



Who killed Kesentseng? Cultural knowledge and narratological analysis in the interpretation of the Setswana short story “Ga le a ka la tswa” (“Doomed to die before dawn”) by B.D. Magoleng

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Abstract

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In this article the argument is put forward that although the criterial force in narrative texts is the fact that these texts are intrinsically narrative, there is a range of extra-narrative components which should also be taken into consideration in processes of interpretation. The article explores the cultural dimension of a short story in Setswana and illustrates how cultural knowledge is essential to reach a more comprehensive understanding of the text.

Opsomming

Wie het vir Kesentseng doodgemaak? Kulturele kennis en narratologiese analise in die interpretasie van die Setswana-kortverhaal “Ga le a ka la tswa” (“Gedoem om te sterf voor dagbreek”) deur B.D. Magoleng

Die sentrale argument in hierdie artikel is dat hoewel verhalende tekste bepaal en gedefinieer word deur die narratiewe aard daarvan, daar ook nie-narratiewe komponente in verhale voorkom. Hierdie nie-narratiewe komponente kan van deurslaggewende belang wees in die interpretasie van die tekste. Die belang en noodsaaklikheid van kulturele kennis vir narratiewe tekste word geïllustreer aan die hand

van 'n bespreking van die kulturele inhoude van 'n Setswana-kortverhaal.

1. Introduction

1.1 Narratology

There has always been controversy around the use of narratology. It has been described as too structuralist, too limited in its focus on the narrative aspects of stories as well as too rigid in the set of possibilities applied to narrative texts. While readers and analysts of narrative texts cannot escape taking cognisance of the narrative components of the texts, it is also true that contemporary narrative theory has proved that it can accommodate much more than mere narrative.

Meir Sternberg (2001:115) addresses this issue in an article “How narrativity makes a difference” and starts off by pointing out that a discipline should have clarity on its object and of its relation to other disciplines. Applied to narratology, the questions to be asked are: “What is narrative?” and “What becomes of the components shared with other disciplines in the text itself and in the reading and analysis of a narrative text?” (Sternberg, 2001:115). Many narratologists however, have formulated the view that narratology can be used as a descriptive tool and that the narratological description and analysis merely serves as the basis of a much more sophisticated interpretation of the text (Du Plooy, 1991; Du Plooy, 1993; Fludernik, 2003).

It is generally accepted by narratologists that not everything in a narrative text is intrinsically narrative and that these non-narrative aspects can be essential to the understanding of the specific text. According to Sternberg (2001:116) one can distinguish “the constants of narrative in its narrativity, a law unto itself, from the variables of narrative in its textuality, which includes a range of extranarrative components, dimensions, patterns and effects”. In an early essay on narrative structure, Roland Barthes (1977), clearly concerned with the same issue, distinguishes between functions and indices in a narrative text. The functions describe actions and are those elements in the text which move the narrative forward. These can be essential (called the cardinal functions) or merely supplementary (the catalysts), whereas the indices are those elements in the text that determine and qualify meaning in a more complex way (Barthes, 1977:91-97). The difference between functions and indices is described as follows: “... functions involve

metonymic relata, indices metaphoric relata; the former correspond to a functionality of doing, the latter to a functionality of being” (Barthes, 1977:93). It would therefore seem logical to assume that in narrative texts, the narrative master forces are supplemented and complicated by other features, that these “metaphoric” components can be incorporated into the narrative structure, sometimes to such an extent that the narrative “shifts its operative locus and center” (Sternberg, 2001:117).

1.2 Cultural content in Setswana stories

The above argument serves as an introduction to the problems the reader is faced with when analysing and interpreting stories which depend heavily on cultural knowledge. The short stories of B.D. Magoleng, written in Setswana, cannot be understood without knowledge of the cultural meanings of many of the elements and aspects of the stories. In other words, without knowledge of the cultural identity of the main characters neither the conflict nor the outcome of the story makes sense. This is of course no problem to the native Setswana reader or listener, but the issue becomes very interesting when the reader comes from another culture and does not possess the cultural knowledge.

