CHARACTERIZATION IN
PELO E JA SERATI
BY J. M. NTSEME

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DEDICATION

To my late mother, Elizabeth Kotu,
and my father, Daniel Kotu.
And also to my sisters Mashadi, Stokie,
Mmammule and Ketina,
and my only brother, Johannes Kotu.
DECLARATION

I declare that

CHARACTERISATION IN J. M. NTSIME'S DRAMA:
PELO E JA SERATI

is my own work, that all the sources used or quoted have been indicated by means of complete references, and that this mini-dissertation was not previously submitted by me for a degree at another university.

E. M. KOTU
DATE 3/1/1998
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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore representation and use of character in J. M. Ntsime's play, *Pelo e ia Serati*, with special reference to the ways in which the general attitudes and thinking processes of the characters are influenced by the social environment in which they find themselves. Conflict between traditional and modern marriage customs, a major theme of Ntsime's play, will also be examined.

Although this study confines itself to Ntsime's drama, it intends to highlight the significance of characterisation in plays generally. Reference will be made to the views of, *inter alia*, Levitt, Pfister and Barry.

This study comprises a total of seven chapters, including the introduction which details the aim, scope and method of research.

Chapter two provides a backdrop to the analysis, exploring the life and career of J. M. Ntsime and also summarises the cast of characters and the plot of *Pelo e ia Serati*.

Following this mise en scène, chapter three takes up the concept of "characterisation" and considers the author's use of setting (temporal as well as geographical) and the significance of place names.

Chapter four focuses on one of Ntsime's most effective methods of characterisation, his naming of the characters.

Chapter five examines Ntsime's use of imagery and comparison.
Chapter six considers the crucial role of conflict in *Pelo e Ja Serati*. Here, I examine the fundamental conflict between traditional and modern marriage customs as well as the character Dithole's personal struggle between duty/destiny and desire.

Chapter seven concludes this mini-dissertation by considering, in the spirit of comedy, the lessons about social change contained in the play.
Die doel met hierdie studie is om die voorstelling en gebruik van karakterisering in J. M. Ntsime se drama Pelo e ia Serati te ondersoek. Daar is in die besonder gefokus op die wyse waarop die gesindhede en die denkprosesse van karakters beïnvloed word deur die sosiale omgewing waarin hulle hul bevind. Die konflik tussen tradisionele en moderne huweliksgewoontes soos dit deur Ntsime beskryf word, kom ook onder die loep.

Ten slotte word beoog om die betekenis van karakterisering in dramas in die algemeen na vore te bring, alhoewel hierdie studie prakties tot Pelo e ia Serati beperk word.

Teoreties behels hierdie studie die sienings van onder andere Levitt, Pfister, en Barry.

Na bovermelde “mise en scène” word in hoofstuk drie die begrip “karakterisering” behandel. Na die definitiering van bogenoemde begrip, word die ouer se hantering van milieu (tydruimtelik en geografies) sowel as die waarde van plekname ondersoek.

In hoofstuk vier word gefokus op Ntsime se mees doeltreffende metodes van karakterisering, naamlik die benaming van karakters.

Hoofstuk vyf ondersoek in die besonder Ntsime se gebruik van beelde en die rol daarvan in karakterisering.

Die kritieke rol van konflik in Pelo e ia Serati hoofstuk ses beskou. Hier word die grondliggende konflik tussen tradisionele en moderne huweliksgewoontes sowel
as die karakter Dithole se persoonlike stryd tussen plig' en persoonlike voorkeur ondersoek.

Hoofstuk sewe sluit die skripsie af, deur in die gees van komedie, die lesse oor sosiale verandering te oorweeg wat die drama na vore bring.
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 AIM

The aim of this study is to explore the representation and use of character in J. M. Ntsime's play, Pelo e ja Serati. Special reference will be made to the ways in which the general attitudes and thinking processes of the characters are influenced and affected by the social environment in which they find themselves. In addition, the conflict between traditional and modern marriage customs portrayed by Ntsime will be examined.

Ultimately, this study intends to highlight the significance of characterisation not only in Pelo e ja Serati, but in plays more generally.

1.2 SCOPE

This study comprises a total of seven chapters, including the introduction which details the aim, scope and methods of research. Chapter two provides a backdrop to my analysis, exploring the life and career of J. M. Ntsime and also summarising the cast of characters and the plot of Pelo e ja Serati.

Following this mise en scène, chapter three takes up the concept of "characterisation." Having defined this concept, I consider the author's use of setting (temporal as well as geographical) and the significance of place names. In addition, this chapter draws upon the framework set forth by Greimas (see Ntombela 1994: 31) to explore the significance of characters' relations to other characters, and the ways in which these relations serve to develop the plot of Pelo e ja Serati. This chapter concludes by examining Ntsime's use of dialogue.
Chapter four focuses on one of Ntsime’s most effective methods of characterisation, his naming of the characters. In this chapter, an attempt will be made to illustrate that certain names imply an action (e.g. Moremi or “he who chops”; Modiegi or “she who delays”) and that these meanings serve to anticipate or precipitate the events of the drama.

In chapter five, I examine characterisation and style, in particular Ntsime’s use of imagery. Whereas the author uses a variety of images, the present study focuses on metaphor, personification and simile as these are among the devices most commonly used in Setswana literature.

Chapter six considers the crucial role of conflict in Pelo e ja Serati. Here I examine the fundamental conflict between traditional and modern marriage customs as well as the character Dithole’s personal struggle between destiny/duty and desire. This chapter concludes by pondering the resolution of this conflict and the seemingly happy—and sudden—conclusion of the play. These and other questions are taken up by way of conclusion in chapter seven.

1.3 METHODS
A brief theoretical overview of characterisation in plays will be provided, after which a structuralist mode of analysis will be applied.

1.4 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

1.4.1 Characterisation
T. E. Ntombela (1994: 131), discussing C. T. Msimang’s novel Akuiwe Emhlahleni, defines characterisation in the following terms:
A narrative device employed by the author to give a human identity to the non-human figures in the story. The author does this with a view that such non-human figures, as he uses them in the text, assume some form of human status for the reader, because they (the characters) are representations of persons.

Ntombela further notes that characterisation is important at two levels: (1) the story, and (2) the text.

In addition, Daniel P. Kunene (1993: 155), writing in Characterization, Realism and Social Inequality in the Novels of C. L. S. Nyembezi, observes that two of the most important purposes of drama are (1) to entertain; and (2) to give the reader a greater understanding of human behaviour.

1.4.2 NAMING

D. M. G. Sekeleko, in his Naming Practices in J. M. Ntsime’s “Pelo e ja Serati”, argues that most of the character names in Pelo e ja Serati can be classified as charactonyms, i.e. attributive names. Alvarez-Altman and Burrelbach (1987: 6) associate charactonyms with actinism, or “the radiation of heat or light” (OED 1995, 1: 93), because they send out a definite meaning to the reader/audience:

these names are capable of transmitting intellectual actinic rays of light upon the characters and their attributes.
This assertion is supported by Ducrot and Todorov (1983: 225) who note that a character’s name:

... announces in advance the properties that will be attributed to a character.

1.4.3 Imagery

Imagery as a general term covers the use of language to represent objects, actions, feelings, thoughts, ideas, states of mind, supernatural powers, and any sensory or extra-sensory experience. Gray (1992) distinguishes between three types of imagery: literal, perceptual and conceptual. He further defines an image in the following terms (Gray 1992: 144):

... a word-picture, a description of some visible scene or object. More commonly, however, imagery refers to the figurative language in a piece of literature or all the words which refer to objects and qualities which appeal to senses and feelings.

All plays rely upon imagery to convey meaning to the reader/audience. Imagery is a crucial method of characterisation and plot formation not only in Ntsime’s *Pelo e ia Serati*, but in other Setswana plays as well.

As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, the images and names found in *Pelo e ia Serati* convey explicit as well as implicit meanings to the reader/audience. In many cases, these meanings are culturally
specific (e.g. references to witchcraft). Accordingly, this classic story of "star-crossed lovers" serves as a platform through which Ntsime is able to communicate particular ideas and lessons to his fellow Botswana.
2. MISE EN SCÈNE

Before turning to the analysis of characterisation in Pelo e ja Serati, it will be useful to place the play within the context of the author’s life and career as a scholar, educationalist and preacher. For the sake of exposition, the cast of characters is also listed, along with the English translations of each character’s name and a brief description of his/her role in the play. Finally, a plot summary is offered.

2.1 THE AUTHOR AND HIS ENVIRONMENT

The following details of Ntsime’s life are taken from an M.A. thesis by V. K. Motsilenyane (1993) as well as from a personal interview with Ntsime’s relative, Norman Phiri, which I conducted in August 1998.

Joseph Motlahasedi Ntsime was born on the 30th of July, 1930 in Ramatshaba near Saulspoort (Moruleng) in the Mankwe district of the North-West Province.

