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The Works of Thomas Mofolo: Summaries and Critiques

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Publication Date

1970-04-01

**THE WORKS OF THOMAS MOFOLO:
SUMMARIES AND CRITIQUES**

A forerunner of
A DIGEST OF AFRICAN VERNACULAR LITERATURES
by

DANIEL P. KUNENE

Occasional Paper No. 2

CONTENT

<i>MOETI OA BOCHABELA (EAST-BOUND TRAVELER)</i>	3
CRITIQUE.....	4
<i>PITSENG</i>	5
CRITIQUE.....	9
<i>CHAKA</i>	10
CRITIQUE.....	15

FOREWORD

The summaries and critiques of the works of Thomas Mofolo (originally written in Sesotho or Southern Sotho) which are presented in this paper constitute part of a somewhat ambitious project that I have entitled *A Digest of African Vernacular Literatures*. The project is intended to cover only written works of copyrighted authorship, as against orally transmitted literature. It has two phases. The prosecution of the first phase entails the preparation of English summaries of African vernacular literary works with accompanying critiques. The summaries have to be adequate in the sense that they will give the reader enough of the essentials of the story (in the case of prose writings) to make it possible for him to talk intelligently about it. Names of important characters will be mentioned and their roles in the story shown in the summaries. Drama will be treated in more or less the same manner as novels and novelettes. Collections of poems and short stories will be given one summary per collection rather than per poem or short story, with the research worker having the option to single out any outstanding item for special comment. At the end of each summary, a critique of the work will be given covering the various aspects of that literary form.

While Phase I is in progress, the research team involved will be selecting works or portions of works which in their opinion are of sufficiently high standard to be translated into English. "Portion" will include a chapter, a series of paragraphs, a poem, a section of a poem, an act or a scene out of a play, etc., always provided that the portion so selected can stand independently of the rest of the work. It is intended that such translations be done at the conclusion of the first phase of the project, even though some overlapping might be found to be inevitable.

The project is to cover all the non-Arabic countries of sub-Saharan Africa eventually. I have already done some work on the South African Bantu languages, of which I speak several. The rest of the area of operation is to be covered country by country, with the help of suitable translators, over a period of a few years.

The idea of a project of this nature came to me for several reasons. Firstly, in my teaching of African vernacular literature in English translation, I have experienced considerable difficulty as a result of the virtual non-existence of translated works. I have, largely, had to create such material for my classes, living, as it were, from hand to mouth. If this project succeeds, this difficulty will be greatly reduced. Secondly, literary works of Africans writing in English and French, a relatively recent phenomenon, but currently very much in vogue, have, with a dramatic suddenness made many people, both academic and lay, for the first time aware that Africans write. And one is left with the uncomfortable feeling that to many such people Africans not only write, *but have only just begun to write*. This is by no means so, and it is hoped that this project will correct this attitude. Much more important, however, is the fact that the result of the project will be to make African vernacular literary works linguistically accessible, albeit on a limited scale, to many who might otherwise have been excluded from them by the language barrier. This is true of the African continent itself—the project is seen as a bridge-builder on this level, so that Africans with a knowledge of English will be able to read the works, if only in summary form, of Africans outside their own language group.

While the summaries and critiques are not to be too elaborate, *adequacy* must always be the guiding principle. The length of each summary and its accompanying critique will, naturally, also depend on the length and quality of the book treated.

Daniel P. Kunene
University of California Los Angeles
April 4, 1967

Moeti oa Bochabela (East-Bound Traveler)

Morija, 1907, 1912, 1925, 1951, 19571, 1961; 74 pp

Mofolo has, as his setting, Lesotho before the coming of the White man into South Africa. He describes Africa as being, in those days, a land "clothed in great darkness, a fearful darkness, in which all the things of darkness were done." The hero, Fekisi, is born at this time in Lesotho.

Fekisi's father and mother were exemplary in their behavior, and they brought him up under strict discipline. Fekisi, as a young man, is horrified at some of the goings-on of the people in his village—he sees his neighbor, Phakoane, beating his wife whenever he is drunk, till one day in his drunken rage, he kills her. He sees people going to beer-parties, and swearing and indulging in illicit sexual relations, and killing. He sees the weak and defenseless being bullied by the strong. He hears people telling lies deliberately and for no reason.

Fekisi is strong, and he always helps the weak and the innocent, fighting on their side. He is always ready to help those in distress, or to make amends for the wrongs perpetrated against them.

At the same time, he is over-awed and puzzled by the mysteries of nature—rain, the seasons, the firmament, vegetation, animal life. Who or what made all these things? What is the cause of the things of creation? Life must have a purpose. What is it? He asks searching questions from the old people he trusts concerning these things, and they tell him that God is responsible for them all. They tell him the story of the *Kgodumvdumo*, a monster of tremendous size which swallowed all the people except one woman who miraculously escaped, and who gave birth to a son who delivered the people from the belly of this beast; and how, after first showing gratitude, the people had begun to hate him and finally killed him. They tell him that God once lived among the people, but that due to their evil ways, God turned his back on them and went to live far away from them.

His fear of the evil ways of his fellow men, and his desire to find God, make him decide to leave his home. He begins to be unhappy, and his herds, and the people, notice it.

Then one day, while Fekisi is watching his herds in the veld, there is a total eclipse of the sun, during which there is a low, long-drawn-out rumbling like thunder, and the sound of many angry voices is heard. Many people die from fright. Fekisi prays to God to help him, and a sweet soft voice tells him his prayer has been heard, but that he is to seek God until he finds Him.

That night he has a dream in which he sees *Ntswana-tsatsi* (the place from which the sun comes) which, he has been told by the old people, is where God lives. There is a thick circular growth of reeds there, with a clear space in the center where a spring is bubbling forth vigorously. Above it, in space, he sees an apparition—a human-like figure covered in thick mist, with hair so long that it sweeps the ground. It is beautiful. Fekisi takes this as an indication of the direction he must take and on waking up, decides to leave that very night. He bids farewell to his herds by reciting their praises, and he goes.

Next day Fekisi is mourned by all the people who loved him for his love of justice, or for his looks, or because he is related to them.

¹ For each title, the dates of all editions are given, and that of the edition used in preparing the summary is underlined.

Early in his journey, he passes through a village of the Batlokwa during the night. There are festivities going on. He finds a man overcome by alcohol and tries to help him. He overhears people plotting to kill another. He follows them and fights and rescues the victim.

He now enters a wilderness where there are no villages and no people. He has miraculous hair-breadth escapes from hunger and thirst, a lion and a lioness which he kills as they attack him, a crocodile from which he escapes just in time as he crosses a river, and a large snake which turns out to be a harmless one. Eventually he arrives at the sea.

