theory in the narrative.

We agree with Catherine Belsey (1980:13) that 'to understand the text is to explain it in terms of the author's ideas, psychological state or social background ... the influence of the family, the environment or the society', granting, among other

difficulties, the problem of access to the author's idea or experience which he holds prior to the expression of it in the narrative text. This should in no way be considered to be at variance with our belief in the theory that

> meaning is never a fixed essence inherent in the text but is always constructed by the reader, the result of a 'circulation' between social formation, reader and text (Barthes, 1980:69).

The form of the realist text always acts in conjunction with the expressive theory and ideology by inviting the reader to perceive and judge the "truth" of the text, to interpret, as it were, the world as it is perceived by an author whose autonomy is the source and evidence of the truth of that interpretation (*ibid.*). In this way we have a subjective communication, a shared understanding (by both the author and the reader) of a text which represents the world. In the words of Catherine Belsey (1980:7),

> literature reflects the **reality** of experience as it is perceived by one (especially gifted) individual, who **expresses** it in a discourse which enables other individuals to recognize it as true ... the theory of expressive realism itself.

Thus in a narrative, the author is lending form to a story, lending form to his moral and metaphysical views, to his particular experience of sensations, his personal and particularly incisive perception of people, places, and society (Hardy, 1964:1), for narratives, especially novels, are about life, written from personal experience, telling truths about the period which produced them and the world in general or about

human nature. Their expression of particular perceptions and individual insights of their authors is the very source of their authenticity. These perceptions of the author constitute what is literarily referred to as **theme.**

Some readers - especially student readers - often consider the terms "theme" and "moral" to be interchangeable, and consequently look for some rule of conduct they can regard as applicable to their lives in everything they read. It is best to avoid such terms as "moral" and "lesson" and "message" in the discussion of fiction lest they obscure the fact that a narrative is not necessarily a preachment or a sermon. Rather, what should be borne in mind is that a narrative's **first** object, at least for the Western writer, is enjoyment, and that the purpose of interpretive narrative writers is to give us 'a great awareness' and 'a great understanding' of life, and not necessarily to inculcate a code of moral rules for regulating daily human conduct (Perrine, 1983:108).

The theme of any narrative is its controlling idea, its central insight, its unifying generalization about life, whether stated or implied by the story. For the theme of a narrative may be explicitly stated somewhere in the discourse either by the author himself or by one of his characters, or merely implied by the story, as most narrative writers will, unlike essayists or philosophers, reveal life through their narrative, rather than comment on it. They may reveal life or some truth about it by deliberately introducing as a unifying element some concept or theory of life that the narrative is meant to illustrate. In the words of Tomashevsky (1965:67),

Achebe clearly shows a preoccupation to re-create out of the despised history of Africa, the story of its dignity and integrity. By concerning himself with theme dealing with the historical disintegration of the African people in their unequal contest with Europe, he has decided to re-create the world of the African past and present, with emphasis on its austere dignity and tribal integrity. Achebe thus 'imposes upon himself the task of re-educating the new generation, and creating a new sense of awareness through what he considers will be "applied art" committed to the task' (Awoonor, 1972:126; Killam, 1969:97-98).

It is important to note here that fictional writing in West Africa as well as East Africa by natives of these regions is a post-war phenomenon which evolved along with the nationalist struggle for political independence. After political independence the creative writers channelled their energies from national politics to cultural issues. The writers, who write about the Black-White conflict in these regions

> do so, one might say, in remembrance of things past, but for the South Africans the struggle continues against inhuman operations of Apartheid. So pervasive are its effects on all aspects of the African's life that his writing too is dominated by it. The enforcement of rigorous censorship laws curtails much meaningful writing within the country (Owomoyela, 1979:98).

The problem posed by conditions in South Africa, **inter alia** the 'rigorous censorship laws', makes it difficult for the South African writer to respond with both vigour of the imagination and sufficient technical resources to the 'ready-made themes and

> The idea expressed by the theme is the idea that **summarizes** and unifies the verbal material in the work. The work as a whole may have a theme and at the same time each part of the work its own theme. The development of a work is a process of diversification unified by a single theme.

It is clear, from the above quotation and what has gone before it, that theme (what is being said in a narrative) unites the separate elements of a work, and that to be coherent, a narrative structure must have a unifying theme running through it. Consequently, theme selection and theme development are crucial aesthetic problems in the narrative. To be effective, the selected theme should deal with vital issues, current, topical questions which may reach general human interest developed through some kind of specific material which is relevant to reality in order to maintain the element of interest.

Usually the emotion attached to the theme, or to the specific material used to develop the theme, plays a major role in maintaining interest. Successful narratives are designed to produce a spontaneous effect on their reader, and the emotions they excite in the reader are their chief means of holding attention. Tomashevsky illustrates this very appropriately:

> It is not enough, for example, to state the phases of the revolutionary movement in the cold tones of a lecture; the listener must sympathize, must be indignant, joyful, disturbed. Only then does the work become **really** "real"; only then are the listener's emotions unprotestingly led in the desired direction (1965:65).

Thus, it is important for any contemporary narrative writer within the contemporary period to select carefully what to depict, for not everything that is contemporary is essential, and not everything will evoke in all the readers the same interest.

General interest in a theme is determined by the historical conditions prevailing at the time the literary work appears (*ibid*). It is understandable, therefore, that many African novelists have been naturally influenced in their theme selection by historic events. Chinua Achebe, for one, influenced by the prevailing historical conditions, decided on a missionary venture designed to prepare the Africans to face the future in a positive frame of mind, with pride and belief in themselves (Owomoyela, 1979:81).

3.4 Theme in Oral Narrative

What has been said above about the problems of theme selection and theme development cannot be as valid in oral prose narratives as it is in the written narrative, for, unlike the written narrative, the oral narrative authorship is characterized by anonymity. Even scholars besotted with the myth of filiation have over the years found that to search for origins of traditional prose narratives, for their sources, proves to be an impossible task to accomplish. Every "text" simply appears to be an "intertext" of another "text"; every text appears to belong to the "intertextual". Yet, like the written narrative with definite authorship, each oral narrative also has a unifying theme running through it.

According to Boris Tomashevsky, after reducing a work to its thematic elements, we come to parts that are irreducible, to 'the smallest particles of thematic material: "evening comes", "Raskolnikov kills the old woman", "the hero dies", etc.' (1965:67).

The theme of such irreducible part of a narrative is called the **motif.** Such motifs have helped Formalists to achieve meritorious classifications of traditional oral prose narratives in the world.

Although there are various recurrent themes in the traditional oral narrative, in a broad sense, however, these narratives are calculated to

> provide moral instruction in proper behaviour and conduct, and to educate the youth in the tenets of group solidarity: respect for the elders, awareness of duties and responsibilities (Awoonor, 1972:13).

Hence in many of the folktales there features the function - sequence, Interdiction - Violation - Consequence, in which the Interdiction (which in most cases is from parents to children) may be explicitly stated or implied, and the Consequence of the Violation is a form of Punishment.

In the *nonwane* (Northern Sotho universal term for traditional oral prose narratives like myth, legend, folktale, fable, etc.) of "Mokgadi le Mokgatšana" (*Maitišong,* 1990a:74-76), for instance, the implied cultural interdiction, "thou shalt not swear at others", is violated by Mokgadi who swears at a stone over which her younger sister, Mokgatšana stumbles. The punishment meted out is that when the group of girls returns from collecting firewood, the stone has grown into a huge rock which blocks the way of Mokgadi and Mokgatšana, allowing the rest of the girls free passage upon their singing of a magic song. Consequently, Mokgadi and Mokgatšana fall prey to a cannibal from whose captivity they are rescued by a huge bird. Similarly in "Banenyana le Letšimokgopo" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:81-83), a group of four girls who

neglect to heed the warning to return home before sunset falls prey to a giant, and only two of them are rescued by a bird after the other two have been killed by the giant.

In the various versions of the *nonwane* of "Tšelana and the Ogre" - compare "Ngwadiane le Temankgolo" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:92-95) and "Tšelana le Temankgolo" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:134-143) - the lad refuses to move with his family and the rest of the village from an ogre infested area, only to be captured later and tortured by the same ogres before finally succeeding in escaping or being rescued. The fact that the culprits usually do not suffer permanent condemnation or death, and are eventually rescued by some supernatural helper is illustrative of the moral instruction in proper behaviour that the narratives are calculated to provide. After violation of the interdiction, explicit or implicit, the culprit must suffer and live to tell the story, as it were.

According to Kofi Awoonor (1972:12-13),

> One of the most recurrent themes of the prose narratives is that of conflict; the victory of cunning over force dramatizes this conflict.

The cunning referred to here should not be mistaken for that of the trickster, for the heroes of these narratives - be they boys or girls, men or women, or even animals - emphasize the survival factor for man in a world of uncertainty.

In "Ngwadiane le Temankgolo" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:92-95) Phetole sets out to find his sister, Ngwadiane, who has been swallowed by an ogre. He finds the ogre weaving a grain basket. Knowing that a direct physical combat will put him in jeopardy, he employs cunning to overpower the ogre and retrieve his sister from the ogre's stomach. He tells the ogre:

> *'Aowa, Rakgolo; le loga bošaedi! Emang ke le logele. Tsenang ka mo gare le se rutlole ka magetla. Nna ke tla ba ke se swere botse. Se tlo re mola se thoma go re, la kgona go tšwa, la se mena gabotse.* (1990a:95).
>
> (No, Grandfather; you are not weaving correctly! Let me weave for you! Get inside it and push it out with your shoulders. In the meantime I shall be holding it upright. When it becomes like this, you may come out and form its seam-stitch).

To the unsuspecting ogre, this sounds like a very genuine offer of assistance, and he naturally accepts it. While the ogre is thus incapacitated, Phetole pierces his stomach and out come Ngwadiane and all the other people the ogre had swallowed.

Similarly in "Kganane le Ratšimo" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:84-87), "Ramakgahlela le Dimo" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:88-91), and "Ngwana Mašila le Timamogolo" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:128-133), the people use cunning rather than force by substituting dangerous bees for the captive in the ogre's bag while he is either away drawing drinking water, or sleeping in a drunken stupor.

The purpose of the employment of cunning by Tortoise in "Mokhudu le Motlou" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:11-14) is not to dupe the other animals but simply to survive as he feels his life threatened. After killing Elephant and cutting his carcass into

pieces, the animals plan to carry the meat across the river. However, at the river all the animals agree that no-one should help Tortoise (the smallest and most helpless of them all) across the river, and thus leave him behind stranded, alone.

> *Mokhudu o namile o re mola ba sa mmone o tsena ka gare ga mogodu wa Motlou. Ba mo rwele. Ba sela ka yena.* (1990b:14).
> (While they were not looking, Tortoise slipped into the stomach of the slain Elephant. They carried him [unawares]. They crossed with him).

The most popular theme handled by the majority of animal tales is the trickster theme. In the tales we see a representation of deeper psychological forces present in us, those elements which we would like to give rein to but fail because of the normative rules of society.

> While bearing in mind the function of the tales in re-affirming social convention we must also be prepared to see in them expressions of **anti**-social feeling; they are not merely a weapon of the 'establishment'. This side of the trickster, his role as representative of our own 'darkest desires', can be seen most clearly in his tricks, where he gleefully deceives others to gain his ends and takes pleasure in deliberately flaunting the rules (Street, 1972:86).

Thus, we see Hare in "Mabutle le Tau" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:1-5) full of envy for Lion's might and the fact that the latter is feared by all the animals. He thus pretends to be helping Lion with a plan to catch the other animals for meat, when his real motive is to kill Lion afterwards and eat the meat alone. To demonstrate his envy for Lion's feared and revered position in the animal kingdom he skins the dead

Lion, wears his skin and goes about terrorizing the baboons in the neighbourhood. Such actions speak very loudly about the unhappiness of the small about the fact that others are bigger than they, and the weak about the stronger.

So also in "Mokhudu le Motlou" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:11-14), when Tortoise eats all the fruit on the royal branch while the other animals are asleep, and decides to implicate Elephant by stuffing the peels and pips in his anus, he does not seem to have any reasonable grudge against Elephant besides the fact that he (Tortoise) is the smallest while Elephant is the biggest of the animals. Similarly in "Mmutla le Khudu" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:21-27), when Tortoise uses trickery to win a race against Hare (the slowest animal versus the fastest animal), the trickster represents the obverse of order and thus demonstrates the need for some balance between order and chaos, the need for some flexibility in the application of order in society.

Brian V. Street (*op.cit.*) very aptly maintains that the way the trickster breaks all the rules, acting in the opposite way to that laid down by society to the delight of the listeners, suggests the same use of written narratives for social protest. Like the written narratives, the tales present a caricature of social reality, a satire on social convention, and an opportunity to voice social protest.

3.5 Thematic Concerns in Written Narrative

African writers and critics like Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe have pointed out that the African writer has a duty to act as the conscience of his nation, to face up to the truth and force his countrymen 'to see themselves as others see them', to alert them to the debasement of standards in their community, 'to the prevalence of corruption, incompetence, nepotism, brutality, injustice, poverty, social inequality, materialism, hypocrisy and snobbery' (Palmer, 1979:241).

For the most outstanding and the most original critics of the Structuralist school, "the world exists and the writer speaks - there is literature". Even casual literary theorists have bandied about the common sense thesis that conditions of political, economic, and social repression in a country offer excellent material for rigorous literary activity. It is not surprising, therefore, that the best productions of the modern African literary scene, as well as others by a few famous European and American writers were written in the circumstances or in the tradition of protest against an unjust order.

As far as the thematic aspects of the novel are concerned, Africa as a whole emerges as the general theme for most of the African novelists. Understandably, this broad African theme can be broken down into numerous "subthemes", all of which reflect aspects of the African past and present, such as the following: the theme of warrior heroes, the theme of colonization (which depicts the intrusion of the white man into the African continent as well as agitation against the colonialists), the theme of the African's life under colonial rule, the theme of the clash of cultures or the conflict between the European and the old traditional values, and the theme of oppression of Africans by Europeans, to mention only a few. The prevalent theme in most of the productions is corruption, while the general mood is that of disillusionment. Quite naturally, the novelists were influenced in their selection of subject matter by the historic events.

According to Ambanasom (1985:16) one prevalent feature that characterizes the West African fiction is a return to the past which was largely affected by slave trade and colonialism. The writers (like Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye) try to recapture the simplicity and romantic attraction of the African traditional way of life that was disrupted by the coming of the European. On the other hand, others like Ngugi wa Thiong'o believe that though the past is important to a certain extent, the

African writers should not be too preoccupied with the fascination of the past, but should allow the present to occupy them more. They should be involved in depicting and making a statement about the conflict in present day African society, the conflict between the emerging middle class elite and the general suffering mass. In Ngugi's (1972:45) opinion, for an African writer in a capitalist state to concern himself with the past is tantamount to mere escapism from present reality.

Chinua Achebe, in his "The African Writer and the Biafran Cause" (1975:78) displays a similar conviction and believes that literature in Africa should be about right and just causes, for he writers:

> It is clear to me that an African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant - like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames.

Writing elsewhere, Achebe (1973a:8) shows that thematic considerations for him go beyond merely writing about contemporary issues, 'about politics in 1964, about city life, about the last coup d'etat'. Although they are all legitimate themes, according to him, the 'fundamental theme' should first be disposed of:

> This theme - put more simply - is that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity (*ibid.*).

plots in the persistent turmoil of oppressive racism he lives under' (Moyana, 1976:86). As a result, many foreign critics of South African literature, both black and white, have found it to abound in mediocrities.

Writing about what he terms neo-African literature in African languages, Janheinz Jahn (1968:100) notes that Sotho, Xhosa and Zulu languages produced talented authors and became literary languages, and that each had a spiritual centre (often referred to as a mission station) and a publishing house. However, the centres were both help and hindrance as the author could only produce semi-free literature. This situation worsened when 'in 1955 the law for Bantu Education swept away the mission schools' for anything which was allowed to appear then 'scarcely deserves to be called literature: it is merely reading matter for beginners' (*ibid.*)

Although we cannot speak for all the South African languages that have produced 'neo-African' literature, at least as far as the Northern Sotho narrative is concerned, we find Jahn's criticism rather too harsh. However, we agree that the South African censorship laws have adversely affected the thematic selections and treatment in the Northern Sotho written narrative, as they have in other South African languages, black and white, for the writer in the country publishes, as it were, only by the grace of the government. To make the point of the seriousness of this issue, we are tempted to quote T.T. Moyana at length:

> How could one ever write a book which, in the South African context, may be interpreted as innocent of promoting 'feelings of hostility between Natives and Europeans'. or 'engendering feelings of hostility between the European inhabitants of the Union on the one hand, and any other section of the inhabitants on the other', or 'representing antagonistic relations between capital and labour, or

making reference to controversial international politics, or carrying scenes of intermingling between Black and White or of pugilistic encounters between them', or furthering 'any of the aims of communism' or unlikely to cause someone to contravene 'any law by way of protest' or free of anything the [Publications Control] Board could consider 'on any ground whatsoever objectionable'. (1976:88).

On the question whether there is change in strategy as far as the censors are concerned, whether nowadays the censors seem to say, "If it is good literature it may pass; if it is blatant propaganda it may not", many South African writers and critics feel that would not be farther away from the truth. They feel there is some sort of formula whereby the censors restrict people in terms of what they read, by deciding what people must read and how they must read it, thus hoping for "selfcensorship" where the writer restricts himself because he is afraid of what might happen to his book (Richard Rive, interviewed by Dieter Welz, 1989:10).

As a result of the government censorship and the inevitable writers' selfcensorship the Northern Sotho narrative fiction, like the rest of South African fiction, has experienced escapism into fantasy with some writers opting for mystic primitivism (cf. Mamogobo's *Kgamphuphu*), some taking to the safe haven of historical themes [cf. Maredi's *Tlala ya Mohlopi*], and others depicting the conflict of cultures by dramatizing the move from the agrarian societies and cultures into the world of cities, and the attendant overthrow of the system of values and mores that animated the older world (cf. Senyatsi's *Maroba*, and Matlala's *Molato Mpeng*).

Yet another group follow their English contemporaries of white liberal South African literature in the "Jim comes to Jo'burg" syndrome, depicting a Black who lives an idyllic existence in a little village, and later goes into the big cities where all

hell breaks loose and he goes back licking his economic wounds (Richard Rive interviewed by Dieter Welz, 1989:12). The moral of the story is clearly that he should stay where he is, namely on the farm, whose life is simpler than city life, where civil formalities are more respected than in the city (cf. Madiba's *Nkotsana*).

At the same time there is another group of sophisticated writers, who, although they are preoccupied with the evils of the repressive apartheid system, are marked out by their calculated circumvention of explicit protest. These writers portray the situation sensitively and let it speak for itself, and indirectly express their anger against colonialism, anger tempered by a sense of humour in a double-edged nature of their hard-biting satire. (cf. Ramaila's *Tsakata*, and Mminele's *Ngwana wa Mobu*).

The sophistication of these writers seems to stem from the belief by most South African writers and critics that nowadays works critical of the South African social and economic set-up are passed provided they are difficult literature, read by a few people only. In response to a question on the validity of this statement, Stephen Gray (interviewed by Dieter Welz, 1989:27-29) maintains that white, sophisticated literature has a better chance of passing censorship than black literature which tends to be more or less propagandistic;

> It is undoubtedly true that the white person who has tremendous access to the newspapers and to international protest forums gets an easier and lighter deal and, in fact, is treated rather specially, whereas an unknown black writer is terribly vulnerable and is far more likely to be banned. Possibly the censors would see it on the grounds that his work is propagandistic, whereas the white's work is art ... but I still think there is a lot of room for being able to say exactly what you

> want to say if you say it cleverly enough. Audiences [drama] are quite clever enough to understand exactly what you mean even though you may not be able to say it outright or literally ... there is no need to stand on stage and say: Apartheid is appalling! It is implied.

We shall attempt to illustrate how these writers, through impersonal narration often accompanied by direct intrusion by the author, "show" the truth rather than "tell" it, in a closer examination of protest in Ramaila's *Tsakata* and in Mminele's *Ngwana wa Mobu*. In these works, as will be seen, what seems obvious and natural is not necessarily so, but on the contrary, the "obvious" and the "natural" are not **given** but **produced** in a sophisticated manner.

3.6 **Protest in Ramaila's** *Tsakata*

In this novel, what seems obvious and natural - the castigation of the African on the one hand, and the praising of the Whites as well as the South African government on the other - is not necessarily so. In fact, the novelist's treatment of the protest theme is so sophisticated that it acquired the stamp of approval (immediately after the title page) from the education authorities in the person of H.J. van Zyl, Inspector of Native Education, Transvaal:

> I have read this Manuscript with the greatest pleasure. It follows the new orthography and is very well written. E.M. Ramaila is a writer of various other successful books, and I consider "TSAKATA" to be an improvement on his previous books. It will be one of the most beautiful narratives in Northern Sotho, and this book will be welcomed everywhere.

Right from the onset Ramaila gives us the personification of the values of the African (Northern Sotho) society in the hero, Tsakata. Throughout the narrative the qualities Tsakata has consciously cultivated are the same qualities that characterize the African in South Africa. Right at the beginning of the narrative the novelist, still in a sophisticated manner, portrays the white man's attitude of superiority over the black man in the narrative of Tsakata's expulsion from school:

> *O be a šetše a le ngwageng wa mafelelo wa dithuto tša gagwe, eupša bjale a dirile tše ntshwanyana tše di sa kwaneng le melao. Ka manyami le ka pefelo mookamedi wa sekolo o ile a šupetša morwa Monare tsela, a be a bolela ka Seisemane a re: "Tšwaa ka dikgoro tše tšhweu tša sekolo se. Dikgoro tše tšhweu di buletšwe ba ba nang le dipelo tše tšhweu fela. Sepela!"* (1981:3)
>
> (He was already in his final year of study but had now done some blackish things that were contrary to the regulations. With sadness and anger the school headmaster expelled the son of Monare, and even spoke in English and said, "Walk out through the white gates of this school. The white gates are open for only those who have white hearts. Go!").

Through the use of the terms *ntshwanyana* and *tšhweu* ("blackish" and "white") the novelist depicts the headmaster (who was obviously a white man) equating **black** with bad, evil, and **white** with good, holy. The novelist merely tells us that Tsakata had done something "blackish", and does not commit himself to furnishing details of Tsakata's offence, thus successfully depicting the white man as the villain and the black pupil as the innocent victim of circumstances. Similarly in the narrative of the friction between Nape and Tsakata later in the novel, the author does not give details of their quarrel, but gives his excuse as follows

Tshekong goba tshekišanong ya melato ye mengwe, Makgowa a na le lefoko le le reng: "Evidence was heard in camera". ... Le yona phapang ya Nape le Tsakata e tla sekelwa ka kobong mo pukung ye. (1981:90).

(In the trials or law suits involving certain cases the English have a saying as follows, "Evidence was heard in camera". ... So also the dispute between Nape and Tsakata will be heard in camera in this book).

It is striking, therefore, that the author at times chooses to avoid the details of cases that may have a bearing on the social practices that reveal racialism and low morality. One gains the impression that the novelist does not want to commit himself, or simply avoids the details as they would make his protest too direct and explicit rather than implicit. It is thus left to the reader to fill in the gaps by inference.

The black pupil as the innocent victim of circumstances is clearly but indirectly demonstrated in another incident involving another pupil of the same school from which Tsakata was expelled. In this incident the pupil, Tšhungwane complains to the school headmaster against unfair treatment by Mr Brown (a white teacher). The following is the headmaster's arrogant response:

"Nna ke bjalo ka motho wa mohumi yo a ruileng dikgomo, dinku le dikgogo. Se ke se tlhologelang ke gore diruiwa tše ka moka di phedišane ka khutšo. Fela ge kgogo e sa kgone go phedišana le kgomo ka khutšo le ka boikokobetso, gona nna ke tla tloša kgogo. Ga ke rate go tlhwa ke tshwenyana le dikgomo tša gešo ka baka la tabana tša kgogo". (1981:4).

("I am like a rich man who farms on cattle, sheep and poultry. My desire is to have all these animals co-existing peacefully. However, if the fowl cannot co-exist peacefully and submissively with the cow, then I shall get rid of the fowl. I do not want to be troubling our cattle because of the trivialities of the fowl").

Makwela (1977:119) aptly interprets the headmaster's *dikgomo* (cattle) to refer to the white teachers at the school, *dinku* (sheep) to the black teachers, and finally, *dikgogo* (fowls) to the school pupils. The symbolism immediately evokes in one 'the disparity in the market values of the animals used in the superintendent's illustration' (*ibid.*). In this narrative, in the words of Janheinz Jahn (1968:89),

> Everything European is from the outset assumed to be 'superior', 'progressive', and better than the 'bad', 'bloodthirsty', 'savage', 'heathen', African traditions. The European commands and instructs, the African obeys in action and conforms in thought.

As if doubtful whether his sophisticated treatment of the protest will be sufficient to help him get away with it, the novelist, through some "appropriate" authorial intrusion, praises the noble white headmaster and "apologizes" for his harshness thus:

> *Mookamedi yo e be e le motho yo a tsebang go atlhola ditaba ka go loka. Le gona o be a na le pelo e telele ya go theetša dipelaelo tša barutwana ka botho, eupša mo letšatšing le, Tšhungwane o wetše mookamedi ka godimo a sa selekilwe ke tša Tsakata, yo e beng e sa le matšatši a mararo fela ge a rakilwe.* (1981:4).

(This headmaster was someone who could judge matters with justice. Furthermore, he had the patience to listen kindly to the pupils' grievances; but on this day, Tšhungwane had approached him tactlessly while he was still angered by the case of Tsakata, who had been expelled only three days previously).

This authorial explanation may give the reader a false impression that the novelist puts all blame on the pupil, and approves of the headmaster's behaviour, which was only "normal" under the circumstances. There is little wonder, therefore, that Van Zyl finds himself reading the manuscript 'with the greatest pleasure', and subsequently concluding that 'this book will be welcomed everywhere'.

The narrative then takes us to Johannesburg, where Tsakata soon finds employment even though there was a scarcity of jobs. He makes sufficient money, lives happily, affords various appetites, makes friends, and copes easily with the city life. *Gauteng ya ba gae* (1981:5) - Johannesburg become an ideal home. It is only when he becomes unemployed, and makes numerous fruitless attempts to find another job, that Tsakata's life changes. The novelist puts it as follows.

Morago ga lebaka le letelele a felelwa ke modiro wo, le gona a se ke a hwetša o mong le ge a leka ka maatla go o nyaka, 'mme ya ba gona a thomang metlhako le mathaithai a lefase.(1981:5)

(After a long time his services in this job were no longer required, and although he tried very hard to find another job, he could not find employment, and then he started with the struggles and tricks of the world).

Later when we find Tsakata engaged in various fraudulent and illicit means of making money, living by his wit, we can easily look back to this "change" and realize how unemployment in this country corrupts an otherwise good man.

It is this unemployment that leads Tsakata to contravene several of the South African laws in order to make a living on the Reef. As far as the South African discriminatory laws are concerned (for example, the pass laws as well as the liquor laws), the novelist does not even attempt to register his protest in an implicit and covert manner, for he openly declares, though in a "showing" rather than a "telling" manner:

> *Mo ditoropong tše kgolo tša Afrika ya Borwa, batho ba baso ba tlhompha melao ye e beetšweng batho ka moka. Ge e le ye e beetšweng ba mmala wo moso fela, yona ba a e nyatša.* (1981:7).
>
> (In the big South African cities, the black people respect the laws that affect all the people alike. But they despise those that are meant only for the people of a black colour).

There are so many "special passes" that are prescribed for Blacks in the South African cities that Tsakata, through forgery of these, becomes a wealthy man:

> 'There is a special for travelling, a special for a visit, a special to go out at night and a special to seek work' ... In an article in *Sjambok* in 1930, H.D. Tyamzashe ... identified twelve kinds of passes needed at various times. 'The pass law system', he wrote, 'teems with irregularities and anomalies .... The whole thing is unjust'. (Couzens, 1976:50;68).

As for the law prohibiting black people from purchasing liquor, it is despised not only by the Africans themselves, but even by some of the white people themselves. However, it is only when the narrative "shows" how these Whites exploit the provisions of the law to take advantage of the poor Africans, that their reason, for "despising" the law begins to dawn on the reader. We quote:

> *Molao wa go iletša Bathobaso bjalwa le wona ga se wa batho botlhe. O swana le melao ya dipasa. Ka baka leo le wona o a nyatšega, o bile o nyatšwa le ke Makgowa a mangwe a a kgonago go bona se e leng toka ya go phedišana ga batho mo nageng ye. Se se theošang nepo le maleba a melao ya mohuta wo, ke ge le Makgowa a mangwe a leka go holega ka yona. Ba a hwetšwa ba ba thabelang go reka mabjalwa a ka theko e nnyane gore ba tle ba khuphuge ka go a rekiša ka e kgolo go Bathobaso.* (1981:20).
>
> (The law that prohibits Africans from purchasing liquor, also does not affect all the people. It is similar to the pass laws. For that reason, it is also despicable, despised even by some Europeans who can realize the justice of the co-existence of people in this country. What causes the aim and provisions of such laws to fail is the fact that even some Europeans try to benefit through them. You find those who are glad to purchase this liquor at a lower cost so that they may gain from selling it to Africans at a higher price).