Ntsime started school at the age of eleven years. He completed his primary education in 1947 at Ramatshaba Primary School. He subsequently obtained his Junior Certificate at Munsieville Secondary School, near Krugersdorp, and completed his Matric at Klnerton College of Education in Lady Selborne.

From 1953 to 1955 Ntsime trained as a teacher at Pretoria College of Education. He then studied privately with UNISA. Ntsime later completed his B.A. degree, majoring in Setswana and Psychology.

Ntsime then joined Munsieville Secondary School as a teacher until 1956. From 1956 to 1963 he was a teacher at Bafokeng High School and principal
of Motswedi High School at Lehurutshe. Ntsime was then promoted to the post of Inspector of Schools in Tlhabane Circuit at Rustenburg from 1964.

Ntšime also served on the following committees:

- **1964**: Secretary of the Setswana Language Board
- **1977**: Chairman of the Board of African Languages
- **1976**: Coordinator of Parliamentary Affairs (BOP)
- **1977-1983**: Secretary of Department of Education (BOP)
- **1983**: Commissioner of Workers' Compensation (BOP)
- **1983**: Member, Department of Education and later appointed Deputy Minister of Education (BOP)

Following the fall of the Bophuthatswana Government in 1994, Ntšime returned to his village, Lesetlheng at Moruleng. This can be attributed to the fact that Ntšime had been quite actively involved in the Mangope regime and was thus unsettled by political developments after 1994. Ntšime has retired from politics and is still living in Lesetlheng.

Ntšime married Fanny Setsabeng Mathodi Pooe in 1958 (29 February). They have been blessed with seven children: Bareng, Kalebe, Kabelo-Manyane, Moabi, Mmasekoala-Boitumelo, Kagiso and Kubu.

As an author, Ntšime has contributed enormously to Setswana grammar, literature and poetry. His publications include:

**Grammar books**
- *Puo e Tshelang* (Standards 6 and 7)
- *Tsa Rona* (Standards 5, 6 and 7)
- *E Antswe Letseleng* (Standards 6-10)
Novels
- Thathlamano ya Matlhasedi (Standards 1-6)
- Thathlamano ya Marang (Standards 1-5)

Poetry
- "Tswina" (1979) (Mamepe)
- "Mafoko a Mafatswà" (1986) (co-author)

Short Stories
- "Mpolelele dilo" (1972) (co-author)
- "Ntlo tie le tsa Mağopa" (1984)

Folklore
- Nkoko ke Reeditse (1988)
- Maabanyane (1989)

Plays
- Kobo e Ntsho (1968)
- Pelo e Ntsho (1972)
- Pelo e ja Serati (1975)
- Matlhothapelo (1976)
- Lorato ke eng (1980)
- Se se Jelenq re (1985)
- Ke Batla go itse re (1985)
- Ke mo Opile nga (1988)
- Madi ka Madi (1990)
Ntsime received various awards in recognition of his contributions to Setswana literature and education. For instance, he received the Solomon T. Plaatjie trophy for his poem, “Tswina” (first prize). L. M. Taunyane is the co-author of “Tswina.” In addition, the former Bophuthatswana government conveyed upon Ntsime “The Order of the Leopard” on 16 December 1982. Two years later, in 1984, Ntsime received a Certificate of Dedication and Devotion from the former Bophuthatswana’s Teachers’ Association.

Ntsime is not only a scholar and educationalist, but also a lay Christian preacher. While living in Mafikeng, he used to preach and pray regularly on Sunday at the N. G. Kerk. He has remained a staunch member of this church throughout his life. This aspect of his life is manifest not only in the themes about which he writes, but in the normative messages conveyed in his work. As I will demonstrate in the subsequent chapters of this mini-dissertation, Ntsime’s role of author-as-preacher is vital to the analysis of the nature of Pelo e ja Serati.

2.2 CAST OF CHARACTERS

The nature of translation renders it difficult for non-Setswana speakers to capture fully the meanings implied in certain characters’ names. These names, as well as extracts from Pelo e ja Serati, are translated for the benefit of readers who do not read Setswana. It is important to note that, due to the very nature of translation, certain of the English passages may not always reflect the implicit, cultural meanings of the text and/or the author’s intended meanings.

These meanings will be explored in greater detail in the following chapters. However, for the sake of exposition, it is useful to delineate the cast of characters at this stage.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Translation of Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dithole</td>
<td>dust</td>
<td>main character; chief’s son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serame</td>
<td>ice</td>
<td>Dithole’s father; chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nteseng</td>
<td>leave me alone</td>
<td>Dithole’s mother; chief’s wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itumeleeng</td>
<td>be happy</td>
<td>Dithole’s uncle; chief’s brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batshepile</td>
<td>they are cheap</td>
<td>Dithole’s friend and confidant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moremi</td>
<td>he who chops</td>
<td>witch-doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keoagile</td>
<td>I’ve built it</td>
<td>village head-man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaotingwe</td>
<td>it cannot be extinguished</td>
<td>village head-man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modiegi</td>
<td>she who delays</td>
<td>Nombini’s friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lefufa</td>
<td>jealousy</td>
<td>village girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mmolefuva</td>
<td>mother of jealousy</td>
<td>Lefufa’s mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ditshohebo</td>
<td>gossip</td>
<td>village girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mmaditshebo</td>
<td>mother of gossip</td>
<td>Ditshohebo’s mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nkileg</td>
<td>hate me</td>
<td>village girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mmankileg</td>
<td>mother of hate me</td>
<td>Nkileg’s mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngaka Matwetwe</td>
<td>expert in traditional medicinal charms</td>
<td>witch-doctor at Phalaborwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itirelelg</td>
<td>do things on your own</td>
<td>wife of Ngaka Matwetwe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dlamini</td>
<td>Nguni name, foreigner</td>
<td>Nombini’s father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thandwe</td>
<td>love</td>
<td>Dlamini’s wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nombini</td>
<td>the second one</td>
<td>daughter of Dlamini and Thandwe; the woman whom Dithole wishes to marry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosidi</td>
<td>grinder</td>
<td>Dithole’s cousin; villagers’ choice to be Dithole’s wife</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3 PLOT SUMMARY

The title of the play can be translated as "a loving heart knows no bounds." This implies that a person must be free to choose his/her own love-partner/spouse. Ntsime uses this notion to demonstrate the conflict between traditional and modern marriage customs. A related theme is the struggle between duty/destiny and personal choice, as manifest in Dithole's struggle to do his duty and to follow his heart.

The play is set in Bakhudung village and in Phalaborwa. The events described in Pelo e ja Serati probably take place between the 1920s and 1940s, a period of South African history marked by the disintegration of more traditional ways of life under an increasingly capitalist and urbanised political-economy.

Ntsime uses the play as a platform to caution his fellow Batswana against "losing" their culture, since modern marriage customs are portrayed as a deliberate attempt to ignore and even degrade African cultural traditions. Here, the author-as-preacher cautions both the old and the young against evil deeds and urges the youth, in particular, to respect their elders and the traditional ways of life.

2.4 PELO E JA SERATI AS COMEDY

Central to any analysis of Pelo e ja Serati is an understanding of the genre of the play. It can be regarded as a comedy, since it fits Frye's (1957: 84) description of a comedy so well:

What normally happens [in a comedy] is that a young man wants a young woman, that his desire is resisted by some opposition, usually
paternal, and that near the end of the play some twist in the plot enables the hero to have his will.

In this play, Dithole (dust) represents the hero, a young man in love with Nombini (the second one). Dithole wishes to marry Nombini, but his desire is resisted by his parents as well as other villagers. This is because Nombini is a foreigner and, as the future king of Bakhudung village, tradition dictates that Dithole's wife must be chosen for him by his people. Dithole is supported in his endeavour to marry Nombini by Batšhipile, Modiegi, Nkileng and Mmankieng. On the other hand, he is opposed by Serame, Ntseng, Gaotingwe and Keaoagile. Dithole clashes particularly strongly with his father, Serame, further indicating the comic nature of Pelo e ja Serati, as described by Frye (1957).

After a heated argument with his father, Dithole flees to Thaba ya Bادية (Mountain of Gods). Similarly, Nombini, who has been staying in Bakhudung village with her parents, takes refuge in Phalaborwa (better than the south). The author's deliberate choice of Phalaborwa for Nombini's safe haven creates a direct contrast between Nombini's home, which signifies the outside world, and Bakhudung village, which is lacking in tolerance and characterised by unfair or outdated practices. The movement by Nombini from Bakhudung village to Phalaborwa signifies or mirrors the plot's movement towards a new society where a loving heart can indeed know no bounds.

This understanding of Pelo e ja Serati is supported by Frye (1957: 84) who makes the following further observations about comedy:
In this simple pattern there are several complex elements. In the first place, the movement of comedy is usually a movement from one kind of society to another. At the beginning of the play the obstructing characters are in charge of the play's society, and the audience recognizes that they are usurpers. At the end of the play the device in the plot that brings hero and heroine together causes a new society to crystallize around the hero.