There is a voice he hears in a dream, urging him to persevere, and he sees an apparition exactly like the one he saw before leaving his home. For days, he walks up and down the coast until his provisions are finished, and he develops a fever from hunger, thirst, fatigue and the heat of the sun. One day he faints, and on coming round, finds three men "white in color, with hair like a horse's mane, with blue eyes, who spoke a language he did not understand." They take him to their boat, nurse him back to health and sail after one month. To their question why he travels alone he answers, "I journey alone because I have resolved to go in search of that which most people do not understand; besides, I was caused to leave [my home] by the things which most people love ...". When he hears that these men have come from the east and are now returning there, he is overjoyed. They tell him about God and His code for man's conduct. When they hear from him the story of the *Kgodumodumo*, they tell him about Christ, emphasizing the similarity.

They arrive in their country and take Fekisi to a priest where he is given hospitality and all his questions about God are answered patiently and to his satisfaction. In this country there are no policemen, no jails, no tax, no king—God is their King. The people live virtuous and honest lives.

Shortly after this there is a great service at the church during which Fekisi sees the substance of the apparition he has seen before in his dreams. It is above the altar, and he stares at it with longing and with joy and contentment in his face. A mist descends down the walls above the altar and the priests run away. Fekisi goes towards the altar with outstretched arms and cries, "Hail, my Jesus! I have longed for You! Let me go with You, I pray, home to the Lord!" Then there is a voice saying that he be admitted for he has not prized the things of the world above Christ. Thereafter, many voices are heard saying, "Open up the doors for him and let him in, for he is one who loved the Son of Man both in hard times and in good." When the congregation look up again and go to Fekisi, they find that he is dead.

Critique

In *Moeti*, Mofolo is crusading for the new religion, *viz.* Christianity. He is advocating an "exodus" by his people, a wholesale spiritual migration from "heathenism" to Christianity. In the process, the people must, of course, abandon their institutions, their customs, their traditions, their manner of dress, etc.—the "pitch black darkness" of old, and substitute for these, those introduced by the white missionaries, which symbolize "the light that has come." Fekisi thus takes a symbolic journey, a journey across cultural boundaries occasioned by his total rejection of his own cultural values, and his yearning for the values brought by the white missionary. God to him, as indeed to most, if not all, African Christians, is a Whiteman, "a human figure . . . with hair so long that it sweeps the ground."

Fekisi cannot, strictly speaking, be called a character, for he is not a human being. Fekisi is a saint in human environment and must of necessity be horrified by man's ways. He rejects this environment and it too rejects

him. He can only find happiness in a land where there are "no laws, no policemen, no king, and no taxes."

Other people in the story are mentioned only in passing, and are not meant to leave a permanent impression on the reader. They are mere illustrations in a story which largely does not concern them. This is, of course, true to the nature of this book, which is an allegory.

The weaknesses in this book are offset by a well concentrated plot and a sense of direction: Fekisi has two main problems—the "sinful" lives of the people, and where and how to find God. When he goes on his journey, you understand the strong stimuli at work—his strong desire to escape from man's environment lest he be corrupted by it, and his equally strong desire to seek God until he finds him.

The language and the style are excellent.

Pitseng

Morija, 1910, 1930, 1951, 1960; 169 pp

A young preacher, his wife and baby and two men accompanying him are on their way to Pitseng where he is going to be the pastor and teacher. Because it is already towards evening and the weather is cold and there is a possibility of snow, they decide to spend the night in a cave even though they are already near Pitseng. It begins to snow shortly after they enter the cave and make a fire. The preacher goes out to find a man he has seen picking his way over the cliffs just as it began snowing. He invites him to join them in the cave. Just before they retire, they hear a dog howling and suspect that its owner may be caught in the snow. Fearing that the others might stop him, the preacher waits until everybody is asleep and then goes to investigate. He finds and rescues three men whom he brings into the cave. Early next morning their people are informed and they come to fetch them from the cave. Everybody is highly impressed by the young preacher's selfless sacrifice, and the people of Pitseng and the surrounding villages welcome him with warm hearts. The people who come to greet him bring provisions of food, fuel, utensils and other things he may need as a stranger.

The preacher, who has been nicknamed Katse (Cat) by the school children because of the wild-cat-skin cap he often wears, is an excellent teacher, very patient with the children, especially the very young and those who are slow to understand. His aim is to develop the whole man, and he often discusses with his pupils such topics as "choosing the right partner," "the duties of a woman in the home," "the duties of a man," etc. There are two outstanding children who catch his eye—Aria Sebaka, a twelve-year-old girl, very neat and tidy, conscientious, attentive, intelligent and respectful. Also, she has a beautiful singing voice. With exactly the same qualities is a boy named Alfred Phakoe who watches his teacher carefully all the time, and models his own life and behavior on his. Katse feels something *must* happen between these two children.

After school when the children go home, Aria is always hurrying to arrive home, thinking of one or other chore with which she has to help her mother. After she has done her chores and run her errands, she attends to her schoolwork, and gets everything ready for the next day. On the way home she sings various songs inspired by the beauty of nature she sees around her, or her longing for her mother, etc.

Most of the bigger children take their time getting home, flirting among themselves in the process. (Mofolo here digresses to criticize this behavior and contrast it with the courtship and marriage of earlier times. He agrees with the remark that this devaluation of a thing so sacred as love is found among Christians, while non-Christians still continue to hold it sacred.)

Many people have become converted, more by the exemplary behavior of their preacher than by his words. He begins to wish very much that Alfred Phakoe and Aria Sebaka should, when their time comes, fall in love. And in the last sermon he preaches before Alfred Phakoe leaves home for teacher training college, he chooses verses that compare Christ's love for the church with the love of lovers. There is a great deal of comment on Katse's sermon of that day. Alfred Phakoe is horrified by the flirtation of the young men and women of Lesotho, and is sure that this happens only in Lesotho and not among other nations. Aria Sebaka, walking back home, day-dreams of a land where the sacredness of love is taken so seriously that when a loved one dies, the partner who remains refrains from involvement with anyone else since the only one he/she loved is gone.

Alfred Phakoe leaves home for a high school in the Cape Colony. He is fired with the zeal to become someone useful to his fellow Africans when he completes his studies.

He mixes with students from different parts of Africa. He talks little and mainly listens in order to learn. He observes, among other things, that most of the students put God last in most of the things they do "like most white people who put God last in everything," and he is determined not to be like that. During the school holidays, he visits various parts of South Africa in order to learn more about the different people and their way of life.

At school, he sees students "debasing" love into something to play with. A young man has many girl friends at the same time, or he forgets his present girl friend when he meets another girl to whom he is attracted. So also with the girl. Alfred Phakoe thinks of the places he has visited: Among the Indians (in Natal) and the Chinese he concludes there is no love because the women are always locked up. Among the Zulu, women are ill-treated because "they have been bought". He goes on to describe people of other places and how they practice love and marriage. He concludes that the Basotho are no better than the people among whom a partner who is tired of his/her spouse, simply leaves as soon as he/she meets someone else, because when a Mosotho man gets tired of his wife, he marries another, on and on up to ten wives. He decides that the kind of love mentioned in Katse's sermon does not exist anywhere.