The novelist "shows" that it is usually "poor Whites" (1981:23) living on the outskirts of certain towns that engage in such business. These black clients are welcomed in the houses of these Whites and made comfortable, obviously not for humane but for economic reasons, and to keep the black clients out of sight of the law:

Ba dudišwa gabotse gore ba reke ba iketlile, ba ba nwang ba nwe ba be ba kgoge ba kgone ba etšwa ka o tee ka o tee. (1981:23).

(They are made to sit comfortably so that they may buy with ease, those who drink may drink and even smoke, and then they may leave one after the other).

Thus, the discriminatory laws do not only corrupt the disadvantaged Blacks, but also make it possible for Whites to exploit Blacks economically, for poor Whites to take advantage over poor Blacks who seek to make a living.

After "showing" all the possible evils of the discriminatory laws of the country, the novelist, for obvious reasons, does not leave the image of Tsakata as a victim of circumstances on our minds, but causes him to be arrested, convicted and punished. In the very last paragraph of the novel the novelist says:

Gape botlhe ba swanetše go tseba gore ga go "lefadi" le le kgonang go thoma la be la fetša le sešo la swarwa la otlwa ... (1981:139).

(Further, all should know that there is no "criminal" who is able to start and even finish before he is caught and punished).

Then to round off the "moral" of his narrative, the novelist quotes from the Bible, Ecclesiastes 10:8

"Yo a kgatlollang morako o tla longwa ke noga" (1981:139).
(He who breaks a wall will be bitten by a snake).

This has clear reference to those who contravene the South African discriminaroty laws because they find them unjust and despicable. The novelist here successfully focuses the attention of the censors on the pseudo-theme, **crime does not pay**, thus leaving the protest covert.

Ramaila does not limit his protest to an outcry against the social injustices brought about by the South African discriminatory laws. He also expresses his anger (though tempered by a sense of humour) against the colonization of Africans by Europeans in South Africa, against the questioning, at various times, of the African's 'very claim to humanity', and the abuse of their persons as well as the insult to their intelligence (Achebe, 1975:79).

He protests strongly against the loss of the African's dignity and faith in themselves as a result of the years of denigration and self-abasement at the hands of their colonizers. He protests against the disaster brought upon the African's psyche in the period of subjection to the Whites, to the extent that they could easily forsake their culture for the European's culture, yes, even forsake their traditional names and assume those of their bosses. In short, he protests strongly against the rape of the African society by the European society.

In spite of his anger and hostility towards the agents of colonialism, Ramaila, in treatment of this protest, is at the same time involved in an act of diplomacy: he strives to restore to his people a sense of dignity, and at the same time 'convince the colonizer that these people are worthy of this dignity' (Gikandi, 1987:43).

To attend fully to the question of the African's loss of identity and dignity, the novelist takes us out of the big cities, back to the rural areas where our traditional culture can significantly stare us in the face.

The novelist explains that most European names by which many Africans call themselves were assumed in their slavery, after they were captured by the Europeans in wars such as the Burger - Sekhukhune war of 1878, and the Boer-Malebogo war of 1894. Later others who came to these Europeans voluntarily simply followed suit and changed their names to assume those of their bosses. Yet others, who later interacted with the former two groups *ba kgatlhwa ke maina a Sekgowa* (took a liking to the European names), and simply changed their traditional names to assume new European names (1981:76-77). The last group were simply given new names when they were employed by their European bosses, such as **Januarie, Februarie, Maart, April, Swartbooi, Geelbooi**, and **Witbooi.**

> *Tšeo ka moka ke diennywa tša thulano ya merafe ye mebedi - o mošweu le o moso - ye e sa swaneng le ka gonnyane.* (1981:77)
>
> (All that is the result of a clash between two races - the white one and the black one - which are very different from each other).

Here the novelist does not find it necessary to state the obvious, namely that the clash has resulted in White "swallowing" Black, and not vice versa.

The Rev. Gustav Schweigenberg queries Tsakata's use of an alias (Mr Davidson) thus:

> "*Gomme lena le ipitša ka maina a Sekgowa ka baka lang?*" (1981:82)

("And why do you people call yourselves by European names?")

To this, Tsakata explains that he often finds it necessary to call himself Davidson when entering into certain transactions where he would not like to disclose his race. Just as he took advantage of the discriminatory pass laws of the country to enrich himself back in the big cities, Tsakata also uses the oppressor's name to avoid being discriminated against and exploited in any business dealings simply because he is black. The European's query quoted above is more a rebuke of some sort, like, "Who do you think you are, calling yourselves by **our** names?" - a disguised entrenchment of separatism - rather than an expression of concern over the African's abandonment of his culture. The African's use of the European name is acceptable as long as it denotes that he is the European's slave; but, as soon as it is used as a tool of equality it becomes questionable.

The novelist speaks out loudly against the European missionary's pretexes of concern over the African's cultural heritage through the principal character, Tsakata - another sophisticated way of putting his protest across. The importance of the verbal exchange between Tsakata and the missionary as an expression of protest compels us to quote extensively at this point:

> *Tsakata a re: "Re a tseba gore wena o moapostola yo mogolo wa 'kgatello'. Ebile le dikuranta tše tša ba baso tše o di balang tše, ga se gore o kgatlhwa ke tšwelopele ya rena, eupša o senka megopolo ya rena, le go bona ka mo o ka thušang ba geno go re thibela le go re gatelela". Monere a re: "O bolela bjalo ka sefofu. Rena re tšwile kua kgole gaborena go le tlišetša seetša sa ebangedi. Tlhologelo ya rena ke gore le hume yona, 'mme le golele godimo ka segagabolena, ka mebolelo le ka mekgwa mafelong a lena, e seng Makgoweng goba ka mekgwa ya*

Makgowa. Karogano ye e a le hola". Tsakata a re: "E ka re hola bjang? Palo ya ba bašweu ke maetengwa a mabedi, ge ya rena ba baso e le maetengwa a seswai. Bjale mo nageng ye ya Kopano (Union of S.A.) ge naga e kgaogantšwe diripa tše lesome, lena ba maetengwa a mabedi le tšere diripa tše di šupang mo go tše lesome, le tlogeletše rena ba maetengwa a seswai diripa tše tharo fela mo go tše lesome. Bjale re ka tšwela pele mafelong a rena, ra golela godimo ka segagaborena re le kae?" Mafoko a mangwe a mafelelo a ile a bolelwa ke "Monere", Tsakata a homotše bjalo ka yo a fentšweng, a bile a ikokobeditše. (1981:83-84).

(Tsakata said, "We know that you are a great apostle of 'oppression'. Even these newspapers for Blacks that you read, you do not read because you are pleased with our advancement, but because you are examining our thinking to find out how you can help your people in restricting and oppressing us". The Reverend said, "You speak like a blind person. We left our home far away to bring you the light of the gospel. Our desire is that you should be rich in it, develop in your culture, in languages and customs within your areas, not those of the Whites or in customs of the Whites. This separation benefits you." Tsakata said, "How can it benefit us? The white people number two million, while we black people number eight million. Now in this country of the Union (Union of S.A.) if the land is divided into ten parts, you who number two million have taken seven parts out of ten, and have left us who number eight million only three parts out of ten. Now, from where shall we be able to develop in our own culture?" Some of the last words were spoken by "The Missionary", while Tsakata was silent, as if defeated, as well as submissive).

In his sophisticated manner of treating the protest by "showing" the truth rather than by "telling" it, the novelist engages the **colonizer** and **colonized** in a debate and leaves the reader to draw his own conclusions. The missionary, speaking on behalf of the apologists of colonialism, tries to justify colonialism as 'the pacification of a lawless continent and redemption of its people from an interminable cycle of godless brutishness' (Owomoyela, 1979:82), while Tsakata, for the South African Blacks, is also determined to set the record straight and free the African past of those stigmas, at the same time making a statement of intent to resist the white man's oppression.

Although Tsakata obviously has a stronger, less emotional and more rational argument backed by "statistical data", the missionary is given the **last word** in the argument, perhaps to cover up the "blatant", sharp criticism and thus escape censorship. Once more we notice that the novelist elects to merely mention that the missionary spoke the 'last words', without sharing the details of those last words with us, perhaps to avoid committing himself to either side of the argument (again to escape censorship).

3.7 **Protest in Mminele's** *Ngwana wa Mobu*

Thematic selection and treatment is just as sophisticated in *Ngwana wa Mobu* as it is in *Tsakata*. While in the latter the novelist "shows" the life of the African under colonial rule and offers a sharp criticism of the domination of Blacks by Whites in South Africa, in the former the novelist "shows" the struggle of the African society in South Africa against colonialism. Ironically, the outcry against the attitudes and actions of the missionaries towards Africans in South Africa is given the "stamp of approval" by a descendant (in one way or another) of the missionaries in *Tsakata*. Similarly, in *Ngwana a Mobu*, the strong protest against the colonizing of Africans by

Europeans in South Africa not only successfully escapes censorship, but goes on to win the first prize in a literary contest in a celebration of the Republic of South Africa.

In Mminele's narrative, as in most protest literature in South Africa, what seems obvious and natural is often misleading. The title itself, *Ngwana wa Mobu* ("Child of the Soil") says a lot about the protest in this narrative. In a nutshell, the title, "Child of the Soil" already suggests the African's re-awakening to the fact that the land belongs to him just as he belongs to the land; but the colonizers have taken over control of the land [Lahlang]; however, the African society tries by hook or by crook to take over control of their land [Phankga]; but the resistance of the colonialists is so strong that the leaders of the struggle end up being exiled [Phankga's transfer].

The very first sentence of the narrative, *Bo sele* (1983:1) - "It is daybreak" (which also happens to be the last word of the narrative), alludes to the **awakening**. The coming of light at daybreak suggests the beginning of enlightenment, of a new sense of awareness of what has been shrouded in the darkness of the night, namely the austere dignity of the African past and present as well as tribal, if not national integrity, **vis-a-vis** the violence of colonialism.

The second paragraph alludes to this **violence** of colonialism that has been taking place against the African society thus:

> *E a phathologa kgoši ya leratadima, e inologa bodibeng bjo bohubedu bja badimo, moo e letšego e hlapišwa mašula le megokgo ya maabane ka madi a bona badimo.* (1983:1).

(The King of the sky appears; it emerges, soaked, from the red pool of the gods, where it was being cleansed through the night, of the evils and tears of yesterday with the blood of the gods themselves).

The evils (*mašula*) of colonialism obviously brought suffering, tears (*megokgo*) in the recent past (*maabane* - "yesterday"). The bringing of the gods, the ancestors, into the picture, together with their blood, shed by the violent colonialism, offers a streak of hope in the emerging awareness and the struggle which will ensue against colonialism.

The third paragraph alludes to the **uneasiness** of those who have been in power (*bahlanka ba raleswiswi* - 'the servants of the evil one') at the emergence of the new force that threatens to depose them, as follows:

Bahlanka ba raleswiswi ba khwapheditše meselana ka maotswaneng le ka dikhutlwaneng, ba fela ba utswa ka meselana ya mahlo go bontšhiša gore na ka kgonthe ke gona ge kgoši ya bona e thenkgollwa setulong. E, ke nako, ba swanetše go široga ka gobane ga go poopedi šakeng, poo ke e tee. (1983:1).

(The servants of the evil one run around, tails between the legs, in the ditches and hidden places. They frequently peep nervously to ascertain if indeed their king is being dethroned. Yes, it is time, they must give way because there cannot be two masters, there can only be one master).

The last sentence of this paragraph constitutes a loud and clear call for the restoration of the old order. As can be seen in the foregoing quotations, the novelist's protest is shrowded in this intricate metaphor of the rising sun.

Then the narrative takes us to Kopanong school, where a completers' function is being held. Here too, the novelist, still hiding behind the intricacies of metaphor, continues to allude to the African's past, characterized by **blindness** to the reality of colonialism, and the present, characterized by a new **realization** of his dignity and integrity. We quote:

> *Go laelwa barutwaborutiši bao bjale ba iphahletšego go yo fahlolla bafahlwa tebetebeng ya leswiswi leo le foufaditšego dithokgwa le melala, meboto le meedi yeo e sa amušago bana ba thari ye ntsho ka letswele la tholo le thoro.* (1983:1)
>
> (It is a function bidding farewell to the student-teachers who have now armed themselves to go and enable those who have a foreign body in their eyes to see again in the pitch darkness which has blinded forests and plains, hills and valleys, where the black nation still lives from hunting game and cultivating corn).

The role of the **new** movement to bring **consciousness**, enlightenment to the otherwise **sleeping** community is made clear. Reference here to the **sleeping** or **blind** society occupying this land ('forests and plains, hills and valleys'), does not in the least slant the low intelligence of the African society (or the lack of it), but its colonized condition in which its colonizers stand in the way of development, forcing the society to continue leading a primitive life, living 'from hunting game and cultivating corn'. Hence it is not **blind**, but **blinded**. The very first time that the

hero of the narrative is introduced to us, the novelist does not only refrain from mentioning his name, but also indicates that it is unsafe, almost taboo to do so. He says:

> *Ke mminatau wa go tšwa nageng ya Bakantirang, wa bolela leina la gagwe o tla šupša ke baditi ka monwana wa manapanyane, gageno ya ba thabeng.* (1983:2)
>
> (He belongs to the lion totem clan from Bakantirang territory; if you mention his name the caretakers of the initiates will reprimand you severely, and you will be in serious trouble).

The prevailing circumstances compel the activities of the new movement to operate underground, under cover, anonymously, to operate covertly, and are characterized by daredevil boldness. The novelist later introduces Phankga to us as the representative of the new movement. The role of Lahlang as 'head' (ruler) of the school (community) and his status in the community *motšwadinageng*-('foreigner') enables us to identify him with the colonial government.

Throughout the narrative, the fact that Africa belongs to the Africans and should be given back to them to control, to rule, is emphasized - as in the popular Africanist slogan, "Let Africa come back". Repetition of the word *mobu* (soil) in Phankga's claim to the position of leadership at the present time being held by Lahlang clearly emphasizes this point. His soliloquy outlines the conflict around which the narrative discourse revolves:

"Ge ke be ke sa le maleng a mme, mme o be a fela a monoka **mobu wo** *go ntiiša ka wona. Ge ke belegwa, lentšu la ka la mathomo le kwelwe ke* **mobu wo**, *gomme ba ntlhapiša ka meetse ao a elago mo* **mobung wo**. *Ke godišitšwe ke eng ge e se dijo tša* **mobu wo?** - *Bjale sekolo se se swanetše go hlahlwa ke mang ge e se ngwana wa* **mobu wo?** *Ke mang?* **Ke nna.**

Lahlang ke mofaladi ... bjale o itirile kgošana mo Rethuše. **Bogoši bjo ke bja ka.** *Ka gona o swanetše go ntšhala ka morago. Go sego bjalo a nyakišiše tselana ya go ya gagabo ... "* (1983:13)

("When I was still in my mother's womb, my mother used to savour **this soil** to strengthen me with it. When I was born, my first voice was heard by **this soil**, and they bathed me in water that flows on **this soil**. What made me grow up if not food from **this soil?** - Now, who must be in charge of this school, if not a child of **this soil**? Who is that? **It is I.**

Lahlang is a foreigner ... now he has made himself a petty ruler here at Rethuše. This leadership is mine. Therefore, he must follow my command. Otherwise he should find the path back to his home ... ")

Phankga's claim to the position of leadership is not based on any other criterion (for example, academic or professional training) than the fact that the land belongs to him as much as he belongs to it, while Lahlang remains a foreigner who must find his way back to his home.

The identification of hero and community is established from the beginning of the narrative. Phankga only has to make the community aware of their situation to enlist their support. Mokhura, the school committee chairman, has for many years been labouring under the delusion that all is well in the state of their affairs. He is the first to come to a rude awakening to reality and to admit to Phaŋkga:

> *"Motlogolo, taba ya gago e kwala gabotsebotse. Ebile madi a ka a a bela ge ke gopodišiša gona bjale ...* **Lekomofere** *lela ke kgale le re dirile kgogwana robala, o a rereša, Motlogolo. Le swanetše go kobakoba ka morago ga gago ... ge le palelwa ... re tla le laetša tsela ya go ya gabolona... "* (1983:17)
>
> (Nephew, your point is crystal-clear. I am even boiling with anger as I consider it right now.... That **foreigner** has been lulling us to sleep for too long, you are right, Nephew. He must be under your leadership and command ... if he fails ... we shall show him the way back to his home ... ")

Indeed, the cohesiveness of traditional life characteristic of this novel, demonstrated in the frequent communal ceremonies, the people's willingness to lend a hand in matters that affect others, and their solidarity in a common front against outsiders, enables Phankga (with Mokhura's assistance) to "awaken the people from their sleep". Their strategy is to address the people at gatherings, even if it means organizing a communal beer drinking party at their own expense. The result is that the community is divided into three groups; the first group (Mokhura, Mafamo, and others) support the **new order** represented by Phankga; the second group (Setu, Nthibitha, and others) choose to remain neutral. Setu tells Mogafi:

"Aowa! Nna le Nthibitha re ikemetše thoko, re no bogela botse fela. Ge Mafamo a etla ka mo lapeng la ka go tlo re huetša ka moya wo wa bona wa **Lekomofere** *le ngwana wa mobu, ke no re: 'Aowa, re a go kwa Tau', ka tloga ka ikhomolela".* (1983:67)

("No! Nthibitha and I are standing aloof; we just watch the drama only. When Mafamo comes to my household here to try and indoctrinate us with that spirit of theirs about the **foreigner** and the child of the soil, I simply say, 'No, we hear you, Tau', and then keep quiet").

Phankga himself regards his teaching at Rethuše as "undoing" the evil of colonization. He arrogantly tells the headmaster, Lahlang, one day, when called upon to account for keeping his pupils for too long in class when they are expected to assemble with others for morning devotions:

"Ga o tsebe go rutolla bana ga se papadi, eye!" (1983:22)

("Do you not know that it is no play to undo bad teaching in pupils, huh!")

Such arrogance, together with other actions of the strategy planned by the resistance movement, cause the colonizers sleepless nights.

The novelist humourously dramatizes the hardships borne by the colonizers in an incident in which Lahlang gulps his tea, not knowing that it is still boiling hot, and thus scalds his mouth cavity. Once more the novelist resorts to intricate metaphor for the treatment of his protest. The hot tea which scalds Lahlang's mouth and

brings him bitterness is like the resistance movement which is as much difficult to handle. However, the government is prepared to resist this new movement's tactics, for Lahlang explains his misery to his wife after the tea incident:

> "*E ile ya ntšhuma kgapele ke re ke a e nwa. Ge e le mo e sa le ke e bea gore e fole ... Ai! Mošemane yo o tla be a ntšofatša ka go hlwa a mphara ka meleko yeo e bilego e nthemiša hlogo, mogatšaka*" (1983:21).
>
> ("It scalded me earlier on when I tried to drink it. As it is, I left it some time ago to cool ... **Ai!** This boy will cause me to age by always confronting me with his daring feats which even cause me a headache, my dear").

So, for the colonizers, all it requires from them is patience; it is only time that will "untangle the knot", and the "hot tea" (Phankga's movement) will soon cool.

The colonizers adopt this attitude because they believe their colonialism is not only right, but also morally justified. It is as though they believe that in colonizing Africa, they were acting on God's behalf to deliver the Africans from savagery. No wonder, then, that Lahlang is determined to go on doing '*mošomo wa ka woo ke o tletšego mo nageng ye*' ['my work for which I came in this country'], (1983:23). His only source of strength appears to be a poster hanging in a frame on his wall, given to him by his grandfather on the day he wedded his wife. The poster displays the following words in gilded letters:

> *Modimo ke setšhabelo le maatla a rena* (1983:24)
>
> (God is our refuge and our strength)

It is significant to note that this message has been passed down to them from their ancestors; therefore, the colonizers will not surrender easily. Indeed Lahlang holds on until, out of sheer despair, Phankga resorts to treacherous acts, such as to sabotage their school choir's excursion to Pretoria, which collectively lead to his being transferred from Rethuše (or exiled?).

Although the novelist does not make the struggle against colonialism succeed in this narrative (for obvious reasons), he leaves us no doubt how much disruption the imperialist occupation and exploitation has caused within the traditional society by alien educational and religious systems. On the surface, the description of the koppie, Sentšhupe, around which the Makgwareng village is built, might give some reader the impression that the novelist is taking to lyrical evocation of natural beauty of the countryside. This brings us back to the question of manifest and latent meaning in South African protest literature, especially by Africans.

In its depth, the description of this koppie offers the reader a vivid picture of the African community **BEFORE** and **AFTER** colonization, thus illustrating how the African culture has been defied and trampled by the colonialist. Here we shall quote the description and history of Sentšhupe at length:

> *Ke thabana ye botsana ya maswika a maramagana e kego ke mae a tšhilwane. Botse bja yona bo oketšwa ke molalana wo mmotsana wo o lego ka godimo ga yona. O ka be wa re badimo ba ile ba iketlela yona ka dipato gore e tle e be le molalana wo mmotsana wo. Mo patogeng ya yona go na le mehlare ya mehutahuta, fela go atile megaba. Go kwala gore Batau ba mathomo ba ba go aga moo, ba ile ba e lebelela ka mahlo a a fapanago. Kgoši ya bona le diputswa tše dingwe tša motse - bontši e le bomatwetwe - ba ile ge ba makatšwa ke sebopego se sa yona,*

ba bile ba di tšholla, ba fetša ka gore ke thabana ya badimo e se ke ya šupša ka monwana - ke Sentšhupe. Ka lehlakoreng le lengwe, go be go le bao ba e lebelelago ka go e kganyoga, ba bile ba duma ge motse wa mošate o ka agwa mo molalaneng wa yona, gore kgoši e kgone go ukamela setšhaba seo se tlago ba se e farafarile.
Mehla le mabaka di a fetoga ruri. Lehono, mo molalaneng wo, go rakaletše thutlwa ya kereke, molala wa yona o ka be wa re o phuleletša legodimong. Ke ye tshweu ya go agwa ka maswika. Le ge e se ye kgolo ka kudu, e utswa pelo ya mmogi ka sebopego sa yona le bodulo bja yona - Modimo gare ga badimo. (1983:25).

(It is a little beautiful mountain with red-and-white stones like the eggs of a sparrow. Its beauty is improved by a little beautiful plain on top of it. One may even think the gods took their time flattening it with their wooden implements to give it this little beautiful plain. At its foot there are various kinds of trees, but predominantly the sweet-bark tree. It is said that the first Batau to settle there, first looked at it with different impressions. Their king and some elderly people of the village - most of them medicinemen - were so astonished by this shape of it that they threw their divining bones, and concluded that it is a little mountain of the gods and should not be pointed at with a finger - it is Sentšhupe. On the other hand, there were those who looked at it with admiration, and even wished that the king's home could be built on its plain, so that the king could overlook his subjects who would settle around him. Times and circumstances change indeed. Today, on this plain stands a giraffe-shaped church,

its neck appears to stretch into heaven. It is white in colour, with a stone wall. Though not very big, its shape and situation make it to appeal to the onlooker's heart - God amidst the gods).

Here the novelist presents an idyllic picture of traditional life before the arrival of the Europeans, and explains the various elements in favourable light: The expressions *'thabana ye botsana'* ('a little beautiful mountain') and *'molalana wo mmotsana'* ('a little beautiful plain'), with the use of the diminutive form to express admiration, accomplish that. He further presents a picture of 'the first Batau to settle there', probably alluding to the African nation as a whole before the arrival of the Europeans. Their traditional life is characterized by **respect, dignity** and **orderliness**. The king (*kgoši*), together with some grey-headed (*diputswa*) men in the village, most of them medicinemen (*bomatwetwe*), act on behalf of and in the interests of the people when they, after divination, declare the little mountain sacred - *'thabana ya badimo'* ('little mountain of the gods'). The dignified position that the traditional ruler still holds among his people is demonstrated by the wish of some of the villagers that the little plain on the little mountain could be an ideal home for the king - overlooking his people. However, as the gods are traditionally greater than the king, the message of the gods is heeded, and the little mountain is continued to be regarded as sacred.

But there is more to the message of the gods: the little mountain may not be pointed at with a finger. Yet the arrival of the Europeans has changed and undermined all that. At the very sacred spot they have erected a stone church. The structure of the church is described as having a long tower (giving it the shape of a giraffe) which appears to be reaching out to heaven. As if in defiance of the instruction of the gods that no-one should point a finger at the sacred little mountain (*'e se ke ya šupša'*), the church tower '**points**' upward and appears to

stretch through to heaven (as if to intensity the defiant action). Initially the beauty of the little mountain, with its beautiful little plain, was ascribed to the painstaking efforts of the gods (*'o ka ba wa re badimo ba ile ba iketlela yona'*); but now God (symbolized by the church) as an intruder, positions himself comfortably amidst the gods (*'Modimo gare ga badimo'*).

Oyekan Owomoyela, describing the negritude efforts to rediscover and proclaim African culture in the works of Chinua Achebe and Camara Laye, would sum up the change in this traditional religion most appropriately as follows:

> The advent of the Europeans into that setting is regarded as traumatic and disruptive because the intruder lacks understanding of, or regard for, the institutions he finds and ruthlessly proceeds to destroy them. (1979:82).

3.8 **Résumé**

The selection and development of theme in both the primary oral narrative and the written narrative, as can be seen in the analyses above, reassert the traditional attitude toward the narrative as socially functional. The study of the narrative, both oral and written, should thus be pursued as an examination of the narrator's expressions of attitudes and values related to the African tradition and to contact with other traditions, which brings about change. A close examination of these, in both the oral and the written narrative, reveals that the narrative deals predominantly with socio-political issues, and as such reflects the functionality of African aesthetics. In the written narrative, for example, this has to be so, for the

narrative, being about life, is written from the narrator's personal experience, and is produced by the period in which it is written and by the world in general as well as human nature.

Theme selection and development, therefore, remain crucial aesthetic problems in the narrative, for, while the novelists may wish to select themes which deal with vital issues, with current, topical questions which may maintain the element of interest, in the South African situation they still have to contend with the censorship laws. The blessing disguised in this evil, however, is the emergence of sophisticated writers who devise a highly developed artistic way of saying what may not be approved. These writers, in their calculated circumvention of explicit protest, are able to portray the South African situation sensitively by making it speak for itself. While they may appear to be exploiting ready-made plots and avoiding the crucial social and political inequalities in the country, what seems obvious and natural in their works is not necessarily so. Instead of **giving** the "obvious" and the "natural", they **produce** them in a sophisticated and highly artistic manner.

The functionality of the Northern Sotho prose narrative, from oral to written, as "applied art", will further be demonstrated in an analysis of character in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

CHARACTER IN THE NARRATIVE

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter we shall examine elements of character in the Northern Sotho narrative rather than techniques of characterization. It is our contention that the latter have been adequately dealt with in Serudu's *Character Delineation in Some Novels of O.K. Matsepe* (1979). Of course, we agree that the two can never really be separated, although it also makes sense that in fiction, as in real life, there is no **necessary** connection between a character's qualities - qualities which make the character more fully human in that through them he responds more fully to others - and the power (of the artist) to express them.

> "What is character but the determination of incident?
> What is incident but the illustration of character?
> What is either a picture or a novel that is **not** of
> character? What else do we seek in it and find in it?"

These questions are raised by Henry James in his famous essay, "The Art of Fiction", used to introduce Tzvetan Todorov's chapter on character, viz. "Narrative-Men" in *The Poetics of prose* (1984:66), and appropriately quoted by Scholes and Kellogg (1968:160). These questions will always be raised whenever narratologists debate which of the elements of narrative is basic.

Most Formalists and Structuralists seem to agree that if the elements character and plot are to be taken into consideration, then character is secondary to plot, a derivative product of plot. It has been considered secondary, for it plays the role of a connecting thread helping us to orient ourselves amid the piling-up of details, an auxiliary means for classing and ordering particular motives in the narrative.

On the other hand, some Structuralists are of the opinion that both character and event in plot are logically necessary to narrative, and that it is a matter of the changing taste of authors and the reading publics where chief interest falls. For Seymour Chatman,

> the question of "priority" or "dominance" is not meaningful. Stories only exist where both events and existents occur. There cannot be events without existents. And though it is true that a text can have existents without events (a portrait, a descriptive essay), no one would think of calling it a narrative (1988:113).

However, we cannot ignore the fact that some narratives may be plot-centred, apsychological (in which the actions are not there to illustrate character but in which, on the contrary, the characters are subservient to the action) or character-centred, psychological (in which the inward life of the character is really accessible). While the primary oral narrative as well as the early written narrative in Northern Sotho may reveal apsychological tendencies, contemporary or modern written narratives tend to concentrate, perhaps from the influence of Western fiction, on the psychology of the character, concentrate on his inner self. Consequently, the differences between modern character - unlike between

traditional character - are so great as to be qualitative rather than quantitative, with traits so numerous that they tend not to "add up" or "break down" to any single aspect or pattern (*op.cit*), as can be done with traditional character.

