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Truthfulness and jealousy in Tendamudzimu Robert Ratshitanga's *Vhungoho na Vivho*

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This article explores how Ratshiṱanga's poem *Vhungoho na Vivho* [Truthfulness and Jealousy] employs metaphor and personification to portray the moral conflict between truthfulness and jealousy within the Tshivenḓa cultural context. While Tshivenḓa literature is rich in moral and philosophical content, limited scholarly attention has been given to how figurative language reinforces these narratives in poetry. Through qualitative textual analysis and close reading, the article investigates how Ratshiṱanga's poetic techniques emphasise the triumph of truthfulness over jealousy. The study is guided by a moral-critical approach, supported by a functional perspective on figurative language, to examine both the ethical dimensions of the poem and the communicative role of metaphor and personification in conveying moral meaning within Tshivenḓa culture.

Contribution: The findings aim to demonstrate the role of figurative language in moral instruction and cultural preservation, thereby contributing to the critical appreciation of Tshivenḓa poetry as a vehicle for transmitting societal values.

Keywords: truthfulness; jealousy; metaphor; personification; morals; values; poetry.

Introduction

The Vhavenḓa community, like many African societies, is grounded in a moral framework that upholds values such as truthfulness, communal harmony, respect, Ubuntu [humanity towards others] and reciprocal relationships. Within this ethical paradigm, dishonesty and jealousy are regarded not only as individual shortcomings but also as disruptive forces that threaten social cohesion. These moral failings erode trust, destabilise relationships and weaken the communal values upon which Vhavenḓa identity is built. Truthfulness [*vhungoh*] and the rejection of jealousy [*vivho*] are thus viewed as cornerstones of both personal integrity and collective well-being.

This article focuses on the poem *Vhungoho na Vivho* [Truthfulness and Jealousy], written by Ratshiṱanga, which appears in the anthology also entitled *Vhungoho na Vivho* (Ratshiṱanga 1972). Although the anthology contains several poems, the present study is limited to analysing this single poem. The study corpus therefore comprises a single poetic text, namely the poem *Vhungoho na Vivho*, rather than the entire anthology of the same title. This clarification is necessary to avoid ambiguity of reference and to define the precise scope of the investigation.

Given that this article does not concern itself with Ratshiṱanga's broader literary oeuvre or personal biography, the analysis is deliberately centred on the poem as an autonomous text. The interpretation is guided by the poem's internal structure, imagery and aesthetic dynamics, which together shape the arguments presented in this study. Consequently, this literary exposition does not engage with the historical-biographical dimensions of the author's life, affiliations or authorial intent. However, it focuses exclusively on how meaning is generated within the text through the deployment of literary devices and thematic development.

Ratshiṱanga's poem *Vhungoho na Vivho* presents a compelling literary portrayal of these opposing moral forces. Through the artistic use of metaphor and personification, Ratshiṱanga animates the abstract concepts of truthfulness and jealousy, casting them into direct moral and philosophical conflict. The poem encapsulates core Tshivenḓa cultural teachings that promote honesty and warn against the corrosive nature of envy. As such, it functions as both a work of art and a moral text that reflects and preserves cultural values across generations.

Tshivenḓa poetry, deeply rooted in oral tradition, has historically served as a medium for transmitting philosophical wisdom, social commentary and ethical instruction. Figurative

language, particularly metaphor and personification, plays a vital role in this tradition by conveying abstract concepts in accessible and emotionally resonant ways. Despite its cultural and pedagogical importance, Tshivenḓa poetry remains underrepresented in mainstream African literary studies, particularly regarding how poetic devices shape moral narratives. Scholars such as Mphaya (2015) and Madima (2018) have acknowledged the moral function of Tshivenḓa literature. However, few studies have systematically examined the rhetorical strategies through which such teachings are communicated, especially through close analysis of individual poems.

In contrast, African literary theorists such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) and Achebe (1975) have emphasised the significance of metaphor, allegory and oral storytelling in encoding indigenous knowledge and ethical values. However, their work has largely focused on broader African narratives, with limited attention to specific poetic texts within marginalised language traditions such as Tshivenḓa. Furthermore, while metaphor and personification have been widely studied in Western and pan-African literary traditions (Finnegan 2012; Lakoff & Johnson 1980), their specific application in Tshivenḓa poetry remains largely unexplored. This article addresses that gap by offering a focused literary analysis of the poem *Vhungoho na Vivho*, examining how Ratshiṱanga employs these devices to structure a moral opposition between truthfulness and jealousy.

The relevance of this inquiry extends beyond literary appreciation. It engages with contemporary moral dilemmas and offers cultural insights into how traditional values may be harnessed to address issues of dishonesty, mistrust and envy in present-day communities. Thus, the article contributes to both the theoretical discourse on African moral philosophy and the applied discourse on cultural renewal and ethical education.

In view of the above, the central research question guiding this article is as follows: How does Ratshiṱanga's poem *Vhungoho na Vivho* employ metaphor and personification to depict the relationship between truthfulness and jealousy?

Contribution and broader impact

This article makes a critical contribution to Tshivenḓa literary scholarship by demonstrating how figurative language operates as both an aesthetic and an ethical tool in indigenous poetry. The article highlights the capacity of Tshivenḓa poetic traditions to articulate moral values in ways that remain culturally grounded and pedagogically effective. More broadly, the article strengthens the case for including underrepresented African languages and literatures in the canon of moral and philosophical discourse.