One day Alfred Phakoe receives two letters—one from his father requesting him to spend the next school vacation at home. The other, from a friend of his at Pitseng, tells him, among other things, that Katse has given up the school. This is very sad news for Alfred. He wonders why Katse gave up a task he loved so much and of which he made such a success; why his (Alfred's) father does not say anything about this. His thoughts wander, and he sees Katse, the preacher doing wonderful work converting the unconverted, and strengthening the faith of the Christians. With his heart so much in his work, and his work so successful, why does he give it up? He remembers that Katse has always been troubled by his eyes, and he shudders at the thought that he may have gone blind. That night he wanders off alone, not knowing where he is going, his thoughts at Pitseng with Katse. He wanders on and on late into the night, meanwhile praying for Katse, until his senses are brought back by an apparition he sees flashing past him momentarily and disappearing: It has the form of an exceptionally tall person wearing snow-white garments, walking but not treading on the ground. It strikes him that no one has said that Katse has gone blind; he now retraces his steps, feeling much lighter. Back at school, as soon as he falls asleep, he has a dream in which he sees twelve men draped in snow-white garments, standing in threes at the four corners of the valley of Pitseng. After a while they get closer and closer to each other until they meet at the school in the valley. He observes that each one is holding many beautiful vessels in his hands containing, to varying degrees of fullness, something they keep sniffing at. These, one of them says, are the prayers of the Christians. The fullest and most beautiful vessel has the name of Mr. Katse written on it. The next in fullness and beauty is one with a name beginning with the letters Ar—, but the rest of which Alfred is unable to decipher. There is a voice from the heavens addressing these men regarding their mission, and a light mist descends upon them and covers the vessels they are holding. Alfred wakes up, but shortly

afterwards he falls asleep again and has another dream: Katse is reading the Bible, preparing his sermon for the following day. Above him, on a bookshelf, is sitting a man of seemingly royal descent, who, Alfred concludes, must be the Son of Man.

After what seems a long time, Alfred receives answers to his two letters, each of which states briefly that Mr. Katse gave up the school for no serious reason. He also receives a letter from Katse himself in which he tells him briefly that he has had to give up the school because of his sight. He says to Alfred that Aria asks to be remembered to him, and later states that there is something he wishes very much that Alfred should do when he has finished school; he says that it is in the form of a riddle in this letter and, indeed, in all his previous letters. Alfred does not know what it is, but it is, in fact, his wish that Alfred and Aria should "discover" one another.

When school vacation comes, and Alfred goes home, he is met at the railway station by Majoale who tells him about the extreme sadness that attended the parting of Katse from his pupils and from his congregation. He tells him of the terrible famine that befell them one year, and the selflessness with which Katse shared everything he had with all who were in distress through that famine.

Majoale tells Alfred of one of Mr. Katse's sermons shortly before he left, a sermon that revealed the secret of his growing self-sacrifice and spiritual purification. He is "crucified with Christ" and, with his body stretched out there helpless, the spirit of God enters in him unhindered. Majoale tells him the new church building, a much bigger one than the first one, is completed, and is filled every Sunday by the people whom Katse has converted.

Alfred sees his fellow-students engaged in love affairs with girls as they proceed to their respective homes for the vacation. While he would not, himself, be involved, he does not want to interfere or in any way be a stumbling block to these people, and whenever he can, he makes them feel free to carry on in spite of his presence.

Meanwhile Aria Sebaka has become a beautiful young girl, and the young men come to her one after another, pleading for her love. She rejects them for, she says, she feels nothing in her that would make her accept a love proposal.

Alfred and Aria, separately, experience shock after shock as they see, not only aimless flirting among the young people, but when, after observing what at first appears to be true love, like the love of Mr. Katse's sermon, they see one of the two parties bringing an end to the whole thing because he or she is tired of the other partner and wants somebody else. They refuse to be involved.

Katse's work at Pitseng has begun to suffer since his departure. Teachers come and go, and this gives the children no time to get used to them, and there is no continuity in the work. At this stage the people of Pitseng appeal to Alfred who has been teaching for the past two years at the high school in the Cape where he was a student, to come back home and take over the school and the church, especially the school. Mr. Katse, hearing of the decline of the work he has begun, adds his voice to the appeal. So Alfred returns to Pitseng. At this time Aria Sebaka is an assistant teacher at the school at Pitseng. Several times she and Alfred Phakoe just miss seeing each other. Then one day at a Thursday afternoon church service, he hears a beautiful alto voice during the singing, and on looking around to see where it comes from, his eyes and Aria's meet. Both of them are immediately attracted to each other even though neither knows the other's identity, since Aria was still small when Alfred left for the Cape. Aria goes away immediately after the service and another week passes before they meet at Aria's home where Alfred has gone to greet the family. When Aria walks into the room in which Alfred is sitting with her mother, neither she nor Alfred has any suspicion that he or she is about to see "that

face" which he/she saw in church. They are both stunned, and they stand for some time in silence. Afterwards they relax again and converse, all three of them, as if nothing has happened. Aria's mother is, however, suspicious that some-thing is brewing between them. They arrange to meet in the next few days for Aria to show Alfred the school administration books and orient him into the school's routine. They meet on the appointed day, and after they have attended to the school's business, Alfred asks Aria to be his partner in establishing a home. She walks out even before he finishes speaking. Three days later, she writes him a note apologizing for her behavior and saying she will answer his proposal later. She then writes to the school manager to resign her job since it would be "improper" for her and Alfred, as lovers, to teach in the same school. When her resignation has been accepted, she writes again to Alfred accepting his proposal. They then arrange to meet and talk it over face to face. The appointed day comes and Alfred goes to Aria's place where they decide when to tell their parents and when the wedding is to be. Alfred then kisses her hand before leaving.

Their respective parents, on hearing the news, are so excited they brush aside all the formalities of negotiations of this kind. Alfred's father wants to set a date for the wedding much nearer than the one decided on by Alfred and Aria, but on this point Alfred is adamant—it shall be no sooner than six months hence. Now Alfred writes to Mr. Katse telling him about it all, and thanking him for having persistently mentioned Aria's name in his letters. All the people in the villages around are surprised to hear this news, but some understand that Alfred and Aria are two of a kind, and it is not surprising that they have taken naturally to each other.