On the basis of the primary oral narrative, Propp has taught us something about the nature of narrative literature namely to look at plot-functions and character-roles 'with an eye for their vigorous and narrowly delimited interconnections' (Scholes, 1974:67). Thus the views of the Formalists and some Structuralists resemble Aristotle's in that characters are regarded as products of plots, and their status "functional", regarded as participants or **actants** rather than **personnages**. According to them, narrative theory should avoid psychological essences, and analyze only what characters do in a story and not what they are by some outside psychological or moral measure (Chatman, 1988:111). Some critics of Western African fiction also endorse this theory for they argue that a character is 'remembered not by his looks but by his deeds' (Dseagu, 1986:116). Action, therefore, seems more easily amenable to the construction of "narrative grammars".

Thus Propp subordinates characters to seven 'spheres of action' within which their performance can be categorized according to general rules: (1) the villain; (2) the donor (provider); (3) the helper; (4) the princess (a sought-for person) and her father; (5) the dispatcher; (6) the hero (seeker or victim); and (7) the false hero. In a given narrative, from primary oral narrative to much fiction which is far removed from fairy tales in other respects, a character may perform more than one role, and, conversely, a role may employ several characters (Scholes, 1974:64-5; Rimmon-Kenan, 1988:34).

For Propp, therefore, characters are simply the products of what it is that a given Russian wondertale requires them to do. Thus in the *nonwane* "Moselapše" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:48-55) it is what the characters do that is important, and not who or what they are. In the first move of the *nonwane*, not a single character bears a name. This move deals simply with the actions of 'a certain man who had two wives ..... [who] were siblings'. In this narrative, what is important is the action, the events, and not the actants or existents: "Somebody" (anybody) must bring meat home, which "somebody else" (anybody) steals, forcing the former to seek and find some form of lie-detector. The culprit can be anybody whose child will be forced to flee with a baby to their grandmother's, thus setting the scene for the appearance of Moselapše. Thus the entire narrative refers to '*monna yola*' ('that man'); '*mosadi yola*' ('that woman'), '*ngwana yola*' ('that child'); and '*mokgekolo yola*' ('that old woman').

Similarly the *nonwane* "Ngwadiane le Temankgolo" *Maitišong*, 1990a: 1990a:92-95) requires any beings to carry out the following character-roles: the **villain** (in this narrative, Temankgolo) who tricks and captures the **victim hero** (performed by Ngwadiane) so that the **seeker hero** (performed by Phetole) sets out - in some versions, on the initiative of a **dispatcher** - to rescue the victim hero.

Like interchangeable parts the characters in this narrative, namely Temankgolo (the villain), Ngwadiane (the victim hero) and Phetole (the seeker hero), might easily be "transferred" to another narrative, say the *nonwane* "Kgolomodumo" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:61-63), with no loss of efficiency at all. In the latter *nonwane*, the sinister villain is performed by the *kgolomodumo* (a swallowing monster), while the role of the victimized hero is performed by Lesibana. When the enraged monster swallows

Lesibana and all the people and livestock of his village, a **supernatural helper,** in the form of a bird, saves one old woman who later performs the role of dispatcher for the seeker hero (performed by Mašilo).

To emphasize this functional nature of characters, most primary oral narratives assign generic rather than specific names to characters. Consequently, in most narratives, the roles of the characters are encapsulated in the names that the narrator assigns them, thus enabling the characters to objectify the polarities of moral and social situations revealed in the formal patterns, advancing the aims of the narrative to promote, in the audience, awareness of the struggle in existence between good and evil.

In "Mokgadi le Mokgatšana" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:74-76) and "Mašilo le Mašilwane" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:107-110), the names of the two siblings suggest that their role is 'to dramatize the two poles of moral and social values' (Dseagu, 1986:117). Being almost identical, their names suggest immediately to the not so unfamiliar audience that their function is to compare and contrast two modes of behaviour, to establish moral and social paradigms rather than state secrets of a personal nature about the characters.

Mokgadi and Mašilo, like the older sister in "Mogatša Noga" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:85-90), being older, would, under normal circumstances, have been the wiser, more intelligent, more experienced and more patient siblings. However, the younger sibling almost always turns out to have more plausible attributes than the older. When Mokgatšana stumbles over a stone, it is, Mokgadi who loses her temper and curses the stone that is later to block their way home. When the supernatural helper (a bird) asks Mokgatšana, "*ntšhelele ditloo ke go botše ditaba*"

(1990a:75) ["pour me some ground-nuts and I shall tell you some news"], Mokgadi tries to stop Mokgatšana from complying. She is, however, defied by her younger sister, and the bird rescues the two of them from the approaching cannibals.

Similarly when Mašilo and Mašilwane's path forks out into two, Mašilo takes the wrong direction which eventually brings him back a less successful hunter of the two. If 'the word "masilo" is a word which means "a false or harmful person"' (Moephuli, 1979:121), then Mašilwane stands for everything in contrast to Mašilo. If the latter stands for "evil", then the former invariably stands for "good".

Daniel Kunene finds this functional role of characters to be prevalent also in the Southern African novel, thus reflecting the didactic pursuits of the literature. He has found that in such novels the author

> often chooses allegorical names for his characters, so that you can tell at once what roles they are going to play in the story (1968:23).

However, this feature of the written narrative will not be discussed here, as the present study has not found it to be remarkably predominant in Northern Sotho fiction, save in some of Matsepe's novels as well as Mminele's *Ngwana wa Mobu*, to some extent (see Serudu, 1979: pp13-15; 30-35).

However, for our purpose, the characters in the Northern Sotho written narrative can be classified, fundamentally, on the one hand (following Propp, Greimas and Bremond), according to whether they are "heroes" or "villains", "subjects" (desiring an object), "objects" (desired by the subjects), "senders" (motivating desire), "receivers" (recipients of the object), "helpers" (of the subject), "opponents" (of the

subject), and so forth. On the other hand, characters can even more fundamentally be classified in terms of their textual prominence distinguishing the main characters from more or less secondary ones.

> In general, the main character is not only referred to by the greatest number of propositions, but he is also qualitatively different from the other characters .... He may also be functionally different (if there is a difficult task, he is the one who performs it; if there is a lack, he is the one who liquidates it). Besides, his appearance in the narrative may correspond to strategically important points, like the beginning or the end of various sequences (Prince, 1982:72).

Thus Moelelwa in Sehlodimela's novelette, as the main character, appears at the beginning of the narrative, described as a very beautiful lass whose laziness and slovenliness in household chores sharply contrasts her beauty. There is hardly an event in the entire narrative which does not have a bearing, directly or indirectly, on her. Most events depict her as object desired by one or other subject in the narrative. For example, she is wooed by and rejects an elderly medicineman from Lebaka, rejects the suit of Nakampe, a local lad, is courted by Janaware, a lad from Swaziland, who ultimately resigns his job to elope with her to Swaziland. We are with her from the first paragraph of the narrative where her beauty and laziness are described, to the last, where she is divorced and frustrated as a result of the same laziness.

Similarly in Madiba's *Nkotsana*, the narrative opens with the announcement of the birth of the main character and closes with his death. Nkotsana, the main character, assumes the role of subject in most events of the narrative, meeting bad "senders" (Dabula's gang of thieves in Bokgalaka) in quest of wealth, and a good

"sender" (Maseroka, back home after he is released from jail) in quest of a bride. As he appears to do everything he does under someone else's influence, he takes to strong drink as a result of befriending some Jews and Indians on his frequent banking trips to Pietersburg. This leads him eventually to his fatal road accident.

In other novels more than one character may enjoy textual prominence, making it less obvious who is the main character, the protagonist in the narrative. In *Maroba*, for instance, the action interest is centred equally on Maroba's son, Khutšo, as well as on his daughter, Tšhidi, apparently for thematic purposes - to illustrate Maroba's folly in believing that education beyond standard six is for boys rather than for girls.

In *Kgamphuphu*, however, the division of the role of protagonist between Tšelane and her brother, Kgamphuphu, appears to be guided more by chronology than by thematic concerns. The events in Tšelane's life, including those that lead to her murder, later have a very strong relation to Kgamphuphu's actions.

All said and done, for convenience we can group most characters constructed in the Northern Sotho narrative described here into three categories: protagonists and their antagonists, with what Serudu terms the 'in-between' character or tritagonist supporting either the former or the latter group. The most prominent of them all are the protagonists. It is difficult, or undesirable to generalize about them as **personnages**, as each protagonist exists as an individual case and thus demands special consideration. However, a few "safe" generalizations about them may be found in the following words of W.J. Harvey:

> They are vehicles by which all the most interesting questions are raised; they evoke our beliefs, sympathies, revulsions; they incarnate the moral vision of the world inherent in the total novel. In a sense they are end-products; they are what the novel exists for; it exists to reveal them. (1966:56).

Whether they are protagonists or antagonists, senders or recipients, helpers or frustrators, characters can be dynamic (when they change or grow) or static (when they do not): they can be consistent or inconsistent; and they can be round or flat, that is, complex or simple, multidimensional or unidimensional, capable of surprising the reader or incapable thereof. In the next section we turn our attention to this feature of character in the narrative.

4.2 Static and Developing Characters

Already in 1927 E.M. Forster distinguished between 'flat' and 'round' characters. Flat or static characters are analogous to 'humours', caricatures, types. They are usually built around a single idea or quality, are characterized by one or two traits, and can thus be 'expressed in one sentence' (Forster, 1963:75). These characters are called static because normally they do not develop in the course of the action, and are easily recognized and easily remembered by the audience. The static character is the same sort of person at the end of the narrative as at the beginning. This type of character never surprises the reader or audience, but, rather, 'delights by fulfilling expectations copiously' (Ong, 1987:151).

The type 'flat', 'static', 'heavy', and quite 'opaque' character derives originally from the primary oral narrative, 'which can provide characters of no other kind' (*ibid.*). By combining a few attributes a storyteller constructs a character as atoms are

combined to form a molecule. But the narratives never attempt to penetrate inside the character. They concentrate on his words and actions alone, and never analyze his thoughts. Understandably such a character cannot develop in any way. As characters in the primary oral narrative are invariably static, this feature does not warrant any detailed discussion here. We shall thus concentrate on the flat character in the Northern Sotho written narrative alone.

The **stock character** is a special kind of flat character in the narrative. This is the stereotyped figure who has occurred so often in the narrative that his nature is immediately recognized, for example, the handsome brave hero, the beautiful modest heroine, the cruel step mother, the sinister villain, and so forth.

> Such stock characters are found very often in inferior fiction because they require neither imagination nor observation on the part of the writer and are instantly recognized to the reader. Like interchangeable parts they might be transferred from one story to another with less loss of efficiency (Perrine, 1983:68).

Early Northern Sotho fiction, especially by the novelists who began their writing careers in the 1940's and the late 1950's, is almost totally devoid of what in the West has been referred to as 'character growth'. Instead, in whole groups of novels, the characters are basically the same at the beginning, in the middle and at the end. At the opening of the narrative, (*Moelelwa*) the beautiful Moelelwa's slovenliness and laziness to keep house is narrated thus:

Ka ngwakong wabo e be e re ke ka leŠakeng la dikolobe, motho o be a re ge a nyaka go dula a sware bothata bja go thoma a fatafata bjaka kgwale e fatela bana ba yona dijo. BošaedI bjaka bjo ga re sa tseba le gore re ka bo swantšha le eng sa go šišimiša(1985:5).

(The interior of their house was like a pigsty; if one wanted to sit down, one first had to struggle, scratching the floor like a partridge scratching to find food for its young. We do not know anything nauseating enough to compare with slovenliness such as this).

Because of her beauty Moelelwa attracts suitors both old and young, from far and near. However, she is not ashamed of the dirty hut she entertains them in. Although she has grown up into a maiden, she does not even know how to cook porridge. Her laziness and slovenliness notwithstanding, Moelelwa falls in love and elopes with Janaware to Swaziland, his home.

Towards the close of the narrative, when Moelelwa is a married woman with a son, Makezi, the condition of her hut in Swaziland is described in exactly the same terms that could be used to describe the state of the hut she left as a young maiden in the Transvaal:

Ntlo ya gona e be e tletše melete, e le maphusuphusu, le mosegare wo monana o fo kwa magotlo ge a rakadišana ka ntlong. Maloko a dikgogo a bonala kae le kae ka mo gare, mafehlo, ditelo, dingetana, dipitša le tše dingwe o hwetša di gašane le ngwako; ge a robetše bošego tše dingwe di dio ragwa ka maoto (1985:29).

(That house had a lot of holes, with the floor dilapidated; even in broad day light you could hear the mice chasing one another in the hut. Everywhere inside the hut could be seen the droppings of the fowls; and the churning sticks, wooden and clay dishes, pots and other utensils, one would find scattered in the hut; when she slept, some of them would be kicked with her feet).

Thus, from the beginning of the narrative to its end, Moelelwa remains the same. The focus of the narrative is on one facet of her character, her laziness and slovenliness, for, what is important for the novelist is not Moelelwa as a person, but the transmission of the message: Children should learn to perform the duties of adulthood even in their youth. Moelelwa appears in the narrative not as a **personnage**, but merely to fulfil a function in the plot. Her character development is not important, not necessary.

Similarly, the only change that we see in Nkotsana, in Madiba's narrative, is his physical growth from childhood through boyhood, to manhood. Changing situations such as the moving of his entire village to a new settlement, his escapades at Sekgosese near Soekmekaar and ultimately in Bokgalaka (now Zimbabwe), and finally when he is married to Reneilwe, do not influence his character in any way. He remains the same, one may say, "naughty" young man until his fatal road accident.

These examples illustrate that writing and print do not entirely do away with the flat character; as narrative moves from primary orality to greater and greater 'chirographic and typographic control' (Ong, 1987:152), the flat or type character appears to yield to characters that grow more and more 'round', that is, at first unpredictable but ultimately consistent in terms of the complex character structure

and complex motivation. The concept of the developing character who changes inwardly, of peering directly into the mind and dramatizing or analyzing thoughts instead of words and deeds, of character **individuation**, that is, a psychological growing up (Nnolim, 1975:120), appears in the later or more or less contemporary narrative in Northern Sotho.

One such character is the principal character in Matsepe's *Megokgo ya Bjoko*, namely Leilane. 'At the beginning of the novel, Leilane is presented as someone who is responsible' (Serudu, 1979:87). However, the incident where his wife, Mohlatša, vomits when she sees him eating the meat of the foetus of his dead cow, thus provoking him to assault her mercilessly, is presented as a catastrophe and a turning-point in his life. From this point onwards, Leilane appears to lose all sense of respect and humility, to take delight in hurting the feelings of other people or even putting their lives in danger - compare the contempt with which he treats his in-laws and King Lefehlo, and the attempted murder of his rescuer, Maphuthe - and can thus be seen as an embodiment of 'man's insatiable ambition which is the root of endless troubles and sufferings' (*ibid.*).

But Leilane does not remain like that until the end of the narrative. His encounter with the white people makes his reunion and reconciliation with Maphuthe, and later Lefehlo, possible. In his conversation with Maphuthe, when the latter keeps harping on the fact that he was fleeing from Leilane after surviving the fall down the cliff, we can almost not believe our ears when we hear Leilane say:

> *"Hle se nkgohlometše pelo ka mantšu a mohuta woo? Ka gona go fela o lla ka nna, badimo ba tla mpona, ba ntlhoya, ba mpona go ba mmolai wa mohlakodiši wa ka. Hle se fele o bolela ka mokgwa woo?"* (1969:93).

(Please do not break my heart with such words? By continuously complaining about me, you will bring the wrath of the ancestral spirits on me, for they will regard me as one who murders his rescuer. Please do not keep on talking like that?).

This is certainly not the same Leilane 'who did not love peace ... who was always wishing to inflict pain on others' (Serudu, 1979:31), and who always appeared to be full of vengeance. Complexity of motivation and internal psychological growth, that is, the process of discovering those aspects of oneself that make one an individual different from all others, with passage of time, has made Leilane like a "real person".

4.3 **Character and Context**

Whether they are 'flat' or 'round', characters in the narrative always appear within a certain context that seems to have a bearing on their personality. The data by which we can describe these characters are the aggregate of our experience of the characters 'in a number of situations, relationships, contexts' (Harvey, 1966:31). The most important of these contexts is the web of relationships in which any single character is enmeshed. So much of what they are can only be defined in terms of their relations with other characters in the narrative.

It should also be observed that although in the traditional culture an individual character is distinguishable by his proper name or praise-name, he is less an autonomous individual than in the Western sense. In the Northern Sotho narrative in general, the character's individuality in his social capacity is largely predetermined by social institutions, his social status as well as his specific position within the social hierarchy as defined by the society (Obiechina, 1975:83).

Thus, Tsakata, in Ramaila's novel, is born into a clan already bearing an ancestral stamp; he is under the tutelary influence of his grandfather, whose name he also bears. He is not merely an autonomous individual but has mystic bonds with his ancestor. He is born into 'institutions which have been perfected and sanctioned by checks and balances' (*ibid.*). In all his dealings he appears to be helpless to change those institutions because they derive their character from past usage and the authority of his ancestor, Sebatane Monare.

Most of the narratives with a rural setting recognize the corporate nature of the social environment and its conditioning influence on the traditional, corporate individual. The social and political institutions of the traditional society exact conformity from the individual and discourage deviations and subversion of the common will, thus emphasizing the primacy of the group over the individuals who compose it.

Thus we see how, in Madiba's *Nkotsana*, the primacy of the communal ethic controls the deviant Nkotsana and forces him into normalcy. When he returns from Bokgalaka where he has done a prison term, he stays single until well past the age of marriage. However, pressure builds up in his family and in the community until he has to set out in quest of a bride. Not only does Nkotsana marry, but the pressure of his family and his community ultimately channels his social life into a semblance of stability; through communal coercion he is able to rise to a position of prominence within his society.

Similarly in Senyatsi's *Maroba* the ongoing fear of failing the communal obligation is found even in an undertaking like education. Maroba's daughter, Tšhidi, who has been sent to a teacher training college by her reluctant father, strives to achieve success at all costs:

Gape a se ke a lebala gore phegello ya gagwe ke go kgodiša tatagwe gore sekolo se loketše le bana ba banenyana. (1964:95).

(And she did not forget that her ambition was to convince her father that education was good for girls as well).

In her thoughts and actions we can hear an echo of these words: "Many are watching my progress; if I fail to reach the top, those watching me, both the living and the dead, will curse me for failing them". We should also note that even if this character does well, achieves success, the honour goes not to her, but to her family.

Often in matters such as marriage we find the individual character pitted against the communal tradition. Matete, in *Molato Mpeng* is not free to choose her partner. Her marriage to Thamaga's son, Mashosho, is arranged by her father without her knowledge or consent, and even against her will, for she is in love with someone else, namely, Phure. After he has agreed with Thamaga that they will meet at the magistrate's offices to have Matete and Mashosho married, Seopela simply instructs his daughter as follows:

"Matete o swanetše go nyalana le Mashosho, ka swele, le gona e se bang neng? Ka Mošupologo. Ga ke nyake molomo wa gago, sepela o yo itokiša". (1976:77).

("Matete, you must get married to Mashosho, by force, and without fail, on Monday. I do not want a single word from you, go and prepare yourself").

The same Matete who is refusing so vehemently to become Mashosho's wife shows us, in an earlier incident where Maphutha proposes to her, that she is aware of her communal obligation when she tells Maphutha:

> *"Le nna ke a go rata ... Fela o swanetše gore o yo nkgopela go batswadi, gore le se se ka hlagago e le taba e be o šetše o ikgokile"* (1976:11).

> ("I love you too ... But you must go and ask my parents for my hand in marriage, so that if anything serious may happen in future, you will already have committed yourself").

In this case the character may have made her own choice of partner in marriage, but the parent's approval must still be sought first.

It is interesting to note that strange acts are sometimes performed by some characters in the name of communally based traditions, apparently placing higher value on the society **in toto**, and not on the individuals. In *Kgamphuphu*, for example, no matter how repulsive Tšelane's ritual murder may be, once the king (Mmabzi) - in the name of the tribe, as it were - appoints Mamadikwane to do it, the communal obligation is higher than any individual's preference.

In such instances, of course, the corollary is that ultimately it is the king's responsibility , regardless of who actually commits the act, although in this particular narrative the novelist makes Mamadikwane to "pay" for his act by becoming mentally deranged and subsequently dying where no-one can find him to give him a decent burial.

To sum up, then, in the words of Mutiso (1974:91),

> the primacy of the traditional communal ethic as opposed to an individualistic ethic continues to dominate the ... socio-political milieu. The communal ethic is accepted not only by the traditionalist but is shared by the modern African as well.

It appears, then, that when the characters become individualistic, or adopt individualistic concerns, misfortune usually strikes. For example, nothing happens to king Mmabzi for ordering the ritual murder of Tšelane who refuses to become his wife, but when he attempts to murder Kgamphuphu for personal individualistic jealousies, he meets his sudden death. This demonstrates the fact that the tradition of the communal ethic is all pervasive, and that those who defy it do so at their own risk.

Unlike the rural characters, characters in the modern urban setting tend to be marked by their extreme individualism, appearing as single and often isolated individuals. The absence of a unified cultural ethos leaves them with an immense degree of individual initiative, and they are, unlike their rural counterparts, much freer in their thinking.

When the rural character goes to the city and becomes acculturated, he either abandons a number of his communal values (and morals?) and substitutes for them European individualism or adds the individualism on to his communalism. For him the city, being a place for creation of new social systems - often dominated by money - becomes a liberating agent from custom and tradition.

For example, we have a prototype urban individual as the principal character in *Tsakata*. Tsakata is not so much intelligent as clever and shrewd in a worldly kind of way - as is the case with most prototype urban characters. He is adaptable

because the wider scope of his experiences in the city prepares him to step into different roles. His lack of unified vision of cultural (including moral) values leaves him free to indulge his instincts, drives and appetites. We are not surprised when he becomes free about sex (refer to his love affair with Flora that leads to his being assaulted by Flora's husband, and his involvement with a so-called Coloured woman who bears him a son, Ben), when he cheats and engages in fraudulent activities in such a way that he gets all the advantages out of life without giving anything back in return. His rural parents want him to marry his cousin, but he goes ahead and marries a woman of his own choice, from a different language group - thus demonstrating just how much broader his scope is in comparison to his parents'.

In *Nkotsana*, the principal character assumes both the role of a rural character coerced by traditional communalism at home and that of a prototype urban individual in Bokgalaka. Here we see his individualistic actions lending him in jail where he serves a prison term, after which he does not waste any time in finding his way back home. Since the city is open to change and at the same time unstructured in terms of knowledge of what to do, when grief comes to such a character in the narrative, his refuge is the village. Such reactions, as we have seen in *Nkotsana*, are basically detrimental to change in the individuals, because they never become liberated enough to shape their own destiny. 'They can always fall back on the village for salvation' (Mutiso, 1974:77).

The literature suggests that the modern African individualist in the city is almost by definition a schizoid person, for whenever he has apparently shaken the operational aspects of the communal ethic, 'it nevertheless returns to haunt his memory' (*op.cit.*).

Maphutha, in *Molato Mpeng*, in the exercise of his city freedom, associates with a certain woman who ends up making a legal claim against him for marriage, alleging that he has exploited her sexually and materially. All his attempts to oppose the claim legally fail, and he is ultimately forced to marry the woman. When his brother, Mashosho, dies, thus opening a possibility for Maphutha to marry Matete, Maphutha realizes that his marriage to the city woman is a stumbling block, and plans his wife's murder. From there his refuge is the village, where the ethic is strongest, but the long arm of the law soon finds him and brings him to book for his wife's murder.

In the urban prototype individual we can see the transforming effect of the city on its inhabitants. The character comes to the city from the village, full of hope and with a heart responsive to filial loyalty and affection, but he is soon sucked into the miasma of urban corruption, 'coarsened by the overwhelming materialism of the city and toughened by the struggle for survival' (Obiechina, 1975:102).

The important point to note here is that all these characters are individualistic rather than communalistic, although they are hardly realized as individuals, for the novelists seem to be interested not in their psychological growth but in themselves as "type" characters rather than round ones. In comparison to these "type" characters, there is another group of "symbolic" characters that are presented symbolically, and through whom particular aspects of African life and beliefs - culture, religion, relationships between Black and White, and many others - are discernible in certain written narratives.

Some authors critically present those aspects of tradition they have selected for treatment,and dramatize in those narratives the realities and dilemmas of the past and the present (Taiwo, 1976:xiv). The Northern Sotho narrative, like the traditional African narrative, is woven out of everyday events. According to Janheinz Jahn,

> All the events become images and so acquire paradigmatic value and point beyond the moment. None of the actors is in the European sense an individual confronting society. Every figure represents in the first instance a type, it is paradigmatic, like an African mask (1961:211).

In *Tsakata*, for instance, the narrator treats the life of Tsakata as a symbol of the situation in the South African big cities. Every experience that Tsakata has becomes a paradigm, and every personal frustration a general experience. In its concluding chapter the narrator even remarks:

> *"ka Tsakata le botlhe ba re gahlaneng nabo, re bone seripana fela sa bophelo bja batho ba metlheng yeno"* (1981:138)
>
> (in Tsakata and all the rest that we have met, we saw only a small portion of the life led by the people of nowadays).

In the next pages we shall attempt to examine the narrator's moral attitude towards, and the symbolic role played by king characters, women characters, and European characters in some of the selected Northern Sotho novels.

4.4 King Characters

The king as the traditional leader of his people wields enormous powers (Serudu, 1990:42). His functions are wide and varied. For instance, he is regarded as the father of his tribe, its legislative as well as executive head, supreme judge and the commander-in-chief of its army. As head of the army, with which he is in a position to enforce the power of his position, he is also expected to protect the tribe as a whole as well as individual subjects. He is also responsible for the maintenance of traditional law and order, as well as ensuring that justice is done to all, big or small.

> But, as is implied in some of these novels, traditional leaders failed their people on several occasions, mainly for selfish reasons, and laid themselves and the order they stood for open to attack (Taiwo, 1976:29).

According to Serudu, the kings that are used as characters in the novels of Matsepe have similar roles to play, even if they approach their task in dissimilar ways, thus demonstrating the fact that 'leadership in different hands takes different forms' (1979:60). For instance, in *Megokgo ya Bjoko* the narrator sharply contrasts the leadership of Lefehlo with that of his late father, his predecessor. The latter is described as a great king whose paramountcy was characterized by warmth and feeling. Although he was well known for his achievements on the battlefields, he was not a warmonger. Whenever the neighbouring kings had disputes among themselves, they came to him for advice, and he helped them to settle their differences amicably (1969:30).

Lefehlo, on the other hand, is described as the direct opposite of his late father with regard to his relations with his subjects. The narrator describes his reign with the following illuminating words:

> *Pušo ya gagwe e be e le ya bosogana, ya go thuhlula le go kgorometša, e le pušo ya go šoga batho ditsebe le go ba soba, pušo ya go dira mo nkego mo motseng monna ke yena a nnoši, ka go realo, ya se ba natefele kudu.* (1969:20).
>
> (His reign was characterized by youthfulness, by pulling and pushing around, being a rule where he pulled the people's ears and also pinched them, a rule through which he behaved as if in the entire village he was the only man; as a result, it was not very pleasant for them).

Although the traditional rulers are presented in these novels as custodians of law and order, one quality of theirs which dominates all others is violent behaviour. We admire both Lefehlo and Nthumule as they hear all types of cases at the *kgoro* and try to do justice in their respective territories. But the narrator successfully paints a picture of one who treats his subjects as his personal belongings when he describes Nthumule's slaughter of his own people in a moment of rage.

When all his regiments and diviners are gathered to prepare for war against Lefehlo, the crows that had previously flown away with their divining bones return and encircle them with the same objects. When the diviners are too terrified to carry out Nthumule's instruction to pick them up, the narrator describes Nthumule's outburst of furious anger as follows:

O ile a taboga a fahletše, ka ntle ga go hlaola a tidimetša o mongwe le o mongwe ka lerumo a rema le ka selepe ... a phutša dikudumela a fetša lešaba la gagwe ka seatla sa gagwe ... (1969:88).

(He sprang up armed, and without discrimination, he pierced anyone with a spear and also chopped with an axe ... with sweat streaming from him he annihilated his own people with his own hand ...).

This gross misuse of power and violent taking of people's lives at will, typical of African traditional leaders, is appropriately demonstrated in the following words of the legendary Zulu king, Shaka:

"I will kill without a cause him whom I wish to kill, be he guilty or be he innocent, for this is the law upon earth. I will hearken to the entrieties of none" (Mofolo, 1967:57).

In *Kgamphuphu* we meet such a traditional leader, Mmabzi, who can even afford to feel jealousy instead of pride when some of his subjects are praised for their brave deeds. Like the youthful Lefehlo (*Megokgo ya Bjoko*), he wants to feel that in the entire village he is the only man - all glory must be given to him. Thus, when Kgamphuphu has killed a leopard single-handed, Mmabzi, instead of thanking his ancestral spirits for such bravery in one of his subjects, is devoured by inexplicable jealousy, for the narrator says:

Kua kgorong tlase ga morula ke ge Mmabzi a elwa le dipelo go na le tshele. Bogale bo ka tšewa bjang ke lešoboro? Lešoboro le ka itheta gakaalo pele ga banna moloko wa badimo? (1984:46).

(At the *kgoro* under a morula tree Mmabzi was in serious internal conflict and full of jealously. How can the glory of bravery be achieved by an uninitiated youth? Can an uninitiated sing his own praises so much in front of the men, the descendants of the ancestors?).

This jealously breeds hatred for the youth in the king's heart and subsequently leads to his unsuccessful attempt on Kgamphuphu's life when their regiments return in victory after their battle against the Matebele (1984:81-82).