When Nombini arrives in Phalaborwa after having fled Bakhudung village, she is welcomed by the character Itireleng (do things on your own) who is the wife of Ngaka Matwetwe. In apparent distress, Nombini tells Itireleng (Ntsime 1982: 69):

Mma, ke tswa golo go se fa.
Ke lathegetswe ke tsela le legae,
Jaanong ke kopa Marobalo le pabalelo
Ke latlhegile, lekwa ke tswapng ga ke go itse;
Le leina la motse o ga ke o itse.

(Madam [mother], I am from far away.
I have lost my way home.
Please provide me with a place to sleep and security. I am lost, I don't even know where I come from. I don't even know the name of this place).
Itireleng’s response to Nombini underscores the contrast between Bakhudung village and Phalaborwa and the movement of the plot towards the creation of a new and better society (Ntsime 1982: 69):

Motse o, o bidiwa Phalaborwa ngwanaka.  
Batho be ona ba molemo thata;  
Ga o a latlhega ngwanaka, o gorogile mo gae.

(This place is called Phalaborwa, my child. People here are kind and civilised. You are not lost, you are at home.)

Itireleng, who appears to be a very kind and understanding person, and her husband, Ngaka Matwetwe, console Nombini. When Nombini explains that her father, Dlamini, has been chased away from Bakhudung village because he, like herself, is a foreigner, Matwetwe expresses his belief that ethnic barriers are not important. He also states that if he had a son, he would advise him to marry Nombini (Ntsime 1982: 70):

A ngwana yo Montle!  
Fa nka be ke na le morwa.  
Nka be ke mo go nyadisa.  
Le fa e le Letebele ga go re sepe,  
E bile ga a lebege jaaka Letebele.  
Le Setswana o se itse Sentele Thata.

(Oh what a beautiful girl!  
If I had a son I would advise him to marry you.  
It doesn’t matter even if she is a Letebele. She
doesn't even look like Letebele. 'She even speaks Setswana so well').

As Frye (1957) has indicated, the movement of a comedy is usually from one kind of a society to another. Here Nombini has escaped from Bakhudung village which is more traditional, perhaps even "backward," when compared to Phalaborwa which is better than other places, in this case better than the south. One feature of its superior status is that in Phalaborwa people seem not to be worried about ethnic barriers. It is significant that Matwetwe attempts to console Nombini in a light-hearted manner, exposing the out-dated practices of Bakhudung village to the corrective of laughter. This is the essence of comedy.

Later in the plot, with the help of Ngaka Matwetwe, Dithole and Nombini return to Bakhudung village where they are greeted with jubilation and the promise of a marriage feast. In the end, the village as a whole is changed and a new society is born. This renewal of society and the happy ending of the play are clear indications of its comic nature.

The sudden change in attitude amongst the villagers is, however, somewhat puzzling. Before considering this issue, to which I will return in the conclusion of this mini-dissertation, it is necessary to examine the ways in which Ntsime communicates meaning to his reader/audience. Accordingly, the importance of characterization forms the subject of the next chapter.
3. WHAT IS CHARACTERISATION?

3.1 THE USE OF CHARACTERS

One of the main purposes of literature is to give the reader an insight into human behaviour. Authors achieve this through a variety of techniques, including characterisation. This can be defined as a narrative device employed by an author to give a human identity to literary figures. The author achieves this through the capacity of such figures to assume some form of human status for the reader/audience.

This is because the meaning of any text turns upon the capacity of the reader/audience to identify with the characters and the dilemmas in which they find themselves. Such identification hinges on the use of language, names, dialogue, action/inaction and setting, all of which convey explicit as well as implicit meaning to a reader/audience located in a specific historical and cultural milieu.

Significantly, it is often the more subtle meanings -- for instance, those conveyed by a character’s name or a place name -- that provide the reader/audience with the most important clues about the events unfolding in the text. On the one hand, this provision of clues by the author assumes a particular knowledge on the part of the reader/audience. On the other hand, certain, usually more explicit, clues presuppose the reader/audience’s lack of knowledge.

To illustrate, let us examine some of the opening passages of Pelo e ja Serâti. In the soliloquy that begins the play, Ditolo states his wish to “fly to Matebeleland” (nkabo ke fofeta Tebeleng [Ntsem1982: 2]), and subsequently tells Batshipile that he loves a Ndebele girl (“ke rata ngwana
wa Letebele". The conflict inherent in this statement would be immediately apparent to a reader/audience familiar with traditional Batswana marriage practices. For those unfamiliar with Batswana traditions, Ntsime (1982: 3) provides a further explanation of the chasm of custom and culture: “Leo le aghweng ke mkgwala ditso” (that which has been built on norms and values). Ntsime the author/preacher appears to direct this explicit information about culture and history to a specific reader/audience, presumably the youth and/or urban dwellers whom he believes have “lost” the past.

3.2 CHARACTERISATION IN Pelo e Ja Serati

Ntsime’s characters illuminate both the negative and positive aspects of human behaviour. Characters like Mmalefufa and Mmaditshebo despise Nombini, a foreigner and the chosen love of Dithole. Those with power indulge their greed by degrading those without power, as in the clash between the royal family of Kgosi Serame and the young lovers, Dithole and Nombini. To unravel these and other conflicts portrayed in the play, it is necessary to determine what the characters, or groups of characters, represent to the audience. In the remainder of this chapter, I will consider some of the ways through which Ntsime assigns specific meanings to individual characters as well as groups of characters.

3.2.1 Setting

Let me first consider the setting of Pelo e ja Serat. Ntsime places his characters in real geographical environments, including rural areas like Phalaborwa and Marumasweu (Bakhudung Village). This is a powerful mechanism of characterisation which helps the reader/audience to grasp the events of the play. Stereotypical rural characters, for instance, will be more closely associated with “tradition” and conservative values than their urban counterparts.
whom the reader/audience will expect to be more “modern” in their ways.

Historically, the play is probably set between the 1920s and 1940s, a period of South African history marked by increasing urbanisation and migrant labour as well as the institutionalisation of wage labour. During these decades, black South Africans like the residents of Bakhudung Village had to negotiate new relations with urban centres and “modernity” (see, e.g. Marks and Rathbone 1982). This historical period, then, provides an excellent backdrop to a clash between times and cultures, manifest in the central conflict between traditional and modern marriage practices.

In terms of the characters, “tradition” is represented by Dithole’s parents who insist that he marry his cousin, Mosidi. Conversely, social change and, by association, “modernity” is signified by Dithole himself and Nombini who support the idea that a loving heart knows no bounds.

In sum, Pelo e ia Serati includes characters and settings who invoke in the reader/audience definite notions of tradition and social change. In this manner, the central conflict between traditional and modern marriage customs is created and sustained.

3.2.2 Characters are characters through other characters

As noted in the introduction, T. E. Ntombela (1994: 131) argues that characterisation is important at two levels (the story and the text). At the level of the story, the characters are grouped together and are called actants. Ntombela cites the framework established by Greimas.
that distinguishes between actor and actant. Both are submitting to an act, and both categories can include human beings as characters, inanimate objects (e.g., magic rings or trees) as well as abstract concepts like destiny. However, whereas there can be numerous actors, actants are reduced to six in Greimas' scheme:

**Figure 1: GREIMAS' ACTANTIAL FRAMEWORK**

![Diagram of Greimas' Actantial Framework]

The subject is usually the main character, who always strives towards a certain objective. To achieve the desired objective, the subject is pushed and motivated by certain forces which are always abstract, for instance bravery, love, or fate. Dithole, for instance, struggles between duty and destiny. It often happens that the subject and the receiver correspond. If the subject succeeds in accomplishing his desired goal, he becomes the receiver.

The subject usually experiences some measure of resistance in his/her struggle to reach the desired objective or goal and thus requires assistance. The type of resistance he/she experiences is exerted by opponents. The helpers are the persons who aid the subject to attain his/her objective. These relations with the
subject/protagonist allow the reader/audience to make contrasts between the characters, which is an important method of plot development.

Greimas' framework is useful in analysing the relationships between characters in *Pelo e ja Serati*. Dithole is undoubtedly the subject of the play. He wishes to marry Nombini, a Ndebele girl. This desire appears to be shattered by his parents (Serame and Nteseng) who demand that he marry his cousin, Mosidi. In this conflict with his parents, Dithole is motivated not only by love for Nombini but by his ambition for a new, more tolerant society. Dithole's parents regard the anticipated marriage between Dithole and Nombini as being against their cultural beliefs and practices. Specifically, they disapprove of the marriage because Nombini is not a Motswana; should Dithole marry her, he would be going against the endogamous marriage customs of his people, the wishes of his parents, and his own destiny of kingship.