The day for Alfred Phakoe to be ordained as preacher for Pitseng has been set, and Mr. Katse is expected to be present. But his condition deteriorates and his doctors advise that he be removed from the hospital in Maseru where he has been for some time, to a place near the sea. He has not received Alfred's letter for he left Matsieng, where the letter was addressed, before it came. He writes to Alfred and requests him urgently to meet him at Aliwal North, on his (Katse's) way to East London, for there is something he wants to discuss with him. The letter arrives too late for Alfred to meet Katse at Aliwal North on the appointed day; so when he arrives there and hears that Mr. Katse has already left, he gets on a train to follow him. Just before he leaves, a telegram comes stating that Mr. Katse has had to be taken off the train at Molteno because of a severe pain that made it difficult for him to endure the trip. After what seems a long long time, the train eventually arrives in Molteno, and Alfred meets someone who directs him to where Mr. Katse is. As he parts from this man, the morning star appears. Meanwhile, Mr. Katse, obviously nearing his end, between brief spells of sleep, keeps asking those about him whether Alfred Phakoe has not yet arrived. He prays to God to strengthen Alfred and to make him know that which he, Katse, wished to tell him. Next he asks, several times also, whether the morning star has not yet appeared, and finally he tells the people, "Now the morning star has appeared, go out and see it,"—then he dies, and Alfred arrives just a few moments too late.

On his return to Pitseng there is much snow, and he finds shelter for the night in the same cave used by Mr. Katse on his first journey to Pitseng. This, to the people of Pitseng, is a sign that he who comes to replace Mr. Katse is a man as worthy as he.

The first day the banns regarding the wedding of Alfred and Aria are published in church, the church is full to capacity since every one wants to hear it for himself. The day of the wedding is preceded by feverish preparations for the festivities. Everybody in the community and neighboring villages is involved—the school children, the church, the youth. There is a guard of honour for the bridal party, every one holding fresh flowers in their hands. The parents of the couple are so happy they cannot believe their eyes. The weather is beautiful after recent rains, and all nature seems to be in joyous sympathy with Alfred and Aria, as they, together with a group of young people, wander away from the village into the veld, playing and running in jovial mood, picking the best of the wild flowers and running to Alfred and Aria and giving them to them. Alfred and Aria

seem to see more beauty in each other each time they look at each other again.

Critique

Pitseng is a story about courtship and marriage. Love is a sacred God-given thing, not to be abused and debased through purposeless flirtation. A young man and a young girl must wait until they have reached a suitable age, and even then must not allow themselves to be involved with someone whom they are not certain in their hearts that they are going to marry, and without whom they would remain unmarried for the rest of their lives. This, in a nutshell, is the story of this book. It is highly didactic, and, as with *Moeti*, the people in it are not people in the true sense of the word, but illustrations of virtue and vice in a story that is concerned, not with those people, but with Virtue and Vice. Alfred Phakoe and Aria Sebaka are, for most of the time, portrayed as statues of Virtue, sitting upon their high pedestals and looking with disapproval and even dismay at the goings-on of ordinary mortals. Only towards the end, when they fall madly in love with one another, do they begin to be human beings reacting positively to their environment, and not negatively, as they have hitherto been doing. It is now *their* lives, and not *other people's* lives, that they are concerned with. Before this, they are no different from Fekisi, the hero of *Moeti* who, wearing his halo all over the place, never fails to see evil in his fellow human beings, nor to correct it, or try to correct it, every time.

Many chapters end with one or two paragraphs in which the writer underscores the moral lesson in what has gone before. This kind of digression in order to sermonize is found also in other parts of the book, some of the digressions being quite long.

Pitseng suffers from yet another weakness, *viz.* that it has no plot. For the most part things just don't hang together. Alfred illustrates how a young man ought to behave, and Aria does the same for the girls. The rest of the young men and young women have each a little story told about them, showing up their debasement of love. It is pure accident that Aria and Alfred bump into each other towards the end, and fall in love. And when this happens, they are afraid and not quite sure what to do. Even the death of Mr. Katse, otherwise beautifully described, seems to be of no relevance to the rest of the story.

There are passages in the book that are beautifully descriptive, as that of the situation of the villages clustering around Pitseng, and also the way in which nature harmonizes with the bridal couple Aria and Alfred and the young people with them, walking about in the country on the afternoon of their wedding day.

There is one sense in which *Pitseng* stands out from Mofolo's other two books. While, in *Pitseng*, Mofolo is still very much an advocate of the White man's religion, and an undisguised admirer of the outward symbols of Europeanization—e.g. the manner of dress of the girl students at the high school in the Cape where Alfred obtains his higher education—yet, he speaks admiringly also of the way in which marriage was negotiated among the Basotho of old: ". . . a young man grew up and matured and became a man without knowing what courtship was. And when the time came when he wished to marry ... he would take the cattle out at early dawn, and they would go to the pastures un milked. That was the sign whereby he informed his people that he was begging for marriage: for it was a shameful thing if he spoke with his mouth to his parents that he wanted to marry." After describing the procedure followed by the young man's parents—the careful search, in collaboration with other men of the village, for a suitable girl, each one considered having her background and the ways and dispositions of her parents thoroughly examined, etc., and contrasting this with the freedom with which the youth of the Christianized Pitseng go about with girls and flirt openly with them, Mofolo concludes, *in spite of himself*, that, ". . . the heathens are telling the truth when they say that the evil influences [found among the Basotho] come from the Whites, and come into Lesotho with the Christian converts, because this habit whereby a young man decides independently upon marriage, consulting only with his girl friend, started

with the converts. This attitude has completely destroyed the youth of Lesotho ... "

This is no easy admission for Mofolo to make, with his zeal for the Christian faith: and his ambiguous position stands out even more sharply still when, in the very next chapter, he makes Alfred to wonder whether the pure love mentioned in Mr. Katse's sermon exists, "for he saw with his own eyes a young man being in love with many young girls, and so with the girls, but he felt certain that among other nations it was not so, and that this was something peculiar to Lesotho. If for "other nations" we read "the Whites," and for "Lesotho" we read "the Black people of South Africa," then we have the essence of what Mofolo, through Alfred, is about in this statement. But then, once again, much farther on, Mofolo, in one of his numerous digressions, says, "The modern age is said to be an age of light, of wisdom, and of progress, while the olden days, the days of the *difaqane*, are said to have been days of darkness, of ignorance and lack of enlightenment, yet in a matter such as this one of marriage, we have found that for many those were the days of wisdom, and not of darkness and ignorance, and that it is the modern days that are days of darkness and ignorance, and not of wisdom and light." Mofolo is, in fact, saying that something of value has been lost with the coming of Christianity (or of the Whites, or of Western civilization, whatever one wants to call it), only, he is saying it apologetically, as a concession, almost timidly. Yet the conflict is there none-the-less. And this conflict and ambiguity is carried right into the lives of Alfred and Aria, for we are now unable to say whether "the straight and narrow path" that they follow in the matter of love is thanks to the Christian influence to which they have been exposed and to which they have reacted so positively, or to the light and wisdom of the dark and ignorant days of the *difaqane*!