This article focuses on the Setswana short story "Ga le a ka la tswa" (“Doomed to die before dawn”) by B.D. Magoleng (1974) and wants to indicate the importance of cultural issues in the narrative. The behavioural attitudes, morals, manners and wisdom of the characters, the places and circumstances of the action and especially the names of characters cannot be taken at face value, but should be seen as embedded in cultural thinking and cultural codes of meaning. The story is embedded in the cultural context to such an extent, that almost everything must be understood metaphorically. The story cannot be regarded as a mere sequence of events or actions, but is a powerful portrayal of cultural identity.

The discussion of cultural identity in this story is based on Hofstede’s insights and his theoretical explanation of cultural modes of thought. An exposition of Hofstede’s theory is given and then the focus is shifted to cultural issues in the story of Magoleng.

2. Hofstede’s theory of cultural identity

According to Hofstede (1991:4-14) every person carries within him or herself patterns of thinking, feeling and potential acting which have been learned throughout his or her lifetime. Much of this has

been acquired in early childhood, because at that time a person is most susceptible to learning and assimilating. As soon as certain patterns of thinking, feeling and acting have established themselves within a person's mind, she/he must unlearn these before being able to learn something different – unlearning is more difficult than learning for the first time.

Culture is therefore learned, not inherited. It derives from one's social environment, not from one's genes. Culture should be distinguished from human nature on one side, and from an individual's personality on the other, although exactly where the borders lie between human nature and culture, and between culture and personality, is a matter of ongoing discussion among social scientists.

2.1 Symbols, heroes, rituals and values

According to Hofstede (1991:7-9) cultural differences manifest themselves in several ways. From the many terms used to describe manifestations of culture, the following four cover the total concept rather neatly: symbols, heroes, rituals and values. In the figure on the next page these concepts are illustrated as the layers of an onion, indicating that symbols represent the most superficial and values the deepest manifestations of culture, with heroes and rituals in between.

Symbols are words, gestures, pictures, or objects that carry a particular meaning that is only recognised by those who share the culture. The words in a language or jargon belong to this category, as do dress, hairstyles, Coca-Cola, flags, and status symbols. New symbols are easily developed and old ones disappear as one group regularly copies symbols from others. This is why symbols are regarded as the outer, most superficial layer of cultural identity (see the figure on the next page).

Heroes are persons, alive or dead, real or imaginary, who possess characteristics which are highly prized in a culture and who thus serve as models for behaviour.

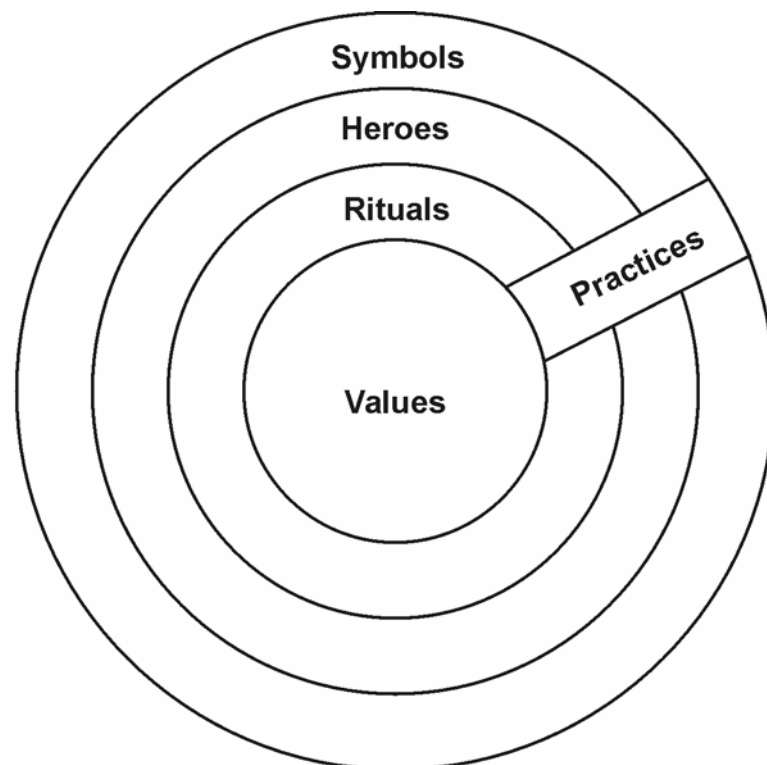
Rituals are collective activities, technically superfluous in reaching desired ends, but which, within a culture, are considered as socially essential: they are therefore carried out for their own sake. Ways of greeting and paying respect to others, social and religious ceremonies are examples.