To achieve his desired objective, Dithole is pushed and motivated by his devotion to Nombini. Love, cast in its "modern" form, is depicted in the character of Nombini: even when her character does not physically appear on the stage, Nombini's presence, both favourable and foreboding, is apparent. Other abstract forces that compel Dithole are bravery, cleverness and duty.

In his struggle, Dithole is assisted by his friend Batshipile. Dithole is opposed by his parents, particularly his father, Serame, and other villagers, including Keoagile and Gaotingwe. The importance of these and other characters' names as well as Ntsime's creation of
opposing/contrasting parties will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

3.2.3 Dialogue and monologue/soliloquy

The essence of the clash between traditional and modern marriage customs is revealed to the reader/audience in the first act of the play. The conversation between Batšhipile and Dithole at Boswela-Nku River contains a poignant plot summary. As Batšhipile (Ntsime 1982: 4) tells his friend and ally:

ke a go utwa molekane
tela itse gore pelo e ja serati
go buiwe jalo ke mogologolo

(I hear you my friend. But please note that a loving heart knows no bounds. So said the elders.)

Batšhipile has just found Dithole ambling along the river valley, contemplating and soliloquising about life and his love for Nombini. This is the opening scene of the drama, in which Dithole, addressing the reader/audience directly, casts himself as the comic hero (Ntsime 1982: 1-2):

fa nkabo ke na le maatla a bommampipi.
Nkabo ke itsalanya le Marubisi.
ke itsalanya le dinonyane tsa bosigo,
gore ditle di nkadime diphuka,
nkabo ke na le diphuka tsa lephoi
(If I had extraordinary powers like witches, I would be a friend to owls and a friend of night birds, so that they would lend me their wings. If I had had the wings of a dove, I would fly to Matebeleland to marvel at the sight of her.)

Here, the reader/audience receives important clues about the events to follow. Dithole's physical separation from his love, Nombini, mirrors the culturally problematic nature of their anticipated marriage. Nombini is not only far away, she is, according to traditional marriage customs and the views of his parents, beyond his grasp, for she is of Ndebele origin and, in short, out of bounds to a Motswana like him.

The conflict between traditional and modern marriage customs is discussed in greater detail in chapter six. What is important to note at this stage is that, from the onset of the play, the reader/audience is able to anticipate the nature and possible outcomes of the clash at hand. Will, for instance, Dithole realise his love for Nombini, or will he succumb to the wishes of his parents? Ntsime achieves this through his use of characters: their names, the time and place in which they find themselves, their words and their relationships to other characters (i.e. alliances, oppositions) allow the audience to anticipate the events of the play. In the next chapter, I examine Ntsime's most powerful method of characterisation, his use of names.
4. CHARACTERISATION AND NAMING

As noted in the introduction, most of the character names in *Pelo e la Serati* have been classified as attributive names: they announce in advance the role a particular character will fulfill and the actions he/she will perform. This allows the reader/audience to anticipate the plot and to associate a character’s actions with his/her name. This name-giving technique is a powerful mechanism of characterisation in the hands of Ntsime who uses it throughout the play to reveal the traits of his characters.

Dithole’s name, which can be translated as “dust,” does not only depict his character’s personality but also helps to develop the plot. According to Batswana beliefs, “dust” implies a bad or evil omen (“ina lebe seromo”). To his father and mother, Dithole represents a nuisance like dust. The association with dust (dirt, sand) and blindness and darkness is quite potent: Dithole’s character struggles with his wishes to marry Nombini, seemingly blinded by his love for her and oblivious to his culture and destiny. Moreover, as Dithole’s father, Serame, states in the play (Ntsime 1982: 8; cf. Sekeleko 1993: 39):

```
e kete o tla re thunthunyetsa dithole
```

(it would seem he would blind our eyes with dust.)

Dithole counters this notion that he is a nuisance or a trouble-maker, asking his father (Ntsime 1982: 9):

```
ke kile ka thunthunyetsa re dithole ka?
```

(Where did I blind my father’s eyes with dust?).
But, later in the play, when Dithole is with Nombini at Baswela-Nku River, he acknowledges that he is "dust" (Ntsime 1982: 39):

ke Dithole ke tla thunthunyetsa bagoumaki dithole;
ke ba fatla matlho a kilo le letlhoo.

(1 am dust. I shall blind the eyes of those who mention your name. I shall blind their hateful eyes.)

Here, Dithole suggests tradition itself is blind, signified by the stubbornness and loathing of his parents and other villagers. He acknowledges that he is "dust," and vows to blind (punish) those who cannot see the power and wisdom of true love, in the names of the present and future kings. Ntsime has brilliantly represented traditional customs (old age; ice; frozen in the past) and more modern practices (youth; change; dust).

Nteseng, Dithole’s mother, is of the same opinion as Serame. She agrees with Serame that Dithole’s blindness is creating problems in the village and alludes to the corrupting influences of dust/dirt (Ntsime 1982: 50):

ke raya gore o sotlile rraago, ngwanaka, ka go suputsa leina la gagwe mo ditholeng

(I dare say that you have ridiculed your father, my son, by rolling about his name in the dust.)
The above-mentioned information demonstrates that Dithole's name does not only depict his character but also serves to develop the plot. Dust is an active force that can disrupt as well as punish. It is associated with drought which brings hardship and suffering. However, dust is also a harbinger of change, as before a rainstorm or during the spring sandstorms that often occur in the geographical setting of the play.

The names of other characters also contribute to the plot. Batšhipile, as noted above, is allied with Dithole. Literally, "Batšhipile" can be translated as "they are cheap" i.e. "they have swallowed their pride." This name indicates to the reader/audience that Batšhipile has turned his back on his culture, or "sold out" his people and their way of life. This act of naming places Batšhipile not only in alliance with Dithole, but also in opposition to Dithole's parents and the traditional ways they represent. Thus, the characters are grouped according to the play's main theme concerning conflicting marriage customs and ideals and the fundamental clash between tradition and modernity.

All the characters can be categorised in terms of their alliance or opposition to Dithole. Ntsime's use of three Nguni names (Nombini, Dlamini and Thandiwe) designates these characters as outsiders in a village predominated by Batswana. These and other names (e.g. Lefufa or "jealousy") serve as explicit markers of conflict. The meanings inherent in other characters' names are, however, often much more implicit. This chapter will analyse these meanings and also explore the ways in which the concerns of the opposing parties sustain the plot.
### Table 2: OPPOSING GROUPS OF CHARACTERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characters who support Dithole's marriage to Nombini</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Batšhipile (they are cheap, i.e. they have swallowed their pride)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modiegi (she who is late)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nkilieng (Hate, i.e. you can hate me but I will say what I deem fit and right)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mmankilieng ([Mother of Nkilieng] hate me)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characters who oppose Dithole's marriage to Nombini</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serame (ice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nteseng (you leave me alone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lefufa (jealousy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ditshebo (gossip)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mmateufua (jealousy's mother)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mmaditshebo (gossip's mother)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaotingwe (it won't be extinguished, i.e. fire)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keoagile (I have built it, i.e. the village)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The author undoubtedly chose these names deliberately. Some names, like Mmateufua and Lefufa, are self-explanatory. The relationship between these two characters, as between Mmaditshebo and Ditshebo, can be summed up as “kgomo e e masi ga e itsale, fa e itsale, e itsale motsalo o o maswe” or “Leina le ile boreelong” which means “like mother like daughter.” Lefufa and Ditshebo are young girls who resent Nombini, an outsider, for having won the heart of the future king. The girls’ dislike of foreigners seems to have been learnt at home, as manifest in the behaviour of their respective mothers.
On the other side of the conflict we find the mother-daughter pair of Nkileng and Mmankileng (hate me and mother of hate me). These characters openly support Dithole’s intentions to marry Nombini. Nkileng and Mmankileng are afraid of neither the jealous women of the village, nor the headmen, nor even the king himself. According to these two characters, Nombini is the most beautiful girl in the village and therefore it should surprise no one that Dithole has chosen her to be his bride. As Nkileng says (Ntsime 1982: 18):

ke ngongoregela fa le tshwenya Nombini,
Le fa a ka nna mohumagadi go siame,
ke maemo a a mo tshwanetseng lentie.

(I complain when you [jealous women] worry Nombini. Even if she can be like a queen it does not matter. It is the position that suits her so well.)

Mirroring the words of her daughter, Mmankileng states (Ntsime 1982: 24):

Jaanong Dithole a ka nna a nyala Lelebele.
Gonne bonile jwa lwe ke kgogedi e e maatla.

(Now Dithole can marry a Ndebele because her beauty is a strong attraction.)

Nkileng and Mmankileng are not afraid to speak their minds, nor do they fear being reprimanded for voicing their opinions. The names of these two characters suggest a certain ignorance (or blindness) on the part of the other villagers who are
quick to hate not only Nombini the outsider, but also those who, contrary to the beliefs of the majority, sing her praises.