Chaka

Morija, 1925, 1926, 1957, 1962; 156 pp

Among the chiefs of the Nguni communities to the east of the Maluti mountains was Jobe, Senior Chief over a wide area, a lover of peace, and a promoter of trade. Many weaker tribes sought refuge under him. These included the Fenu Lwenja, later to be known as the Zulu.

Senzangakhona, chief of the Fenu Lwenja, has no sons by his first three wives. As he wishes very much to have an heir, he contemplates marrying another wife. He organizes a large feast where, among the young women who have come, he is attracted to Nandi, a girl from Ncube's village.

On the day the young women from Ncube's village return home, Senzangakhona meets them in the fields, and in spite of their protests and those of Nandi herself, he persuades Nandi to submit to his desire. On being informed that she is pregnant, he makes hurried arrangements to marry her. Nandi gives birth to a boy who is named Shaka² He immediately informs Jobe that he now has an heir, and Jobe is pleased.

Not long after Chaka is born, Senzangakhona's first three wives each get a son—Mfokazana, Dingana and Mhlangana respectively. These wives immediately demand to know who is going to be heir, hinting, of course, that, as they are the senior wives, he should come from among *their* sons. Senzangakhona avoids the question as he loves Chaka and his mother very much, and the senior wives find a doctor to bewitch him and make him hate Nandi. When everything fails, they confront him with the threat to reveal the circumstances of Chaka's birth. He is seized with fear, and he there and then decides that Chaka shall no longer be his heir, and chooses Mfokanza instead. He does not, however, inform Jobe of this change.

Even though no one dares to say it openly, it begins to be whispered about that Chaka is a child of sin, and he

² Called Chaka by the Basotho

ought to be killed. Chaka's age-mates, being influenced by this, fight him whenever they meet him, often causing him serious injuries. A woman doctor, engaged by Nandi while Chaka was still only a toddler, is consulted again, and she gives him additional medicines to further strengthen him; she innoculates him, and he is to continue bathing at the river at dawn, either alone, or, if his mother accompanies him, she is to wait some distance away from where he is bathing and never go to him unless he calls her with a long, low whistle. She gives him medicines that will make him brave, and long to fight. He has now become adept at fighting with his sticks, and he provokes fights with and overwhelms the boys who used to give him a beating. They finally acknowledge him as their superior and they have to submit to his will.

One day Chaka, still but a tender youth, accompanies a band of men who go after a lion which has been raiding their folds at night and killing their cattle. At the first roar of the lion all the men run away, but Chaka, realizing that the lion has caught one of the men, and having failed to persuade any of the other men to go back with him to help the lion's victim, kills the lion single-handed. The women and the girls compose songs praising him and deriding the men. This increases the envy of Senzangakhona's other wives and their sons, and they seek to destroy him. The lion is sent as a trophy to Senzangakhona who in turn passes it on to Dingiswayo who is now Senior Chief after the death of his father, Jobe. Dingiswayo expresses the wish that Chaka be sent to him so that he may know him, but Senzangakhona never does this.

While Chaka is bathing at the river at dawn one day, the water becomes turbulent, a warm wind blows, and then an eerie calm suddenly descends upon everything. After this a monster comes out of the deep and twines its two tongues round Chaka's neck and twists its body around him. It then licks him from head to toe and then slowly and silently glides back into the water. Then there is a thick mist over the water out of which come voices promising Chaka great might. Shortly after this Chaka and his mother receive the bad news that their doctor is dead. However, before she died she arranged for her master, who had taught her, to take over the care of Chaka. Chaka and Nandi must not attempt to look for him, he will come on his own at a suitable time.

One night at Ncube's village, a hyena gets into the hut where the young people are sleeping, and takes a young girl, Mfokazana's girl friend. Mfokazana is present, and he hears everything, as well as the girl's shouts for help, but he, and others who hear it, are too terrified to go to her rescue. Chaka is awakened by her screams. He follows the hyena and kills it, and calms her down. At first she thinks that Chaka is a wizard to whom the hyena has taken her, but after repeated reassurances by Chaka, she believes the incredible and runs throughout the village shouting out the story of her miraculous escape through Chaka's bravery. Mfokazana decides to kill Chaka for bringing shame upon him. He comes to where Chaka is sitting upon the dead beast, slowly wiping the blood from off the blade of his spear, and strikes him a blow at the back of his head. Chaka fights back, causing Mfokazana serious injuries and leaving him unconscious on the ground; he also fights off the young men of Mfokazana's group, killing most of them. The news has already reached Senzangakhona at Nobamba that "a son of his" has killed a hyena. Dingana, the first to arrive with his group, from Nobamba, seeing Mfokazana lying unconscious on the ground, at once attacks Chaka. Chaka fights well, helped by a few men of Ncube's village, and Dingana and his fellows are left lying on the ground. When Senzangakhona and his wives arrive, they are disappointed to see that Chaka is the one who killed the hyena and not Mfokazana as they had thought, and shocked to see Mfokazana and Dingana lying on the ground unconscious. Angrily they demand that Chaka be killed, and Senzangakhona gives the order, "Kill him!" Chaka now fights like the desperate castaway that he is. He is helped by many other men. Unfortunately, his spear and his stick break, and he has no choice but to run for his life. He runs until he enters a nearby forest and hides there. The women compose a song sharply rebuking Senzangakhona for his cruel act. Dingiswayo, on hearing this, imposes a fine of many cattle on Senzangakhona, and orders him to find Chaka and bring him to him alive.

Chaka is mourned in his village by those who admired him and failed to understand his father's cruelty towards

him. Towards midday, even the cattle and the goats and the calves and the kids, not having been attended, add to their cries, and when the dogs begin to howl, there is a weird chorus. Chaka feels proud that all this is happening because of him. He is now convinced that there is no justice, that might is right.

Then he continues wandering for several days. One day Chaka, terribly exhausted, finds a large tree and rests under it and sleeps. On waking up he finds a medicine man standing over him with malice and treachery in his face, which in a flash are replaced by kindness and sympathy of great depth. He slowly reveals to Chaka who he is, by telling Chaka some of the secrets known to Chaka alone. He is Isanusi, the doctor mentioned by Chaka's deceased woman doctor. Chaka is overjoyed and, in response to Isanusi's probing, he indicates that he wishes only to be restored to the position of heir to his father's chieftainship. Isanusi, however, fires him with ambition for much greater things than that.

Isanusi strengthens Chaka with various medicines, and then gives him a choice to accept or reject a medicine which he describes as being "exceedingly bad, yet at the same time exceedingly good"; it is one that makes the user blood-thirsty, to enjoy killing. Chaka wants it. Isanusi finds it and uses it on him. He further makes him a fighting stick and a short stabbing spear from a rare tree found near the seacoast.

At moments of crisis and danger, Chaka is to whisper the name of Isanusi, and help will come immediately. Chaka more than once calls Isanusi "doctor", and Isanusi repeatedly warns him not to call him "doctor," but to call him "Isanusi". Isanusi now walks with him part of the way to Dingiswayo's.