In another incident, Mmabzi, despite his age, regards himself to be the only man who deserves Tšelane, who has grown into a very beautiful maiden sought after by all the young men in the village. He regards Tšelane as a personal possession of the king, with which the king can do as he pleases. When Tšelane turns down his proposal for marriage, we hear Mmabzi say:

"Theetša mo ngwanana, bona mo. Afa o lemoga gore o bolela le mang? Ke nna kgoši. Ke nna phenyaditšhaba. Tšohle di goma mo go nna. O motho ka nna. Ga go se o ka bago sona ka ntle le nna ... " (1984:54).

("Listen here, maiden, look here. Are you aware whom you are talking to? I am the king. I am the conqueror of nations. I am the ultimate end of all things. You are a person because of me. Without me you cannot become anything ... ").

Indeed when he has failed to intimidate Tšelane into giving in to his sexual demands, he orders her brutal execution at the palace, but not before he has raped her to satisfy his lust (1984:58).

With the coming of the Europeans to South Africa, the king as traditional leader has seen his supreme powers very substantially reduced. His powers, duties and privileges under the new order are to ensure the welfare of the tribe, to ensure that the common law is maintained, and to carry out any instructions issued to him by the Commissioner who represents the authority of the State President in his territory.

> The general effect of the various Acts and Proclamations is that, although the chief and his councils administer the affairs of the tribe, the supreme political and judicial authority is the European administration acting through the Bantu Affairs Commissioners (Mönnig, 1988:251).

In *Tlala ya Mohlopi*, for instance, when the tribesmen express their views against the collection of various taxes in their territory by the European authorities instead of by their king for the benefit of his people, the king's response is as follows:

> *"Bapedi, mantšu a lena a a kwagala, gomme le a tseba le lena gore le nna ke šetše ke le kgoši ka molomo, maatla ga a sa le gona, ke leina fela le šetšego, ba ba bušago ba gona ... "* (1969:37).
>
> ("Bapedi, your words are understandable, but you too know that I also remain a king only nominally, I have no more powers, only the name remains, those who rule are there ... ").

The king's argument makes it very clear that the position of the kings has become subordinate to the European government. In support of this fact, Mönnig says:

> In the management of its affairs under the direction of its chief, the tribe is subject to the overriding authority of the European administration. This has naturally affected the traditional position of the chieftainship (1988:250).

4.5 **Women Characters**

Without attempting to appear anti-feminist in any way, we may observe here that until recently, the African world has been depicted in written literature as a man's world. Mutiso (1974:57) correctly asserts that African women writers, as well as powerful women characters are relatively rare in African literature. They may be a reflection of traditional values whereby the woman, whenever she appears in literature, is usually presented as an appendage of man, as man's best confidant and natural adviser (compare how Molwantwa is pressurized by his wife into becoming a Christian convert, in *Nkotsana*, (1984:6). In support of this fact, Charles Larson also maintains that in many West African novels, the female characters play almost no significant part, and that 'if they are present, they are mere objects, performing a function' (1978:149).

This image of women may have its origins in the folk narrative, where a man's bravery is almost always rewarded with a woman's (yes, even the princess's) hand in marriage [cf. "Tau ya Seina sa Motho", *Keleketla* (1990b:94) and "Ngaka Rabodiba", *Maitišong* (1990a:46)]. Thus, we understand clearly the motive behind the actions of Mashosho in *Molato Mpeng*, whose ugly countenance makes him withdraw from girls and even to declare to Phure: "... *wa diatla le leleme la ka nka se mmone*" (1976:49). ["... I shall never find any (woman) through my own actions and proposal"]. We understand when this Mashosho exposes himself to great danger by volunteering to

kill the leopard that plagues his village (1976:48). In his heart he entertains the mythological belief that if he kills the leopard, his bravery will be rewarded with a woman - in this case, Matete.

Similarly, as the regiments are getting ready to go to war, in *Kgamphuphu*, we hear one of the mothers singing praises to her son and even promising him a wife if he returns with glory, as follows:

> "... *Ke tla go nyadiša mosadi, ngwana yo mošwana ge o bowa o le yena mogale wa marumo ...* " (1984:2).
>
> ("... I shall marry you a wife, a light-skinned girl, if you return being a brave hero in the battle ... ").

The same Matete, in *Molato Mpeng*, is treated as a mere object, a man's possession that can exchange hands arbitrarily in settlement of debts, for her insolvent father approaches the local businessman, Thamaga, and simply requests:

> "*Thamaga, ntswale ke tla go fa mosadi*" (1976:3).
> ("Thamaga, help me and I shall give you a wife").

From that moment in the narrative Matete is treated by these two adult men (Seopela and Thamaga) as an object which has been bought - her market value unashamedly set at a mere two hundred Rand.

It appears that in the African narrative, both oral and written, the role of women characters is to be available to men for marriage and for procreation alone. According to Mutiso, in all African writing 'there is evidence that where schooling

was possible, it was mainly for boys' (1974:57). We find good evidence of this negative attitude of the traditional African man toward education of girls in *Maroba*. Maroba's reason for not being in favour of educating girls is that they are not "permanent members" of your family. In his own opinion,

> *ngwana wa ngwanenyana e be e le mofeti ka gobane ge a fetša go tsena sekolo o šetše a re o a tšewa, gomme wena motswadi o ka se tsebe gore naa o boelwa ke eng, ge o sentše ditšhelete o re o a mo ruta?* (1964:5).
>
> (a daughter was just a passer-by because when she completes her schooling she is already talking about getting married, and you, the parent will not know what you benefit, after wasting money in trying to educate her?).

Maroba's other complaint against educating girls is that education makes them to forsake their culture and thus become 'animals', especially when they go to live in cities, where they, like most urban Africans, soon lose touch with tradition:

> *Ba tšhabela Makgoweng, gape ba rata go lahla mekgwa ya bona ya Sesotho ba re ba dira Sekgowa. Ga ba sa nyaka le go tšeišwa ke batswadi ba bona!* (1964:5).
>
> (They escape to the white man's cities, and also like to forsake their African customs, saying that they practise European culture. They no longer allow their parents to arrange their marriage too!).

This leads us to the Northern Sotho novelists' general, almost consistent moral attitude in their treatment of urban women characters. These characters are presented as being liberated from the hold of tradition. The literature makes it clear that women can function as individuals in the modern society, free from any man's domination, more easily in the cities than in the rural and traditional areas. This literature in general does not present the most liberated women in the cities as the most admirable in terms of moral values, for they are often presented as prostitutes or mistresses (Mutiso, 1974:72).

For instance, in *Tsakata*, an Orlando man and his wife, Flora, always quarrel because the woman is occasionally fetched by a strange man (Tsakata - alias, Mr Davidson) in a car. This man takes her to dance parties at the "Paleis de danse" in Johannesburg in the evenings. The narrator explains the conflict in this family as follows:

> *Mogatša Flora ga a rate ge mosadi wa gagwe a sepela dipineng tša bošego ..... o a di gana. Flora yena di mo tsene mading, ga a kgone go di lesa.* (1981:16).
>
> (Flora's husband does not want his wife to attend dance sessions at night .... he prohibits them. As for Flora, she is under their total influence, she is unable to leave them).

We may not be wrong to conclude from Flora's actions that it is not the dance sessions she is under the influence of, but Tsakata himself, that she is his mistress.

In *Molato Mpeng*, the same Matete (in Johannesburg) who continues communicating with her fiance, Phure (at Tibane, a rural area), accepts Maphutha's proposal with these words:

> "*Le nna ke a go rata ... Fela o swanetše gore o yo nkgopela go batswadi, gore le se se ka hlagago e le taba e be o šetše o ikgokile*". (1976:11).
>
> ("I love you too ... But you must go and ask my parents for my hand in marriage, so that if anything serious may happen in future, you will already have committed yourself").

We do not have very far to look for what Matete implies by "anything serious". She wants to "enjoy" Maphutha's company while she is in Johannesburg, despite the fact that she has agreed to be married to Phure at home. By asking Maphutha to communicate with her parents she is only taking out an "insurance policy", to assure herself of marriage should Maphutha make her pregnant.

Thus the woman character in the city is presented as having all but lost touch with tradition, while her rural cousin, who is closer to the traditional mode of life, still retains it. But the woman closer to traditional mode of life is usually presented in the novels as being subordinate to man. In fact, the impression is given that she needs the man's supervising and regulating presence in order to behave accordingly, and this belief appears to have its origin in the role played by women in the primary oral narrative.

If we take into consideration the fact that most storytellers in the folk narrative tradition are women, it is a little absurd that the women in folktales are usually presented with negative attributes - they are mischievous, unreliable, disobedient,

vain, and so forth. In "Samesebelete" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:22) the woman acts against her husband's instructions in his absence and feeds their dog very rough bran instead of the usual food they share with it. In "Kokobolaya Dilo", "Nonyana ya Morwa Motswiri" as well as "Phakamatšana" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:31,34 and 29 respectively), a man's wives eat of the forbidden fruit in the absence of their husband and die. In "Moselapše" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:48) the younger of a man's wives steals his guineafowl in his absence and her guilt is only discovered through a tightrope feat over a magic pool. In "Tšhilwanangwidi" and "Serapela" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:47 and 50 resp.) as well as "O Jele Ngwana a re ke Mmutla" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:56), a mother entrusts her baby to total strangers to nurse while she is hoeing her field, without even asking for their credentials. She receives the most revolting punishment in the form of enforced cannibalism, when the tricksters roast her baby and share the meat with her, claiming it to be a hare. This cannibalism is culturally connected with witchcraft, as the witches are often believed to eat the flesh of their victims hoping to acquire their powers, their vital force.

In the narrative of Maphutha's son using a magic black cat to heal women who have acquired an evil illness from their acts of witchcraft in *Megokgo ya Bjoko*, the narrator cannot help remarking:

> *Go makatša kudu gore ke ka lebaka la eng matšwa a swara basadi ka boati.* (1969:55).
>
> (It is very surprising why the medicinal trap for those guilty of having practised witchcraft in most cases catches women).

Although he puts it as a question, the sarcasm here cannot escape our notice - it is usually women, not men, who are guilty of practising witchcraft.

Similarly, when Phankga informs his uncle Mokhura, in *Ngwana wa Mobu*, that there is already a maiden he is thinking of taking as a bride, the older man spontaneously cautions him:

> *Ke holofela gore o kgethile gabotse, moisa tena. O se ke wa re tlišetša baloi ka mo lelokong la gaborena.* (1983:48).
>
> (I hope you have made a good choice, you fellow. You must not bring us witches in this clan of ours).

The novelists' consistent moral attitude with regard to the mischievousness and unreliability of women is again clearly marked in *Tlala ya Mohlopi*. In a year when the harvest has been very good, some families with no foresight take all their grain to the stores to sell at a very low price. It seems to be only the men who are practical enough to think of the possibility of a poor harvest the following year. It is these men who forbid their families to take their grain to the stores. However, the success of their effort naturally depends on the co-operation of their wives. In those families where the man is only nominally the head, whenever he tries to stop the woman from taking the grain to the store, *mong wa lapa a nape a babe bjalo ka pherefere, gomme mokgalabje a nape a lahlele legare phokeng*, (1969:8) [the owner of the household becomes very furious, and the old man holds his peace].

It is not any easier - to get the woman's co-operation - even in those families where the man is really the head. All the woman has to do is wait until the man goes into the village on a drinking spree, then she will remain taking the grain to the store - behind his back - and, what is worse, using the children to do it, and as such teaching them how to disobey their elders. The narrator describes this action as follows:

mmago ngwana a huhumediše ngwana sešuba, gomme yena a hlapetše gore a mokgalabje ga a boe, ngwana a tšeele pele, a sepele ka tsela ye mokgalabje a ka se mmonego, gomme a be a šetše a lailwe gore ge a ka kopana le mokgalabje, a be a šetše a re o romilwe ke mmago mokete. (1969:9).

(The mother will send her child with half a bag through the rear entrance, while she stands guard to see if the old man is coming; the child goes on, using a path where the old man is not likely to see her; meanwhile she has been instructed that if she should meet the old man, she should say she has been sent by someone else).

The typical woman, then, keeps quiet and pretends to be obedient even when she does not like what the head of the family commands. In her heart she knows that the man will soon go out to the other men of the village, and she can remain doing as she pleases.

4.6 **European Characters**

The early Northern Sotho novels, especially those that can be placed into a definite historical period, depict the European as a new phenomenon in the African world. Conceived mainly according to pre-existing categories of African thought, the European is incorporated into the universe of vital forces. According to Placide Tempels,

> The technological skill of the white man impressed the Bantu. The white man seemed to be the master of great natural forces (1969:66).

In these works, one might venture to say, the European is regarded with a certain amount of marvel and admiration.

In *Kgamphuphu,* for instance, when the king, Mmabzi sends his tribesmen to the diamond mines to work for guns, he has this to say about the newly arrived Europeans:

> "*.... Ba re kua tlase mošola wa Lekwe banna ba bohlale ba gorogile, ba tlile le marumo a bogale a bolayago tlou ka modumo o tee fela. Ke marumo a mollo a a bolayago motho a sa le kgole, a fetša mašabašaba a batho le dira ba sa le kgole ...* " (1984:15).
>
> ("... They say down there across the Vaal River, clever men have arrived, bringing with them sharp spears that will kill an elephant with only one sound. They are spears of fire which will kill a person from a distance, and destroy multitudes of people and armies being far away ....").

We find the same marvel at and admiration of the European's guns in *Megokgo ya Bjoko*. Tshehlwane can hardly believe his hunters when they say they have met the people who kill with a "magic stick" (*tšhupabaloi*), with which a single man was able to kill a buffalo (1969:101). As in **Kgamphuphu** the information about these strange people fills the tribesmen with enthusiasm to go and meet them, in order to acquire their power and magic.

Serudu correctly asserts that the events in the last portion of the final chapter of this novel, *Megokgo ya Bjoko,* portray 'the arrival of the first Whites in the Transvaal and their early contacts with Black communities' (1979:20). It is understandable,

therefore, that the Europeans are portrayed as good, bringers of love and peace and brotherhood, for the novel only deals with their first contact with the Africans, and, for that matter, at the close of the narrative. However, the novelists who deal with the later period of interaction between the Africans and the Europeans, portray a different picture of the latter.

In these novels, the European characters are usually not fully drawn or endowed with any individuality of their own. As they are examined from the outside, they appear only as caricatures, as mere specimens, as a type. They are presented as 'stereotyped and one-dimensional, efficient little machines meant to do a job in the British Foreign Service ... ' (Larson, 1978:153). We meet one such character in *Tsakata*, namely Rev. G. Schweigenberg, whom the novelist presents as one who interferes in the people's lives (1981:81).

In general, the European character is identified as a colonialist and/or capitalist whose mission is to exploit the material wealth of the Africans. In *Nkotsana*, for instance, the only reference to the European farmer on whose land the people lived is in connection with the collection of land dues from the tenants. They have even nicknamed him "Mphesaka" from his typical demand: *Mphe sa ka gomme le nna ke tlo kgaogana nago* - "Give me what belongs to me, and I shall leave you alone too". (1984:11).

After Nkotsana's people have moved from the farms because they are not prepared to do "free labour" for the farmers, some of the farms are bought by other Europeans from the Cape and the Orange Free State. Under these farmers, those people who stay on on their farms are subjected to worse exploitation. The novelist describes it as follows:

Mong wa bona gape e ile ya ba monna yo šoro. A ba šomiša ka sehlogo. Dikgomo ge di be di tswetše le tša bona o be a di gama. Beng ba tšona ba tlo humana mafsi a tšona mola manamane a godile, bommawo ba se sa tšwa mafsi a pale. (1984:22).

(Their master was also a cruel man. He mercilessly made them work. When the cows had calves, he milked their cows as well. The owners of the cows would only have their milk when the calves had grown up, when the cows no longer produced sufficient milk).

During the drought, in *Tlala ya Mohlopi*, when the people would do anything to find their families some food, the European farmers in the neighbourhood often found an opportunity to enrich themselves at the expense of the famine stricken people by offering them corn or maize meal in exchange for something else of much greater market value. The narrator shows what they did, without appearing to accuse them of exploitation, in the following description of the practice:

Ka sewela, go rotoge Leburu le laišitše mekotla, gomme le sa nyake selo, le tsoma dikolobe fela. Bomankgege ba sepele, go hwetšwe kakatla ya kolobe e tšewa ka dikgamelo di se kae, gomme tše dingwe di tšewe ka dirotwana fela. (1969:31).

(Occasionally there would appear a Boer with a load of bags, who wanted nothing but pigs as payment. The pigs would then go, and one would find a huge pig being taken for a few bushels, and others would be taken for mere baskets of grain only).

In general, the novelists portray the European character as a harsh person, viewed against the background of the humility of the African people. For example, in *Tsakata* the novelist describes Violet Willoughby, a so-called Coloured teacher at Kgautšwane School, as follows:

> *O tlhakantše mabobo a Sesotho le kgalemelo ya Sekgowa.* (1981:73).
>
> (She is a mixture of the kind generosity of an African and the harsh strictness of a European).

As a result, the Africans exercise great care whenever they have to deal with a European; they avoid doing or saying anything that may bring them the wrath of these people. One of the tribal leaders who have just attended a meeting between themselves and the government officials at the Commissioner's offices, in *Tlala ya Mohlopi*, describes this typical behaviour and explains that it is characterized by the following admission:

> *"Re tlo reng e le Makgowa, re tšhaba go ba nyamiša, ba re lebelela ka mahlo a a sa lokago, ba hlwe ba re šetšešetše morago".* (1969:73).
>
> ("What can we say, when it is the Europeans, we fear to disappoint them and have them looking at us with evil eyes and always bothering us).

Thus, whenever a European character is presented in interaction with African characters in the narrative, the former is portrayed as being on a vantage-point over the latter who often choose to say or do nothing, for peace's sake.

4.7 **Résumé**

From the discussions above, it is clear that a poetics for the study of character in the Northern Sotho narrative, from oral to written, should concentrate on characters as **actants** in the story, rather than **personnages**, that is, as products of plots which help the reader to orient himself amid numerous and various details as well as to understand the narrator's particular motives in the narrative. Such a poetics should concentrate on the "functional" status of characters in the narrative, analyzing the actions of the characters in the story rather than psychological essences about these characters; for, even if some narrators do indulge in vivid descriptions of their characters which paint a living picture in the reader's mind (c.f. Mminele's *Ngwana wa Mobu*), most characters are remembered not by their vividly described appearances but by their deeds.

The functional status of characters in the Northern Sotho narrative promotes, in the audience or the reader, awareness of the persistent struggle between good and evil, usually portrayed in the narratives; for, a character always appears in the narrative enmeshed in a web of relationships with other characters. This attribute also reflects clearly on the didactic pursuits of the Northern Sotho narrative in general. Through the characters and their deeds, many questions are raised in the audience's or the reader's minds, many cultural beliefs and values as well as sympathies and revulsions are evoked, in short, the characters incarnate the narrator's moral vision of the world in general.

CHAPTER V

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

5.1 Introduction

Although we have often made reference to "the author", "the novelist" in the previous chapters, the task of our critique was not to bring out the relationships of particular works with particular authors, but rather to analyze the narrative through its structure, through its intrinsic form, and to analyze the play of its internal relationships. We agree, however, that some considerations extrinsic to the narrative text could not be avoided in discussing matters such as thematic selection and treatment. But, for some time now criticism and philosophy have been taking note of what one may call "the death of the author". Post-structural criticism, for instance, regards every text as an intertext of another text, thus belonging to the intertextual. However, even this criticism cannot deny the fact that insofar as there is a narrative, there must be someone narrating it.

Thus, a narrative text becomes that text in which a narrative agent, a narrator, tells a story. In a written text this narrator is not a person, but the linguistic subject, a function which expresses itself in the language that constitutes the text (Bal, 1988:119). In the primary oral narrative the **narrator** is a visible, fictive 'I', a storyteller who interferes in his narration as much as he likes, or, where necessary, who even participates in the action of the narrative of a character. The 'I' of the novel, which is for the most part invisible, is 'that agent which utters the linguistic signs which constitute the text' (Bal, 1988:120). Tzvetan Todorov calls this agent the 'poetic personality' (1970:133).

It has become a commonplace of literary theory that it is essential not to confuse author and narrator. Wayne Booth, in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (originally published in 1961), even found it necessary to introduce the concept of the implied author as a concession to the arguments against the request for the intentions of the empirical author. The term would enable him to discuss and analyze the ideological and moral stances of a narrative text without having to refer directly to a biographical author. For the purposes of this chapter we shall follow Mieke Bal and others, and stick to **narrator** (in the written narrative) as 'that agent which utters the linguistic signs which constitute the text', and not the (biographical) author of the narrative.

5.2 Narrator

In the primary oral narrative the narrator, who is the visible storyteller or narrator-performer, simply spins a tale, unbothered by considerations of form: 'There was a tale', he begins, and then proceeds to narrate the tale to his audience; he describes the character whenever it becomes necessary for general effect, often speculating on what the characters think and feel, as well as describing their action; he also interjects comments and ideas of his own whenever he feels like it. Rather than be bothered by considerations of form, the narrator-performer tries to establish himself as the narrator-creator of the tale he is narrating. His ability to harmonize the individual (represented by himself) with the social and contemporary (represented by the audience) and with the historical (represented by the traditional tale) will determine the success of the performance, and consequently the survival of folklore (Başgöz, 1986:12).

The creativity of the narrator-performer, however, is limited by the traditionality of the tale in that he works within a tradition which imposes certain 'structural patterns and plot-cliches' upon him (Scheub, 1975:360). Since all the events in a primary

oral narrative are deemed to have occurred in remote or past time, the narrator-performer is called upon by tradition to present them along certain fixed and predictable lines. The telling or retelling is obviously done by someone who, although he was not an eyewitness to the events narrated, nevertheless comes to possess the information on the events. The invitation to the audience to listen to a tale, "*E rile e le nonwane*" ("There was a tale") is sufficient evidence of this.

Although the narrator-performer is the main source of information on all the events in the tale, he still does not exercise all the powers of omniscience. The limits of his knowledge do not extend beyond the actions and the events that can be seen and heard. Thus, he does not include as recorded observation anything that could not have been seen or heard in action. In "Mabutle le Tau" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:1-5) for instance, the narrator-performer does not say anything about any intentions or other mental formulations that Hare could have had when he approached Lion with a plan to catch other animals. It is simply stated,

> *A hwetša e le gore a ka fa Tau maano a go hweletša Tau dijo.* (1990b:1).
>
> (He found that he could give Lion a plan to find himself food).

Similarly in "Mmutla le Dinakana tša Montshe" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:28-33) while Hare and Duiker are collecting firewood, the narrator-performer merely reports that Hare saw a bitter-apple, picked and hid it under his armpit. What Hare plans to do later with this bitter-apple is not hinted. When Crocodile later robs Hare of his fifes, all that is reported about Hare's mental formulations is, '*A re na bokaone ke dire bjang?*' (1990b:24). ['He said, "What can I do?"']. Then Hare sets off to go and dig out ground bees. Again the narrator-performer does not mention what is going

on in Hare's mind. It is as though the narrator-performer consistently refuses to go directly into Hare's mind, and makes no room for 'speculative comments and interpretive reporting' (Dseagu: 1987:145). The narrator-performer, therefore, allows himself only **limited omniscience**. Anything that appears in a tale, which is not so obviously noticeable, if described at all, is described as a matter of conjecture and speculation.

For instance, when the narrator-performer in "Tau ya Moroko Dimpeng" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:34-38) recounts,

> *Taba ye ya ba bothata kudu go monna yo. Sebete sa tau o tla se tšea kae? Fela o swanetše go thuša mogatšagwe.* (1990b:34).
>
> (This matter was very difficult for this man. Where will he find the liver of a lion? Still, he has to help his wife).

he is not in any way peering into the heart and mind of this man and reporting on his feelings and thoughts. The report takes the form of speculation and reflection of possible reactions, intentions and motives of the character. In other words, the narrator-performer's interpretations of the event are determined within the ideology of his cultural group, and will, therefore, tend to be accepted as general truths recognizable and acceptable within that cultural sphere.

The conditions are different in the written narrative. The narrator takes us whenever he wishes, peers inside the minds and hearts of his characters at will and tells us what they are thinking or feeling. Although most narrators do not claim the authority of the eyewitness in their narratives - the rarity of the so-called first-person novels in Northern Sotho is sufficient evidence - as omniscient narrators they stand

in a godlike position above their characters, knowing what each of them thinks and feels, and often allowing us to overhear conversations or 'catch a character unawares in a way denied to any participant in the story' (Raban, 1968:33).

In *Ngwana wa Mobu*, for instance, the imperceptible narrator also acts as the external focalizer (or narrator-focalizer) when the focalized (Phankga's thoughts and feelings) are analyzed and presented from within (1983:46), penetrating those thoughts and feelings: Mokhura, who has attended the meeting of the School Committee and the Inspectorate, has just reported to Phankga that their plan to oust Lahlang and substitute Phankga for him as principal did not succeed. The narrator-focalizer analyzes Phankga's actions, thoughts and feelings as follows:

> *Phankga o fela a tloša mahlo go malomeagwe a lebelela fase, a tloge a lebelele godimo. O re ke hlakanya dibedi le dibedi o hwetša di mo fa mphetša, a tloge a hlakanye gape a bone di mo fa motabe. Monagano wa gagwe o tologile o bile o šešerekane bjalo ka ditho tša motho yo a ikgateletšego ka sebela. Ka mokgwa wo ditaba tše di mo galakelago ka wona ga a kwe le monkgwana wo mobosana wa morogwana wo o lego moo pele ga gagwe ...* (1983:46).
>
> (Phankga occasionally stops looking at his uncle and focuses his eyes on the floor, and then gazes upward. He tries to add two and two but they give him five, then he adds once more and they give him six. His mind has melted to the extent that his limbs feel as groggy as though he had abused alcohol. This news is so bitter for him that he does not even smell the aroma of the chicken laid before him ...).

In the first sentence the narrator is an external focalizer who perceives Phankga's actions from without. But then he allows himself inside Phankga's mind and heart and presents not only Phankga's mind grappling with the problem, but also his dismay as well as what is going on in his senses. In this way the narrating agent (who narrates), who is also the focalizer (who sees), forms in this focalization a triadic relation between narrator, focalizer, and focalized, based on contiguity (Cohan & Shires, 1988:15). In principle such narrator-focalizers know everything about the represented world, although they often choose to restrict their knowledge - out of rhetorical considerations such as creating an effect of suspense and surprise.

In *Tlala ya Mohlopi*, for example, the narrator who also acts as focalizer, gives us the impression, right at the beginning of the novel, of one who knows everything about the represented world, its past, present and future. The narrative opens with a reference to the present: *Lehono ke lehono* ... (1969:5) [Today is today ...]. Later the narrator takes our minds to the remote past,

> *Mehleng ela, matlapa a sa kgiwa morogo; mola makgema le madimo a be a sa šinamelana, go be go tsebja gore "tlala" ke eng.* (1969:5).
>
> (In those days when the rocks still grew wild spinach, when the cannibals and ogres still fought one another, it was known what "famine" really is).

Then the narrator consolidates his knowledge of the past and present with that of the future in one sentence, thus:

Kganthe, tšela tša ge matlapa a be a sa kgiwa morogo, e be e le dinyane, ka gore mokhora o o kakago o ba bego ba le go ona o be o se wa ka wa ba gona, gomme dikgolo di be di se tla. (1969:6).

(And yet, the events of the days when wild spinach still grew on rocks were a small matter, for the abundance of food such as they had, had never been had, and more severe famine was still to come).

By so doing the narrator has almost summarized the fabula of the whole narrative, right at the beginning: The years of famine, characterized by the existence of cannibals and ogres, were followed by years of abundance in which the people rejoiced and relaxed, for they did not know that harder times were still to come. Such omniscient narrators usually display familiarity with the character's innermost thoughts and feelings, knowledge of the past, the present and the future of the world they narrate about; the ability to be present where the characters are supposed to be, in principle, unaccompanied; and the awareness of what is happening in several homes and villages at a given time.

However, for thematic purposes, the narrator often chooses to limit his omniscience or we may have the same anonymous narrating agency, but through different focalizers. In the same novel, for instance, the narrator introduces the white government official with very scanty description, restricting the scope of narration to only what can be outwardly observed, thus:

Ba sa hlaka le megopolo ya bona, ba bona go rotoga mošemane wa lerarana wa moriri o moso. (1969:60).

(While they were thus in mental turmoil, they saw a tall and slender lad with black hair appearing).