The majority finds a poignant voice in the character of Mmalefufa, who busies herself with spreading rumours in the village about Dithole’s plans to marry Nombini. Mmalefufa’s character helps to stir up the conflict between tradition and modernity in Act 2, Scene 3, prior to the actual proposal which only takes place in Act 3, Scene 2. Mmalefufa’s rumours thus serve to anticipate or precipitate the events of the play (Ntsime 1982: 28):

A lona ga lo ise lo utlwe sepe?
Moi se o, o duma kgang ya bona,
Dithole o ikaelela go nyala Nombini.

(Do you mean that you have not heard the rumours? This village rears with the news that Dithole intends to marry Nombini.)

Mmalefufa says these words in the presence of tribal men, namely Keoagile (“I have built it” i.e. the village) and Gaotingwe (“it won’t be extinguished” i.e. the fire). Apparently, she involves these men in the affairs of Dithole and Nombini to gather support for her plans to destroy their relationship. Gaotingwe is also Mmalefufa’s husband, Keoagile, their family friend. Significantly, Ntsime could have given Gaotingwe’s character the name “Rralefufa’r (jealousy’s father) because he supports the utterances of his wife and daughter. As Gaotingwe states (Ntsime 1982: 28, cf. Sekeleka 1993: 49):
Kana Keoagile, mme yo o bua mafoko.
Ka setswana morwa kgosi o batlewa mosadi ke morafe. Mosadi wa kgosi ke mosadi wa morafe.

(By the way, Keoagile, this woman speaks real words. According to Batswana customs, a king's wife must be chosen by the tribe; a king's wife is a servant of the tribe.)

Keoagile's name ("I have built it" i.e. the village) suggests, on the one hand, that he is a prominent man in the community and a guardian of its values. However, Ntsime might equally have given this character the name "Keothubile" ("I have broken it"), given his stubborn and hostile attitude towards the proposed marriage between Dithole and Nombini and his stated desire to break up their relationship. As Keoagile states (Ntsime 1982: 29):

Nna banake ba ka se buawe ka letebele. Ka re ka monna a bina khudu nka se loma! O re sema Makgalagadi.

(As for me, my children won't be ruled by a Ndebele. I swear by my father who venerates a tortoise, I can bite my elbow [i.e. I vow that it will never happen]. He [Dithole] takes us for fools [Makgaigadi].)

Given the divisions amongst the villagers over the proposed marriage, as well as the underlying opposition between tradition and modernity, Ntsime's naming of Keoagile becomes all the more significant. The author would seem to be asking the
reader/audience whether Keoagile and the attitudes he represents will ultimately break or destroy much more than the marriage. Or, alternatively, whether these attitudes ultimately will recover or preserve traditional practices and “build up” Batswana culture.

In contrast, Dithole seems to be attempting to tear down cultural stereotypes and create good relationships and respect between different ethnic groups (Batswana and Nguni [Matabele]). Keoagile, on the other hand, is very disrespectful towards Dithole, his future king. Keoagile swears an oath against the “kgosi” (prince), an action that seems to contradict his stated fidelity to Batswana culture. His behaviour is thus inconsistent, leaving the reader/audience to ponder the virtues and vices of tradition.

The above-cited dialogue between Keoagile and Gaotingwe also serves to develop the plot. They conclude by saying that they will take the matter to the king.

In Act 3, Scene 2 we see Dithole achieving his aim: he proposes to Nombini and she agrees to marry him. Dithole tells his friend, Batshipile, who promises his support. Dithole must now face his parents to account for the rumours that have been circulating through the village. When his mother approached him earlier in the play and questioned his affair with Nombini, Dithole dismissed it as a misleading and vicious story. He completely denied his love for Nombini and blamed the villagers of creating unnecessary conflict between his father and the tribe.

Meanwhile, Keoagile and Gaotingwe have brought the matter before Dithole’s father, the king. Having presented their allegation that Dithole loves the daughter of a foreigner, they proposed that the prince (kgosi) be called to clarify his position. However, Serame emphasized that Dithole should, and would marry Mosidi, his cousin. Serame’s uncompromising attitude mirrors his name (ice). He stands firm, like frozen water that cannot flow. Serame does not deviate from his understanding that a Motswana cannot possibly marry a Ndebele, and that a partner for a boy
must be chosen by his parents. Serame stands in opposition to Gaotingwe (and his allies) as ice is to fire. Another impression is that Serame is locked, or frozen, in his traditional beliefs, to such an extent that only his son can bring change to the tribe.

In the ensuing scene, the tribesmen together with the king cross-examine Dithole about his affair with Dithole. Serame tells his son that his tribe (Bakhudung) loves him very much, and that his bride must be chosen by them. Dithole replies that while he appreciates his people’s love for him, his true love is the one he loves with his whole heart: a Ndebele girl.

Serame is shocked by Dithole’s decision, having never expected such an outburst from his son. Serame threatens Dithole with a knobkerrie, and the boy runs away from the village and settles in Thaba ya Badimo (Mountain of the Gods). Serame also orders that Nombini’s family be driven out of the village. Nombini flees the village to Phalaborwa.

The name Nombini means “a second one.” This name seems to imply that Nombini is an additional or alternative wife to Dithole, after his cousin (who represents tradition and the love of his people). Nombini is also the second main character who propels the plot whether she is physically present on stage or merely an object of discourse.

Her main characteristics are beauty, innocence, dedication and perseverance. These traits are revealed through various methods of characterisation. These include monologue/soliloquy, situations of conflict, dialogue/conversation and contrasts between characters.
At the opening of the play, for instance, Dithole describes Nombini’s beauty in a conversation with Dithole (Ntsime 1982: 2):

"Ke mosetsana yo motshwana wa Letebele.

(She is very beautiful, a Tebele girl.)

The discussion between Modiege, Lefufa, Nombini and Ditshebo which takes place at Nkileng’s home further reveals the beauty of Nombini. As Ditshebo states (Ntsime 1982: 16):

"Ke bowa ka kwano mo go boNombini,
kgebe tse ditshetlhana tse di matlho a mafatshwane.

(I cannot be compared to Nombini. She has an extraordinary beauty with beautiful, dark eyes.)

Nombini’s parents, Dlamini and Thandiwe, learn of her affair with Dithole when they are confronted by Mogale, Gaotingwe and Keoagile. Nombini confesses to her father that she is indeed in love with Dithole (Ntsime 1982: 59):

"Ee, ke ratana le ene rra,
ke mo rata fela jaaka a nthata.

(Yes, I am indeed in love with him [Dithole], father. I love him just as he loves me.)"
Just as Dithole revealed to his friend Batšhipile that he loves Nombini wholeheartedly, so Nombini confides in her father. She admits to her parents that she is deeply in love with Dithole, despite the problems that her feelings are causing within the village. This dialogue with her parents is a clear indication that Nombini, like Dithole, is an open, candid and strong character.

Nombini's interactions with Matwetwe and his wife, Itireleng, elucidate both her innocence and dedication. Matwetwe describes her as a workaholic, a person with strong feminine qualities and also something of a little child (Ntšime 1982: 84). She puts her trust in Matwetwe and follows his instructions fully. Nombini also confides in Matwetwe that she is worried about the welfare and whereabouts of her parents and their herd of cattle.

To assist Nombini, Matwetwe throws his magic bones and learns that she is also extremely concerned about the whereabouts of Dithole. Matwetwe explains to Nombini that Dithole is alive and is staying at Thabeng ya Badimo (Mountain of the Gods), but that he has been taken there by a ferocious animal and has been turned into a wild beast. This comparison between Dithole and a wild animal can be interpreted as a reference to the hero's wild or insatiable love for Nombini or the fact that, without her, he is no longer fully human.

Matwetwe further tells Nombini that she is the only person who can rescue Dithole from his predicament. But, the ngaka tells her, she must be strong and take traditional medicinal charms with her. She must also complete a number of tasks which will test her perseverance. The first assignment she receives from Matwetwe is to climb a very rugged mountain to fetch the dung of Mnadipeia (a fearsome mountain snake that feeds on dassie).
Nombini’s second assignment was to wake at dawn and go to the Mountains of Vultures. Here she must fetch a vulture feather to be used as another medicinal charm in her journey to rescue Dithole.

The two assignments were dangerous at times. During the first task, Nombini encountered a fearsome snake, but she is ultimately successful in all that Matwetwe instructs her to do. Her dedication and perseverance are apparent to the reader/audience. Having completed her two assignments, she is now ready for the long journey to the Mountain of Gods.