Chaka is welcomed with great joy by Dingiswayo. He is put into Dingiswayo's armies where he distinguishes himself by killing a madman who lives in a nearby forest and strikes terror into the people, but even more by his bravery, strength and adeptness in the battle against Zwide. After this battle, he is promoted to a higher rank in the army.

Chaka never tells his mother the whole truth about Isanusi except to say that the doctor mentioned by their late woman doctor has been, and he has treated him (Chaka).

Early one morning, on returning from his periodic river baths, Chaka sees two men sitting on the riverbank, one looking tall, handsome, strong, with piercing eyes, and evidently fleet of foot. He is smartly dressed. The other has the appearance of a half-wit, with thick hanging lips, exceptionally large ears, shifty eyes, long tufts of unkempt hair, and very long arms; evidently strong as an ox, and untiring in long-distance running. Their names are respectively Malunga and Ndlebe. When Chaka's eyes fall on them, each seems to be electrified into action. When Chaka is about to call Isanusi, they stop him and tell him they are, in fact, Isanusi's servants who have been sent to live close by Chaka and be his constant advisers and bodyguard.

Again Chaka only casually mentions Ndlebe to his mother, and makes no mention at all of Malunga. He lies to Dingiswayo, saying that these two are his childhood friends who have come to join him. Dingiswayo fears them instinctively, especially Malunga who then on his own decides not to stay.

Zwide attacks Dingiswayo again, determined to destroy him once and for all. Ndlebe starts a fire that brings out of hiding Zwide's main force hidden in the forest to trap Dingiswayo's armies. Later he and Malunga (who is suddenly there from nowhere) fight side by side with Chaka and nearly annihilate the enemy. Chaka gets all the credit for this, and is thereafter placed in charge of all the armies.

Meanwhile Senzangakhona dies, and Mfokazana becomes chief after him. Dingiswayo is informed after the act in each case—after Senzangakhona's burial in the first case, and after Mfokazana's accession to the

chieftainship in the other—while Chaka knows everything beforehand through Ndlebe.

Chaka is in love with Dingiswayo's beautiful sister, Noliwa, but he is afraid to approach her lest she and Dingiswayo take offence at his (as he thinks) effrontery. Little does he know that Noliwa is just as madly in love with *him*. Ndlebe, by various stratagems, finds out Noliwa's feelings and informs Chaka, and Chaka is almost mad with joy.

Dingiswayo refuses to recognize Mfokazana as successor to Senzangakhona, and he gives Chaka a regiment and "permits" him to go and claim, by force if necessary, his right to succession. Mfokazana is defeated and killed. When Chaka wants to kill Dingana and Mhlangana also, Ndlebe pleads for them and Chaka saves their lives—a curious thing since Ndlebe would normally do just the opposite.

The day before Chaka is installed, Isanusi, Ndlebe, Malunga, and Chaka all meet at Senzangakhona's grave at midnight and Isanusi, sitting upon the soil of the new grave, speaks to the ancestral spirits in a strange tongue. Ndlebe is meanwhile trotting around the grave while Malunga points and vigorously shakes his spear to all the four corners of the earth, stabbing the ground with it each time. Later Isanusi tells Chaka to stand on top of him and hear what his father has to say to him. Chaka receives his father's blessing. After this Chaka and Malunga and Ndlebe go back to the village.

After his accession, Chaka leads Dingiswayo's armies against the Amangwane. He is victorious.

Chaka with great difficulty confesses to Dingiswayo his love for Noliwa. Dingiswayo is, of course, willing to let him marry her provided *she* is willing.

Zwide surprises Dingiswayo while the latter's armies are dispersed to their homes for a brief rest. Dingiswayo meets him with a skeleton army, but is defeated and captured before help can reach him. Zwide, contrary to the war ethics then observed, kills Dingiswayo, whose armies then unanimously and tumultuously acclaim Chaka new chief in place of Dingiswayo. Chaka is prevented from saving him with a ransom through Ndlebe and Malunga making it generally known that Dingiswayo has already been killed, even while he is yet alive. Zwide makes a fresh assault on Chaka, but he is destroyed.

Isanusi, knowing of Chaka's betrothal to Noliwa, "jokingly" suggests Chaka should not marry. He tells him of greater kingship, power, and renown than he already has, and that for this he must sacrifice the person he most loves. It is Noliwa he has to sacrifice. Chaka would agree at once, but Isanusi gives him a year in which to consider the matter (later reduced to nine months at Chaka's request). Also, he (Isanusi) suggests Chaka should find a new name for his nation. That same moment Chaka hears a low, distant rumbling of thunder: "Zulu! AmaZulu! (The Heavens! The People of the Heavens!)", is his response to Isanusi. The people respond well to the new name for, as they say, "those who [wish to] fight him, it were better they first attack the gods and conquer them, and only then come and face *him!*"

Chaka now reorganizes everything: Dingiswayo had promoted trade and industry, and a market town was beginning to arise, and his traders travelled as far north as Delagoa Bay. Chaka gives a military orientation to everything, from games, dances, conversation, to serious military training and preparation for war. He abolishes circumcision, and men can only qualify for marriage after distinguished military service. He replaces the long throwing spear with the short stabbing one. There is a rigorous military training, and a tight security is thrown about the city, his council meeting place and his personal residence.

The time comes for Chaka to say whether he will have Noliwa or greater glory. He fights a furious battle with

his conscience—determined to achieve the ultimate in might and glory and extent of empire, yet paying the price with much reluctance since he loves Noliwa with amazing love. The stronger motivation wins, and he kills Noliwa who is already with child by him.

". . . and the little remaining spark of humanity was extinguished, reduced to ashes within the fearful darkness of his heart. . . . and his self died, died forever, and there entered (into him) the nature fully of a beast."

He sends his armies out to fight Buthelezi and Qwabe. On their return a great slaughter follows—those who ran away, those who lost their spears, those who did not bring an enemy spear, those who threw the stabbing spear instead of getting close enough to use it without throwing it—these are all condemned to die; those who cried for the condemned—these have their eyes taken out; those who pleaded for the condemned—these have their tongues pulled out by their roots.

He begins to attack neighboring tribes for no reason at all, until the land is in a state of perpetual flight and warfare. Mzilikazi, his most trusted general, flees to the north with his regiments, but not before obtaining some young women by stealth from Chaka's country itself. Those sent to bring Mzilikazi back fail to do so, and they are burnt alive.