Importantly, this research also offers value to individuals and communities affected by the real-life consequences of jealousy and dishonesty. For direct victims, such as those who have suffered betrayal in familial, social or professional settings, the poem's portrayal of truthfulness triumphing over jealousy offers moral reassurance and cultural validation. For indirect victims and observers, the poem serves as a reflective tool, urging a return to foundational values that promote ethical coexistence and mutual respect.

In the broader Tshivenḓa context, and indeed across many African societies struggling with declining moral standards, this article positions literature as a resource for moral rejuvenation. The article shows how indigenous poetry can offer more than cultural nostalgia; poetry can also serve as a source of healing, guidance and social transformation. By foregrounding the symbolic and ethical dimensions of *Vhungoho na Vivho*, the article affirms literature's enduring role in shaping not only thought but also behaviour and identity.

Literature review

Tshivenḓa literature, and poetry in particular, remains a vital yet under-examined repository of indigenous knowledge, moral instruction and cultural expression. While the literature is often celebrated for its linguistic richness and oral tradition, its literary devices and their ethical functions have not received the critical scrutiny they deserve. This observation forms the basis for the present engagement with existing scholarship, as this article interrogates how metaphor and personification contribute to moral discourse in Ratshiṱanga's *Vhungoho na Vivho*. In doing so, this article positions itself within and beyond existing scholarly conversations.

Mphaya (2015) and Madima (2018) provide a valuable foundation in highlighting the moral and didactic function of Tshivenḓa literature. Their work emphasises that poems and oral narratives serve as tools for teaching communal values such as respect, discipline and honesty. However, while these scholars acknowledge the presence of moral teachings, they pay limited attention to the formal mechanisms, particularly figurative language, through which these values are communicated. This lack of focus on literary technique creates space for this article to offer a more nuanced reading of *Vhungoho na Vivho*, in which metaphor and personification are not merely stylistic flourishes but central to the poem's moral argument.

Across the broader field of African literary studies, foundational scholars such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) and Achebe (1975) have long argued for the centrality of African literature in advancing indigenous values and decolonising knowledge systems. Literature, in their view, is not simply an aesthetic artefact but a cultural and ideological battleground. This article aligns with that perspective, particularly with Ngũgĩ's insistence on the importance of writing in African languages. However, while their analyses often centre on prose fiction and political allegory, this article extends that discourse to indigenous poetry, an area often overlooked in favour of the novel. In doing so, it demonstrates that Tshivenḓa poetry, too, functions as a site of cultural resistance and moral reflection.

Similarly, Finnegan (2012) offers a comprehensive account of oral literature in Africa, acknowledging the use of metaphor and personification in traditional genres. However, her work stops short of interrogating how these devices function in moral instruction. Moreover, Finnegan cautions against reading African oral texts too rigidly through Western literary frameworks. In line with that caution, this article approaches metaphor and personification not as universal rhetorical tools but as culturally embedded devices with specific ethical resonance within the Vhavenḓa worldview.

Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) influential work, *Metaphors We Live By*, offers further theoretical grounding, asserting that metaphors shape not only language but also thought and behaviour. Although emerging from Western linguistic philosophy, their theory opens important possibilities for interpreting indigenous African texts. This article draws on their notion of conceptual metaphor to explore how *Vhungoho na Vivho* embodies a worldview in which abstract qualities such as truthfulness and jealousy are made intelligible through vivid, personified imagery. However, this article diverges from their cognitive-linguistic framework by rooting its analysis in the ethical and cultural contexts of Tshivenḓa society.

Other studies on Tshivenḓa literature tend to focus on broad thematic concerns, such as the tension between tradition and modernity (Ramugondo 2020) or historical representation (Tshamano 2019). While such contributions are valuable in foregrounding the social function of literature, they often overlook the poetic techniques that drive thematic development. This article addresses that oversight by demonstrating that metaphor and personification in *Vhungoho na Vivho* are not ornamental; they are structural elements that frame the poem's ethical universe.

Furthermore, ongoing debates within African literary theory concern the balance between aesthetic and moral readings of literature. Barber (1999), for example, warns that moral criticism may risk reducing complex literary texts to didactic tools, thereby neglecting their artistic nuance. This article acknowledges this tension but contends that in *Vhungoho na Vivho*, the moral and aesthetic dimensions are not mutually exclusive. Rather, Ratshiṱanga's poetic style enhances both the clarity and the emotional weight of the poem's ethical message.

In synthesising this body of scholarship, it becomes evident that although significant strides have been made in recognising the moral value of Tshivenḓa and African literature, there is a need for more focused textual analysis of how literary devices operate within specific cultural frameworks. This article responds to that need by offering a literary analysis of *Vhungoho na Vivho*, which foregrounds the role of metaphor and personification in articulating a distinctly Tshivenḓa moral vision.

Theoretical grounding

This article is primarily grounded in a moral-critical approach, also known as Ethical Literary Criticism, which holds that literature should be evaluated for not only its aesthetic qualities but also the moral and ethical insights it conveys. The origins of Moral Criticism can be traced back to classical philosophy, particularly to Aristotle, who, in the Poetics, argues that literature serves a didactic and cathartic function by enabling audiences to reflect on virtue, vice, and the consequences of human actions (Aristotle 1996). According to this perspective, literary works serve as a means of moral instruction by portraying the conflict between ethical and unethical behaviour.