But the narrator soon has to introduce another character at the same gathering, namely Mogaramedi, before he hands over the narrating to him. This time, however, the narrator allows himself unlimited onmiscience, for he not only describes him outwardly, but also adds that he was fearless and would not say anything just to please someone: *a se na boi, a sa rate go beba motho mahlong* (1969:62). While the narrator feels comfortable with Mogaramedi, it is obvious that he would rather distance himself from the white government official, a stranger, and allow him to perform as a reflector-character in the narrative, that is 'mirror in his consciousness what is going on in the world outside or inside himself' (Stanzel, 1981:7). This brings us to the use of the **reliable narrator.**

It appears that in matters of a controversial nature in the Northern Sotho narrative the tendency is for the main narrator to hand over to secondary or tertiary narrators, so that we end up with a narrative with more than one narrator. In such cases the main narrator plays the role of introducing the secondary narrators whenever their turn of narration comes. When this is done, the secondary narrator - who in this case is a character which participates in the fabula as an actor - becomes a reliable narrator 'whose rendering of the story and commentary on it the reader is supposed to take as authoritative account of the fictional truth' (Rimmon-Kenan, 1988:100). This character gives us **internal focalization.**

The main narrator in *Tlala ya Mohlopi* introduces the narrative where messengers bring word to the tribesmen of the coming of government officials to collect various taxes. Then the narrator recedes into the background, as it were, and the anonymous narration which was told in the third-person, becomes **character-bound,**

that is, is told in the first-person by various characters in the fabula. First, it is one old man who addresses the other characters, including their king, and protests against the callousness of the government which goes ahead and demands taxes - poll tax, dog tax, property tax, land tax, etc. - in spite of the people's suffering from famine. His character-bound narrative is told in the first- person, with the use of the first-person pronoun "**we**":

> "... **re** *botšwa go tla ga ba Mmušo go tlo tsoma makgetho, gomme ga go yo a tsebago ge lenyaga* **re** *swanne le ngwagola ...* " (1969:36).
>
> ("... **we** are told of the coming of the people of the Government to collect taxes, but there is no-one who does not know that this year **we** come out just like last year ...").

All that the main narrator does at such points of the narrative is to introduce the speakers and let them take over the focalization. Once again on the occasion of the meeting of the tribal leaders and the government official at the Commissioner's office, the main narrator introduces the official and lets him take over the narration as a character in the fabula, and later allows the leaders to express their dissatisfaction themselves (1969:60-77). Then we have the third-person narration framing or alternating with first-person ones.

> Likewise, more than one first-person narrator can assume responsibility for the narration, with the multiple accounts appearing in succession (one after another); or in alternation (one alongside another); or in hierarchy (one totally enclosing another); or even in collaboration (two narrators telling their story jointly). To a large

extent, even accounts dominated by a single narrator cannot avoid inserting other characters' accounts in the narration (Cohan & Shires, 1988:91).

We note in this narrative the narrator's use of nameless secondary narrators *"yo mongwe"* ("someone"), who, for the mere fact that they are characters participating in the fabula as actors, remain reliable narrators. We can assume that they are given this anonymity to create the *kgoro* (tribal court) atmosphere, with the Northern Sotho cultural saying in mind: *"Lentšu la kgorong ga le šalwe morago"* (1969:73) ["One is not persecuted for what one has said at the *kgoro*"]. But the anonymous *monnamogolo* (old man) appears to be used in this narrative for a special purpose - his reliability, not simply because he is an intradiegetic narrator, but because his old age denotes life experience and wisdom.

In *Ngwana wa Mobu* the main narrator alternates with the secondary narrator without moving from third- to first-person narration when we are given a review of past events through the salient thoughts of Lahlang. The main narrator introduces the character-bound focalization as follows:

Ke sebaka bjale a hlabile hlogo tafoleng, fela ga se a ya ka boroko. Boroko bo ka tla bjang a eswa? Megopolo e ngapangapa lefaufau ka baka la tše a tlabanago natšo matšatši a (1983:20).

(Although he has been sitting for some time with his head on the table, he is not asleep. How can sleep come when he is on fire? His thoughts scratch the sky because of the events that have been puzzling him these days).

Then follows a review of the events that 'have been puzzling' Lahlang since the beginning of the year: the arrival of Phankga at the school at the beginning of the year; Lahlang's ray of hope for relief from many years of toiling without assistance; Phankga's change of attitude, refusal to co-operate, and arrogance. Although the events are presented in a third-person narrative, it is obvious that the main narrator is re-presenting the thoughts that are going on in Lahlang's mind. Although the subject of the **énonciation** is the main narrator, the focalization is that of the character Lahlang, is character-bound.

Within this same narrative the focalization frequently shifts from the one character, Lahlang, to the other, Phankga, like when Phankga's first-person narrative explaining why he is not prepared to submit his scheme of work and preparation books to the principal is quoted in full:

> *"Mokgalabje, dipuku tše ke a di šomiša. Dijo tšeo ke swanetšego go di solela bana bešo di ka mo dipukung tše ... Ge o rata go di bona o ka no roma ngwana ge e le Mokibelo goba Sontaga a tla a di tšea kua gae. Moo nka se be le pelaelo ka gobane ke tla be ke sa rute"* (1983:20-21).
>
> ("Old man, as for these books, I am using them. The food that I must dish out to my brothers and sisters are in these books ... If you would like to see them you can still send a child on a Saturday or Sunday to come and fetch them at home. In that case I shall have no complaint because I shall not be teaching").

The shifting of the character-bound focalization from one character to the other does not only help to achieve reliability in narrators, but is significant in other ways. In the words of Mieke Bal (1988:105),

> Character-bound focalization (CF) can vary, can shift from one character to another. In such cases, we may be given a good picture of the origins of a conflict. We are shown how differently the various characters view the same facts. This technique can result in neutrality towards all the characters. Nevertheless, there usually is never a doubt in our minds which character should receive most attention and sympathy.

Thus, we have several instances where several narrators exist in the same novel, so that one narrative, no matter how long or how short, fits inside another 'like a set of Chinese boxes' (Raban, 1968:35). It is a striking feature of the narrative that often a narrator, especially at the beginning of the novel, may remain imperceptible for a long time, using the third-person narration, but suddenly begin to refer to himself and to the reader, suddenly become dramatized. This leads us to the concept of **dramatized narrators.**

Wayne Booth (1967:152) defines a dramatized narrator thus:

> In a sense even the most reticent narrator has been dramatized as soon as he refers to himself as "I", or ... "we" ... But many novels dramatize their narrators with great fullness, making them into characters who are as vivid as those they tell us about.

The narrator in the Northern Sotho narrative does not become fully dramatized in the sense of Booth's definition. However, sometimes he is dramatized in such a subtle manner that the reader hardly notices. But the **narrative-situations**, that is, the different relationships of the narrative "I" to the object of narration, hardly ever remains constant within **one** narrative text - at least on the macro-narrative level.

The opening paragraphs of *Maroba* may give the reader the impression that he has to do with a first-person narrative. The narrator, although remaining imperceptible and anonymous, describes Maroba's kraals of livestock as if he is himself a character in the fabula. For instance, when he describes how Maroba's goats have multiplied themselves, he adds:

> *Ye nngwe e bile e wele ka 'putšana tše tharo ...* **Ke kwele** *modišana yo mongwe wa tšona a re: "O ka re di šetše di tseba yeo e tswetšego ka putšane e tee ..."* (1964:1-2).
>
> (One of them has even given birth to three kids ... **I heard** one of their goatherds say, "It is as if they already know the one that gave birth to one kid ...").

The expression 'I heard ... ' creates the impression that the narrator, as one of the characters in the fabula, heard what the goatherd had said. The same impression is created when the narrator explains where Maroba got his name from, thus:

> *Leina le le hlotšwe ke rakgolo wa gagwe, yo* **ba reng** *e be e le motho wa sehlogo sa go šiiša ...* **Ba re** *e be e se go tia ...* (1964:3).
>
> (This name was created by his grandfather, who, **they say**, was a very cruel person ... **They say** he was so strong ...).

The expression, 'they say' is used as in 'hearsay', that is, what the narrator (as one of the characters in the fabula) has heard other characters who knew Maroba's grandfather say.

Presenting the account of the men sitting with Maroba at the *kgoro*, the narrator says:

> *Go tšerwe magang; go bile go anega yena mo letšatšing le,* **ke** *ra yena komangkanna.* (1964:2).
>
> (They are engaged in conversation; on this day, the narrating is done by himself, **I** mean him, the boss).

This time the 'I' is without doubt the narrator 'I' who does not necessarily have to be one of the characters participating in the fabula as an actor.

In *Megokgo ya Bjoko* we have an even more sophisticated movement of narration from one focalizer to another. The narrator interrupts his own narration of the event where the men are investigating Leilane's case of assault at the *kgoro* by posing the following quiz:

> *Ao! Na ditaba tša batho ba di sepela bjang? Re kwele seboledi se re Leilane o iteile mogogadi, hleng bjale go kwala gore o iteile mosadi?... Aowa, re tleleng natšo hle* (1969:2).
>
> (**Ao!** What matter are these people actually discussing? We heard one speaker say Leilane had assaulted his father-in-law; how is it now said that he assaulted his wife? ... No, please explain it for us).

With the use of 'we' in the question the narrator-focalizer becomes a narratee-focalizer. Then the narrator resumes the narration by attempting to give a solution to the quiz thus:

Ke nnete gore Leilane o iteile mogogadi, ke nnete gape gore o iteile mosadi wa gagwe ... (1969:2).

(It is true that Leilane assaulted his father-in-law; it is also true that he assaulted his own wife ...)

And now, once gain the narration is done by a narrator-focalizer.

However, the narration moves once more to a different focalizer within the same sentence, when the narrator adds:

... *gomme hle bana***bešu**, *le tla* **ntshwarela** *ge* **ke re** *le* **nna** *nka be* **ke** *dirile ka moo Leilane a dirilego ka gona, ka gore le ge go lefa* **nka** *lefa - le bona ba tla šala le mabadi, le gona ba tla tlwaologa go hlatšišwa ke tše* **ke** *di jago. Dihlaya ke* **tša ka**, *mpa ke* **ya ka**, *bjale o tshwenywa ke eng?* (1969:3).

(... further more, **my** fellowmen, forgive **me** when **I say I** too would have done what Leilane did, for even if **I** pay a fine - they will also remain with some scars, and they will get out of their habit of vomiting because of what **I** am eating. The taste buds are **mine**, and the stomach is **mine**, what has it got to do with you?).

The use of the first-person here introduces a character-bound focalization. The 'I' in this excerpt clearly does not denote the same focalizer as does the 'we' that poses the quiz in the earlier quotation above. This 'I' is now a character who participates in the fabula as an actor, that is, as one of the men hearing Leilane's case at the *kgoro*.

When the narrative continues with, *ke nnete gore o ba iteile gomme ditaba tša ntshe di tlile ka tsela ye*: (1969:3) [It is true that he assaulted them, and this is how it happened:], we can see the focalization returning to the main narrator once more.

Sometimes the narrator uses the second-person pronoun 'you', often denoted by the subject concord '**o**', to forge an intimate link between narrator, character and reader. In the opening paragraph of *Ngwana wa Mobu*, for instance, the main narrator says:

> *Bo sele. Tsoša mahlo o a hlabe Bohlabela, o mpontšhe tše ke di bonago.* (1983:1).
>
> (It is daybreak. Raise your eyes and focus them on the East, and help me see what I am perceiving).

This is an open invitation to the narratee to join the narrator in his perception, to perceive the object of narration through the narrator's focalization, to be involved in the events; in short, to accompany the narrator on his long journey of this narrative. And when the 'journey' is completed, the same narrator closes the narrative by bidding the narratee farewell, as it were, in the closing paragraph, as follows:

> *Go ya ka magoro ga se go tšwana, bagešo. A re yeng re yo khutša ... Re tla kwa tša "Ngwana wa mobu" bo sele.* (1983:79).
>
> (Till we meet again, my fellowmen. Let us go and rest ... We shall hear about "The child of the soil" in the morning).

The use of the personal pronouns 'we' and 'you' in novels can be aptly summed up in the words of Florence Stratton (1980:123):

> The 'we' and 'you' ... are, of course, personal pronouns referring to participants in a speech event. 'We' refers to the speaker and others who have had a similar experience, while the reader, whether or not 'you' is present, is the addressee. By this means, not only is a conversational situation created through which the reader as addressee is made to experience a greater sense of personal involvement than when the generic 'you' is employed, but all the advantages of the first-person method of narration are also gained.

Sometimes, as we read in the above quotation, the generic 'you' is used by the narrator. For instance, the narrator in *Megokgo ya Bjoko* says:

> *Ka moo mohlamong* **le** *tsebago ka gona, ngwaga o bjalo magomo a a fela* ... (1969:4).
>
> (As **you** probably may know, in such a year cattle die in large numbers ...).

The narrator in such cases is appealing to the narratee's foreknowledge and life experience. In such cases, the generic 'you' refers to 'people in general', and has the effect of involving the reader in the events, although the bond between narrator and narratee is now comparatively weak.

Having examined the various narrators and their focalizations, we may now proceed to the different modes of narration in the narrative.

5.3 Narration

The narrator in primary oral narrative, that is, the storyteller often interrupts his narrative with individual remarks aimed at explaining some archaic words and expressions (which may not be understood any more by his audience), or instructing his listeners on various topics such as religion and folk medicine, or describing the meaning of certain customs, traditions and rituals which are given in the tale. Such individual remarks, referred to as "**digressions**", are cross-cultural folklore phenomena. Başgöz (1986:6) observes, and happily too, that despite the significance of these digressions in reflecting the individuality of the narrator, and in the very structure of the narrative, they have not been taken seriously by folklorists. They have not always been considered as part of the so-called text, and have thus not been recorded and published. As the material used in the present study does not contain any digressions by the storytellers, these general remarks about this feature of the narrative should suffice as far as the primary oral narrative is concerned. Rather we shall concentrate on its use in the written narrative.

Digression is defined by standard dictionaries as a passage which deviates from the central theme, a departure from the main subject, or a wandering away from the main topic. Many narratives are interspersed with myths, biographical information, and elaborate descriptions of objects, scenes and personages; all of these can be regarded as digression. According to Başgöz (*op.cit.*) digressions in general can be divided into three categories:

(1) explanatory and instructional;

(2) opinion-related and communicative; and

(3) self-reproaching and confessional.

(At a party we usually find two groups of people ... Between these two groups, it is difficult to satiate the last one with food. The reason being that they behave like the Bushmen and wild dogs [that is, scavengers]. However, that is not a problem; the concern and determination of anyone who feeds others should be to satiate his guests with food. If he does that, then they will go about speaking well of him, and so his name will be regarded very highly).

(4) *Dihlako tša kgomo kapa tša pudi le ge e le tša nku, ke selo se segologolo bophelong bja modiša. Mošemane yo a sa dišego, kotlo ya gagwe e hlaga mohla wo mobjalo. Yena o a tingwa a ja monkgo fela ... ga go se se ka mo thušang, ge e se gore a ithatiše go diša.* (1964:17-18).

(The hooves of a slaughtered beast or goat, or even a sheep, are of very great importance in the life of a herdsman. As for the boy who does not herd, his punishment comes on such a day. He is denied [the hooves] and left to 'eat' only the aroma ...nothing can help him, besides getting himself to like herding).

(5) *Dinama tša bašemane ga se dihlako fela; ke mehlobohlobo ya hlakanatswaka. Nama ye kgolo ya bona ke lesothwane .... Gomme dinama tše di tla ngwathagantšhwa gore ba bagolo ba je tše bose gomme ba banyenyane bona ba je masothwana le maloko a a lego ka gare ga maphephe a wona. Boikarabelo le go belaela ke dilo tše di sa tsebegego bophelong bja mošemane.* (1964:18).

(Boysmeat does not consist of hooves alone; it is a concoction of various types. Their greatest meat is the paunch ... And then these various kinds of meat will be cut into pieces, so that the big boys can eat delicious ones, while the small boys eat the paunch together with the dung that is between its leaves. Querying and complaining are unknown things in the life of a boy).

It is clear that the narrator's intrusion in these examples (and many others, for the novel teams with digressions from opening to closing) is not inadvertent but deliberate. They function to provide a perspective,often a traditional and cultural one, without involving the narrator's feelings or opinions. The intrusions, commenting on some of the events recounted, bring out or underline their importance (from a traditional-cultural perspective) in a certain sequence, or their intrinsic interest. Furthermore, they do not only help characterize the narrator but also affect our interpretation of and response to the narrative (Prince, 1982:13).

The next category of digressions, namely **opinion-related and communicative digressions**, enjoys an even greater usage in the Northern Sotho written narrative. By means of these digressions the narrator often expresses displeasure from social and political tendencies, operation of social institutions, and so forth, or reveals his own feelings, ideas and values related to the events being recounted. These digressions take the form of reliable commentary, and can range over any aspect of human experience as well as be related to the primary narrative in innumerable ways and degrees (Booth, 1967:155).

After the event of Nkotsana's death in hospital in *Nkotsana*, for instance, the narrative stands still to allow the narrator to intrude with a comparison of a widow's mourning period in the primitive society and mourning in the modern. The digression begins as follows:

> *Mehleng ya gola e sa le Sesothosotho sa borare, mola thuto ya Sekgowa le Sedumedi e sešo ya tsena nka be yo ngwan'a Nkwana a kile a di bona mola a tlogelwang ke monna wa gagwe ...* (1984:68).
>
> (In those days when it was still the traditional African custom of our forefathers, before the advent of the European and Christian teaching, this daughter of Nkwana would have suffered greatly after the death of her husband ...).

In 150 words the digression goes on, giving details, in very crude descriptions, of how Reneilwe would have been expected, by tradition and custom, to live through the entire year - her attire, her sanitary condition, the rites she would have had to observe whenever she ventured out of her home, etc. The comparison is rounded off with the following words, before the narrator returns to what actually happened to Reneilwe in the fabula of this narrative:

> *Lebaka leno la thuto ya Bojakane batho ba thuto yeo tšeo tše šoro ga di sa bonwa go bona. Di šaletše bao ba sa swereng segologolo.* (1984:68).
>
> (In this era of the teachings of Christianity, those cruel things are no longer seen among the people of that culture. They remain for those who still follow the primitive culture).

The narrator's critical comments here are direct and strong. As the conditions allow it and the civil liberties of the narrator are guaranteed, as it were (cf. thematic concerns in Chapter III above), the protest of digression has turned into strong and open social religious attack. The narrator no longer links the story and the narratee as a mediator, but introduces himself directly to his narrattee, centering the spotlight on his own personality, his own beliefs and values. He is a contemporary man like his narratee. He renders his judgement about the attributes and behaviour of the story characters and the development of the plot, like an art critic. In the words of Baṣgõz (1986:7),

> He discloses his opinions, ideas, and values, enacting the role of an old man, a father. And he praises, protests, and criticizes individuals, institutions, and human relations of the past and present like a social commentator. Thus he deviates from the story narration.

Even if the narrator sometimes finds that some of his beliefs on which a full appreciation of his work depends may come ready-made and fully accepted by the reader, still a considerable amount of commentary is directed to reinforcing those values which most readers already take for granted, as in the example quoted above.

Sometimes the narrator's reliable commentary becomes an isolated rhetoric, with the narrator in his own person doing what he can, 'with all the stops pulled, to work us into a proper mood before his story begins' (Booth, 1967:201). For example, in the same narrative Nkotsana's parents try to arrange a marriage between him and Morongwa, Mantloboko's daughter. Because of sheer shyness Nkotsana fails to establish a relationship with Morongwa, thus earning her contempt. This experience causes Nkotsana to venture to another territory in quest of a bride. At this point the narrator finds it necessary to digress with a mood-setting commentary, thus:

Majakane a kgale mola thuto e sa ja bogale, e tuka mo dipelong, ba be ba fela ba hlaka melawanalawana ya go leka go godišetša bana ba bona bophelong bjo bokaone bja go se swane le bja seditšhaba .... Ka mabaka a mang ye mengwe melao e be e tlaba, e makatša. (1984:50).

(The Christian converts of olden days, when the influence of Christianity was still strong and burning in their hearts, used to formulate various rules to try and lead their children to a life better than that of the heathens ... Sometimes some of the rules were puzzling and astonishing).

This digression functions as a mood-setting commentary, to prepare us psychologically for the events that are to follow, which may be unusual in contemporary society, like the announcement in the church, at the end of the service, that Nkotsana was at their mission station, Matlhokolo, to visit his aunt as well as look around for a bride (1984:52).

Wayne Booth correctly observes that sometimes intrusions about values and beliefs offer a special temptation to the narrator who then turns himself into a 'philosophermanque', and 'indulges in irrelevant pontification' (1967:181). In *Moelelwa*, for instance, the narrator gives an account of the disorderliness and untidiness of Moelelwa's home by describing her arrival home after a dance-party, unconcerned about the filth in the house, and also by giving details of her mother's arrival home from a drinking-bout. Then the narrator halts the description of MmaMoelelwa's condition of drunkenness to give vent to his feelings about women who use alcohol, commencing as follows:

Ge basadi ba segagešo ba sa lemoge gore bjalwa magareng a bona ke gona go senyega ga setšhaba le boitshwaro bja ka gae, le go phušuga ga thutothuto, yeo e lego motheo wa lapa, yeo e swanetšego go fiwa bana gore ba gole ka go bo boifa le go bo hlaswa, ge go se bjalo gona thuto ya tšwelopele magareng a rena e ka se ke ya ba ntshe ... Ka baka leo batswadi ba swanetše go hlokomela mesepelo ya bona, ka go dira bjalo ke gona ge ba phediša setšhaba sa ka moso. (1985:9).

(If the women of our culture do not realize that alcoholic drink among them means the destruction of the nation and family conduct, as well as demolishing real education, which is the foundation of a family, which should be offered to children to enable them to grow up fearing and abhorring it [alcoholic drink], otherwise the influence of civilization will not exist among us .... For that reason, parents should watch their own movements, and by so doing they ensure the survival of the future generation).

Towards the end of the digression it is no longer clear whether the preachment is a criticism against women, mothers who use intoxicating drink, or 'parents' whose behaviour before their children leaves much to be desired. Thus we see, in this excerpt, an example of narrators who, after succumbing to the temptation of an intrusion about values and beliefs, get carried away and widen the scope of their preachment to include even objects that are not dramatized in the narrative text.

Such philosophizing often presents special difficulties to some narrators, leading them, as we have pointed out, to practices that justify literary critics' attack on commentary. It is because of such uncontrolled commentary that critics have been

convinced that "objective" or "impersonal" or dramatic modes of narration are naturally superior to any mode that allows for direct appearances by the narrator (Booth, 1967:8).

Nevertheless, in some Northern Sotho novels we still encounter narrators who use the mood-setting commentary, especially philosophizing, and use it well. The narrative of *Megokgo ya Bjoko*, for instance, opens with the following deep philosophizing comment that properly sets our mood for the intricacies that characterize the entire narrative:

> *Re llela go phela, re llišwa ke go phela; re llela go phala ba bangwe, re llišwa ke go phalwa ke ba bangwe; re llela tšwelopele, re llišwa ke tšwelopele, ka ge nnete gona bophelo e le peapeano yeo go yona mang le mang a ratago go ba tšhia ya letšatši le lengwe le le lengwe. Re llela go buša, re llišwa ke go bušwa; re llela go huma, re llišwa ke bodiidi, gobane nnete gona se se kaone se ka ganwa ke wa kgopolo ya mohuta mang?* (1969:1; 31; 45; 58).
>
> (We yearn to live, we complain about living; we yearn to be better than others, we complain that others are better than we; we yearn for progress, we complain about progress, for indeed life is a race in which everyone would like to be a winner of every day. We yearn to rule, we complain about being governed; we yearn to be rich, we complain about poverty, for indeed, of what thinking will he be who declines something better?)

The narrator philosophizes about the natural desire of man, not only to **live**, but to lead a **better** life than others, to be **more** progressive than others, to be revered **more** than others, to be **more** powerful than others, and, not only to combat poverty, but to be **wealthier** than others. The narrator's intrusion right at the opening of the narrative already implicitly outlines the source of conflict in the first narrative.

To show that the intrusion is not inadvertent but deliberate, the narrator conjures up the same commentary, verbatim, each time he narrates an event that verifies this philosophy. For instance, on the occasion of the death of Lefehlo's father, a king revered by all the neighbouring kings, all the neighbouring kings come to pay their last tribute to him, except Nthumule. All of them observe a period of mourning by suspending initiation schools, prohibiting feasts and the tilling of their lands, and so forth, except Nthumule; indeed Nthumule makes sure that all that is regarded as taboo during the mourning of a king's death is done - and very conspicuously too - among his subjects. At this point the narrator brings up the commentary (1969:31) as if to refresh the narratee's memory.

The same commentary is used again (1969:45) to digress in the narrative of the event in which the supremacy of Lefehlo's medicinemen over Nthumule's is demonstrated by a flight of pied crows that pick up all the divining bones of the latter and fly away (1969:44). Again, when the two kings prepare for battle the narrator digresses with the same philosophizing commentary (1969:58), to remind us that life is one long struggle for power. In fact, the entire narrative is characterized by dichotomies of goodness and evil, strength and weakness, friendship and enmity; and the various binary oppositions are mediated by the arrival of the Voortrekkers on the scene towards the close of the narrative.

Just as the narrative opens with a philosophizing commentary to set our mood for the coming contraries, it also closes with another, to assert that the binary oppositions have been mediated to a resolution, thus:

> ... *mme go ratega bjang ge bana ba motho ba dutše gammogo mme ba ratana etšwe pele ba be ba melelane meno a ka godimo?* (1969:103).
>
> (... and how lovely is it when the children of man live together and love one another even though previously they had turned against one another?)

This closing philosophizing leaves us with no doubt that the initial mood-setting commentary was not in any way inadvertent but deliberate, and had a direct bearing on the object of narration.

There is another type of digression that characterizes the Northern Sotho narrative worth mention, and this consists mainly of incorporation of traditional folklore forms - such as proverbs, myths, praise poetry and quotations from primary oral sources - into the narrative. In these digressions the narrator himself does not directly reveal his own feelings, ideas, values or comments, but lets a traditional form express them in his stead (Başgöz, 1986:8). The following examples illustrate the use of proverbs in such digressions.

Introducing the main character in *Maroba*, the narrator intrudes to explain that traditionally people were given names from what they did, although other names often came from their grandfathers' or their fathers' praises. To give this traditional exposition more substance, and to make the commentary more reliable, the narrator incorporates a proverb, thus:

Moswana o re: "Leina ga le rengwe sehlareng" (1964:3).

(The old people say, "A name is not chopped off a tree").

Similarly in *Molato Mpeng*, the description of the morning's activities in the village as well as at the fields includes the farmers' preoccupation with the birds that feed on the strewn seed; and mention of these birds tempts the narrator to quote from the Bible, thus:

O be a di bone mogologolo wa bogologolo Pukung ye Kgethwa bogologolo: "Bonang, ga di leme, ga di bjale; eupša di a phela" (1976:21).

(The ancestor of ancient times had observed them in the Holy Book of olden times: "Behold, they plough not, they sow not; yet they live").

This biblical quotation is used in this text as a proverb is usually used, as can be seen in the manner in which it is introduced.

It is remarkable that most of these proverbs are introduced in the digressions by means of the phrase, "*moswana o re*"; "*mogologolo o re*" (commonly meaning "the old people, the ancestors, say"). This can be regarded as the narrator's indirect manifestation of self. In these contexts, the narrator is not the creator of this folklore form, as its message and form have been handed down by the tradition (as is evidenced by the reference to *moswana* or *mogologolo*); but of significance is the fact that he is the selector. He selects and links the traditional lore to the first narrative and assigns it a specific function.

In *Tsakata*, for instance, the narrator sets our mood for the narrative of the extra-marital affair between Tsakata and Flora, which leads to Tsakata's assault by Flora's suspicious husband, with the following digression:

> *Baswana ba rerešitše ge ba re go boletše Hobeane a Hodi a Hororo a re:* **'Ngwaga hloka-seema le ntshware le mpolaye, ema sa ngwaga e be nna. Le tle le šale le re: Ka ngwaga ola ra go bolaya Hobeane".** *Ngwaga o mongwe le o mongwe o tšweletša taba goba madireng a mafsa motseng o mongwe le o mongwe.* (1981:15).
>
> (The old people spoke the truth when they said it was Hobeane the son of Hodi the son of Hororo [mythological ancestors of the Northern Sotho] who spoke and said, "**If one year passes without an occurrence, you should catch me and kill me, and let me be the event of the year. Then you will remain saying: In that year when we killed Hobeane".** Each year brings forth some new incident or news in every village).

The digression is introduced by means of the folklore form which is ascribed to a mythological ancestor. The narrator has selected this folklore form and linked it to the main narrative with a special function in mind. The proverb is used in this particular text to set our mood for the event that is to follow. As the proverb makes explicit reference to a violent act (the killing of Hobeane), through it our mood is aptly set for the violence which forms part of the event that is about to be narrated (the assault of Tsakata). Through this proverb the narrator addresses our mood and feeling directly, immediately, attempting to put us into a frame of mind before this particular narrative begins. It is as if the narrator is saying to us, "Get ready for

some kind of violence ... ". Thus, through the intrusion, the narrator heightens the intensity with which we experience this particular moment in the narrative, and moulds our judgement on one scale of values or another.

In conclusion, we note that digressions in general are about something clearly dramatized in the main narrative. In a digression the narrator tries to make clear to the narratee the nature of the focalized object itself, by giving the narratee the hard facts, by establishing a world of norms, or by relating the **fabula** in the narrative to general truths. Through digressions, the narrator explains the meaning of a motif or episode and expresses his emphasis, understanding, and personal interpretation, either directly or indirectly. We note further that in the digressions the narrator addresses the narrattee directly, changing the third-person narration into the first, as it were. During the narration of the first narrative the father, religious or traditional man, remains silent; however, internal or external stimuli, from time to time, activate these other selves and let them come to the fore, thus interrupting the narration. When this happens, the narrating agency becomes silent and the fabula comes to a standstill. The narrating agency 'transfers the message of the story into a different channel, a different level of communication ... (which) ... becomes a personal channel where the narrator talks from and about himself' (Basgoz, 1986:7).