The ways in which people experience the symbols, heroes and rituals all manifest in certain *practices*. The practices as such are visible to an outside observer; their cultural meaning, however, is invisible and lies precisely and only in the way the insiders interpret these practices.

The core of culture is formed by a system of *values*. Values are broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others. Values are feelings with an arrow to it: they have a plus and a minus side. They deal with evil vs. good, dirty vs. clean, ugly vs. beautiful, unnatural vs. natural, abnormal vs. normal, paradoxical vs. logical and irrational vs. rational.

Values are among the first things children learn – not consciously, but implicitly. Development psychologists believe that by the age of ten, most children have their basic value system firmly in place and after that age, changes are difficult to make. Because they were acquired so early in our lives, many values remain unconscious to those who hold them. Therefore they cannot be discussed, nor can they directly be observed by outsiders. They can only be inferred from the way people act under various circumstances.

(Hofstede, 1991)



The 'onion diagram': manifestations of culture at different levels of depth

After a brief summary of the storyline in the following paragraph, the symbols, heroes, rituals and values which play a role in Magoleng's story, will be discussed by analysing specific examples. The point that the article wants to make, is that although the surface structure of the story seems to be very simple and does not provide much explanation to a reader from outside the Batswana culture, the cultural knowledge of readers from within the Batswana culture enable them to understand the story effortlessly. One of the writers of the article read the story from outside and the other from inside the Batswana culture and the article is the result of the discussion between them.

2.2 Cultural determinants in "Ga le a ka la tswa" ("Doomed to die before dawn") by B.D. Magoleng

In Magoleng's story "Doomed to die before dawn", a young man, Kesentseng, comes home to find that his dog has been sold by his brother to another man. He is very upset and tries to get the dog back. The buyer of the dog, Gaolekwe, is a powerful man, a witch-doctor. Although he gives the dog back, he warns Kesentseng that he will die before the next dawn. Kesentseng goes home and tells his parents about the bad prediction and while they are talking lightning strikes and the light goes out. In the dark Kesentseng's father believes that there is a witch. He struggles violently with the witch and when the light comes on, Kesentseng is dead. A few days later Kesentseng is buried (Magoleng, 1974).

The story is told in a relatively uncomplicated way, presenting the events in a chronological order. Very little extra information is provided and there is no speculation about the causes and results of the action.

The story presents a number of questions to the reader who is not acquainted with Setswana culture.

- Why is Kesentseng so very upset about the selling of the dog? His brother needed the money for food and therefore it might seem an inevitable action to sell the dog.
- Why does Gaolekwe not want to sell the dog back to Kesentseng? The price of the dog was not high and Kesentseng clearly wants the dog back very badly.
- Why does Gaolekwe curse Kesentseng, even predicting his death? How can he know that Kesentseng will die?

- Why does Kesentseng's father become so scared in the dark and starts fighting the person whose heavy breathing he can hear?
- Why does nobody ask any questions about the fact that, when the light comes on after the struggle in the dark, Kesentseng is dead and there is no sign of a witch? Kesentseng's mother and sister are present but they say nothing.

It is as if there is an outer and an inner world in the story. The outer world is presented to the reader and only when the story is scrutinised closely, indications of the inner world can be discerned. In the narration the three universal narrative effects or dynamics mentioned by Sternberg (2001:117), namely suspense, curiosity and surprise feature strongly and effectively, so that the reader is taken through the story wondering what is going to happen. Will Gaolekwe's curse become true and if so, how and when is Kesentseng going to die? In the end the reader is surprised by the sudden and unexpected turn in the story. Kesentseng is dead after the light comes on and only his father, mother and sister are present. The reader is, however, left in the dark about the reaction of the mother and sister, who do not say anything and accept Kesentseng's death as if it were something natural and also by the fact that the narrator of the story does not explain or offer any logical reason for the turn of events.