In the twentieth century, Moral Criticism developed further through the work of scholars who emphasised literature's ethical responsibility. Brooks (1960) and Tate (1938) argue that poetry is not morally neutral but rather communicates values that influence readers' understanding of human conduct. Similarly, Shaw (1997) maintains that literature plays a significant role in shaping moral consciousness by presenting situations in which readers must evaluate right and wrong. From this viewpoint, literary texts function as interpretive spaces where ethical dilemmas are explored, and moral values are reinforced. These principles are particularly relevant to African literature, in which artistic expression is often closely connected to communal values, social harmony and moral instruction.

The relevance of the moral-critical approach to this article lies in its focus on the ethical dimensions embedded in Ratshiṱanga's poem *Vhungoho na Vivho*. The poem presents a moral opposition between truthfulness [*vhungoho*] and jealousy [*vivho*], depicting them as contrasting forces that influence human behaviour and social relationships. Through metaphor and personification, Ratshiṱanga constructs a moral allegory that reflects important ethical principles within Tshivenḓa culture. In line with Empson's (1951) view that poetry often encodes moral conflict through figurative language, the poem may be interpreted as a literary representation of the struggle between virtue and vice. Moral Criticism, therefore, provides an appropriate framework for examining how the poem communicates ethical teachings through poetic form.

In addition to the moral-critical approach, this article also draws on insights from the functional perspective, which emphasises the role of language and literary devices in performing specific communicative and cultural functions within a text. Functional approaches to language maintain that stylistic and linguistic choices are purposeful and contribute to the construction of meaning within particular social and cultural contexts (Fowler 1986; Halliday 1978; Ricoeur 1977). From this perspective, figurative language such as metaphor and personification is not merely decorative but helpful in conveying ideas, shaping interpretation and reinforcing social values.

In the context of Tshivenḓa poetry, figurative language serves as a means of expressing moral philosophy in an accessible,

culturally meaningful form. Metaphor and personification allow abstract concepts such as truthfulness and jealousy to be represented as active forces, making ethical ideas easier to understand and remember. Widdowson (1975) observes that literary language operates functionally by guiding the reader's interpretation and emphasising meanings through stylistic choices. This functional perspective supports the present analysis by explaining how Ratshiṱanga's poetic techniques work to communicate moral teachings.

By combining a moral-critical approach with insights from a functional perspective, this article examines both the ethical significance and the communicative function of figurative language in *Vhungoho na Vivho*. Moral Criticism provides the primary framework for interpreting the poem's moral message. At the same time, the functional perspective helps to explain how metaphor and personification operate within the text to convey that message effectively. This complementary approach makes it possible to analyse the poem as both a work of art and a vehicle for moral instruction within the Tshivenḓa literary tradition.

Research methods and design

This article employs a qualitative literary research design, underpinned by textual analysis as the primary methodological tool to examine how Ratshiṱanga's poem *Vhungoho na Vivho* employs metaphor and personification to depict the moral interplay between truthfulness [*Vhungoho*] and jealousy [*Vivho*]. The primary source for this research is the poem, selected for its rich thematic content and engagement with moral and philosophical concerns central to Tshivenḓa culture (Mphaya 2015). The study corpus comprises a single poetic text: the poem *Vhungoho na Vivho* by Ratshiṱanga, published in the anthology *Vhungoho na Vivho* (Ratshiṱanga 1972). The analysis focuses exclusively on this individual poem rather than the entire anthology. This poem has been purposefully selected for its profound thematic engagement with moral values and its rich use of figurative language. Its allegorical structure and symbolic characters provide fertile ground for literary analysis, particularly within the framework of the moral-critical approach. As a work deeply rooted in indigenous Tshivenḓa oral and written traditions, the poem exemplifies how literature functions as a repository of cultural wisdom and ethical reflection. A close textual analysis will be conducted to identify instances of metaphor and personification and to examine how these literary devices reinforce key themes.

The thematic concerns explored in the poem include the triumph of truthfulness over jealousy, the moral consequences of jealousy, the enduring nature of truthfulness, and the ethical implications of human choices. These themes resonate with the moral dimensions present in Tshivenḓa literary traditions (Madima 2018). This article employs thematic analysis to systematically examine these themes, which enables the identification, interpretation and categorisation of recurrent patterns within the text. This method ensures a rigorous examination of how metaphor and personification shape the poem's ethical and philosophical discourse.

The analytical process involves coding passages in which metaphor and personification are evident, followed by a detailed interpretation of how these figures of speech enhance thematic development and moral messaging. This approach aligns with qualitative literary criticism, which prioritises in-depth textual engagement to uncover the underlying ethical narratives within poetic works.

The interpretation is supported by close textual analysis and relevant scholarly literature on Tshivenḓa poetry, African oral tradition and the moral-critical approach (Barber 1999; Finnegan 2012). This approach ensures that the analysis remains theoretically grounded while allowing for detailed interpretation of figurative language within the poem.

Furthermore, ethical considerations will be followed by ensuring proper attribution to Ratshiṱanga as the poem's original author and appropriately referencing all secondary sources that inform the analysis (Ramugondo 2020; Okpewho 1992). Given that this article engages with published literary works, no human participants are involved, thereby minimising ethical concerns related to data collection.