5.4 Narrated

The discussion thus far might suggest that there is as much "telling" as there is "showing" in most of the Northern Sotho novels. One might venture to say that a considerable balance is struck between what is related and what is represented directly in dramatic representations and in the presentation of the thoughts of a character. Although the narrators frequently speak directly and authoritatively to

us even where one would expect them to maintain a certain silence, leaving their characters to work out their destinies or tell their own stories, they still employ - each in his own way - certain dramatic devices, which become characteristic of their style, to present the narrative object. We shall examine some of these devices separately.

5.4.1 *Fantasy*

Fantasy is the nonrealistic story, that is, one that transcends the bounds of known reality. Such a story conjures up a strange and marvelous world in the mind of the narratee; it introduces strange powers and occult forces into the world of ordinary reality. It introduces human characters into a strange and marvelous world where the ordinary laws of nature are suspended, where the landscape and its creatures are unfamiliar, or where familiar creatures perform unfamiliar acts. Such fantasy is commonly associated with primary oral narratives, especially folktales.

In fact, the *nonwane* is a story of fantasy. Its opening formula, *"E rile e le nonwane..."* ("There was a tale ..."), serves to set the mood for the start of the fantastic event, to prepare the audience for adventures, to warn the audience that what follows is fiction and does not call for their belief. The opening formula serves as

> The introduction of the audience to the world of fantasy characteristic of folktales, a world with its own logic, its own laws, and its own reality different from that of everyday life. It introduces them to a world where the unexpected and the magical are commonplace, a

> world where the strong are overcome by the weak, a world where the human being, the animals and other natural objects are unified. (Makgamatha, 1987:67).

Thus in "Kgolomodumo" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:61-63) the audience are prepared for willing suspension of disbelief in the narrative of a single huge animal that swallows all the people of a village, save one old woman, together with all their cattle, sheep and goats. The old woman who survives is instructed by a bird to get into a calabash, and whenever the monster swallows the calabash, the calabash returns through the rear of the monster until the monster abandons it. The same bird gives the old woman three eggs and a small stick with which she must strike them after three days, to bring forth a boy and two dogs. With the help of his dogs, the boy tracks down and kills the monster, thus releasing all the people and animals from its stomach.

Similarly, the reality in "Ngwana Mmopša ka Diatla" [The Hand-made child], (*Keleketla*, 1990b:64-66), and "Letsike" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:63-64), is completely different from that of everyday life, for the children are not born of women in the natural way but made from clay. When the Interdiction in the tale is violated, the boys are caught in the rain, become wet and dissolve into nothingness. Similarly in "Dithupana tša Mogaba" [Sticks of a Sweet-bark Tree], (*Maitišong*, 1990a:68-70), the barren Manare is given three little sticks of a sweet-bark tree which later turn into three baby-girls. They also pass into nothingness when Manare violates the Interdiction in the tale.

The fantasy deepens even more in "Ngwana wa Kutu ya Morula" [Child of the Morula Tree-trunk], (*Keleketla*, 1990b:67-70), when a boy, Masilo, eats a nut in Violation of an Interdiction and later tries to urinate, only to "give birth" to a baby;

and in "Bana ba Magotlo le Magokubu" [Mouse- and Crow-children], (*Keleketla*, 1990b:71-75) and (*Maitišong*, 1990a:65-67) a man instructs his three wives to remain giving birth to mice and pied crows while he is gone visiting. Indeed two of them give birth to mice and pied crows, while the third earns herself her husband's wrath by giving birth to a human baby.

The world of fantasy depicted in folktales is characterized by transformations of characters. In "Mogatša Noga" [Wife of a Snake] and "Morwa Malope" [Malope's Son], (*Keleketla*, 1990b:85-90, and 122-127 respectively), the main character who interacts with the girls is transformed into a snake. In the first tale, the two sisters who set out in quest of wealth first encounter their would-be husband in the form of a fearful snake. After the Solution of the Difficult Task by the first girl - the younger sister - the fearful snake is transformed into a handsome husband for her, who gives her the wealth she had set out to find. In the second tale, the girls are persistently troubled by a man who sleeps with them in their communal hut, claiming he is the son of Malope, the king, until they persuade the entire village to move. However, one of the girls refuses to move with her parents and eventually succeeds in killing the man (who is later transformed into a snake) by planting razor blades in the ground.

In "Sewela le Korintsane" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:43-47) Sewela refuses to marry her cousin because she is in love with a snake that lives in the cave. When her father discovers her secret relationship with the snake, he chops it into small pieces, thus releasing Sewela from its spell. In the logic of folktales we can assume that the act of killing the snake (which leads to Sewela's consent to marry her cousin) prevents the snake's transformation into a man who would marry her instead of her cousin.

In the folktale world of fantasy the unification of human beings, animals and other natural objects is commonplace, for human characters easily infiltrate the animal world, acting like the animals and speaking their language, as in "Tau ya Moroko Dimpeng" [The Lion with a Seam along the Stomach], (*Keleketla*, 1990b:34-38). Similarly the animals, with or without transformations, have the ability to conceal their animal characteristics, re-enter the human world and interact successfully with human characters, as in "Moselapše" and "O Jele Ngwana a re ke Mmutla" [She Ate her Baby Thinking it was a Hare], (*Keleketla*, 1990b:48-55 and 56-60 respectively). In fact, in the reality of the folktale world of fantasy, even if the animals retain the characteristics of their species, they 'think and act like human beings in a human setting' (Makgamatha, 1987:44).

In the written narrative, fantasy, like other elements of fiction, is often employed sheerly for its own sake or to communicate an important insight, such as the temporal or spatial setting of the narrative. An element of fantasy may be employed in a narrative simply for its own strangeness, for thrills, for surprise, or to illuminate the normal world of our experience. As in the primary oral narrative, we approach the written narrative with willing suspension of disbelief, for we understand that the narrator begins by saying "Let us suppose ....", as it were.

The entire narrative of *Kgamphuphu*, from beginning to end, is characterized by the fantastic. Several sections of the novel may create for the reader the impression that he is dealing with a folktale, especially when the popular oral narrative of "Tšelane and the Ogre" is embedded in the first narrative (1984:10-14). Although we cannot say without doubt whether this nonrealistic narrative has been embedded in the first narrative simply for its strangeness and thus to appeal to the reader's

taste for the strange, or to provide an unusual setting for the observation of the human characters in the first narrative, we do find some of its elements of fantasy relating artistically to the first narrative.

For instance, when the villagers cannot take any more of the witchcraft of Dimo's mother, they kill and cook her, and later feed her flesh to the drunk Dimo. Thereafter, when Dimo is shown her head staked on the fence, his reaction is described thus:

> *A tlalwa ke pelo a hlakana hlogo ... a tšama a itlhoba meriri a tšintše a tsetla a namela thaba. Šolee a tšama a ithaga a sobelela a eya ga Moroka-ditšhomila kua ga Mpšanatšikidiki.* (1984:11-12).
>
> (He was filled with fury and became mad ... he walked and pulled at his hair, showing his teeth [like a vicious dog] and groaning as he ascended the mountain. There he went, walking and kicking himself as he disappeared towards the place of Moroka-ditšhomila at Mpšanatšikidiki).

This event artistically foreshadows the murder of Tšelane and the staking of her head at the royal homestead of Mmabzi. In the embedded narrative the sight of the murdered woman's head on a stake fills Dimo, a relative, with fury and derangement, whereas in the first narrative it fills the relative (Kgamphuphu) with vindictive fury and brings the murderer (Mamadikwane) insanity to the extent that he grazes like a cow, burns people's huts, kills their children, chases their women, and even feeds on the people's excrement (1984:59).

Similarly, dream fantasy is employed in the episode were Tlapalathunya and other men prepare to set forth the following morning to the diamond-fields (1984:16-17). Tlapalathunya dreams that a spear is hanging over him and a strange young man is trying to wake him up. He also sees some fire brands illuminating him. Many years later, on the night of Tšelane's murder, Tlapalathunya, who arrives at home to find no-one, dozes off while he is waiting, and is later aroused by Kgamphuphu, a young man he is seeing for the first time. That same night the two are surrounded by men armed with spears, and Tlapalathunya is killed in the ensuing struggle. The fire brands in the dream foreshadow the burning down of Tlapalathunya's huts in the same attack (1984:64-67).

In the same dream Tlapalathunya sees a dog, without a head, dancing on its tail, and this alludes to the murder and decapitation of Tšelane many years later (1984:59). Finally, he sees a leopard-skin passing before his eyes. As the leopard-skin is a cultural symbol of kingship, this vision already prepares us psychologically for Kgamphuphu's enthronement towards the close of the narrative (1984:83).

When the cries of the animals encountered by the characters in this narrative are interpreted as human speech, the reader may be misled into thinking that the narrator is simply indulging in onomatopoeia. For example, when the elegantly dressed Tšelane walks gracefully to the king's village after being summoned by Mmabzi, she passes a pig which squints at her and says "*mmmmm!*" with suspicion; she also passes a cock which crows, "*Ke yoo, ke yoooo*!". ["there she is, there she is!"] (1984:57). Similarly when Kgamphuphu ascends the mountain the day he kills a leopard, the big male baboon chases the young ones away with the cry, "*Motho! Motho o n'e mpšanyana*!". ("Man! Man is with a pup!") (1984:42); and on the night Tlapalathunya and Kgamphuphu are attacked, the latter manages to flee and hears

their pig crying as the attackers kill it, "*Ga se nna! Ga se nna!* ... *Aš, aš! Ga se nna, ga se nnaaaa*!" ("It was not me! It was not me! ... *Aš, aš*! It was not me, it was not mmeeee!" (1984:68).

However, when the narrator engages the fleeing Kgamphuphu in a dialogue with a baboon in a cave, arguing about its animal or human nature (1984:71), the reader will realize that the technique of the talking animals was not in any way inadvertent, but deliberate. In this particular event, the narrator deliberately takes us into the fantastic world of folklore when the baboon leaves Kgamphuphu in the cave, only to return a while later with wild fruit to provide the latter with nourishment. The significance of the event for the fugitive Kgamphuphu is that when no more help can be got from fellow-man, Nature will provide.

We do not encounter such a well defined use of fantasy in many novels. In most cases the fantasy that is employed usually accompanies the magical powers of the traditional medicinemen. For instance, after the disappearance of Leilane from King Nthumule's in *Megokgo ya Bjoko*, all the medicinemen are assembled to divine his whereabouts (1969:43-44). While they are examining the manner in which their thrown divining bones have fallen, there appears from the east a cloud followed by a shooting star in broad daylight. While the cloud is hovering over their heads, there appears a flight of pied crows from nowhere, which swallow all their divining bones before flying away to the west, following the cloud.

This miracle is apparently the work of Phethedi, King Lefehlo's greatest medicineman. This is evidenced by Phethedi's actions on behalf of King Lefehlo in another episode where King Nthumule sends the latter a challenge to prove superiority. On this occasion Phethedi tells King Lefehlo to relax, as he has taken care of everything. Indeed, while all of King Nthumule's armies and medicinemen

are assembled to prepare for the onslaught the same flight of pied crows reappears and, this time, surrounds the crowd with the same divining bones they had swallowed before. This renders King Nthumule's men powerless and helpless to do anything when Phethedi comes to capture their King, accompanied by a group of dancing women (1969:87-89).

Such elements of fantasy help the narrator to create the desired temporal- spatial setting for the narrative. In this particular narrative, the story is set in a traditional African society, during the time when a king had to prove his paramountcy over the other kings by defeating them in battles. This society also upholds the belief in the magical powers of medicinemen, which the kings also depend on for their victory in battles.

5.4.2 *Humour and Satire*

We have noted earlier, during our examination of theme selection and treatment in the Northern Sotho novel, that the protest theme is usually handled tactfully in order to escape censorship. The attack on the European's colonization and oppression of the African is often enshrouded in humour and satire. James Ngugi has the following to say about satire:

> Satire takes, for its province, a whole society and for its purpose, criticism. The satirist sets himself certain standards and criticizes society when and where it departs from these norms. He invites us to assume his standards and share the moral indignation which moves him to pour derision and ridicule on society's failings. He corrects through painful, sometimes malicious laughter (1969:56).

In *Megokgo ya Bjoko*, for instance, the narrator can be seen in a traditional and social setting, pouring 'derision and ridicule' on society's total belief in traditional medicinemen and ancestor worship. He gives an account of a medicineman who is called to attend to a woman suffering from tuberculosis (1969:36-41). Displaying all confidence, he instructs the family of the patient to slaughter a goat, so that he can wrap its skin around the patient, claiming that the skin will drain the sickness out of the patient. When his patient does not become well despite the concoction of medicines he makes her to lick up, he still calls for the slaughtering of a cow so that its fresh dung can be smeared on the floor of the patient's hut. Still the sickness becomes worse, and culminates in the patient's death.

In the same narrative, one of the patient's relatives claims that she had a vision the previous night, in which their ancestors gave her instructions in connection with the patient's cure (1969:38-40): They must go to the patient's uncle, Rathinyane, and ask him to slaughter a cow, so that the patient may be smeared with its fresh dung. Rathinyane's insolent retort clearly ridicules the logic of the message, for he says:

> *Le tla nkwa banabešu, ditaba tše di a mmakatša. Go mmakatša ga tšona ke gore batswadi ba ka ge ba hlokofala - le kgomo e tee ga se ba ntlogelela yona ka gore ka moka le a tseba gore di ile tša ya kae, gomme ke makala gore kgomo yeo mme a e bolelago - o ra ye nna ke tšwago go e tšea kae*" (1969:38).
>
> ("You will hear me, my people, these matters astonish me. My astonishment is caused by the fact that when my parents died - they left me not even a single cow, for you all know what happened to them [the cattle], therefore I wonder at the cow that my mother is referring to - where does she think I got that one from?").

Thus, according to Rathinyane, it does not make sense that his late mother can expect him to have any cow to slaughter, when she knows (or is supposed to know?) that when she died she had left him none. In his own voice, the narrator queries the logic of the message in this account thus: How can the ancestors demand a cow when they left none behind at the time of their death? How can the ancestors suddenly show concern in their daughter-in-law's health, when they never saw eye to eye during their lifetime? If they know where to find whatever is needed urgently, why do the ancestors take their message to someone else far away? It is clear that those who claim the ancestors sent them to Rathinyane are merely jealous of his cattle, and seek to find a way to reduce their number (1969:39).

As far as traditional medicinemen are concerned, in this novel, the narrator seems to have no problem. Even though he gives humorous accounts of their queer methods of healing their patients, they are, naturally, sometimes successful and sometimes unsuccessful. For instance, Maphutha's son, who is known for his ability to redirect medicinal traps from his patients to the people who set them, successfully heals a sick woman by strapping a black cat on her back and then beating it with a stick. When the cat is beaten, it scratches and bites the patient who runs and unfastens the cat. Freed, the cat climbs into a tree and cries, trembling, before it drops dead. The patient becomes instantly well. Impressed by his success, the villagers bring him another patient with the same sickness. But this time, instead of climbing into a tree, the freed cat attacks and kills the medicineman (1969:50-56).

Even though the narrator often gives credit to the traditional medicinemen, he also pours derision and ridicule on society's indiscriminate belief in any stranger who claims to be a medicineman. As a result of such belief, some people enrich themselves at the expense of the unsuspecting public, like the couple who tell a man that a living being buried in his yard is depriving his family of peaceful sleep at

night (1969:61-65). After promising to uproot the evil the following morning, they retire with him, only to sneak out during the night and bury a living tortoise they had brought along in his cattle kraal. About such deception, the narrator says:

> *Go tseba mang le mang gore ga go se se re forago go swana le ditaola. Motho o tla a rwaleletše dithebele le ditaola, a re go fihla go wena a go botše ge e le motho yo a ka go fago lešwalo leo ka lona o tla bolayago mabele, lešaka la tlala dikgomo le dihuswane, etšwe yena a se natšo tšona tšeo.* (1969:61).
>
> (Everyone knows that nothing deceives us as easily as divining bones. A man comes carrying a bag of divining bones, and when he gets to you he tells you that he can give you a lucky-charm through which you will have a good harvest as well as fill your kraals with cattle and small stock, when he himself does not have any of these).

In such narratives we see the satirist narrator in his traditional social setting. Other narrators, on the other hand, look at contemporary South Africa. In those narratives we see the satirist narrators in their social as well as political setting. They reduce all conflicts to two polarities, where white is wealth, power and privilege, and black is poverty, labour and servitude.

In *Tlala ya Mohlopi*, for instance, although the characters are not individualized, they are satirical illustrations of stereotyped attitudes, and they are fairly lively too. The story is set in that phase of the socio-political development of the country when nationalist leaders are challenging colonial authority. It is set in the phase when the colonial rulers are trying to buy the co-operation of the tribal leaders.

Before the devastating famine the colonial government uses the familiar methods of forcing the various tribes to pay the various taxes, namely, early morning raids of the villages by the police. But this causes many men (who cannot afford to pay the taxes and levies) to join the rock-rabbits on the mountains at night. It is as though the colonial rulers wait until this devastating famine - which causes villagers to eat organisms they had never thought they could ever eat in their lives, giving them new names to make them less revolting to their ideas of morality: *diboko* (worms) become *dinoto*; *magotlo* (mice) are referred to as *ditweba*; *dikatse* (cats) are called *diphaga*; and *ditšhwene* (baboons) are given a more acceptable name, *"bopudi tša mawa"* - "the goats of the caves" (1969:53-54) - before they employ their tactics.

It is when the famine has assumed such proportions that the tribal leaders are called to the local Commissioner's office, presumably to address the plight of the people. The white government official who addresses the tribal leaders might have been selected because of his ability to speak Sepedi as well as tackle problems in an essentially African way. Yet he talks and acts like any white expatriate displaying an obvious attitude of white government supremacy and power when he says:

> *"Ke tšwa Tshwane ga boMmamelodi 'a ditsebe, ga boPoulo 'a Mabasa, yo ba reng mogale ga a hlahlele, o thuntšha fela, o thuntšha ka lefefera la mošidi"* (1969:60-61).
>
> ("I come from Pretoria, the home of the white people, the home of Paul of Mabasa, of whom they say that like a brave man he does not load his gun but shoots forthwith, his gun winnowing gunpowder").

The European characters in this narrative are conceived as hollow in their smug faith in the efficacy of white government 'generosity' and sympathetic approach to the famine afflicted tribes. Displaying the opportunism of his government, the official refers to the people's necessity of food and the government's necessity of taxes in the same breath as if the two are synonymous, thus:

> *"... Ke tlile fa, ke romilwe, gomme ke a holofela gore bjalo ka ge mokgoši wa lena o kwetše mo ke tšwago, e lego mokgoši wa diyamaleng, le lentšu la ka, e lego la bao ba nthomilego le tlo kwala go lena, gomme ra dirišana ka kwano.*
> *"Le a lla, le bolawa ke tlala, ... Bjalo, Komišinare ya lena, le yona e a lla, e re ga le lefe motšhelo... "* (1969:61).
>
> ("... I have been sent to come here, and I trust that just as your cry for help was heard where I come from, being a cry for food, my word too, being of those who sent me, will be heard by you, and we shall co-operate with understanding.
> "You are crying, you are suffering from hunger, ... Similarly, your Commissioner; he too is crying; he says you do not pay taxes ... ").

While this government official from Pretoria is still addressing the people, a policeman brings him a written message, which he passes on to the gathering: their Commissioner, realizing that the majority came from afar, has prepared them some food to eat, so that they do not stumble and fall from weakness as they return home (1969:65-66). The narrator satirically presents this action as an attempt by the Commissioner to buy the co-operation of the tribal leaders. Indeed, it is only after the men have finished eating that the Assistant Commissioner speaks to them directly for the first time, appealing to them (on behalf of their Commissioner) to

try and convince their people to understand the seriousness of the conditions. It is as though the white Commissioner believes that *polelo ye ba e kwišišago ke mogolo, gomme ditsebe tša bona ke mpa.* (1969:57) [the only language they understand is swallowing food, and for ears they have a stomach].

The shallowness and hollowness of the European characters' regard for the African characters is demonstrated in the immediate response of the tribal leaders after the gathering. Even after the men have been fed, their minds are still razor sharp. No sooner have they crossed the river than they come back to their senses, for one of them remarks:

> "... *Go ja gona re lle, eupša go bonala gore le ge taba ye e ka ba thušo e kgolo go batho ka moka, e na le molaba mola le mola. E reng ya hlakahlakanya botse le bokobo, dijo le dipasa, a re lekeng go e hlokomela*". (1969:70).
>
> ("... As for eating, we have eaten, but it is clear that even though this matter can be great help to all the people, it has a trap here and there. Why does it mix good with evil, food with reference books; let us try to beware of it").

The fact that they have to cross a river before they start airing their views on the government's message illustrates how much they want to distance themselves from the government officials. Despite all the sweet talk and kind gesture, the European is still regarded with suspicion.

As the average contemporary narrative in Northern Sotho seems to be looking at contemporary South Africa, at the rape of the African culture by the European culture, it is least surprising to find a narrator particularly incensed with the hypocrisy of religious (Christian) leaders, or of the Christian converts themselves. The narrator in *Ngwana wa Mobu* undoubtedly introduces the Christian church on the little mountain of Sentšhupe as a substitute for the sacred place of the gods - substitution of one religion by another (cf. 3.7 above).

The humorous description of the happenings inside this church during a "normal" Sunday service (1983:27-29) constitutes malicious laughter at the apparent acceptance of the Christian religion by the average African. For Mokhura and others like him the church is the right place for the assertion of their social status. The narrator humorously describes Mokhura's purposely belated entry into the church each Sunday as follows:

> *E tla re mola go feditšwe ditumišo tša tlhotlamadiba, a tsene mokgomana, a feleletše ka sutu ye ntsho ya go bitša, e sego ditšhabatšhaba tša majaja tše di aparwago ke boLahlang, o hwetšago sutu ya gona e thothomela o ka re motho wa gona o tsenwe ke motlhakgaselo. O tla re ge a putla mo gare ga phuthego a gopotše go yo itahlela madulong a gagwe kua pelelepe, wa hwetša mahlo a digotlane le a difofu a mo dumediša, mokgomana a taramolla maoto se nkego o tshela mekero, diatla di sobeletše ka dipotleng, di bile di kukile borokgo ka gonnyane gore dikaušo tša maswi le tšona di dumediše phuthego ...*
> (1983:27-28).

(Only when the introductory liturgy has been completed will the noble man enter, elegantly dressed in an expensive black suit, not the cheap garments which are worn by people like Lahlang, where you find the suit trembling as if the person wearing it is in a shivering fit. As he walks through the centre of the congregation and prepares to drop himself in his seat right in front, you will find the eyes of the youngsters and of the blind greeting him, while the noble man stretches his legs as if he is jumping over ditches, his hands deep in his pockets and even lifting the trousers a little to allow the white socks to greet the congregation too ...).

Thus Mokhura deliberately enters the church late to avoid being crowded out by the youngsters and the aged - *pataganapatagana le boradimpana le bohlogoputswa* (1983:27). For him the church service might as well become a fashion parade. The motive behind his coming to the church is clearly to show off his well-fed body and his expensive clothes, as well as his money during Sunday offering time, rather than to have spiritual nourishment, for, the satirist continues (1983:28) *Ge e le lebakeng la thero lona ... sebata se ile ka boroko* (As for the duration of the sermon .... the great one is fast asleep).

Mokhura's inattentive stance during Evangelist Mohlala's sermon is not an isolated case. Phankga, as can be expected of other young men like him, is not fast asleep like his uncle, but engrossed in daydreams about his uncle's suit and the prospect of buying himself an elegant suit at the end of the month to impress the congregation on Sundays (1983:29). He also spends most of the sermon time feasting his eyes on the women in the congregation. In the words of the narrator,

o gahlana le mahlo a Phankga ao a takataketšago - gagolo ka mo lehlakoreng la basadi - o ka re ke monna a lekola dikgomo ka šakeng (1983:28).

(you meet Phankga's eyes which are squinting through - especially at the side of the women - like a man who is surveying cattle in a kraal).

Whenever his mind wanders back to Evangelist Mohlala's sermon, he wonders impatiently when the sermon will be brought to an end so that the congregation can admire him conducting his choir, thus:

'Na o tla fetša neng mokgalabje yo re sa kwego le gore o reng?' (1983:29).

('When will this old man, whose sermon we cannot even follow, ever finish?').

Like his uncle, he has not come to the church for any spiritual nourishment but to be admired by other members of the congregation. Mokhura is not the only member of the congregation who is sleeping through the sermon:

"... Mosadi wa Lahlang yena o kae? O gona, fela šole! O tanya dihlapi. Bošušununu bjo bja gagwe bo mo dirile serokoroko". (1983:29).

("... As for Lahlang's wife, where is she? She is present; but there she is! She is slumbering. This obesity of hers has turned her into one who falls asleep very easily).

Satirically speaking, it is not necessarily her obesity that makes her sleep through the sermon. Sleeping while one is being addressed is sufficient evidence of lack of concentration, which, in turn, suggests lack of interest in what is being said.

It is significant to note that the narrator punctuates the description of all these happenings with the satirical expression, *Thero yona e tšwela pele* (1983:28; 29). [As for the sermon, it is going on]. Not only are the members of the congregation inattentive to what the sermon is all about, but the preacher is also not bothered about Mokhura who moves up and down the church punishing the little children who make noise, or about Phankga who is daydreaming: *Thero yona e tšwela pele*. Thus, for the majority of the people present in the church, the church service has no religious role to play, but merely provides an opportunity for a social gathering - the satirist's malicious laughter at the failure of the Christian religion which is being imposed by the colonialists on a traditional society.

5.5 Résumé

Although the narrator in the primary oral narrative has his representation of events limited by the nature of the narrative to the actions and events that can be seen or heard, his counterpart in the written narrative is able to take the reader wherever he wishes, often peering inside the minds and hearts of the characters to reveal what they are thinking or feeling. A considerable balance is struck, however, between the narrator's "telling" and "showing", for he does not become fully dramatized by referring to himself as "I" in the narrative, notwithstanding the fact that sometimes he is dramatized so subtly that an unobservant reader hardly notices. Of great interest is the fact that the narrator in the written narrative often hands over the narration of events handling controversial matters to tertiary narrators who participate in the **fabula** as actors, and thus assumes a position of neutrality while he

allows the characters to speak for him. However, certain internal or external stimuli often activate this narrator's other selves to come to the fore and reveal his own feelings related to the events being recounted, by means of digressions.

When it becomes necessary, the narrator often uses devices such as fantasy, humour and satire to conceal his "telling" in the narrative. Besides these stylistic devices discussed above, other symbols are employed in the narrative, both oral and written, which have cultural significance. The relationship between these symbols and the Northern Sotho culture will be examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI

SYMBOLISM AND CULTURE IN THE NARRATIVE

6.1 Introduction

The majority of the aspects of the narrative discussed in the previous chapters, such as thematic selection and treatment, character, and narratology, are couched in the symbolism and culture of the community from which the narrative comes. In this chapter an attempt will be made to examine the relationship between symbolism and culture in the Northern Sotho narrative, from oral to written. But first, it is necessary to outline the meanings of the two terms, symbolism and culture, for purposes of this study.

Any system of **literary symbolism** will usually depend on the existence of a commonly known body of ideas or beliefs within a given community. In the written narrative, a fabric of symbolism may enable the novelist to create a moral and intellectual framework for the action of his novel. Through symbolism the novelist is able to link the limited world of his characters to one, any one, of the universal systems of values, in such a way that the readers are made to compare the events in the novel with their mythological or historical parallels. Thus a specific action in an action episode or in the story itself may illustrate a general pattern of behaviour through the use of a **symbol** (Raban, 1968:101).

There are many kinds of symbols which are found often where art is found, for symbols are a part of art. Some symbols are represented by animals, certain plants, natural phenomena, certain colours, and so forth. Symbols and what they stand for may vary among peoples, for each people has its own symbols whose meanings are

generally known to almost everyone, notwithstanding the fact that there are those symbols which can only be interpreted by a few individuals, such as the symbols used in initiation and in divination.

The literary symbol, which has the proper function of animating the mind by opening out for it a prospect into a field of kindred representations stretching beyond its ken, also reveals the order that lies behind our deceptive everyday reality (Fowler, 1987:240). It is very aptly defined by Abraham Kriel as follows:

> When any human being desires to convey his private experience to another, the best method would obviously be to subject him to the same circumstances. Since this is usually impossible, the speaker has to avail himself of substitutes for the ingredients of the original experience. Such a substitute, which should have the quality of evoking the same reaction as the original ingredient at least partly, is called a symbol. (1971:3).

Culture in this study, on the other hand, will be taken in its broadest sense as a way of life fashioned by a people in their collective endeavour to live and come to terms with their total environment (Ngugi, 1972:4). Culture here will encompass a people's art, their science and all their social institutions, as well as their system of beliefs and rituals. Just as each people has its own symbols, so also every people has a culture, and this culture is continuously changing, whether slowly or rapidly, as a result of its contiguity to other cultures.