The key to the story lies in the cultural meaning of many small elements. In the rest of the article the cultural meaning of these elements will be explained. The cultural manifestations can be grouped under the headings provided by Hofstede, namely as symbols, heroes, rituals and values. As these are discussed, Magoleng's story will be explained in more detail.

2.2.1 Symbols

The symbols that Magoleng uses tie in with Batswana culture and also reveal what the cultural meaning of the story is.

Generally speaking, the meaning of a symbol rests in the relationship between a signifier (the word, element or image in the text) and a signified (the concept or meaning attached to that image). The relation between signified and signifier is arbitrary in a general sense, but specific within a specific cultural context. Through symbols and metaphors which function as symbols, the author conveys his or her message without giving direct explanations. In other words, cultural or social metaphors help to create and suggest the meaning of the story.

The following paragraphs will focus on the meaning of gifts, nature symbolism, witchcraft, nature and time (past and present) in Magoleng's story.

2.2.1.1 Gifts

One of the dominant features of Batswana society is the respect for gifts. In Setswana literature, the custom of presenting a gift to the nephew often forms part of the story. It is important to know that a gift from a maternal uncle is valued in the utmost degree, because of the privileged position of the maternal uncle in the extended family. It is a typical feature of Batswana culture (accepted and respected by all) that the maternal uncle has a special role to play in the lives of his nephews as an example and as a protector. A gift from the maternal uncle should be treasured and under no circumstances be lost or sold without dire consequences. Often the gift is in the form of cattle, money, foodstuffs, a bicycle or other articles, but in this story Kesentseng's dog was presented to him by his uncle.

That is the reason why Kesentseng is so upset about the loss of his dog in "Ga le ka ke la tswa". Kesentseng cannot accept the loss of the dog, because a gift from his uncle should never be lost or given away, according to Setswana traditional norms and values. In Setswana culture the belief that a gift should not be sold or given to other person is very strong, because this might bring misfortune to the family. Knowing this, the reader can understand why Kesentseng is so attached to the dog, Thulamotho. It is also mentioned that the dog has previously saved Kesentseng's life when he was threatened by a snake. The meaning of the dog's name is "hitting a man", which also suggests the ability of the dog to attack enemies and protect his master. This makes the dog as such even more valuable and that is why Gaolekwe wants the dog back. The suggestion is that this dog is indeed a very powerful animal.

The fact that Kesentseng received such a gift from his uncle, indicates that he is a valuable person to his direct family as well as to the wider circle of relatives. The gift elevates the value attached to his uncle in the extended families and the value of the gift is enhanced because it is given by the uncle. Furthermore, this gift emphasises Kesentseng's value, security and love, so that the giver, the receiver and the gift itself are bound together by links that symbolise respect and love and responsibility. It should also be remembered that in Batswana society, it is not only the uncles who give gifts; the boys' other relatives and families also give gifts, even if these may be materially smaller than those of the uncles.

The fact that Kesentseng's dog was a special gift from a special person, explains the intensity of his reaction when his brother sells the dog. It is apparent that Boiki does not respect cultural values in the same way as Kesentseng does. He sells the dog to obtain money for food and thinks that he will explain the circumstances to Kesentseng, but Kesentseng is nevertheless extremely upset. For him the cultural issue is more important, because the belief is that if you sell or lose a gift from the maternal uncle, you will lose the blessings associated with the gift. In a way the story juxtaposes cultural belief and immediate pragmatic needs, but the issue is not pursued any further in the story itself. The emphasis is shifted to the cultural conflict. Whereas the reader from outside the culture is puzzled by Kesentseng's reaction to the selling of the dog (especially since it was sold to buy food), it presents no problem to the reader from inside Batswana culture.