Through this comprehensive methodological approach, the article aims to illuminate the intersection between poetic devices and moral philosophy in Tshivenḓa literature. By demonstrating how metaphor and personification construct a moral dichotomy between truthfulness and jealousy, the research offers more profound insights into the role of Tshivenḓa poetry as a medium for moral instruction and cultural preservation.

Vhungoho na vivho

1. *Vhungoho na vivho ndi mbevha na tshimange,*
2. *Nge zwoṯhe mulilo zwi sa okelane*
3. *Vivho ndi vhulaḓa, vhungoho ha amba ḽi a revha,*
4. *Ngeno vhungoho vhu tshi phukhula nga nḓivho*
5. *Mutshilitshili wa vivho ndi vhutsilu,*
6. *Ngeno vhungoho vhu tshi phukhula nga nḓivho*
7. *Tsha vivho ndi u gungula na u fara nga mbilu*
8. *Ngeno ngoho i tshi ḽi haḓa sa khwivho*
9. *Mudzia u vhivha hoṯhe ndi muḽambilu*
10. *Nge na wa muṅwe mukovhe khae zwi khakhea*
11. *Tshidini ndi u tama vhuṱali ngeno wo bebwa u tsilu*
12. *Wa hangwa uri zwi ṱoḓwaho nga vhungoho zwi a phethea*
13. *Vhungoho ndi tshiphiri tsho vhumbaho muthu na shango*
14. *U vhu hanedza ndi hone u shaya nzhele*
15. *Nge hone huṋe vhu sa shavhe mivhango*
16. *Vhunga kha hone vhu si na ndele*
17. *Thi mangali na iwe a hanedzaho zwine nda vha.*
18. *Vhunga tshira tshau ndi hone vhutsilu*
19. *Vha ngaho iwe ndi vhone vhe vha anda*
20. *Thetshelesa u pfe, u litshe u ḽa mbilu.*

Ratshiṱanga (1972)

English translation of *Vhungoho na vivho*

1. Truthfulness is a cat-and-mouse,
2. Because they do not assist each other.
3. Jealousy is a stinging velvet bean; when truthfulness speaks, it weakens jealousy.
4. Even though the two keep on fighting.
5. The backbone of jealousy is stupidity.
6. Whereas truthfulness oozes with knowledge
7. Jealousy's only action is complaining and holding grudges.
8. Whereas truthfulness eradicates it like weeds
9. A selfish person is not at peace with oneself.
10. They see other people's share as wrong.
11. The problem is that jealousy likes to be intelligent, whereas one is born stupid.
12. Jealousy tends to forget that what truthfulness needs is realised.
13. Truthfulness is a secret that made a man and the world.
14. Arguing with it shows a lack of knowledge.
15. Truthfulness does not fear quarrels or disputes.
16. Because nothing can defeat truthfulness
17. I am not surprised when you refuse what I am.
18. Because your problem is foolishness
19. Jealous people are the ones who are many.
20. Listen, understand, and stop complaining.

Ratshi.anga (1972)

Analysis of textual evidence

This section provides a detailed examination of textual evidence from Ratshiṱanga's poem *Vhungoho na Vivho*, focusing on the following predetermined themes: the triumph of truthfulness over jealousy, the moral consequences of jealousy, the enduring nature of truthfulness, and the ethical implications of human choices. By systematically analysing key passages and instances of figurative language, particularly metaphor and personification, this article seeks to illuminate how *Vhungoho na Vivho* constructs a moral dichotomy between truthfulness [*vhungoho*] and jealousy [*vivho*], underscoring their contrasting roles within the moral and philosophical framework of Tshivenḓa culture.

Given that this article does not concern itself with the author's broader literary oeuvre or personal background, the analysis is deliberately centralised on the poem as an autonomous text. The poem's internal echoes and aesthetic dynamics shape the arguments presented herein. This literary exposition does not engage with the historical-biographical dimensions of Ratshiṱanga's life, affiliations or authorial intent. Instead, the focus is exclusively on how meaning is generated within the text through the deployment of literary devices and thematic development.

Through close reading, this analysis aims not only to uncover the ethical dimensions embedded in the poem's structure and language but also to demonstrate how figurative language reinforces its moral vision. By foregrounding the symbolic opposition between truthfulness and jealousy, the poem reaffirms a universal moral principle: that truthfulness ultimately prevails. Furthermore, this exploration highlights how poetic techniques enhance both the text's aesthetic and didactic functions, situating *Vhungoho na Vivho* within broader discourses on African literary aesthetics and indigenous moral philosophy.

The triumph of truthfulness over jealousy

The theme explores the Triumph of Truthfulness over Jealousy in Ratshiṱanga's poem *Vhungoho na Vivho*, illustrating the moral conflict between these two opposing forces. Truthfulness is depicted as a guiding principle that upholds integrity and fosters social cohesion, whereas jealousy leads to moral corruption and societal decay. Through a close analysis of textual evidence, the poem demonstrates the ultimate victory of truthfulness over jealousy, reinforcing its moral and philosophical significance within the Tshivenḓa cultural context. This fact is evidenced by the verses:

Verse 3: '*Vivho ndi vhulaḓa, vhungoho ha amba ḽi a revha*', meaning [Jealousy is a stinging velvet bean; when truthfulness speaks, it weakens jealousy].

Verse 5–6: *Mutshilitshili wa vivho ndi vhutsilu*, [The backbone of jealousy is stupidity],

Ngeno vhungoho vhu tshi phukhula nga nḓivho. [Whereas truthfulness oozes with knowledge].