Matwetwe gives Nombini a white horse called Mosweu. After mixing his medicinal charms, the ngaka sends Nombini on her way, instructing her carefully how to use the charms he has prepared (Ntsime 1982: 85):

Jaanong o utlwelela sentle thata –
Morwa kgosi of fetogile phologolo
O tshaba batho, o a ba i la:
fa a ka go bona pele a ka tshaba
Jaanong fa o lebile fa logageng lo logolo
O be o hupe pheko e mo ganong,
o be o bitsa morwa kgosi ka leina
O be o re Kgwabofala motho wa batho;
kgwabofala o fetoge setseketseke se netswe ke pula.
fa o sena go bua jaana o be o ngatha se.
O itshase ka sona mo matsogong le mo sefatlehong.
E tla re fa o mo tshwara ka seita
A dumele fela jaaka kwana
Now listen attentively. The chief's son has been turned into an animal. He is afraid of people and also hates them. If he sees you first, he will run away. So when you approach the big cave put this charm under your tongue. Then call him by his name and say: "Turn into a twit poor soul. Turn into a twit and be stupefied." Then, after saying this, bite this charm and apply it to your hands and face. Then, when you hold him by the hand, he will respond positively like a lamb. Instruct him to accompany you. Then tell him to climb on the horse. When you approach Bakhudung village, chew this charm and spit it out in front of you.

Nombini adhered to Matwetwe's instructions exactly. Dithole responded to her interventions in the way Matwetwe predicted. The two were then welcomed with jubilation when they returned to the village. This sequence of events reveals to the reader/audience that Nombini loves Dithole very much. The arduous tasks she undertook are a clear indication that she is a very strong, intelligent and committed character.

The impression we receive from the above discussion of the characters' names is that the author has succeeded in developing the plot by assigning his characters
meaningful names. Ntsime’s use of naming in *Pelo e je Serati* cannot be over-emphasized. The names of the characters suit their actions and behaviour. Ntsime’s use of naming also allows the reader/audience to appreciate the play as a work of art, whose powerful meanings are more often than not contained in nuances and subtleties. In sum, the names of the characters reflect and expand upon the author’s intentions (cf. Ashley 1980: 11). In the foregoing discussion, evidence of Ntsime’s use of imagery, in particular comparison, is also apparent. In the next chapter I will explore this method of characterisation in more detail.
5. CHARACTERISATION AND IMAGERY IN PELO e JA SERATI

There are various images in Pelo e ja Serati which promote characterisation and plot development. This chapter will discuss the main types of images used by Ntsime and, in turn, their content and context. As I will demonstrate, the predominant images in Pelo e ja Serati are an important method of characterisation.

5.1 TYPES OF IMAGES USED

Metaphor, personification and simile are among the images most commonly used in Setswana literature. As Grebainer (1975: 53) notes, such images can be both literal and figurative:

Imagery is literal when the images are to be taken in the natural or strict meaning; imagery is figurative when the meaning is an extension of the image presented.

In many instances, the images used can be interpreted literally as well as figuratively. In the opening passage of the play, for example, Dithole compares himself to a bird who wishes to fly away to Matebeleland. More particularly, he likens himself firstly to an owl, a nocturnal animal culturally associated with witchcraft, and then to a vulture, a symbol of death. He subsequently compares himself to a dove, which is a symbol of light and peace. Whereas all these images denote Dithole’s desired flight to Nombini, the owl and vulture would take a different path than the dove. Ntsime thus refers the reader/audience to the choices that Dithole faces and the events that await him and Nombini at the Mountain of Gods.
5.1.1 Metaphor

Metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is substituted for another to demonstrate a likeness or analogy between them. For instance,

O Noga, o ba la go ntshenyetsa botselo.
(you are a snake, you want to destroy my life.)

compares an wicked person or villain to a snake (Ntsime 1982: 34), drawing upon the well-known analogy of snakes and evil.

Metaphor is loosely defined as an implied comparison. In this case, words are used to indicate something different from the literal meaning. Two objects or aspects are compared with each other in their totality. One may thus represent the other to evoke a deeper or figurative meaning.

A striking example of metaphor is found in the following dialogue between Nombini (who is speaking) and Lefufa (Ntsime 1982: 34):

mme ga ke na sepe le bonoga we gago.
O noga o ba la go ntshenyetsa botselo.
(However, I am not fooled by your beguiling manners. You are a serpent, you want to destroy my future.)
In this passage, Ntsime uses the snake as an image to portray the characteristics of Lefufa (jealousy). Here Lefufa is compared to a snake, two objects which are otherwise dissimilar because one is a human being and the other is a reptile. The comparison creates similarity between these two dissimilar things. This image implies that the character of Lefufa has the qualities of a snake - sneaky, slithery and venomous.

When we consider the lines cited above, we realise immediately that the character Lefufa is not literally a snake, but the meaning is figurative in the sense that she is compared with a poisonous animal to indicate the extent and danger of her jealousy.

5.1.2 Personification

This is another type of device whereby a non-human or inanimate object is referred to or given the qualities of a human-being. It is regarded by some recent scholars as a sub-form of the metaphor. As in the case of metaphor and simile, a figurative meaning is often involved. Specific strategies are observed with regard to the creation of this type of image.

One such strategy is to ascribe human characteristics to an animal by adapting the animal’s name to that of a character. In the following passage uttered by Nombini, for example, a horse (pitse e tshweu) is addressed as Mosweu (the name of a person) (Ntsime 1982: 89):
Pitse e tshweu ke tla e bitsa Mosweu.

(I will name this white horse Mosweu.)

This implies that the horse is like a person who will guide Nombini to where Dithole is hiding. Cohen (1973: 193) defines personification as:

>The giving of human characteristics or shape to inanimate objects, to an emotion or instinct, to a moral quality, to an event like death, or to an invisible essence like the soul.

Nombini has confidence in the white horse (Mosweu), and this confidence is further manifest in the Mosupatsela (vulture’s feather) given to Nombini by Matwetwe. As Nombini says (Ntsime 1982: 90):

>Mosupatsela o tla mpontsha tsela,
A Nkisa kwa Dithole a leng teng.

(Mosupatsela [a vulture’s feather] will definitely lead me to where Dithole is.)

This implies that Nombini is certain that with the help of Mosupatsela (vulture’s feather), which Matwetwe has placed on the fore-head of Mosweu (white horse), they will together ultimately reach their destination. The animal and the inanimate object have assumed qualities of seeing and knowing.
5.1.3 Simile

Traditionally, simile is defined as an explicit comparison, as opposed to metaphor where the comparison is implicit. In simile, a comparison is made between two things which may differ in all respects except for the one specific characteristic which they have in common.

Simile is thus regarded as direct comparison. As Cohen (1973: 195) states, simile is:

A figure of speech which makes a direct comparison between two elements and which is usually introduced by 'like' or 'as.'

The following is an excellent example of simile (Ntsime 1982: 35):

Morwa kgosi o bonolo jaaka konyana.

(The prince [Dithole] is as kind as a lamb.)

Here one aspect of a lamb – its docility or gentleness – denotes kindness. This attribute is applied to Dithole's character through explicit comparison. This does not mean that Dithole is literally a lamb, nor is he meant to act like a lamb. The meaning is figurative and indicates the kindness manifest in the character Dithole's personality and behaviour. A lamb is a mild and gentle animal. It is also preferred during traditional sacrificial ceremonies because of its nature. It never makes noise, even when it is slaughtered. It accepts everything gently.
Simile is also used in a conversation between Dithole and Batšhipile, where the protagonist first reveals his feelings for Nombini. Not only Batšhipile but also the reader/audience can easily detect Dithole’s distress. Dithole is not himself, as Batšhipile exclaims (Ntsime 1982: 2):

Dumela Molekane!
Nthang sefathego sa gago se sethete, se.
O ka re sa motho phefo ya mariga e mo gamotse.

(Good day friend! Why is your face so pale like a person who is trapped in a very cold wind?)

From this description of Dithole’s appearance, which is that of a cold, miserable and numb human being, the reader/audience is able to discern his state of mind. Dithole is despondent because he cannot be with Nombini: he is trapped, as if frozen in a block of ice. This passage also reveals an important trait of Batšhipile who is caring and sympathetic towards his friend.

Batšhipile further states (Ntsime 1982: 2):

Pelo ya gago e kgatrakatshega jaaka pheko ya borwa. Matho a gago ga ke a rate molekane,
A senoia maikutlo a a kgoberegileng,
A a tobekaneng jaaka metsi a mogohe.
(Your heart is as disturbed as a wind from the South. Your facial expression does not please me. It reveals your disturbed feelings, like dirty pan water.)

Here, Ntsime compares Dithole to a troubled spirit. His heart is literally beating as strong as the southern winds. This image is further reinforced by his name, which can be translated as "dust." Just as the winds bring dust and disturbance, so the plot will bring conflict and despair. This foreshadowing of events is also achieved through the specific images Ntsime uses throughout the play, an issue to which I now turn.