2.2.1.2 Nature symbolism

Magoleng uses natural symbols like the sun and stars, specifically as they are meaningful in traditional Setswana culture. In "Ga le a ka la tswa" the life and death of Kesentseng is described and referred to in terms of a star and the sun. In many cultures including the Batswana, the sun traditionally symbolises kings, paternal authority, worldly status and victory and the star shines in the darkness (Cirlot, 1962:310; Biedermann, 1989:309-310). Kesentseng's life brings happiness and good fortune in his family, therefore he is like a star. The star and the sun are used as symbols to portray the characteristics of his life. Kesentseng is a blessed person to receive a gift of a dog from his uncle. Traditionally, uncles give blessings through the gifts. Kesentseng's life changes drastically when his younger brother sells his beloved dog for a mere one Rand. Trying to set things right again by retrieving the dog, Kesentseng aggravates Gaolekwe. When Kesentseng walks home after the confrontation with Gaolekwe, the star is still shining. The star shines during the night and when the sun rises the star sets, thus ending its life. Kesentseng dies and then the narrator says: "Letsatsi la botshelo le diketse" ("Life's sun has set") (p. 9). There is the contrast between the sun rising after the death of Kesentseng and Kesentseng's sun which has set. Thus the star and the sun (of the young man's life) have both set for Kesentseng.

2.2.1.3 Witchcraft

The Batswana people believe that witchcraft is associated with darkness or evil. Matjila (1995:31) defines witchcraft as an evil

practice that is used to hurt people. Mostly, witches are poor people who struggle to make ends meet. As a result, they become bitter and frustrated. Out of rage born from envy, they try to bring successful people to their knees. They operate in the dark and in secret so that people will not hate and ostracise them.

Moreover, witchcraft is not only associated with witch-doctors, the thokoloshe and all people with dark powers, but also with threatening natural phenomena like lightning and thunder. In Magoleng's story: "Ga le a ka la tswa", Gaolokwe, the thokoloshe, the darkness, thunder and lightning are all linked together in Kesentseng's downfall and death.

- **Thunder and lightning**

In "Ga le ka la tswa" Kesentseng walks down to Mmapoto's shebeen, unaware that he will receive a rebuff and a fatal threat from Gaolekwe. Gaolekwe threatens Kesentseng in public that he is doomed to die before dawn, thereby revealing his mystical power. Gaolekwe's words cause a sensation, because of the strong belief in supernatural powers in the village. While Kesentseng is telling his parents what has happened, something occurs: "... la itira diphifi tsa matlakadibe" ("... it begins to thunder") (p. 7).

Most people are afraid of thunder and thunder symbolises evil things in most cultures (Biedermann, 1989:342-343). For the African Batswana thunder and lightning are extremely threatening. It is associated with witchcraft and with the thokoloshe and it is also believed that witch-doctors can call forth lightning and thunder to smite those they want to punish. Gaolekwe is a witch-doctor and is accused or suspected of employing one or more ways of hurting members of the community. Even if in actual fact he is not doing this, he is suspected of it.

The lightning then strikes, the lights go out and the wall and the door inside Kesentseng's house are destroyed. The power of the lightning is further emphasised: "Motse ka kwa ntlheng ya matlotla le gona ya feta ya dira metlholo" ("More destruction by lightning was evident at the village near the swamp") (p. 10).

Lightning is feared and respected. Kesentseng's father and the village men believe that the individuals who have access to mystical powers, employ lightning for destructive purposes. The Batswana society believes that lightning is used to harm someone or his belongings. Whatever the scientific explanations concerning lightning in the broad and popular sense might be, every Batswana

village believes in the destructive and directed power of lightning. That belief affects everyone, for better or worse. It is part of the corpus of religious beliefs – all Batswanas know this and those who adhere to tradition, respect these beliefs. This links up with traditional beliefs in many cultures, as lightning is often seen as a symbol of supernatural power and all sorts of evil employment of mystical power, generally in a secret fashion (Biedermann, 1989:206). It is also interesting that traditional Batswanas to this day carry or keep charms on their bodies, in their possessions, homesteads and fields to protect them against lightning.

In the story “Ga le ka la tswa” Gaolokwe’s power as a witch-doctor, thunder and lightning are all associated with evil powers and therefore Kesentseng’s death is seen as a direct result of Gaolekwe’s threat.

2.2.2 Heroes

According to Gugushe (1984:107) and Mbiti (1970:67) at least 75% of the Batswana people are Christians, but most of them still perform certain rituals to appease their traditional gods. Traditional heroes play an important role in Setswana culture. For instance, in the Batswana community the king is the greatest of heroes, but he may not play an active role in battle. Both in traditional and modern literature, uncles are vitally important. It is also interesting that in Setswana literature heroes are people who are alive and dead, and good as well as evil people are regarded as heroes.