John S. Mbiti offers the following definition of culture:

> The word culture covers many things, such as the way people live, behave and act, and their physical as well as their intellectual achievements. Culture shows itself in art and literature, dance, music and drama, in the styles of building houses and people's clothing, in social organization and political systems, in religion, ethics, morals and philosophy, in the customs and institutions of the people, in their values and laws, and in their economic life (1975a:7).

In this study we shall attempt to show how culture dominates certain aspects of reality in the oral and written narrative, both as formal and contextual concerns, and what symbols are used to help us discover the identity of the social group by determining what the people value and how they hope to attain it, for values and strategies reveal identity. In doing so, we cannot simply isolate one aspect of the narrative, say of the folk narrative, for, as Simon Gikandi puts it, myth can be an expression of collective dreams, aesthetic play, or even ritual.

> [Myth] can be the medium through which a community expresses its deepest shared values or expressed feelings: it can be a mode of insight into phenomena, but it can also be 'false consciousness' which deludes people about their real interests (1987:150).

6.2 Cultural Values and Strategies

Among the values shared by the African community in general, and the Northern Sotho community in particular, as is revealed in the narrative, both oral and written, **security** appears to occupy a dominant position.

6.2.1 *Security*

This value is served by the varied ways in which the knavish tricks of the scum of society are frustrated, and the meticulous care that is taken not to upset the equilibrium of vital forces by misuse of power (Kriel, 1989:195). For this reason, children are taught 'to be like others', and not necessarily to outdo them, for excess of any kind - physical strength, mental ability, and magical power - is deprecated. Excess in human relations is compared with excess heat in the cosmic order, which is likely to bring disorder and disaster (Krige & Krige, 1954:76).

The story about "The Lion's Share", which is popular in many African communities, will serve as a good example here. In the Northern Sotho version, namely the tale of "Mabutle le Tau" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:1-5), Lion does not only symbolize established authority of tradition, but also a fierce monarch who strikes terror in the hearts of the lesser beings or his subjects. This is evidenced by the narrator's explanation that *Mabutle o be a boifa Tau ka lebaka la bogolo bja gagwe* (1990b:1) "Hare feared Lion because of his greatness".

This fear for Lion is again illustrated by the baboons who are terrorized by Hare in the lion's skin after the latter has tricked and killed Lion. He finds the baboons brewing beer and commands them to dip their hands in the cooking (hot) brew thus:

> *Mabutle a re: "Tlobunyang!"*
> *Ditšhwene tša re: "Go a fiša"*
> *Mabutle a re: "Tlobunyang le itatswe ka pela! Tlobunyang!"*
> *Tša tlobunya!*
> *"Inakatsweng!"*
> *Tša itatswa.* (1990b:4).

(Hare said, "Dip them in!"

The baboons said, "It is hot".

Hare said, "Dip them in and lick them quickly! Dip them in!"

They dipped their hands in!

"Lick them!"

They licked their hands).

The fierceness of Lion is an excess which cannot be tolerated in society, for it enables him to make other members of the society live in terror and to 'gobble up the food' while the weaker members of society 'have to lick (scrape) the plates' (Ohly, 1986:120). When society finds itself at a disadvantage because of members with excess attributes, such as Lion, a plan, a strategy, has to be devised to escape it or to restore the equilibrium. In this particular tale, Hare helps Lion to catch and kill other animals, tricks the latter into climbing onto the roof of the hut they are laying laths on, and secures his tail on a pole whence he hangs and watches helplessly as Hare helps himself to the fattest pieces of meat from the cooking pots.

The story is obviously based on the assumption of equality among members of the community as a result of partnership in combined efforts. This specific equality of rights is bound to fail in a society where some are 'more equal' than others, where the social system is dominated by **de facto** dictatorship (*op.cit.*) - hence trickery as a strategy appears to be justified.

Similarly in "Mokhudu le Lehodu la Maloko" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:6-10) and "Mokhudu le Motlou" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:11-14) it appears that it is all the animals who ill-treat Tortoise and refuse to allow him to partake of the fruit from the 'big royal branch'. However, when Tortoise has succeeded in freeing himself during the night and

violating the Interdiction by eating all the fruit of the royal branch, he dumps the peels and pips next to Elephant (or stuffs them into his anus), thus implicating the latter and causing him to be killed.

Taking Tortoise's unsightly small appearance and apparent vulnerability into account and comparing it with Elephant's dominantly massive body, we do not have to look far for the reason why the latter is chosen for punishment for Tortoise's ill-treatment - he represents an excess in society which must be eliminated. His huge body is associated with eating more than others or depriving others of food, hence Tortoise's gloating song after Elephant has been killed:

> *Ka bolaišabolaiša Motlou,*
> *Ka re Motlou a bolawe,*
> *Re šale re eja bele* (1990b:9).
>
> (I caused Elephant to be killed,
> I said Elephant should be killed,
> So that we may remain eating grain).

It is interesting to note that even Hare's ability to run faster than other animals is regarded as an unwelcome excess in society. In this case, too, a strategy has to be devised by the slower animals to restore the equilibrium, and for Tortoise in "Mmutla le Khudu" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:21-27), the best strategy is simply procreation. Thus when Hare challenges Tortoise to a race, the narrator puts Tortoise's acceptance of the challenge as follows:

> *Khudu yena o be a tseba gore a ka se šie Mmutla ka lebelo. Fela Khudu a rera go loga maano a go fenya.* (1990b:21).

(As for Tortoise, he knew that he could not outrun Hare in a race. However, Tortoise decided to device a plan to win).

This, Tortoise achieves by placing his many children - whose appearances are identical to his - along the route of the race to deceive Hare that he is always ahead. This does not only signify the importance of procreation, but also serves as a warning to the frustrated Hare to modify his speed and not run faster than others.

According to John S Mbiti, it is African Religion, which is not only part of the cultural heritage, but by far the richest part of the African heritage, that gives members of the African community a sense of security in life, for it is within their religion's way of life that they know who they are, how to act in different situations, and how to solve their problems (1975a:13). In the same work, Mbiti maintains that religion has dominated the thinking of African peoples to such an extent that it has shaped their cultures, social life, political organizations and economic activities.

For the simple reason that it provides for them 'answers' and 'direction in life', people always display a certain amount of reluctance to abandon African Religion quickly, lest they feel insecure afterwards. However, they may leave it with the passage of time, even if partially, or incorporate aspects of another religion (usually the Christian religion) in their religion, especially if this new religion gives them an additional or greater sense of security.

However, the Northern Sotho novelists appear to be avoiding the handling of this aspect of social life in reasonable detail, thus leaving their readers to their own assumptions based on the least reference that is occasionally made to it.

For instance, when the narrator in *Ngwana wa Mobu* makes reference in passing to *Batau ba mathomo ba ba go aga moo* (1983:25) "the first Batau tribe that settled there", and the fact that they decided, after divination, that the little mountain (Sentšhupe) should be regarded as the sacred dwelling of the ancestral spirits - *ba bile ba di tšholla, ba fetša ka go re ke thabana ya badimo.* (1983:25) - the reader feels deprived of the necessary detail of the religious life that was led there before the advent of Christianity. Instead, what follows is the elaborate detail of the half-hearted participation of the community in the Christian worship (See 5.4.2. above). Thus the reader is denied the picture of the tribal set-up and the frame-work of social norms and values by which the Batau of Makgwareng had formerly ordered their lives and their relationship to the ancestors as well as to the other members of the community.

As a result we can only assume that this community abandoned their African Religion for the Christian one when they began to question the sense of security that the former religion gave them in their new social life that was obviously influenced by European or Western culture. The narrator in *Megokgo ya Bjoko* describes this questioning in greater detail as follows:

> *O nkgopela selo seo o tsebago gabotse gore ga ke naso, goba o nkgopela go go direla selo se o tsebago gabotse gore se a mpalela, ka lebaka la eng? O tšea pudi ye o tšwago go e reka, o re o yo rapela badimo beno gore ba go fe mahlatse le mahlogonolo gore se sengwe le se sengwe se o se swarago se go lokele, fela o ba kgopela dilo tšeo o tsebago gabotsebotse gore ga se nke ba eba natšo, ka gore ge nka be go se bjalo - pudi yeo nka be e etšwa ka lešakeng leno, leo e bego e le la bona. Gona fao o ilego go kgopela mahlatse le mahlogonolo, o bile o bolela gore re*

feng pula re tšhungwa ke letšatši, etšwe o tseba gabotse gore motho yoo ga se nke a tseba go e neša, ka go realo o kgopela se se sa kgonegego. (1969:78).

(You ask me for something you know well I do not have, or you ask me to do something for you knowing well that I cannot do it, for what reason? You take a goat that you have bought and say you are going to sacrifice it to your ancestral spirits that they may bring you good luck and blessings so that you should succeed in everything you do, but you are asking them for things you know very well they never possessed, for, were it not so - that goat would be coming from your own kraal, which was also theirs during their lifetime. At that same place where you have gone to pray for good luck and blessings, you even say they should bring us rain for we are scorched by the sun, while you know well that that person never knew how to make rain, as such you are asking for something impossible).

Even if the Batau of Makgwareng in *Ngwana wa Mobu* may have found a new sense of security in the Christian religion after questioning their African Religion, it is remarkable to observe that they do not totally abandon the latter religion, as it is hinted in the narrator's description of the Christian church erected on the sacred little mountain of the ancestral spirits, which is concluded with the following words: *Modimo gare ga badimo* (1983:25). "God amidst the gods".

6.2.2 *Food*

Next to security, the Northern Sotho narrative shows another value that appears to be shared by, and to influence and direct, the lives of the African communities, namely **food.** In the words of Canonici this value is aptly described:

> in societies constantly living at subsistence level, where provision of food constitutes the greatest headache, food becomes a pivotal element and a fundamental driving force: it represents a question of life or death, of starvation, of mere survival or of prosperity. (1990:1).

In the average story of both the oral and the written narrative, food (or some related necessity for livelihood) is presented as the **premium mobile** of creation. It is the Lack of food that sets the action of the story in motion, and only when this Lack has been Liquidated does the story come to an end.

In the tale of "Mmutla le Bana ba Tau" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:1), or its variant version "Mokhudu le Bana ba Tau" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:15), it is the Lack of meat that leads Hare or Tortoise to killing and eating Lion's cubs, thus setting the stage for the conflict that culminates in the "punishment" of the innocent but foolish baboons by Lion. In the tales "Banenyana le Letšimokgopo" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:81), "Mapula le Makgema" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:117) and "Mokgadi le Mokgatšana" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:74), the girls' Absentation from home is necessitated by the Lack of wild spinach, wild fruit, and firewood (for preparation of food), respectively, and this need takes them far away from home, which is a suitable place for the action of the story.

Food or its Lack does not only bring about Absentation of the heroes or heroines, but also Interdiction Violated. In "Kganane le Ratšimo" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:84-87) for instance, the heroine cannot resist the temptation to roast a piece of meat despite the Interdiction, and as such attracts the ogres. The same thing is done by the heroine in "Mapula le Makgema" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:117-121).

The action of the entire tale in "Mašilo le Mašilwane" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:107-110) revolves around food: its Lack, a Difficult Task set for its acquisition, its Lack Liquidated, its new Lack that causes a Villainy and culminates in Punishment. The parting of ways of the dispatched heroes leads to the finding of different qualities of meat; Mašilo's poor quality meat causes him to "murder" Mašilwane and to be subsequently punished with death himself.

In all the tales where food constitutes the initial Lack, the same strategy is always employed: the hero must set out to go and find it. In the written narrative also, even if it is not explicitly mentioned, the movement of the hero away from home usually has something to do with subsistence in many novels. It is the experiences the hero has away from home, in quest of some means of livelihood, that make the story.

In *Tsakata*, for instance, when the hero is expelled from school he has to follow tradition and go and seek employment in Johannesburg. All goes well for him for as long as he is employed and, axiomatically, experiencing no Lack. It is only when he becomes unemployed that Tsakata begins to engage in the fraudulent activities which actually make the story. The narrator puts this beginning, and the reason for it, as follows:

Morago ga lebaka le letelele a felelwa ke modiro wo, le gona a se ke a hwetša o mong le ge a leka ka maatla go o nyaka, 'mme ya ba gona a thomang metlhako le mathaithai a lefase (1981:5).

(After a long time he lost this job, and he did not find another even though he tried very hard to find it, and that is when he began the hardships and crafty ways of the world).

His crafty ways do not only help him to make a living, but also constitute the source of conflict in the narrative, and make the story.

The narrative of the two men who set out to make a living as confidence medicinemen, and bury a live tortoise in a man's yard in the night only to "discover" it the following day (in *Megokgo ya Bjoko*), begins with an admission that it was lack of food that introduced the idea in their minds. The narrator begins as follows:

Bagwera ba ba rena ba ntšhitšwe ke tlala magaeng a bona ... ba kwana gore ba swanetše go sepetša bofora. (1969:61).

(These friends of ours left their homes because of hunger ... and agreed that they must engage in fraudulent activities).

Indeed when we meet them for the first time at the tribal court of King Lefehlo, the *kgoro* is trying to decide who is the rightful owner of the cow that they brought back as payment for their "successful divination" (1969:6).

It appears that where a novel depicts two settings, a rural and an urban one, the hero often becomes compelled by poor economic conditions to leave the rural area (usually home) for the big cities to make a living. When he has achieved this (or when he has been corrupted and frustrated by the city life), the hero usually returns home to the rural area with the wealth he has acquired - or with nothing.

At the opening of the narrative in *Molato Mpeng*, for instance, Seopela is described as a wealthy man in a rural setting. The size of his livestock bears testimony to this fact. The narrator describes this Initial Situation in the following words:

> *Ge di boa mafulo tša morwa Seopela, o be o ka re mohlape wa mošate ... Seopela o be a tumile a tsebega ka gohle. Ka ga gagwe mpa e be e sa tsebe molatša, a eja, a enwa, e bile ga gagwe e ke ke mošate wo monyane. Seopela o be a le meetseng a lethabo a ipshina ka bophelo a ithakgaletše.* (1976:1).
>
> (When they returned from the pastures, the son of Seopela's livestock could be mistaken for the King's herd ... Seopela was famous and well known everywhere. In his house they never ate porridge that had been left over the previous day; he ate and drank, and his home was like a small palace. Seopela lived happily and enjoyed life in pleasure).

The narrator further explains that prior to this, Seopela had been forced to go and work in the cities by the poverty and plight of his family when he grew up. In the city he had tried all the possible ways of making money - including gambling (1976:1). When he had amassed a small fortune he left his job and returned home to invest his money in cattle, sheep and goats.

The abundance of food and drink in Seopela's house is a symbol of happiness and contentment. For as long as this state of affairs prevails the movement of the story will stand still. But the catastrophic event in which his entire herd and flock die sends Seopela out of the comfort of his home to go and borrow money from Thamaga with Matete's hand in marriage as security, and the story is made.

For the simple reason that food serves as a sustenance for the preservation of life, it is such a basically shared value in the African community that even the trickster or villain in folktales often uses it as a means of tricking his victims, 'by tempting them with the offer of food' (Canonici, 1990:7).

In "Mabutle le Tau" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:1-5), for instance, when Hare approaches Lion with the offer: "*Anke ke go rute maano šea, ka gore wena o phela ka nama*" (1990b:1). ["Here, let me teach you a plan, because you live on flesh"], he immediately wins the latter's confidence. When Hare's plan actually works and Lion is able to catch and kill many animals, Lion naturally becomes so preoccupied with thoughts of later enjoying the meat they are cooking that he pays little attention to what Hare is doing to his tail - Hare effortlessly nails Lion's tail to a pole in the roof of the hut they have erected, from where he hangs until he dies.

In "Tšelana le Temankgolo" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:134-143), and "Ngwadiane le Temankgolo" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:92-95), the ogre, pretending to be the hero's mother, sings a song that announces the bringing of food, and thus gains entrance into the locked and barred hut in order to capture his victim.

Food is not only a shared value in the African community as a sustenance, but to offer someone (even a stranger) food in one's home is generally accepted as a sign of hospitality, and such an offer is usually not turned down. Consequently, when the lads come to woo Mmakoma in "Mašita, Kgomo ya Badimo" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:95-100), and have to accomplish a Difficult Task - jumping high in order to touch Mmakoma who is sitting on the roof of a hut - before they can have her hand in marriage, they accept the offer of food before the event, merely out of cultural politeness. Meanwhile the motive behind the offer of food is to make jumping difficult, if not impossible for the lads, as they will be incapacitated by their full stomachs.

Even the lad who finally accomplishes the Difficult Task does not totally refuse to eat the food he is offered - it would be culturally impolite. The narrator puts his approach to the offer in the following words: *Lesogana la fo ngwathangwatha ga molao fela* .... (1990b:97) [The lad merely ate a small piece of food as a customary gesture ....] Thus by showing his prospective in-laws some politeness while at the same time keeping his mind focused on his goal - winning the contest - the lad proves himself to be more matured than the rest.

Not only is one customarily obliged to accept an offer of food out of politeness, but one is also dictated upon by tradition to share one's food with others, for miserliness where food is concerned is regarded by custom as a base quality. Hence, in folk narratives, the helper usually requests the victimized hero for food before he can rescue him or warn him of the danger that is about to befall him. When the hero demonstrates his generosity by offering the food, it is a matter of 'one good turn deserves another'.

In "Mašilo le Kgaetšedi" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:101-106), for instance, while Mašilo is out herding his cattle, his jealous uncle remains digging a hole at Mašilo's entrance to the courtyard and planting stakes to kill him.

A pied crow comes to Mašilo and warns him before he drives the cattle home. But, before it volunteers the information to Mašilo, the crow asks him for a piece of meat:

> *Legokubu le re go Mašilo le re: "Lahlela mohlana, ke go botše". Mašilo a lahlela mohlana, legokubu la ja. Legokubu la re go Mašilo: "Ba epetše dibolai lesorong le o tsenago ka lona".* (1990b:103).
>
> (The pied crow tells Mašilo and says, "Throw me the placenta and I shall tell you". Mašilo threw it a placenta, and the crow ate it. The crow said to Mašilo, "They have buried dangerous objects at the entrance that you use").

Similarly in "Mokgadi le Mokgatšana" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:74-76) the girls' hostess, who happens to be a cannibal, instructs them to remain sorting out the ground-nuts while she goes to look for snuff - actually to call the other cannibals to come and help her kill and eat Mokgadi and Mokgatšana. A helper comes to the girls in the form of a bird:

> *... gwa tšwelela nong ye nngwe ye kgolo, ya re: "Mokgatšana, ntšhelele ditloo ke go botše ditaba". Mokgatšana a e tšhelela fase ya ja, ya fetša. Ya re: "Ntšhelele gape" Mokgatšana a e tšhelela, ya ja, ya fetša.* (1990a:75).

(... there came a certain big bird which said, "Mokgatšana pour me some ground-nuts and I shall tell you some news. Mokgatšana poured some nuts on the floor and it ate and finished them. It said, "Pour me some more". Mokgatšana poured it some, and it ate and finished them).

The repetition of the same request to Mokgatšana is of some significance - it is like a test that the girls have to pass to qualify for the help that the bird can give them. Indeed, when it has finished eating the nuts, the cannibals can be seen approaching in a cloud of dust. The bird spreads its wings and orders the girls to 'get in' before it carries them to their home.

In other tales the villain succeeds in escaping punishment by making his captor an offer of food. In "Nonyana Senyamaswi" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:39-42) and "Leakabosane la Mokotla wa Mokhora" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:37-40), a bird is about to be killed because of its villainous act and because of a scarcity of food, respectively. But the bird implores the man not to kill it as it has an ability to make milk or supply a bag of delicious food, respectively. Naturally, the man spares the bird's life and his family knows hunger no more.

It is important to note that food is not only a shared value as sustenance for preservation of life in the African community. From food, as from other magical objects and substances for which Africans visit traditional medicinemen from time to time, is acquired **vital force**, the potent life, vital energy, which usually constitutes the objects of prayers and invocations to the spirits of the ancestors. When a diviner is visited, for instance, the purpose is often to learn the words of life, so that one can be taught the way of making life stronger.

It is thus important to acquire life, strength or vital force, to live strongly or to make life stronger, and also assure that vital force shall remain perpetually in one's posterity. This will assure the traditional African of supreme happiness. According to Placide Tempels,

> Supreme happiness, the only kind of blessing, is, to the Bantu, to possess the greatest vital force: the worst misfortune and, in every truth, the only misfortune, is, he thinks, the diminution of this power (1969:46).

Thus when the cannibal or ogre (a being regarded as a lonely outcast who perpetually makes attempts to be readmitted into humanity) catches and eats humans, it is understood that he believes that by eating their flesh he will acquire their vital force and be once more like them. Similarly, in "Mothapo" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:24-26) and other versions of the same tale, the only 'crime' for which Mothapo is killed and eaten by the other girls is that she has a vital force which they do not have: she is beautiful and fat. Through eating her flesh the girls hope to acquire her force and potent life.

In the written narrative we also encounter this idea of food constituting a source of vital force. Powerful characters with some social status are often recognizable from their well-fed bodies in some Northern Sotho novels. This shared cultural value is aptly described by Canonici as follows:

> To this shameless declaration that "**fat is beautiful**" one should add its close parallel, that "**fat is powerful**". One cannot under-estimate the connection between wealth, status and power, especially magical power. As a consequence, the man who possesses food and wealth

shows that he has acquired greater magical power than others. There is also the hint that this power has accrued to him by means of the food he was able to consume. Therefore, the quest for food becomes not a simple search for the means of survival, but also for the attainment of social status. (1990:1).

We meet one such character in *Ngwana wa Mobu*, namely Mokhura. A man who undoubtedly possesses vital force, Mokhura commands the respect of the entire village, in sharp contrast to Lahlang, the school principal, who is nicknamed Mogwapawatholo (Kudu-biltong) by some villagers because of his tall but thin body. Mokhura is a businessman who runs the local butchery. In the Makgwareng Lutheran Church congregation he is one of the elders. He is also the chairman of the School Committee. As for his well-fed body, the narrator describes it as follows:

O etišitše mpa pele - bafsa ba bangwe ba e bitša "tšwelopele". Ke namane ya monnatia o sa ikwa, le ge a ile a hlalwa ke moriri e sa le yo mofsa (1983:14).

(He displays a big stomach - some youth call it "progress". He is a bullock of a real man who is still strong, even if he lost his hair while he was still young).

In *Maroba* also, the principal character, Maroba, is a man of vital force who boasts several kraals full of cattle, sheep and goats, and who also keeps several horses as his means of transport. Maroba, like Mokhura, displays a very well-fed body. When Thaloki, one of his servants, assaults his own wife with a whip (sjambok), Maroba's forceful intervention is described as follows:

Naa le mo kubu e ilego gona Thaloki o ile a hlwa a sa tseba? Ga a dio hlakana le selo sa dikgara tša matswele. A re go e ubula a ba a mo menyalatša ka yona mokokotlo wo. (1964:43).

(Did Thaloki ever know what had happened to the whip? All he could see was a figure that had a big chest with breasts. He wrenched it from his [Thaloki's] hands and even struck him a painful blow on his back).

If there are many people gathered together, Maroba is easily recognizable from his well-fed body churning up a lot of vital energy. On the occasion of the principal's farewell function at the local school, the vitality of Maroba's body is described as follows:

A ikubauba yo **montši** *a ba aba ka mediro ya bona...* (1964:43).

(He energetically moved about, the **fat one**, and allocated them their duties ...)

In *Kgamphuphu* the only reference to the concept "fat is powerful" is made in connection with the European miners for whom Kgamphuphu is working, as follows:

Beng ba gagwe ba ba ba thoma go huma ka yena, ba phadima mafatla, ba tšwa dimpa, ba bitšwa boraditšhelete, dikhorane tša Taamane. (1984:73).

(His masters even began to grow wealthy because of him, their bald heads glistened, their stomachs grew bigger, they were called rich people, the well-to-do people - "tycoons" - of Kimberly)

It is interesting to note that the term "*dikhorane*" (wealthy people) has got some food and eating connotations, as it is derived from the verb *-khora* (to be satiated).

6.2.3 *Marriage and Fertility*

Another culturally shared value which is closely related to security and vital force in the Northern Sotho community is **marriage and fertility** (ability to procreate). A man is considered to be a man of some standing in the community, to be ready to assume positions of responsibility in the community, when he gets married. A woman's prestige in the community is also enhanced by marriage. But it should be noted that marriage in a traditional community is neither an individual affair, legalizing the relationship between a man and a woman, nor an affair determined by the love and affection between a man and a woman; but marriage is a group concern, legalizing a relationship between two groups of relatives (or sometimes friends).

It is understandable, therefore, that Molwantwa and his wife are very much concerned about their son, Nkotsana's single status in *Nkotsana*, after he (Nkotsana) has returned from Bokgalaka. So concerned are they that they agree to approach some friends of theirs to negotiate for Nkotsana to marry their daughter (1984:45). Their action is not necessarily in agreement with custom, where the parents choose spouses for their children, but is intended to rectify an anomaly - the entire community is already wondering when Nkotsana is ever going to consider getting married, for all his peers are long married. In the words of the narrator:

Lentšu la gore o tlo tšea neng mosadi mola bagwera ba gagwe e le kgale ba na le malapa le lona ke le leng la ao a bego a fela a šuhla Nkotsana. (1984:44).

(The question, when he was ever going to marry a wife, as his friends had long established their families, is also one of those that were occasionally directed at Nkotsana).

In *Ngwana wa Mobu*, when Mokhura has been to a meeting of the Rethuše School Committee with the School Board and the Inspectorate, where they tried in vain to discredit Lahlang as school principal and recommend Phankga to take his position, he has only one single advice for Phankga: he should marry without delay if he still wishes to be considered for the school's principalship. He has the following motivation:

"... Ke go boditše ka re mohlahlofiši o re ge go nyakwa hlogo ya sekolo, ba kganyoga motho yoo a nago le lapa ... " (1983:48).

("... I have told you and said that the inspector of schools says when a school principal is wanted, they desire someone who has a family...").

Not only does a man's ability to marry a wife suggest that he can be entrusted with serious social responsibilities, but, like his well-fed external appearance, the number of wives a man has (in the traditional African society) also represents his prosperity and vital force. In the average Northern Sotho folktale, for instance, if the hero is a married man, then he has two or more wives, and the common opening statement of the tales is: "**It was a man who had two (or three ...) wives**" [cf.

"Moselapše" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:48) "Bana ba Magotlo le Magokubu" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:71), "Phakamatšana" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:29); "Kokobolayadilo" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:31), "Nonyana ya Morwa' Motswiri" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:34)].

The importance of marriage as an institution does not only lie in affording a man status in the community: the union must yield offsprings. The worst evil that can befall a man is leaving no living heirs behind him when he dies. In fact, one can think of no curse more terrible to put on a man than to wish him to die childless. It is understandable, therefore, that when a marriage between two individuals does not yield any offspring, quite a few strategies are culturally permissible to rectify the anomaly. Members of a family (or even a clan) will set aside all morality, on Western standards, to ensure that a child is born into the marriage, irrespective of who begets that child.

In the tale "Bana ba Magotlo le Magokubu" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:71-75; *Maitišong*, 1990a:65-67), for instance, we encounter a man who has three wives. All his three wives are childless, and, as there is little probability that they can all be barren, the man's virility is called in question and his sterility very strongly hinted at. Those who are conversant with the Northern Sotho culture will immediately see the implications when this man goes away on a long business trip, and instructs his wives to remain bearing him mice and pied crows for children. When two of his wives give birth to mice and crows, and the third to a human child, we understand the man's impulsive hatred for the human child - the child constitutes to the man a constant reminder of his impotence and sterility.

Similarly in the tale "Ngwanammopša ka Diatla" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:64-66), a strange man comes to a childless woman who is herding her cattle by herself, and offers to help her out of her childlessness:

Monna yola a napa a tšea letsopa a bopa motho. Letsopa lela a le bopa a dira mošemane. Letsopa lela la napa la fetoga motho ka nnete... Monna yola a fa mosadi yola ngwana yoo (1990b:64).

(That men then took clay and moulded a person. That clay he moulded into a boy. That clay indeed changed into a person ... That man gave the child to that woman).

Although the story indirectly suggests that the woman 'went out to get a child' in order to cover her husband's sterility, to all intents and purposes the child was simply moulded out of clay - there has not been an immorality.

The importance of offspring for both men and women, husbands and wives, may be culturally explained in the belief that when one dies, one joins the ancestors of the family, the clan, or the tribe. When this happens, the qualities necessary for one to become a spiritual force depend to a large extent on the number of survivors left behind to worship that ancestral spirit. 'The more descendants a person leaves behind, the more important an ancestral spirit he will be' (Mönnig, 1988:55). Writing on the belief concerning the passage of man from this world to the world of the ancestors in African culture, Janheinz Jahn supports the importance of leaving behind living descendants:

> Strictly speaking, therefore, it is false to say that the dead 'live'. They do not 'live', but exist as spiritual forces. As spiritual force, the dead man, the ancestor, is in communication with his descendants. ... Only when he has no further living descendants is he 'entirely dead' (1961:109).