Through a close analysis of textual evidence, the poem demonstrates the ultimate victory of truthfulness over jealousy, reinforcing the moral and philosophical significance of truthfulness within the Tshivenḓa cultural context. This fact is evidenced in the following verses:

Verse 3: *Vivho ndi vhulaḓa, vhungoho ha amba ḽi a revha.* [Jealousy is a stinging velvet bean; when truthfulness speaks, it weakens jealousy.]

In this verse, a metaphor likens *vivho* [jealousy] to *vhulaḓa* [a stinging velvet bean], conveying its harmful, destructive nature. However, *vhungoho* [truthfulness] possesses the power to weaken it. The caesura, marked by the comma between the verses, creates a deliberate pause, heightening the contrast between the two opposing forces. This break in rhythm forces the reader to reflect on the power dynamics at play, reinforcing the idea that, while jealousy may appear formidable, truthfulness ultimately prevails. The structural emphasis placed on the ability of truthfulness to 'speak' and 'weaken' jealousy underscores the poem's moral argument: truthfulness is not passive but actively dismantles falsehood and corruption.

Verses 5–6: *Mutshilitshili wa vivho ndi vhutsilu*, [The backbone of jealousy is stupidity],

Ngeno vhungoho vhu tshi phukhula nga nḓivho. [Whereas truthfulness oozes with knowledge].

These verses continue to develop the theme by contrasting the foundational elements of jealousy and truthfulness. The personification of *vivho* [jealousy] as having a *mutshilitshili* [backbone] that is made of *vhutsilu* [stupidity] further discredits jealousy as a morally deficient and irrational force. Conversely, *vhungoho* [truthfulness] is elevated through the metaphor of 'oozing with knowledge', presenting it as a source of wisdom and enlightenment. The structural contrast between these verses emphasises the inevitability of the triumph of truthfulness over jealousy, reinforcing its role as the guiding moral principle in Tshivenḓa culture.

Thus, the poem not only portrays the triumph of truthfulness over jealousy but also employs poetic devices such as caesura, metaphor and personification to amplify this message. Through these stylistic choices, Ratshiṱanga ensures that the moral lesson remains both persuasive and memorable, in line with Tshivenḓa's rich oral and literary traditions.

The textual evidence further reflects the triumph of truthfulness over jealousy in the following verses:

Verses 7–8: *Tsha vivho ndi u gungula na u fara nga mbilu*, [Jealousy's only action is complaining and holding grudges.

Ngeno ngoho i tshi ḽi haḓa sa khwivho, [Whereas truthfulness eradicates it like weeds].

These verses reinforce the contrast between jealousy [*vivho*] and truthfulness [*vhungoho*] by highlighting their opposing behaviours and effects. Jealousy is depicted as passive and self-destructive, engaging only in *gungula* [complaining] and *fara nga mbilu* [holding grudges], which suggests bitterness, resentment, and stagnation. The personification of jealousy as something that harbours grudges implies that it cannot foster progress or growth.

In stark contrast, truthfulness is portrayed as an active and purifying force that *eradicates* [*ḽi haḓa*] jealousy, just as weeds [*khwivho*] are removed. This metaphor presents truthfulness as a cleansing agent, suggesting that truthfulness can eliminate corruption and moral decay. The comparison to weed removal is particularly striking, as it implies that truthfulness opposes jealousy and uproots it completely, preventing its resurgence.

Furthermore, the structure of the verses, particularly the use of *Ngeno* [Whereas], serves as a pivotal transition, accentuating the contrast between jealousy and truthfulness. This juxtaposition reinforces the poem's central moral message: truthfulness is superior to jealousy and actively dismantles its influence.

Through personification and metaphor, Ratshiṱanga effectively conveys that the victory of truthfulness over jealousy is inevitable and essential to maintaining moral integrity and societal harmony in Tshivenḓa culture.

The moral consequences of jealousy

In Ratshiṱanga's *Vhungoho na vivho*, the destructive effects of jealousy on individuals and society are highlighted, reinforcing the ultimate triumph of truthfulness over jealousy. Using metaphor, personification and vivid imagery, the poem portrays jealousy [*vivho*] as a force that leads to moral decay, ignorance and suffering, while truthfulness [*vhungoho*] fosters wisdom, integrity and righteousness. The poem is both a cautionary tale and a moral guide, encouraging ethical reflection and responsible decision-making.

The poem *Vhungoho na Vivho* vividly illustrates the moral consequences of jealousy through metaphor, personification and vivid imagery. In **Verse 3**, jealousy is compared to a stinging velvet bean [*Vhulaḓi*], symbolising its toxic and harmful nature. The *caesura* [pause] in the verse further emphasises the contrast between jealousy and truthfulness, highlighting the ability of truthfulness to weaken jealousy's influence. This depiction reinforces the idea that jealousy is corrosive, disrupting both individual lives and societal harmony, whereas truthfulness provides relief and moral clarity.

Closer exploration of the theme

Verses 5–6

In these verses, jealousy is personified as inherently foolish [*vhutsilu*], reinforcing the notion that it leads to ignorance and poor decision-making. At the same time, truthfulness is associated with knowledge and wisdom. The stark contrast between '*vivho*' [jealousy] and '*vhungoho*' [truthfulness] underscores the intellectual and moral superiority of truthfulness.