Chaka now kills off generals whom he suspects of treachery by sending them on well-nigh impossible missions, killing them himself if they return: Nongogo is sent to find iron-ore stone somewhere in the north, given only a hundred warriors to accompany him. Fatigue, hunger, disease, the enemy's spear—these kill them all except for Nongogo himself who, covered with sores and emaciated, yet manages, by sheer strength of will, to arrive back at Chaka's kingdom with a small specimen of the stone and a report on the mission. Chaka accuses him of having killed his men, and he must therefore die. Mnyamana is sent on a cattle raiding expedition to the country of the Swazi. He finds the Swazi armies away in battle and captures the cattle. Chaka says he stole the cattle instead of fighting for them like a man—he is killed.

Chaka kills his mother for having secretly saved one of his children from his harem, for these were all to be destroyed, or their mothers before they were born. During the days of public mourning he kills great numbers of people on various excuses—those who did not cry; those who came late even though they might have come from far; those who ate the meat of the cattle he slaughtered. Shortly after this Isanusi appears and tells Chaka to be ready as he will soon be coming for his reward.

Chaka, finding no happiness if there is no bloodshed, organizes a large feast, during which bad singers are killed since they spoil the festivities; good singers are killed since they make the people cry; those who cry are killed, for they admire not him, but that which only reflects him, viz. the dancing of the warriors; those who have come from far are killed while they sleep for "they have hatched a plot" against him.

He begins to have bad dreams: He sees his life pass before him up to the point where he meets Isanusi, then he wakes up with a start. This happens over and over and he is unable to sleep. The next night he goes out into the veld with some of his regiments where he can sleep in peace. He has more frightening dreams, and as he walks about with all his regiments asleep, he hears the cry of a wolf, and then the howling of a dog left alone in the ruins of a village he has destroyed. He dreams of the multitudes he has killed, seeing their corpses turning about and cursing, while Nandi and Noliwa stand on either side of the ravine in which they are. Evil spirits are among them and Isanusi and Ndlebe and Malunga also, smiling sarcastically, and Isanusi demands his reward.

As if seized with madness, Chaka, by various intrigues, sets one regiment against another, and Zulu warrior destroys Zulu warrior.

Dingana and Mhlangana have returned on the way to an expedition to the north, on the pretext that they are ill. They realize that the people are tired of Chaka, and they see this as an opportunity for them to take the Kingship. Ironically enough, Chaka is overjoyed to hear of their coming, hoping to find some solace in their presence.

When they do come, they realize that the end is near. Later that day while Chaka is daydreaming, they riddle his body with their spears. And at this moment Isanusi appears and demands his payment.

Critique

In *Chaka*, Mofolo is at the height of his creative genius. Motivations are strong and clear, and reactions to them are bold and irreversible. One: Senzangakhona is driven to seeking an additional wife in the hope that she will bear him a son, which the first three wives have not done so far; two: he impregnates Nandi, whom he wants as his fourth wife, before they are married, and the bastard child born from this meeting is a boy whose illegitimacy most people don't know about because of Senzangakhona's rush to marriage, while the few who do know about it include Senzangakhona's first three wives; three: by an irony of Fate, shortly after Chaka is born each of these three wives also bears a son, and the question immediately arises: Can the son of a junior wife be allowed to be heir in preference to the sons of the senior wives, even though he was born first? And worse still, he is a bastard; four: Thus the first three wives, using the illegitimacy of Chaka as a Democles' sword over Senzangakhona's head, force him into disinheriting Chaka and driving both him and his mother away from home; five: Chaka, bitter against his father, turns bitter against humanity in general and takes a secret vow, that he will henceforth do what he likes, when he likes, how he likes, upon whom he likes, for right and justice do not exist, and the might of the strong—that is law.

Every action is thus seen to be strongly motivated, and we even understand, even though we cannot condone, the wanton destruction of human life which Chaka indulges in at the height of his power. We see a human being among other human beings, whose hopes and aspirations are molded and modified and given meaning and direction, by his interaction with them.

With the diviner-doctor and his magic and potent strengthening medicines playing such a prominent role in the story, the three characters Isanusi, Malunga and Ndlebe, who are personifications of Chaka's own qualities and ambitions, fall easily and naturally into place.

In Isanusi, Malunga and Ndlebe, Mofolo has incarnated attributes and personality traits of Chaka himself. Chaka's confrontation with Isanusi in the wilderness is Chaka's confrontation with Chaka—no more and no less. He wakes up, after his deep sleep and, with a safe distance between him and those who seek to destroy him, and, being refreshed from a fatigue caused by many days of almost continuous running, he finds time to sit and reflect. Just before he slept, it was "midday, when the shadows crept underneath their owners," and "the fury of the sun was getting too severe for him; sweat rolled down his body, and the ground was hot when he trod on it, and he was compelled to look for shade." Chaka wakes up and looks at himself: "Your feet," says an inner voice, "show that you have traveled a long distance, running most of the time. Your forehead is wrinkled from lack of sleep, and as a reflection of your troubled mind; the weakness of your eyes betrays that you have not eaten for several days! Isn't that so, Chaka? Yet you are the child of a king! You are a fugitive! Your upbringing has been hard and harsh; you have had to fight to preserve your own life. Your father, rather than take pride in your heroic deeds—killing a lion and a hyena unaided—has abandoned you and set your enemies upon you."

Chaka, seeing himself thus a homeless vagabond whose manly deeds have earned him scorn and have placed his life in danger, whose royal birth has become a mockery, whose father has flung him to the wolves, for a moment looks at himself and sees himself the vile creature that everybody says he is. This we see in the first expression of Isanusi—murderous, and full of malice and hatred. Must Chaka bring an end to it all? Must he destroy this creature? Quickly he grabs his weapons! Which is, of course, all figurative. But in a flash he banishes all these negative thoughts. He will rise from the dust to which he has been reduced, not only to regain his lost heritage of his father's kingdom, but indeed to become King of kings, that all men shall bow before him; and he shall, without pity or compunction, remove all obstacles between him and his goal, and place upon the sacrificial altar all those whose blood will bring about the glory that he desires. "I will wreak my vengeance when that day of mine shall dawn!"

If we compare the thoughts of Chaka at the time he hears the wailing in the village while he is hiding in the forest, with Isanusi's words during his first meeting with Chaka, we see identical sentiments, almost identical words. In fact, the moment of Chaka's appraisal of his situation as he hears the crying in the village, and the moment that Isanusi reveals himself to Chaka, though temporally and spatially separated in the story, are one and the same period of crisis. This is the critical moment in Chaka's life, the moment of decision. And there will be no half measures for him—he will either fade out the nonentity he has been reduced to, or he will rise to heights never before known. Mofolo tells us that while hiding in the forest, Chaka reviews his life from his childhood, and finds it "ugly, fearsome, causing one's body to shudder. ... and he found that here on earth a person who is wise and strong and beautiful and righteous, is one who knows how to fight with his stick, who, when people gainsay him, decides the issue with his stick; and he decided that from that day, he would do just as he wished: Be a person guilty, or he he not, he would simply kill him if he so wished, for that is the law of the people." This is echoed after he has agreed to cooperate with Isanusi, when Isanusi tells him, "I believe that, in a small way, you have observed the ways of this world, that people live by favoritism and according to whom they love, and by hatred and strength. Well, you too had better part with pity from this very day, for pity kills him who pities."