Against this cultural background we can understand how the prevailing circumstances after Talare's initial marriage justify polygamy in *Megokgo ya Bjoko*. The only reason he has for marrying a second wife is that after their first-born son, his wife cannot bear him any more children. This custom is dramatized very beautifully in a conversation between Morara and Ntlhobeng, as Morara narrates:

> "... *Talare o nyetše, a nyetšego, bjalo ka monna o mongwe le o mongwe, a wa a tsoga, mosadi a re a etšwa madibeng a botoga a nathile mošemanyana ka thari. ... Go ile, go ile, bao ba belegwego nae ba hlatlangwa, Talare a se tshwenyege kudu ka ge go belega e se mošomo wa diatla nkabego go tla thwe o a tšwafa. Eile ge betši bao ba bile ba re diraro, a re aowa ge! ... A re go re aowa ge, a ya banneng, fela gwa pala, mafelelong ke ge a ipoeletša. Mosetsana yoo o itšibotše ka lesogana, ya re ge a re dibedi, ya ba le lengwe gape, gona fao a thoma go lešwa ke lapa le legolo bodutu*". (1969:14).

> ("... Talare married, and having married, like any man, he did his best and his wife gave birth to a baby-boy ... Time passed, and those who were born at the same time as he got younger siblings; but Talare did not worry much, as begetting children is not manual labour where it could be assumed that he was indolent. But when those other brides conceived for the third time he could not take it any more! ... When he could not take it any more, he consulted traditional medicinemen, but all was in vain, and eventually he married another wife. That maiden's first child was a boy, and when she conceived for the second time, it was yet another boy, from there he lost interest in his first wife").

Because of her apparent infertility, the principal wife is not worth any more spending of Talare's sexual energy upon - as is suggested by the expression "*a wa a tsoga*". Yet, if he concentrates all his vital energy on his second wife, whose fertility cannot be called in question, he might be assured of a good number of descendants and satisfy the requirements for becoming a spiritual force when he 'dies'.

In *Maroba* we find another African traditionalist who, although he already has three daughters, equates the absence of a son in his family with punishment from the ancestral spirits:

> *Ga a sa tseba gore naa o* **kgopišitše** *medimo ya gabo ka eng. Ge nkabe a tseba o be a tla leka go yo* **phophotha** (1964:6).
>
> (He no longer knows what he did to **offend** his gods. If he knew he would try to go and **appease** them.)

Maroba yearns very much for a son because he believes that a son is for ever, unlike a daughter who only forms a part of your family until someone comes to marry her out of your family, into a new family.

In the words of the narrator:

> *Go yena ngwana wa ngwanenyana e be e le mofeti ka gobane ge a fetša go tsena sekolo o šetše a re o a tšewa ...* (1964:5).
>
> (To him a daughter was just a passer-by because when she completes her schooling she is already talking about getting married ...)

It is clear that Maroba considers the marrying of daughters to be leaving their families **in toto**, in such a way that they may even adopt (or be adopted by) the new ancestral spirits of their in-laws. Such a thing would never happen if those daughters were sons, as our marriages are patrilocal. We can, therefore, understand Maroba's happiness, contentment and excitement when his son, Khutšo is born into his family. But, when Khutšo Maroba changes his name to Jowie McCorkindale in Cape Town, Maroba sees it as an unfortunate diminution of his own power, his vital force.

> *Taba ye e namile ya dira gore Maroba a lwalele pele. Gore a re a tswetše ngwana, bjale ngwana yo a lahla leina la batswadi, le la setšhaba, ya dio ba gona go šola.* (1964:109).
>
> (This matter then caused Maroba's illness to worsen. That he should beget a child, and this child should now discard the parents' name, and that of the tribe, to him was just a bad omen).

Although his wealth made him a powerful man in his community, gave him vital force during his life time, lack of a male descendant might see to the diminution of that force when he joins the ancestral spirits.

6.3 Cultural Symbols in the Oral Narrative

The Northern Sotho culture has a strong emotional identification with animal symbols. This is evidenced by the role animals play in daily life as well as in totemism. Certain animals are selected to express certain cultural symbols, 'not primarily on the ground of their own interesting appearance, but rather for their ability to express symbolically what is dear or dreadful to the human heart' (Kriel,

1971:41). Great mythological stories in which these animals appear could be explained as expressions of a collective, supra-rational impulse, 'for the symbols with which we choose to identify ourselves are important in expressing the values held by a community' (Ngugi, 1972:35). In fact, it is also through symbols that our actions are consecrated and regulated, or negated.

6.3.1 *The Hare and the Tortoise*

Although they are by appearance small and weak, the hare and the tortoise are usually made the principal heroes in Northern Sotho folklore. The reason seems to be 'a deep-seated; inarticulate feeling that the strong cannot always have things their own way and the underdog must some time or other come to its own' (Kriel, 1971:63). In almost all the tales where the hare appears, it is evidently a symbol of cleverness. The hare's cleverness helps it out of many dangerous situations.

When he is caught in a snare while stealing peanuts in a man's field in "Mmutla le Mong wa Tšhemo" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:19-21), Hare pretends to be dead to avoid any more punishment being meted out to him. When a girl carries him home, with instructions to skin and cook him for dinner, Hare tricks her into believing that he is her grandfather, and, as for the instructions to cook him, she got the message wrong, as her father clearly said she must cook 'porridge'. In this way the cleverness of Hare saves his life. Such cleverness is required in our society, especially in the field of inter-personal relations, either for outwitting others in a contest or for safeguarding oneself in this cruel world of uncertainty.

As the number one trickster in the Northern Sotho folk narratives, the hare is known to use its cleverness for malicious purposes - one negative aspect of its cleverness. This explains the fact that after every trickery, the hare is able to look

at its dupe and gloat. The only reason Hare has for killing and eating Lion's cubs that he is supposed to be nursing in "Mmutla le Bana ba Tau" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:1-4), is that he has an uncontrollable craving for their flesh, for he says:

> *"Hei, bana ba ba Tau ka mokgwa wo ba nonnego ka gona, o ka re motho a ka ja namanyana ya bona"* (1990a:1-2).
>
> ("*Hei*, these cubs of Lion are so fat that one craves to eat their little flesh").

We can compare this action with a similar action by a different character, namely Tortoise, in another version of the same tale, "Mokhudu le Bana ba Tau" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:15-20). Although Tortoise also kills and eats Lion's cubs in this version, he has a completely different motive behind his action, namely to teach Lion a lesson for feeding him on the scraps and remnants of his cubs' meal (bones) every day. The narrator puts this circumstance as follows:

> *Mme bana ba ba Tau ge ba seno khora, Mokhudu yena o ja marapo a. Ga a khore. Ke moka Mokhudu a loga maano gore ka ge a sa khore, gore a tle a khore o swanetše gore a dire bjang.* (1990b:15).
>
> (Then when these cubs of Lion are satiated, Tortoise himself eats these bones. He does not become satiated. Then Tortoise devised a plan to see what he could do as he was not having enough to eat).

Thus, through this villainy, Tortoise merely aims at getting even with Lion, and not just to satisfy a strong desire as is the case with Hare in the other version. In this way the tortoise appears in several tales as 'a symbol of righteousness, justice,

equity, perseverance and all those qualities that will ultimately ensure the well-being of society as a whole' (Kriel, 1971:59). Of all the animals that usually appear as tricksters in animal stories, the tortoise is the 'most exemplary and straight-living'. When all the animals have a duty or responsibility to share, the tortoise generally succeeds where they fail, although it is 'despised and dirided by other animals on account of its unsightly appearance, its slowness and apparent vulnerability' (Kriel, 1989:158).

6.3.2 *The Baboon*

If the hare and the tortoise represent cleverness in the Northern Sotho folk narratives, then the baboon is a symbol of stupidity. In most tales the baboon never appears as a single character, but the trickster character usually goes to a group of baboons that are playing their favourite game, making beer, or dancing, or marauding the people's mealie-fields. The baboons believe everything the trickster animal tells them; they accept every information, assurance, etc. that comes to them at its face value and thus always make a sorry discovery of the truth when it is too late.

It is the stupidity of the baboons that encourages the trickster animal to implicate them in a crime they have not committed and cause them to be severely punished for it (often with death), as in "Mokhudu le Bana ba Tau" (*Keleketla* 1990b:20). As a symbol of foolishness in the tales the baboon thus provides us with something to reject.

6.3.3 *The Snake*

In the African culture in general there are many concepts, many mythological ideas connected with the snake. On this question, Kriel correctly observes:

> No other animal and few, if any, other items known to man, have such a rich and varied symbolic significance as the snake ... It possesses so many unique characteristics that it suggests a large variety of associations, some of which appear to be in direct contradiction to others. Although it is one of the best known death dealers, it is often associated with life-giving processes (1989:124).

A considerable number of peoples associate the snake with the spirits of the ancestors, believing that these spirits manifest themselves to their descendants in snake forms (Mbiti, 1975b:104). In the tale "Mahlalla" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:41-42), for instance, the heroine is described as a young girl who stays with her grandmother - a strong suggestion that she might be an orphan. Moreover, Mahlalla persistently pesters her grandmother with questions about the whereabouts of her father. When her grandmother tells Mahlalla that her father is a snake that stays in the pool, we understand that she is referring to an ancestral spirit.

Perhaps its home in the ground makes the snake a neighbour of the ancestral spirits, as it were. Colin Murray has found that the snake that the Batswana call *kgwanyape* (a large snake endowed with mysterious powers) as recorded by Schapera in Botswana, is obviously the same snake known to the Basotho generally as *kganyapa* (a fabulous snake that lurks in deep pools), and 'sometimes identified specifically

with the python' (1980:68). Moleleki contends that the purpoted existence of such a snake significantly points to the African's conception of the world: 'there is also an underworld' (1988:86), that is, the world of the ancestral spirits.

Thus the snake is connected with the function of giving and saving life, of rejuvenation and immortality (just as snakes remove their skins in order to renew or rejuvenate their youth), and this is quite clearly a role that is ascribed to the ancestral spirits. Kriel (1989:124) has recorded that Berglund found that for the Zulu, **pythons** are not animals like other snakes, but they are *amakhosi* (kings).

It is understandable, therefore, when the snake (especially the python) sometimes appears in folk narratives as the Supernatural Helper to save the life of the victimized hero. In "Mašilo le Mašilwane" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:107-110), when Mašilo, out of jealousy for Mašilwane's cattle, attempts to murder the latter by drowning him in a pool of water, the narrator says:

> *Kganthe yola o rile go wela ka kua sedibeng, a swanetše go hwela ka gona, mongmeetse šo! Hlware! Ya napa ya mo tata, ya mo tata, ya mo tata, ya mo ntšhetša ka ntle ga sediba. E mo iša gae* (1990b:109).
>
> (Meanwhile when that one fell into that pool, where he was supposed to die, behold, here is the king of the water! A python! It coiled around him, and coiled and coiled, and took him out of the pool. It is taking him home).

Like the ancestral spirits the python represents a giver and protector of life, a spiritual vital force that will not let the hero's life be endangered without cause, and that will see to the exposure of the villainy so that justice is done. This association

of the python with the ancestral spirits is further evident in Mašilwane's mode of address to the python in the song: *Hlware yešo* (python of my family/my clan/my people).

Similarly in "Ngaka Rabodiba" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:43-46), the same king of the deep pool which is generally believed to endow the '*bakoma*' initiates (i.e. diviner initiates who are believed to be seized by divining spirits) with divining and healing powers, is the only being that can heal the prince after all the known medicinemen have tried their best and still failed. When it is brought to the ailing prince, the snake coils around his body and licks his entire body. In this manner it gives him back his health, gives him a new life, rejuvenates him just as it is able to rejuvenate itself by discarding its skin. The 'fabulous length of the snake' in addition to the 'awe-inspiring deep pool' in this tale evokes both the mystic nature and the reverence characteristic of the world of the ancestral spirits (Moleleki, 1989:8).

There is sufficient evidence in folk narratives that the snake is also sometimes regarded as a symbol of the male life-giving principle. There is no doubt of the association of snakes, through water, with human fertility (Murray, 1980:71), or the belief that the shades of the father, who are intimately involved in the formation of the foetus, often appear in the form of snakes. Evidence of this can be found in the expressions "*noga ya gagwe e swere*" (literally "her snake has caught") or "*noga ya gagwe ga e a dula gabotse*" (literally "her snake is in a wrong position") - both alluding to a woman's pregnancy. There is little wonder, therefore, that the snake's role as **phallic symbol** has so often been emphasized that there is a tendency to regard the snake in folk narratives as a tempter to sexual enjoyment.

Indeed, there is sufficient evidence in folk narratives that snakes are especially fond of women, both for company and for sex. The snake often appears in these tales in the role of a male lover, or a man with an insatiable sexual desire, or even in that of the rival who deprives other men (human beings) of their legitimate spouses by means of its superior sexual attractions.

In "Sewela le Korintsane" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:43-47), for instance, the heroine emphatically refuses to enter into marriage with her cousin as arranged by their parents, or to consider marriage to any man for that matter, because she has an intimate relationship with a snake that lives in a cave on the mountain.

When her parents insist that she marry her cousin, Sewela, the narrator explains, *a iphetoša molwetši wa mapai* (She pretended to be a patient who should be confined to bed). Now, the term *mapai* (1990b:43, 44, 46), which has connotations of the sexual act, already with its repetitions suggests that Sewela was under the sexual spell of the snake. Her helplessness under this spell is confirmed by the fact that when her father discovers her secret affair with the snake, and kills the snake by chopping it into pieces, it is as if the spell suddenly becomes broken. That evening when Sewela is asked how she feels,

> *A re yena o kaone kudu, ebile o ikemišeditše go ya ga malomeagwe go yo nyalwa ke motswalagwe.* (1990b:47).
>
> (She said she felt much better, and was even prepared to go to her uncle's to be married to her cousin).

In "Morwa Malope" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:122-127), the villain appears as a man who claims to be the local prince, and who plagues the village girls by sharing their blankets (bed) with them in their communal sleeping hut every night. However, one of the girls goes outside to answer a call of nature and comes back to notice that there is a snake in their bed:

> *A bona ka kua maotong a bona go tšweletše mosela wa noga* (1990:122).
>
> (She noticed that a snake's tail protruded at their feet).

The girl warns the others to watch the man closely when he comes to sleep with them again. Indeed when he leaves one day at dawn they see a snake's tail hanging from him, and all agree:

> *"Noga yela re e bonego bošego bjola, ke ya monna yo!"* (1990b:123)
>
> ("That snake which we saw the other night is this man's!"

The declaration has obvious sexual undertones.

6.3.4 *Water*

Of all the non-living substances and objects found in African folklore in general there seems to be no other which compares favourably with water in its rich symbolism. Despite the variety of beliefs regarding it, water, seen in relation to

the context in which it is found, is commonly accepted as the symbol of purification and cleansing, of origin and birth, and also equated with the male fluid to stand for the masculine and the shades.

The cleansing and purifying that water symbolizes is not only of bodily but also of mystical impurities that one may contract through the breaking of taboos, the commitment of crime, and through contamination by evil magic.

In "Tšhilwanangwidi" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:47-49), "Serapela" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:50-53), and "O Jele Ngwana a re ke Mmutla" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:56-60), a woman hoeing in the field is tricked into giving her baby to strangers who offer to nurse it for her. The strangers turn out to be cannibals who not only kill the baby, but also trick the woman into partaking of the roasted meat - enforced cannibalism. When she realizes her folly (entrusting her baby to strangers) and the broken taboo (eating one's own child), the woman carries a calabash on her back in the place of her baby. It is significant to note that the calabash is not empty, but always contains water. There is no doubt that the water in the calabash symbolizes the woman's purification and cleansing of the guilt feeling. Through the water the woman attempts to absolve herself from all blame and the consequence of sin - compare the biblical washing of the hands in water.

In "Bana ba Magotlo le Magokubu" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:65-67), the man who instructs his wives to give birth to mice and pied crows while he is away on a mission, returns to find one of them to have given birth to a human child. His hatred for this child (who symbolizes adultery to him) is so intense that he subjects the child to barbaric torture. To save the child's life, its mother takes it to a pool where the hippopotamus and the crocodile offer to nurse it. When she emerges from the pool she is a different person in the man's eyes:

Bjale ngwanenyana a bopegile a **hlatswegile,** *go tšwele ngwanenyana yo botse kudu.* (1990b:66).

(Now the girl had been well moulded and **cleansed** into a very beautiful girl).

The girl had undergone a kind of rebirth in the pool of water, a kind of renewal or entrance into a new kind of life, and the man's intense hatred for her turned into uncompromising love.

It is also interesting to note that in many tales the victimized hero who flees with the adversary in hot pursuit usually comes to a flooded river, as in "Banenyana le Letšimokgopo" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:83), "Bana ba Tšhekwa" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:112), and "Tšelana le Temankgolo" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:142). The hero's ability to cross the flooded river through the assistance of the supernatural helper not only constitutes rescue, but also symbolizes a kind of rebirth, his deliverance from evil, a new lease of life given to him.

According to Berglund, water is not only a symbol of purification and cleansing in African culture,

> It is also a carrier of life itself in that semen is described as water and it is from "the water of the womb" that the child is born (1976:338).

Since every human being "emerges from water" when he is born, it is understandable that it should often be regarded as the original source of life. The characteristic explanation, offered to young children, of "where a baby comes from", namely that

the mother found it in a pool of water at the river, already alludes to the "water" of the womb, where the child is moulded: the noun *popelo* - "womb" derives from the verb *go bopa* - "to mould, create, fashion" (Murray, 1980:69).

In some folk narratives the pool of water is also sometimes involved in other actions of a magical nature, which seem to be directed against some characters' sinful deeds. In "Tau ya Moroko Dimpeng" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:36) for instance, the woman who has been sent to bring her husband water from a pool in which there are no frogs, finds the water so delicious that she cannot stop drinking it. The drinking of the pool dry creates circumstances of potential danger for her, similar to the conditions her husband had found himself in when he had to find a lion's liver for her illness.

In "Moselapše" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:49) a sinew is spread over a deep pool in a river, and all three wives of a man are forced to walk over it in order to determine who stole his guinea-fowl. The assumption is that guilt will be established by inability to perform this tightrope feat.

6.4 Résumé

From the foregoing discussion, one feature of the Northern Sotho narrative becomes conspicuous: life is depicted as a perpetual journey which the hero or heroine undertakes from one world (usually his or her own) to another (usually foreign) which is usually reached with difficulty. According to Kriel,

> The world that is left is profane and mundane and imperfect in some respect or another, while that which is to be reached is undefined and distant, requiring endless wanderings and magic to reach, and there is usually a wish to return from it. (1971:30).

In a wondertale, for instance, the hero seems almost always to move from the **NATURAL WORLD** to the **NON-NATURAL WORLD** and, after various unusual experiences which actually make the story, **BACK.** Thus many folktales are characterized by the expression, "They walked, and walked, and walked ...", signifying the length of distance or duration of the journey [cf. "Meetse a a sa Llego Segwagwa" (*Maitišong*,, 1990a:15), "Matšholotšholo" (*Maitišong*, 1990a:58), and "Mogatša Noga" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:85)].

The natural world in these tales can be seen as the hero's ego, his home and district, his country, or the physical world as we are accustomed to it. The non-natural world, on the other hand, can further be divided into an intermediate world of infra-human characters and supernatural objects, and an afterworld which can be equated with the world of ancestral spirits who always exercise a powerful presence over people as well as intervene in events of the other worlds mentioned. Whether we hold the view that the African's universe is regarded as being divisible into two (the heavens and the earth), or that it is conceived of in the form of a three-tier creation, namely the heavens, the earth and the underworld, the underlying factor is that the Africans 'do not think of these divisions as separate but see them as linked together' (Mbiti: 1975a:32). The inhabitants of both the natural and the non-natural worlds are believed to have the ability to exchange visits in their natural form or in transformations.

In ogre tales and other tales of the supernatural the predicament of the hero is usually resolved by the intervention of a **deus ex machina** or Supernatural Helper, which reveals the assistance of the good ancestral spirits towards making good triumph over evil [cf. "Mašilo le Kgaetšedi" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:103) and "Mašilo le Mašilwane" (*Keleketla*, 1990b:109)].

In the written narrative too, it is not unusual to see a character in a serious predicament invoking the power of the ancestral spirits to come to his assistance. In *Kgamphuphu*, for instance, when Kgamphuphu discovers his sister, Tšelane's decapitated body at the entrance to Mmabzi's *kgoro*, the first thing he does is to cast his eyes up to the stars and call down curses upon the perpetrators of the inhuman act, while invoking the ancestral spirits to avenge Tšelane's murder as follows:

> "*.... Botatemogolo badimo bešo wee! Theogang marung le tle le bone tše di dirwang ke bana ba lena! Theogang godimo le lefeletše, ga la tloga le sa bea molao. Bowang lena bengbagolo ba marung le sware molao mosenyi a lefelele.*" (1984:63).
>
> ("..... Hearken, our ancestors, our ancestral spirits! Descend from the clouds and behold what is being done by your descendants! Descend from above and avenge, for you did not leave before promulgating the law. Come back, you great masters in the clouds, maintain the law and let the transgressor pay").

The movement of the hero from one world to another is not a feature confined to the primary oral narrative alone, but it also characterizes the written narrative. Finding no spiritual fulfilment of their ideals of life in the world (land) of their birth, these characters usually leave home in quest of a better life, only to be overtaken by

moral lassitude, danger and suffering which eventually drive them back home. In some cases they leave home because the traditional ways of life and thought of their own community are too rigid and uncivilized for them; but freedom from the bonds of traditional custom soon exposes them to the destructive force of the alien world and forces them to return home [cf. Maphutha in *Molato Mpeng*, and Nkotsana in *Nkotsana*).

When Maroba learns that his son, Khutšo, has left school to go and work for one Jew in Cape Town, in *Maroba*, his response reveals an acquaintance with the consequences of such behaviour. He says:

> *"... o tlo di humana tša naga, di tla mo tlaiša a ba a gopola gae"* (1964:99).
>
> ("... he will find what he is looking for in the land, they will make him suffer until he thinks of home").

Indeed Khutšo's corruption goes from bad to worse, until he takes a foreign name, namely Jowie MacCorkindale, 'as a symbol of his soul's painful longing to escape from his immediate surroundings' (Kolawole, 1975:97).

Although life is depicted as a journey similarly in both the primary and the written narrative in Northern Sotho, it should be kept in mind that the composition of the written narrative is more individualistic than that of the primary oral narrative whose ownership is collective. Consequently, differences of opinion about and treatment of the various cultural values discussed above will have to be allowed for.

CHAPTER VII

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The study of the oral and the written prose narrative in juxtaposition has revealed one certainty about them: Many of the features of the oral narrative are identical to those of the written narrative. This fact creates a safe ground for us, in this inquiry, to draw positive conclusions about the homogeneous tradition of the Northern Sotho prose narrative. This does not of all necessity encourage us to infer that the identify of the Northern Sotho written narrative is derivable from the oral narrative, or that many of the features of the written narrative are a carry-over from the oral narrative. On the contrary, as this inquiry has revealed, the oral and the written narrative do not have to be treated as sources - where the oral narrative is regarded as having influenced the written narrative - but as constituents of the same genre, viz. narrative fiction. Because of these numerous similarities, every narrative text should be regarded as an intertext of another text, thus belonging to the intertextual, as post-structural criticism has taught us.

If there are any differences between these constituents, they can be ascribed to their composition, for the composition of the primary oral narrative is characterized by anonymity, and can therefore be regarded as collective, while that of the written narrative is more or less individualistic, with known authorship and ownership.

We observe, for instance, that although the two (the oral narrative and the written) are to a great extent morphologically compatible, and may thus be similarly defined in the concept of the Northern Sotho prose narrative, they display certain differences in their **plot structures**. While the primary oral narrative has both the number of events and their sequence fixed, the written narrative, on the other hand,

accounts for two levels, namely the temporal sequence of events and the narrative sequence of events. While the primary oral narrative holds the individual strand fast, the written narrative tends to present the various threads of the discourse entangled amongst each other, so that there is a loose organization and uncertain action in the plot structure. Even if we may find many written narratives focusing on a single episode, a single aspect in the hero's life, or on a single sequence of episodes, a comparison of the two genres in this regard reveals that the primary oral narrative has a greater tendency to focus on a single episode than the written narrative.

However, in both genres, the events or episodes in the narrative, at least on the **fabula** level, are arranged in an order that allows the narrative action to follow a well defined pattern, moving from a moment of conflict to that of its resolution. In this pattern, then, the minimal story almost invariably consists of three conjoined events as follows: The first and the third events are static (the third event being the inverse of the first), while the second is active.

This close identity in patterns of the primary oral narrative and the written narrative is not in the least surprising since both genres are founded on the same full-life frame of motivation and verisimilitude; both are woven out of everyday events. The narratives (both oral and written) trace the intricacies of life in all their ramifications as series of patterns and developments, with each action relating to a scheme that is outlined as cause and effect, or action and reward/punishment. The narratives are, therefore, intended to provide a comprehensive representation of the patterns of life.

In its overwhelming **thematic preoccupation** with socio-political issues, the Northern Sotho written narrative demonstrates its cultural continuity with the primary oral narrative as what one may call "applied art". This, as the present inquiry has shown, reflects the traditional African aesthetics in general, and the Northern Sotho aesthetics in particular, as being functional. It is not bent, like its Western counterpart, on depicting a fictional world for the sake of aesthetics. Life in the Northern Sotho Narrative, both oral and written, is depicted as a perpetual journey undertaken by the hero or heroine from what we may call a natural world (his or her own usual world) to a non-natural world (a foreign one), and along which journey all the elements of social life are touched upon. The journey to the outside world is usually characterized by endless difficulties, wanderings, suffering and danger; and there is always a strong wish to return to the original world.

The physical configuration of the journey in the Northern Sotho narrative can be seen as a metaphor for the theme of a life journey, with the cognitive aspects of the hero's adventures on this journey suggesting the metaphorical code of the rite of passage. Even in those cases where the physical configuration of the journey is not explicitly presented as the frame for the movement of the action of the story, some of the devices that are used are such that the metaphorical sense of a journey is always discernible. It is the experiences and trials that occur in the course of the journey to the outside world and back that form the basis for the maturation and education of the hero or heroine. The hero or heroine who has been on a journey returns to take stock of his or her experiences, and both the strand of physical movement and that of internal maturation are then merged in a unified phase of resolution and reward (or punishment). The journey motif in the narrative, then, provides a useful medium whereby an artist can express his ideas about life.

The Northern Sotho narrative does not only depict life as a journey, but also as one long struggle for power. Both the primary oral narrative and the written narrative are concerned with **equilibrium** between members of society. Consequently, the narrative usually presents dichotomies of goodness and evil, friendship and enmity, strength and weakness, to mention just a few. Generally the narrative is about the natural desire of man to live better, to be wealthier, to make life stronger. Thus the hero or heroine in both the primary oral and the written narrative is constantly involved with the **survival** factor for man in an uncertain world.

One of the principal narrative **techniques** whereby the intricacies of life are depicted in the Northern Sotho narrative (from oral to written) is the opposition of models, one ideal and the other undesirable. In these models social issues are presented mainly as dramatic contrasts. The narrative expresses social reality, which is naturally coherent and orderly, as binary oppositions, and by objectifying the polarities of moral and social situations, promotes (in the audience or reader) awareness of the struggle in existence between goodness and evil. By making one model socially undesirable and negative, and the other socially admirable and positive, the narrative artist creates life patterns for the audience or reader.

To create these patterns of life as well as depict the intricacies of life successfully, the Northern Sotho narrative (from oral to written) employs **characters**. The present inquiry has found that in order to understand the characters in the Northern Sotho narrative, one has to approach them as products of plots, for as **actants** rather than **personnages**, their status is presented as **functional**. One should avoid psychological essences and analyze not who or what the characters are, but what they do in the narrative, for through them the narrative artist presents all the most

interesting revulsions as well as his moral vision of the world. The characters, therefore, have a collective rather than an individual hold upon the audience's or reader's imagination.

Finally, although the present inquiry has demonstrated that a text is 'inevitably plural and thus open to a number of readings', by suggesting interpretations of meaning different from those that are usually made about certain narratives, one important factor must always be borne in mind in any search for a poetics for the study of the Northern Sotho narrative fiction: The functional nature of the Northern Sotho aesthetics prescribes the study of the **meaning** of the narrative (from oral to written) against the Northern Sotho **cultural background.**

The present inquiry has found that our pursuit for the interpretation of the meaning of the Northern Sotho narrative is tantamount to an investigation of expressions of shared attitudes and values related to the Northern Sotho tradition (in both the oral and the written narrative), as well as contact with other traditions and change (especially in the contemporary written narrative). In both the primary oral and the written narrative, the basic concerns of society are reflected, and these concerns are in many cases represented in a realistic manner. As the mirror of life, the stories reflect what people do or think, their culturally shared values, and in short, how people conduct their lives.

Any attempt at the interpretation of meaning in the Northern Sotho prose narrative (from oral to written), therefore, will prove difficult for those critics who are not conversant with the Northern Sotho culture. Such critics will find it difficult to interpret the symbols with which the Northern Sotho-speaking community choose to identify themselves in the narratives, and which are important in expressing the values held by that community.

As the scope of the present study with regard to the written narrative indicates, namely the novels of the 1940's to those of the 1960's, this inquiry cannot pretend to be exhaustive in any way as far as the nature of the Northern Sotho prose narrative is concerned. Future research can examine the modern trends in the contemporary Northern Sotho prose narrative, and show how this genre has continued, or ceased to be culture-based.

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