Verses 7–8

These verses depict jealousy as a source of dissatisfaction and social isolation, portraying individuals who feel jealous as constantly complaining and holding grudges [*gungula na u fara nga mbilu*], ultimately finding no fulfilment in their desires. In contrast, truthfulness is described as eradicating evil like weeds, symbolising its power to cleanse and restore moral order. Through these literary devices, the poem not only critiques the detrimental effects of jealousy but also advocates for truthfulness as the path to wisdom, contentment and societal well-being.

Verses 9–10

The poem further explores the moral consequences of jealousy by illustrating its self-destructive nature and inherent contradiction. In verse, *Mudzia u vhivha hoṱhe ndi muḽambilu* [A selfish person is not at peace with oneself] (verse 9), jealousy is depicted as a source of inner turmoil and dissatisfaction. The term '*muḽambilu*' suggests restlessness and unease, reinforcing the idea that jealous individuals,

despite their material gains, experience internal conflict and emotional distress. This view aligns with the broader theme that jealousy leads to perpetual dissatisfaction, preventing individuals from attaining true peace and fulfilment.

The verse *Nge na wa muṅwe mukovhe khae zwi khakhea* [They see other people's share as wrong] (verse 10) highlights jealousy's tendency towards envy and entitlement. The verse suggests that a jealous person is never satisfied with their possessions and instead resents others' prosperity, leading to social disharmony and bitterness. This suggestion reinforces the notion that jealousy fosters division, as it drives individuals to perceive fairness as injustice when it does not serve their interests.

Verses 11–12

The poet deepens this critique by exposing the irony and self-deception inherent in jealousy. The verse *Tshidini ndi u tama vhuṱali ngeno wo bebwa u tsilu* [The problem is that jealousy likes to be intelligent, whereas born stupid] (verse 11) presents both a paradox and an oxymoron, reinforcing jealousy's false sense of wisdom and its ultimate foolishness. A paradox is a statement that appears self-contradictory but reveals a more profound truth (Cuddon 2013). Here, the contradiction lies in the desire for intelligence [*tama vhuṱali*] despite inherent stupidity [*wo bebwa u tsilu*], illustrating how jealousy blinds individuals to their ignorance.

The phrase *tama vhuṱali ngeno wo bebwa u tsilu* exemplifies an oxymoron, a poetic device that places two contradictory terms together to create a striking effect (Abrams & Harpham 2015). The juxtaposition of 'desiring wisdom' and 'being born foolish' highlights the self-deception of jealousy; it operates under the illusion of intelligence, yet ultimately leads to irrational, misguided decisions.

Furthermore, the verse *Wa hangwa uri zwi ʂoḓwaho nga vhungoho zwi a phethea* [Jealousy tends to forget that what truthfulness needs is realised] (verse 12) emphasises the superior and fulfilling nature of truthfulness. Unlike jealousy, which remains insatiable and unfulfilled, truthfulness is associated with completion and sufficiency, ultimately achieving what is morally and ethically just.

The textual evidence therefore presents truthfulness as a force of stability and fulfilment, while jealousy remains an insatiable, destructive force that leads to self-destruction. Through these verses, Ratshiṱanga effectively critiques jealousy as a source of inner conflict, ignorance and social division, while reinforcing the role of truthfulness in fostering peace, wisdom and ultimate fulfilment. The poem thus serves as a moral guide, urging individuals to embrace truthfulness and reject the corrosive influence of jealousy.

The enduring nature of truthfulness

The textual evidence in *Vhungoho na Vivho* by Ratshiṱanga illustrates the resilience and enduring nature of truthfulness, emphasising its capacity to withstand deception, jealousy and adversity. This theme underscores the notion that truthfulness [*vhungoho*], despite encountering challenges, ultimately prevails and remains unwavering over time. Through metaphor and personification, the poem depicts truthfulness as a symbol of stability, wisdom and justice, starkly contrasting jealousy's [*vivho*] transient and self-destructive nature.

Ratshiṱanga powerfully illustrates the enduring and resilient nature of truthfulness, portraying it as an unshakable force that withstands deception, jealousy and adversity. This resilience is evident in *Vivho ndi vhulaḓa, vhungoho ha amba ḽi a revha* [Jealousy is a stinging velvet bean; when truthfulness speaks, it weakens jealousy] (verse 3), where truthfulness is depicted as a force capable of neutralising the harmful and corrosive effects of jealousy. Further reinforcing its permanence, the poet contrasts truthfulness with jealousy's inherent ignorance in '*Mutshilitshili wa vivho ndi vhutsilu, Ngeno vhungoho vhu tshi phukhula nga nḓivho*'. [The backbone of jealousy is stupidity, whereas truthfulness oozes with knowledge] (verse 5–6). The verb *phukhula* [oozes] suggests an overflowing abundance of wisdom, positioning truthfulness as an unceasing source of enlightenment and moral clarity. The poem ultimately asserts that truthfulness not only prevails but also fulfils its purpose, as expressed in *Wa hangwa uri zwi ʂoḓwaho nga vhungoho zwi a phethea* [Jealousy tends to forget that what truthfulness needs is realised] (verse 12), highlighting the completeness and inevitability of truthfulness. Through these verses, Ratshiṱanga affirms that while jealousy is transient, self-destructive, and ultimately futile, truthfulness endures unchallenged, standing as a pillar of justice, wisdom and moral stability.