5.2 DOMINANT IMAGES IN THE PLAY

Ntsime uses a number of images repeatedly. These must be examined not only in terms of their content, but also in relation to each other. For the purposes of analysis, these images are summarised in Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMAGE</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
<th>CONNOTATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>morubisi</td>
<td>owl</td>
<td>darkness; witchcraft; secretiveness; evil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lephoi</td>
<td>dove</td>
<td>light; love; Christianity; peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lenong</td>
<td>vulture</td>
<td>death; decay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nogasa</td>
<td>snake</td>
<td>treachery; evil; ancestors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significantly, Ntsime uses animal images. The first three are all birds and can be grouped together. They can also be contrasted to the snake which is of a different species or totem.
As noted in the first part of this chapter, Dithole compares himself firstly to an owl, and then to a vulture at the opening of the play (Ntsime 1982: 1):

Fa nkabo ke na le maatla a bommampipi,
Nkabo ke tlanya le Morubisi,
Gore de tle di nkadime diphuka.
Ke fofa jaaka dinong tsa loapi,
Ka diphuka di nkuka
Di nkuka di ntebisa kwa go Nombini.

(If I had the power of witches, I would befriend owls so that they would lend me their wings, so that I might fly like vultures. The wings would life me, lifting me and taking me to Nombini)

It is clear to the reader/audience that Dithole is in love with Nombini and anxious to meet her. In addition, the use of the owl/vulture images suggests that his is a troubled and possibly ill-fated affair. To reach her, Dithole must become like an owl which travels at night, like a secret lover, and is strongly associated with witchcraft in Batswana culture. On the one hand, this indicates to the reader/audience that Dithole is determined to beat all odds to realise his love, even wishing to be like a witch. Such determination, on the other hand, conveys definite risk and even death, as signified by the vulture. This death may be interpreted figuratively, because in pursuing Nombini, Dithole will jeopardise his future as king.

Further on in this opening soliloquy, Dithole completes this trio of images by comparing himself to a dove (Ntsime 1982: 2):
Nkabo ke na le diphuka tsa lephoi,
Nkobo ke fofela Tšebeleng;
ke ya go lathele bofofu teng.

(If I had had the wings of a dove, I would have flown to Matebeleland to marvel at the sight of her.)

Dithole refers the audience to his loss, suggesting that if things had been different, he would have gone to Nombini openly rather than under the cover of night. The beauty and goodness of their love has been thwarted by custom and the wishes of Dithole's parents. In relation to the other bird images, however, the dove suggests hope and foreshadows the ultimate resolution of the conflict. As Dithole states:

Nnaare ke buela eng ka mmampipi!
Mmampipi e le selo se se se nang lerato.
A ke bue ka nonyane e tshwaana lephoi
ka boswaana bo sweufatsa pelo.

(Why should I speak about the witches! When a witch doesn't even have love. Let me speak about a beautiful bird, a dove, because its beauty satisfies my heart.)

In this soliloquy as throughout the play, dove imagery is strongly associated with Nombini and the love Dithole feels towards her.
The vulture imagery recurs later in the play, also denoting death, when Nombini attempts to rescue Dithole from the Mountain of Gods. The vulture feathers which she collects, according to Matwetwe's instructions, signify the risks she must undertake. In addition, the vulture feather which she places on the white horse (Mosweu) in preparation for her long journey can also be interpreted as the symbolic death of traditional marriage customs and xenophobia. At the end of the journey, Dithole and Nombini are accepted by the villagers and it is suggested that society is reborn.

Snake imagery is also used repeatedly by Ntsime. Nombini, for instance, encounters dangerous snakes while completing Matwetwe’s assignments. On the one hand, the snakes signify danger. On the other hand, they are traditionally regarded as messengers of the ancestors sent to reveal a person’s destiny.

Snake imagery also appears in the following conversation between Nombini and Lefufa (Ntsime 1982: 34):

mme ga ke na sepe le bonoga jwa gago,
O noga o ba tla go ntshenyetsa botshelo.

(However, I am not fooled by your beguiling manners. You are a serpent, you want to destroy my future.)

Here, the snake imagery achieves characterisation, in several important ways. First, Lefufa’s character, like that of a snake, is seen to be deceitful and treacherous. Second, Ntsime creates a direct opposition between the
two female characters. Lefu fa (snake) is contrasted to Nombini (dove). They belong to different species/totems and are, like oil and water, entirely incompatible.

Significantly, these two characters are set in opposition not through their ethnic origins, but rather through their personality traits. Nombini's status as an outsider is, however, an important component of the conflict between traditional and modern marriage customs, which is the subject of the next chapter.
6. CHARACTERISATION AND THE CONFLICT BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND MODERN MARRIAGE CUSTOMS

Conflict is one of the most important elements of drama. It manifests itself in the sequence of events, in dialogue and in the interactions of characters. Conflict is also perceptible in the language patterns and names of characters, as well as in other theatrical elements. These aspects combine to dramatise conflict that exists in real life. In this way, a character's involvement in the sequence of events points toward a problematic experience which leads to a conflict situation and a crisis in each drama.

According to D. N. Jafita (1978: 35-36):

Conflict finds its origin from the Greek word 'agon' which means a struggle or contest. Ideas and interests that are at variance either within the individual, in which case the conflict is internal, or with those of other people or external forces. In the latter instance it [conflict] is external.

Conflict is thus a clash between divergent ideas, interests or parties. Shole (1988: 17) further notes that:

kgotlheng ke thulanganyo ya ditiragalo ya baanelwa le ya morero, e e supæng matlhakore a mabedi a a thulanang ka ntha ya lebaka lengwe la botshelo go fitlha lengwe la
Conflict is a well arranged series of events, characters and themes whereby two sides would debate upon a certain factor of life until one side comes out victorious or perhaps both become defeated.

In addition, Conradie (1978: 7) writes:

Botsing of konflik is 'n ander element wat in die drama belangrik is. 'n Mens kan sê dat dit 'n element is wat in die een of ander vorm in alle genres aangetref word, maar in drama val dit baie meer op.

He adds (1989: 7):

Botsing is die bron waaruit handeling ontstaan, want dit is moeilik om werkelik gang in 'n verhaal te bring sonder dat daar een of ander probleem en gevolglik stryd of botsing is.
(Conflict is the source of action. 'It is difficult to have a story without there being a problem of some kind or another and, consequently, struggle or conflict.)

Pelo e ja Serati begins with Dithole, the protagonist, describing the conflict underlying the drama. In the opening soliloquy, Dithole states (Ntsime 1982: 1):

Mme kana lerato ke tsala e kgolo ya mmampipi.
Ke raya e la fa le ntoile pelo,
Le nkgwetse mathe ganong ka tshereana
La nthatisa ngwana wa motswakwa.

(Love is a friend of witchcraft. I mean people have bewitched my heart. You [my heart, love as an abstract force] spat in my mouth and you let me be seduced by a foreigner.)

Here the reader/audience is informed about the nature of the conflict: Dithole appears torn between his love for an outsider and his allegiance to his people and their traditions. Although at this early stage of the play this conflict is internalised by the character of Dithole — he is struggling with himself — this theme divides the other characters into opposing camps, with Dithole remaining at the centre of the conflict. Let us consider more fully the meaning of this important soliloquy (Ntsime 1982: 1):

Fa nkabo ke na le maatla a bommampipi,
Nkabo ke itsalanya le marubisi,
ka itsalanya le dinonyane tsa bosigo;
Gore di tle di nkadime diphuka, ' Di nkadime le mathlo a bosigo, ketle ke kgone go rwala masigo... ka diphuka di tla nkuka Di nkuka di ntebisa kwa go Nombini.

(If I had the powers that witches had, I would make friendships with the owls, birds of the night, so that they would lend me their feathers and also their night vision, so that I could venture into the night... for the feathers would carry me, carry me to Nombini.)

And, as Dithole concludes (Ntsime 1982: 1):

Nkabo ke na le diphuka tsa lephoi, Nkabo ke fofela Tefeleng, Ke ya go latlhela bofofu teng ke tie ke jese mathlo bontle, Bontle jwa ngwana wa sebilo.

(If I had feathers like a dove, I would fly to Ndebeleland. To go and see what is there, so as to see the beauty that prevails there, beauty of beauties.)
In the opening passages of the play, the reader/audience learns the following:

1. That the theme of this drama is a love affair that has crossed cultural boundaries;
2. That this love affair involves Dithole (the protagonist) who appears torn between his desire for Nombini and other obligations/duties;
3. That Dithole cannot reach Nombini, i.e., the love affair is frustrated by other characters and/or abstract forces, including the struggle between good and evil. Whereas he is caught in a predicament where his agency appears limited, Ntsime’s use of the owl/dove and night/day imagery suggests that Dithole has important choices to make.

Halten (1975: 10), in observing the development of conflict in comedies like Pelo e ja Serati, notes that it tends to be:

- centred around a pair of lovers who are separated by social and economic barriers,
- parental disapproval, misunderstandings, a third person, or a cloud on his or her reputation.