The tyrant keeps his ear close to the earth, and nips in the bud anything that betrays rebellion against his regime. Mofolo gives us Ndlebe as the personification of this attitude in Chaka. And to represent Chaka's regal stature, his comeliness, his ferocity, strength, and courage in battle, we are given Malunga.

Chaka is much less of a sermon, much less of a propagation of the Gospel, than its predecessors. *Moeti* and *Pitseng* Yet it has its own share of moralizing, and when Mofolo speaks of sin in this book, we know that he is speaking of sin in the Christian sense, and not of social sin in the context of the social milieu which constitutes the setting for his story. "Oh how bitter is the fruit of sin," he says, after describing how Senzangakhona, for fear of the disclosure of the fact that Chaka was conceived out of wedlock, yields to the pressure of his first three wives to abandon Chaka and his mother, "since we now see Senzangakhona having left his wife whom he loved . . . and also having forsaken his child Chaka, through whom he first knew a son, and, to crown it all, being compelled to persecute them!" While this is not all there is of digressions in which the author sermonizes and moralizes in this book, yet there is much less of it here than in *Moeti* and *Pitseng*

Chaka's fall begins even while he is yet climbing up towards his much-desired glory. His humanity has been consistently eroded, while the beast hood of which Mofolo speaks has gained in strength. But the final touch of irony is the bond that he seals with Noliwa's blood. Before this, he is shown as one who loves Noliwa with all his being, a kind of love Chaka has never before felt for another human being, barring his filial love for his mother. While he is doubting the wisdom of an "upstart" such as he approaching a princess on the delicate matter of love, Ndlebe secretly finds out for him that Noliwa is as madly in love with him as he with her. When

Ndlebe breaks the news to him, he prances about with joy mixed with incredulity.

Yet his joy is short-lived, for not long after this, Isanusi, after suggesting to him the possibility of a greater kingship than he already has as successor to Dingiswayo, tells him that for this he has to sacrifice someone he loves above everybody else. Chaka is ready with his answer even when it becomes quite clear who it is he has to sacrifice. But the genuineness of his ready, positive answer is belied by the fact that even after the nine months given him by Isanusi to consider this proposal, "his feelings are in turmoil" when he has to give the final answer, and realizes that it is not yet too late for him to spare Noliwa. Right up to the moment that he comes into Noliwa's house to kill her, a violent battle rages in his heart. When he visits Noliwa as that fateful day approaches, he finds her more beautiful than ever, and "her voice, when she spoke to Chaka, her beloved, made him forget the war-songs and the heroes' praises which he had thought were so beautiful . . . He rubbed his eyes and looked away; and when he looked again at Noliwa, it seemed that her beauty was growing, beauty which was fitting only to a woman greatly beloved of *Nkulunkulu*³ by whom she was chosen to come and show the people the perfection of womanhood." Conscious of his treacherous thoughts, he cannot bear to look at her, and he walks out.

After killing Noliwa, Chaka is incapable of loving—or hating. All the massacres that he commits thereafter are not motivated by hate or even by genuine anger, but are committed for sport.

Chaka now rapidly rises to the very peak of power, but passes straight on to fall on the other side with even greater rapidity.

The tragedy of Chaka abides, perhaps more than in anything else, in the fact that when he comes into his own and carries out his threat to have no consideration for anybody but himself, we react emotionally by shrinking with the utmost horror at the senseless carnage that he indulges in, yet at the same time intellectually we can say that we understand why he behaves that way. But his beast hood is not made any the less revolting for all our mathematical analysis of probabilities based on the hardships he has suffered in his childhood. In fact, we accept Isanusi as the welcome savior of this abandoned child, orphaned even while his parents are yet alive, pursued by merciless bloodhounds set upon him by his own father, when they first meet under that tree in the wilderness. Yet we soon become wary of Isanusi, and wish that Chaka would not give himself over to him so completely. We know why he does, yet we wish he wouldn't do it!

Mofolo's skill in enlivening a situation is amply illustrated in many parts of the book. A good example is the scene at the river pool where Chaka is bathing at dawn, when he is visited by the King of the Deep Waters. In the calm and tranquility which reigns all around, things begin to happen suddenly, vigorously, briefly—e.g. the sudden quivering of the tuft of hair on his head and the throbbing of the skin under it; the sudden chilly wind that agitates the reeds and makes them sway madly to and fro; the sudden vigorous billowing of the water, etc.—all these things, happening one after another, begin suddenly, proceed vigorously but only briefly, and everything is normal again just as suddenly. Mofolo very skillfully uses the doubled verb and the ideophone to dramatize these happenings. He doubles his adverbs and some of his adjectives for emphasis; occasionally he draws out a vowel to achieve emphasis through syllable length.

Mofolo is a master in the creation of an atmosphere. The piece about the last days of Chaka is quite a masterpiece in itself, when Chaka is *alone*, and all his greatness and renown have turned sour in his mouth. He is alone in many senses: He is outside of the village with only a few regiments; it is night; the warriors for their part are sleeping, yet *he* is kept from sleep by his horrible dreams; the stillness of the night is pierced by the howl of a dog left alone as its owners either perished at the spear of Chaka's warriors, or ran for their lives—he is now no better than that dog; he is alone, like the orphans and the widows and widowers of those whose

3 The Great Great One: First Ancestor of the Zulu people according to Zulu mythology.

corpses have been devoured by the wolves, of which he is reminded by the shriek of a wolf in the tranquil night; but worst of all, he is alone in the knowledge of his guilt and its magnitude, and his gnawing conscience, striking violently at him in his state of sub-consciousness, i.e., in his sleep *via* his dreams (for consciously he has suppressed any trace of conscience), reminds *him*, and *him* alone, that he has destroyed himself for, as the Basotho say, "a chief is a chief through his people"—he has laid waste to his kingdom by destroying his people, and thereby himself. And the final irony is that in his loneliness he even longs for his half-brothers—his arch enemies who were saved from his spear by Ndlebe—and hopes to find solace in their company. They come—and they kill him!

Chaka falls with a mighty fall, he does not expire. Not for him the "tide that moving seems asleep." Mofolo's description of him in his last days conveys this idea well. Even when he has become weak from lack of sleep and the terror of his dreams, Mofolo still says of him with great admiration: "He stood up, the lion of Zulu descent, the fearless beast of the wilds, but he stood up sapped of his strength, unable even to raise his mane. He stood up, the great elephant, but he stood up unsteady on his feet, deprived of his strength, breathing heavily." And even when his body is already riddled with spears, when slowly and without anger he turns his face towards his assassins to speak to them, they run away, for he is still "the lion, the elephant, of Zulu descent."