Moreover, Ratshiṱanga elevates the status of truthfulness as a fundamental principle of existence in *Vhungoho ndi tshiphiri tsho vhumbaho muthu na shango* [Truthfulness is a secret that made a man and the world] (verse 13). This verse metaphorically suggests that truthfulness is not merely a moral concept but a foundational element of life and creation itself. To deny or argue against truthfulness is to reveal ignorance, as stated in *U vhu hanedza ndi hone u shaya nzhele* [Arguing with it shows a lack of knowledge] (verse 14), reinforcing the idea that truthfulness is absolute and self-evident. The poem further asserts the unwavering strength of truthfulness in *Nge hone huṋe vhu sa shavhe mivhango* [Truthfulness does not fear quarrels or disputes] (verse 15). Moreover, *Vhunga kha hone vhu si na ndele* [Because nothing can defeat truthfulness] (verse 16), affirming its invincibility in the face of opposition. Through these verses, Ratshiṱanga establishes truthfulness as an eternal and indomitable force, one that transcends temporary conflicts and falsehoods. While jealousy is transient, self-destructive, and ultimately futile, truthfulness endures unchallenged, standing as a pillar of justice, wisdom and moral stability.

Textual evidence further reinforces the resilience of truthfulness through its unwavering stance against denial

and ignorance. The poet personifies truthfulness in *Thi mangali na iwe a hanedzaho zwine nda vha* [I am not surprised when you refuse what I am] (verse 17), presenting it as unaffected by rejection or opposition. This line suggests that truthfulness remains steadfast, regardless of human denial or resistance. The following verse, *Vhunga tshira tshau ndi hone vhutsilu* [Because your problem is foolishness] (verse 18), highlights the inherent folly of rejecting truthfulness, implying that such defiance stems from ignorance rather than reason.

Ratshiṱanga critiques the widespread prevalence of jealousy in *Vha ngaho iwe ndi vhone vhe vha anda* [Jealousy, people are the ones who are many] (verse 19), acknowledging that jealousy dominates society, yet reinforcing that its dominance does not equate to righteousness or permanence. The call to wisdom and discernment is made explicit in *Thetshelesa u pfe, u litshe u ḽa mbilu* [Listen, understand and stop complaining] (verse 20), urging individuals to embrace truthfulness rather than succumbing to bitterness and ignorance. This verse underscores the poem's didactic nature, positioning truthfulness as a guiding principle that leads to enlightenment, while jealousy fosters discontent and self-destruction.

Through these verses, Ratshiṱanga presents truthfulness as enduring and resilient, a force that ultimately prevails despite resistance or overshadowing by jealousy. The unyielding nature and alignment of truthfulness with wisdom stand in sharp contrast to jealousy's fleeting and irrational nature, further affirming its moral superiority and lasting significance.

The ethical implications of human choices

The ethical implications of human choices in *Vhungoho na Vivho* are deeply intertwined with the moral contrast between truthfulness and jealousy, illustrating the consequences of embracing or rejecting ethical principles. The poem underscores that jealousy leads to moral corruption, ignorance and self-destruction, while truthfulness fosters wisdom, justice and stability. In *U vhu hanedza ndi hone u shaya nzhele* [Arguing with it shows a lack of knowledge] (verse 14), Ratshiṱanga critiques those who reject truthfulness, suggesting that denying moral and ethical principles reflects ignorance rather than reason. This view aligns with the broader ethical message that disregarding truthfulness leads to poor judgement and societal discord. Similarly, in *Nge na wa muṅwe mukovhe khae zwi khakhea* [They see other people's share as wrong] (verse 10), the poem highlights jealousy's tendency to foster envy and entitlement, reinforcing its role in social disharmony. The ethical implication here is that selfishness and material obsession not only harm the individual but also create divisions within society. Conversely, the resilience of truthfulness is evident in *Nge hone huṋe vhu sa shavhe mivhango* [Truthfulness does not fear quarrels or disputes] (verse 15), illustrating that ethical integrity withstands opposition and remains steadfast. The didactic tone of *Thetshelesa u pfe, u litshe u ḽa mbilu* [Listen, understand and stop complaining] (verse 20) serves as a moral directive, urging individuals to embrace wisdom and ethical reflection rather than succumbing to ignorance and jealousy. Through these ethical contrasts, the poem advocates for conscious moral choices, reinforcing the idea that truthfulness and integrity lead to fulfilment, while jealousy results in ethical and existential ruin.

Discussion

This section presents the findings from a detailed analysis of Ratshiṱanga's poem *Vhungoho na Vivho*, focusing on the triumph of truthfulness over jealousy, the moral consequences of jealousy, the enduring nature of truthfulness, and the ethical implications of human choices. These findings are interpreted through a moral-critical approach, which examines literature in terms of the ethical values it conveys, and are further supported by a functional perspective, which explains how figurative language operates to communicate meaning within a cultural context. Through these complementary lenses, the article demonstrates how Ratshiṱanga's use of metaphor, personification and structural contrast reinforces moral teachings central to Tshivenḓa culture.