2.2.2.1 The uncle

As mentioned earlier, the uncle cares and protects his nephews against unpleasantness or misfortune, whether this happens unexpectedly or through somebody or something evil. In this story, the uncle strives to keep his nephews, Kesentseng and his younger brother, Boiki, protected and blessed at all times. The uncle possesses characteristics which are highly prized in a culture, and thus serves as a model for behaviour, in a way similar to Hofstede’s (1991:7) explanation.

The uncle blesses Kesentseng, as the eldest in the family, with a gift of a dog, named Thulamotho. Traditionally, the dog, presented as a gift, has a cultural meaning and possesses the same characteristics as the uncle: he is a good shepherd and companion, he is watchful and often a hero. This dog, Thulamotho, indeed once protected Kesentseng against a snake and is therefore very valuable.

2.2.2.2 The witch-doctor

The witch-doctor is a powerful figure. Traditionally he has powerful magic for doing good and evil things. The name Gaolekwe means “you are not tested”. He is a witch-doctor and threatens Kesentseng that he is doomed to die before the next dawn. Therefore there is a link between the witch-doctor’s name and the curse directed at Kesentseng. Traditionally, naming helps to indicate what a character is or what a character is capable of becoming. Thus the meaning of an action is suggested or enforced by the names of the characters involved (Pilane, 1996:56). Moreover, Gaolekwe’s curse becomes true and this proves his power. The name of the village in the story is Bopitiki. The meaning of the name indicates that people do as they like in this village. In the village there is a strong belief in supernatural powers, so that Gaolekwe’s words cause a sensation. In this case, Gaolekwe is suspected of killing Kesentseng and the suspicion is based on his name and his suspected evil powers, which enable him to direct lightning and thunder.

2.2.3 Rituals

According to Jafta (1978:12-16), ritual is associated with some form of religious performance. Rites and rituals control society and individuals, because they are highly revered. The performance of a ritual has a definite procedure and a specific meaning is expressed in a symbolic action. The Setswana ritual makes use of both verbal and symbolic expressions, that are significant to the members of the group. In a traditional Setswana society rituals are performed for the good of the person and the group.

2.2.3.1 Dream and ritual

One of the prominent features of Batswana culture is society’s respect for dreams. In “Ga le a ka la tswa”, Kesentseng’s father advises his son to go and sleep when he is very upset, thereby suggesting that the ancestors will communicate and advise him through his dreams. The dream can be seen as a ritual occasioned by the needs of the moment (Mbiti, 1997). It is a form of supplication to the ancestors and the ancestors form part of the religious system, so that the dream becomes a form of therapy – a view that can also be found in general studies about dreams (Nash *et al.*, 1998:230).

Kesentseng’s father is a traditional man who encourages his son to be calm about Gaolekwe’s threat. He knows that the ancestors will pass their instructions and warnings, guide and forewarn Kesentseng about his future in the form of symbols, that need to be

translated and applied to daily life. Thus the content of the dream serves as a means of personal and cultural problem-solving. In Setswana culture, dreams have significance in that they are believed to occur when the gods want to reveal something unknown to human beings. They are believed to convey messages from the ancestors, or warnings of impending danger, and are regarded seriously (Inglis, 1987:30). Kesentseng's father suggests to his son:

Tsaya marapo o ise go beng

Direct meaning: Take your bones to the owner's (p. 9).

Literal meaning: Go and sleep the sleep of the just.

According to Setswana views, the owners of the bones are the ancestors. Kesentseng's father advises his son to go and communicate with his ancestors through dreams. For the Batswana community, the dream has historically been the chief mode of communication between the ancestors and the living. It was through dreams that ancestors communicated their approval or disapproval of behaviour and indicated a course of action to be followed (Nash *et al.*; 1998:230). As a result of older people's greater concern over dreams, it is not surprising to find that they, more than younger people, attempt to help others by sharing their understanding and experience of dreams (Mbiti, 1997). Of course, this could also be a way of educating and passing on cultural traditions to younger, less informed members of the community.