The opposing forces alluded to in Dithole’s soliloquy are specified in his subsequent conversation with Bašhipile, his confidant and ally. In this portion of dialogue, the reader/audience is able to identify the precise nature of Dithole’s problem (Ntsime 1982: 3):

Molekane ke tla go bolelela ka tolamo,
ke rata ngwana wa Letebele,
mme peio ya me e rotha madi.
Go lekoqo'ba magareng a me le mošetsana, 
leo le agišweng ke mekgwa le ditšo;
Leo melao ya lona e gagametseng 
melao e e sireletsang katamelano ya merafe,
melao e e nyatsang merafe e mengwe.

(My friend, I will inform you logically. I love a 
Ndebele girl, my heart is bleeding. There is a 
chasm between me and this girl. This chasm 
has been built by norms and cultures that 
enforce very strict laws, laws that forbid the 
integration of tribes [ethnic groups]; laws that 
despise and overlook other tribes.)

As he further confides in Batšhipile, Ditšhole provides the reader/audience with the 
other relevant facts (Ntsime 1982: 4-5):

Batsadi ba me ke batho ba segologolo, 
ba dumela melao ya maloba le maabane, 
ba re ya gompieno ga se melao metaonyana, 
e feta le phefo ya manga e foka, 
e tšwana le mmoko e fofa le phefo.

(My parents are old-fashioned people who 
believe in all those old traditions. They despise 
current laws and practices. They say these will 
pass just like a blowing wind, just like measles 
which are contagious.)
From the early stages of the drama, then, the reader/audience is able to pinpoint the protagonist, his dilemma and the obstacles he must overcome to resolve the conflict.

The essence of this conflict is the clash between traditional and modern marriage customs. Dithole seeks to challenge the Batswana practice that prevents young men from choosing their marriage partners. In traditional African societies, marriage is not viewed as a union of two individuals, but rather as a joining of two families — a manifest in various ritual practices like lobola (bridewealth) negotiations. Moreover, the Tswana-Sotho speaking peoples of Southern Africa have historically practiced endogamous marriage, which means that a Motswana (e.g. Dithole) would not traditionally marry a Ndebele (e.g. Nombini). (cf. Schapera 1953; Comaroff 1985) Finally, according to Setswana culture, the prince's wife is chosen by the tribe. The king's wife is the wife of the tribe.

As noted in chapter four, Dithole is supported by certain characters (e.g. Batshipile) and opposed by others, most notably his parents and the village elders. Rivals for the love of Dithole, the future king, equally oppose any union between him and Nombini.

Dithole's determination to assert his own will and simultaneously change traditional ways of marriage amongst his people culminates in his actual proposal to Nombini. He vows that they will overcome the barriers created by tradition, and demonstrate to the villagers the truth and justice of "pelo e ja serati" ("a loving heart knows no bounds"). In Act 3, Scene 2, Dithole pleads with Nombini at Boswela-Nku River (Ntsime 1982: 36):

Nombini, mpe pelo ya gago ke tie ke tselele,
ka wena ke bone botshelo ke bone boitumelo,
ka wena lefatshe le tla bona botshe, 
ka wena morafe we gaetsho o tla bona leedi.

(Nombini, give me your heart that I may live. 
Through you I can find life and happiness. 
Through you the world can see life. Through you our tribe can see light.)

From this it is clear that Dithole wants not only to marry Nombini, but also to enlighten his people. In his eyes, the marriage would show the Bakhudung traditionalists that there is nothing wrong in a Motswana marrying a Ndebele, provided the two are truly in love.

However, Dithole's father, Serame, has already chosen a wife for his son: Mosidi, Dithole's cousin. Dithole feels that he would rather leave the kingship than marry his cousin according to his parents' wishes. As Dithole confesses to Batshipile (Ntsime 1982: 41):

fa go nyala letebele e le photo nka tlogela bogosi, 
le letebele nka inaya Naga e tshetlha.

(If it is wrong to marry a Ndebele, I would rather abdicate the kingship. With a Ndebele girl I could run away into the empty veld.)

Ditshebo (gossip) secretly witnesses this proposal, which culminates in a kiss between the two young lovers. She reports the incident to Lefufa (jealousy) who adds fuel to the fire by claiming she has also seen Batshipile giving Nombini a letter.
from Dithole. Both girls are disheartened by the evidence that Nombini is Dithole’s one true love, and they conspire to murder their rival with medicinal herbs. To intensify the conflict, Ditsebo and Lefufa inform Mmalefufa (jealousy’s mother) who in turn reports the affair to the king’s headmen, Keoagile and Gaotingwe.

As noted above, a confrontation between Dithole and Serame follows, during which Dithole finally admits his love for Nombini and flees the village. Nombini too is forced to flee to safety. She enlists the aid of a medicine-man in Phalaborwa who gives her a white horse and a vulture’s feather which will guide her to Dithole. Thus, although “tradition” frustrates the desires of Nombini and Dithole, its practitioners (e.g. the ngaka), practices and institutions also help the young lovers to resolve their dilemma. This suggests to the reader/audience that not all aspects of “tradition” should be discarded, just as “modernity” should not be praised or accepted en bloc.

The conflict is resolved when, at the close of the play, Dithole and Nombini return to Bakhudung village. There they receive a royal welcome and the blessings of Dithole’s parents and the other villagers. The social and moral fabric of the village have not, to borrow a phrase from West African literature, fallen apart (Achebe 1959). But what are the implications of the play’s ending both for Dithole, the future king, and the village as a whole? How and why is the underlying conflict resolved so suddenly? And what messages does Ntsime wish to convey to the reader/audience? I consider these and other questions in the concluding chapter of this mini-dissertation.
7. CONCLUSION

This mini-dissertation has focused on the use of characterisation in *Pelo e ia Serati*. Following the mise en scène in chapter two, chapter three discussed the significance of setting, characters' relationships with each other as well as dialogue for the development of the plot. Chapter four, which examined characterisation and naming, explored the explicit and implicit meanings that are conveyed to the reader/audience through the author's deliberate choice of characters' names. Characterisation and imagery, in particular comparison, formed the subject of chapter five. Finally, the use of conflict and, in particular the clash between traditional and modern marriage customs that underlies the plot of *Pelo e ia Serati*, were discussed in chapter six.

Although Dithole's personal struggle is resolved in the final acts of the play, I would argue that the fundamental clash between tradition and modernity is never adequately resolved. Dithole, a man of certain “modern” inclinations, will, after all, one day be king of Bakhudung village, what other changes might he bring to the village? In addition, one can speculate that forces like urbanisation, wage labour and capitalism — forces salient to any discussion of South African society in the mid-twentieth century — will impact upon the villagers, whether or not they deem such changes desirable.

My personal opinion is that the author, a man who devoted his life to the promotion and preservation of Setswana language, literature and culture, was reluctant to be open and candid about the relative strength of modern forces. The fact that Serame, Nteseng and the other villagers accept and bless the marriage between Dithole and Nombini would appear to indicate that the traditional ways of marriage are giving way to more modern practices. Ultimately, the reader/audience is left to
conclude that this process of modernisation will affect not only marriage customs, but also other forms of social and cultural organisation.

If, as Ntsime seemingly realises, such changes are inevitable, then he uses *Pelo e ja Serati* as a platform to preach not so much about the evils of modernity (i.e. Dithole is not a villain but a hero) but rather about the eternal relevance and importance of traditional values in a contradictory world. As in any comedy, the possibilities of a new type of society are conveyed to the reader/audience. As a lay preacher and devout Christian, Ntsime changes the world of his characters not through violence and destructive relationships, but through compromise, between the villagers themselves as well as between ostensibly competing systems of values and practices.

One final issue remains to be resolved: Why did the villagers so suddenly re-accept Dithole and his intended bride Nombini? Ultimately, Ntsime leaves this up to the reader/audience to decide. Given the role of Ngaka Matwetwe in reconciling the conflict, one possible explanation might be the intervention of the ancestors or the creative power of tradition, which is consistent with Ntsime's portrayal of tradition and modernity as compatible. However, given Ntsime's personal status as a devout Christian, perhaps a more likely explanation is that good has simply triumphed over evil, and that true love has prevailed. His Christian upbringing, which was probably influenced either directly or indirectly by missionaries, may also account for the message to eradicate arranged marriages in favour of romantic love -- something which missionaries amongst the Batswana had preached against since the early 19th century (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1991).

The contradictory status of tradition in *Pelo e ja Serati* would seem to reflect the author's own conflicting attitudes towards "tradition." On the one hand, he was a devout Christian; on the other, a champion of Setswana language, literature and
culture as well as a fairly prominent official in the Bophuthatswana government which, unlike the character Matwetwe, essentialised cultural divisions and viewed ethnicity as powerful, but dangerous. Ultimately, the quick resolution of the conflict between traditional and modern marriage customs can be seen to reflect the compromises which must be made in a world where abstract forces are engendering rapid change, where social contradictions must be resolved in novel ways, and where notions of culture and history are often viewed as legacies to be preserved and protected.
Text


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