2.2.4 Values

In the Batswana community relationships are regulated by shared social norms, beliefs and needs. In practice members of the society are guided by values, but there is a tension between tradition and modernism, which plays a role in most contemporary Setswana stories.

2.2.4.1 Tradition versus modernism

Magoleng believes that modernism has had a negative impact on the societal behaviour and attitudes of the Batswana. In his stories he thus often portrays the conflict that exists between tradition and modernity (Letsie, 2002:7-29; 192-196).

The whole issue about selling the dog rests on the traditional belief that a valued gift should not be sold. The value of the dog is primarily determined by the respect for traditional family relations. Kesentseng values this tradition, but Boiki apparently does not. As a

result of this, Kesentseng dies and though it is not sure where blame is due, the selling of the dog activates a series of events in which bad fortune is not resisted or resented, because a grave mistake has been made.

When actions in a traditional Setswana story seem to be irrational or even if the narration itself seems to be irrational, one should take into account the underlying traditional belief system. This system determines the course of events and the way in which characters behave.

Another example comes from the final scene of the story. Kesentseng dies and no questions are asked by the other characters. Kesentseng's mother and sister are present when his father struggles with what he thinks is a witch. However, they make no comment on the fact, that when the light comes on, it is Kesentseng who has been killed.

This behaviour is in line with the Setswana tradition that women are only allowed to play with their eyes. Their emotion becomes apparent in their tears, but the tears betoken a silent passivity (p. 9):

Mosadi a tshuba lobone
Ntwa ya khutla.
Morwadi le mmaagwe ba retelelwa ke go itshwara.

(The woman lit the lamp.
The struggle stopped.
Both mother and daughter could not
control their emotions so upset were they.) (p. 9)

Traditionally, women cannot express themselves in words, because of social norms and expectations. Often one can only guess about the real reason for their emotions. The silence of women often implies a passive or at times a forced acceptance of what happens (Sebate, 1996). Kesentseng's mother and his sister are in tears, but they do not utter a word. They are not allowed to criticise or confront the man, who is husband to the one and father to the other. These two characters respect the Batswana cultural tradition in which silence is part of a woman's identity. If the reader does not understand or know this, the story will remain enigmatic and unintelligible.

It would be very difficult to determine the position of the author concerning these cultural issues in the story. It is not clear whether the author wants to criticise the behaviour of characters in either a

cultural of a modern sense, or whether he simply wants to depict situations which can (and probably do) develop on account of cultural beliefs. The confrontation between traditional culture and modern ways of thinking and acting also play a part in the story, but these issues are not developed any further in the story itself. The conflict that arise because of the clash between tradition and modernity is a topic which requires much research and the analyses of many stories and is not pursued any further in this article.

3. Conclusion

One has to keep in mind that the Batswana people share social norms, beliefs, attitudes and needs and must accept that it is necessary to know about these beliefs to understand their stories. In this story it is accepted that witchcraft is a very real but evil practice used to hurt people, that one of the dominant features of Batswana society is respect for gifts and that to lose a gift leads to misfortune. The key to understanding the story is often subtly encoded in imagery and names. The actions of characters are determined by traditional patterns of behaviour, which are, in spite of the conflict caused by modernity, still strong.

From this discussion of the short story “Ga le a ka la tswa” it follows that, to understand and interpret the story, one cannot stick to a narratological description as such, though this may be the first step in the analysis. To understand the “inner” world of the story, one has to resort to cultural knowledge and the cultural context. Meaning is determined by cultural symbols and rituals and people’s actions are determined by the examples of their heroes and by their value system. This is explained by Hofstede (1990) and is indeed true of this story. Furthermore, the point has been illustrated that narratology can be and has to be supplemented by other theoretical and pragmatic approaches to remain useful (Du Plooy, 1991; Du Plooy 1993; Sternberg, 2001; Fludernik, 2003). In the case of Magoleng’s story “Ga le ka ke la tswa” cultural knowledge is essential to really understand and appreciate the story, especially if the reader of the story does not belong to the same cultural group as the characters or the author of the story.

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Key concepts:

cultural knowledge
culture
Magoleng
narratological analysis
Setswana literature

Kernbegrippe:

kulturele kennis
kultuur
Magoleng
narratologiese analise
Setswana literatuur