A significant finding of this article is that *Vhungoho na vivho* asserts the ultimate victory of truthfulness [vhungoho] over jealousy [vivho]. Ratshiṱanga portrays truthfulness as a guiding principle that fosters social cohesion and integrity, while jealousy is depicted as a destructive and corrupting force. The analysis of Verse 3, '*Vivho ndi vhulaḓa, vhungoho ha amba ḽi a revha*' [Jealousy is a stinging velvet bean; when truthfulness speaks, it weakens jealousy], reveals that a metaphor is used to show jealousy's harmful nature, while truthfulness is depicted as a force capable of neutralising its effects. From a moral-critical perspective, this contrast exposes vice and affirms virtue, whereas from a functional perspective, the metaphor makes the moral message vivid and memorable, allowing the poem to communicate ethical meaning in a culturally accessible form (Shelley 2009).

Similarly, in Verses 5–6, the personification of jealousy as having a *mutshilitshili* [backbone] made of *vhutsilu* [stupidity] highlights its inherent irrationality, whereas truthfulness is associated with *nḓivho* [knowledge], reinforcing its intellectual and moral superiority. The structural contrast between these verses illustrates how literature functions as a moral guide, aligning with the moral-critical view that literary texts promote ethical reflection (Elliot 1982). At the same time, from a functional perspective, the personification of abstract qualities enables the reader to perceive moral ideas as concrete, active forces, thereby strengthening the poem's communicative power (Halliday 1978).

Another significant finding is that *Vhungoho na vivho* vividly depicts jealousy as self-destructive and morally degrading. The poem emphasises that jealousy leads to ignorance, suffering and social disharmony, a view consistent with the moral-critical approach, which holds that literature reflects the ethical struggles of human society (Kermode 1990).

In Verse 9, *Mudzia u vhivha hoṱhe ndi muḽambilu* [A selfish person is not at peace with oneself], jealousy is portrayed as a source of inner turmoil, reinforcing the idea that immoral actions lead to self-inflicted suffering. From a functional perspective, this statement serves as a moral warning, guiding the reader towards ethical reflection through concise, symbolic language.

Verse 10, *Nge na wa muṅwe mukovhe khae zwi khakhea* [They see other people's share as wrong], highlights the envious and discontented nature of jealous individuals. By exposing how jealousy fosters resentment and social division, Ratshiṱanga emphasises the moral lesson that selfishness erodes communal harmony, a central concern of moral criticism (Elliot 1982). Functionally, the use of direct, simple imagery strengthens the poem's didactic effect by making its ethical message clear and easy to understand.

The article also finds that the poem presents truthfulness as an enduring and unshakable force. Unlike jealousy, which is temporary and self-defeating, truthfulness remains steadfast despite opposition. This fact is evident in Verse 12, *Wa hangwa uri zwi ṱoḓwaho nga vhungoho zwi a phethea* [Jealousy forgets that what truthfulness seeks is fulfilled], which suggests that truthfulness ultimately leads to completion and fulfilment. From a moral-critical viewpoint, this view reflects the idea that virtue leads to harmony, while vice leads to dissatisfaction (Kermode 1990). From a functional perspective, the contrast between fulfilment and emptiness reinforces the poem's moral meaning by structuring the text around opposing symbolic forces.

Verse 13 further elevates the status of truthfulness: *Vhungoho ndi tshiphiri tsho vhumbaho muthu na shango* [Truthfulness is the secret that made a person and the world]. This metaphor presents truthfulness as fundamental to existence itself, aligning with the moral-critical principle that literature expresses universal ethical truths (Elliot 1982). Functionally, the use of metaphor expands the meaning of truthfulness beyond individual behaviour to a broader cultural and philosophical level, thereby deepening the poem's message.

The findings also show that *Vhungoho na vivho* emphasises the ethical consequences of human choices. The poem suggests that individuals who embrace truthfulness attain wisdom and fulfilment, whereas those guided by jealousy experience conflict and alienation. In Verse 14, *U vhu hanedza ndi hone u shaya nzhele* [Arguing with it shows a lack of knowledge], Ratshiṱanga criticises those who reject truthfulness, equating such behaviour with ignorance. This reflects the moral-critical view that literature corrects moral shortcomings by exposing error and encouraging virtue (Kermode 1990). From a functional perspective, the line's direct, authoritative tone reinforces its instructional purpose.

Furthermore, the poem's concluding lines, such as *Thetshelesa u pfe, u litshe u ḽa mbilu* [Listen, understand and stop complaining], serve as a clear moral directive urging the reader to choose wisdom over jealousy. This reinforces the poem's didactic role, consistent with the moral-critical approach (Shelley 2009). Functionally, the imperative form of the statement enhances its persuasive force, guiding the reader towards ethical reflection.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that Ratshiṱanga's *Vhungoho na vivho* is both a literary and a moral text that critiques jealousy and upholds truthfulness as a guiding ethical principle. Through metaphor, personification and structural contrast, the poem communicates the triumph of virtue over vice, the destructive consequences of jealousy, the enduring nature of truthfulness, and the ethical responsibility of human choice. From a theoretical perspective, the poem may be understood through a moral-critical approach, which highlights its ethical message, together with a functional perspective, which explains how figurative language operates to convey that message effectively. Ratshiṱanga's work therefore demonstrates how Tshivenḓa poetry combines aesthetic expression with moral instruction, reinforcing cultural values embedded within African philosophical traditions.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that Ratshiṱanga's poem *Vhungoho na Vivho* effectively employs metaphor and personification to portray the moral conflict between truthfulness [*vhungoho*] and jealousy [*vivho*]. The analysis was guided by a moral-critical approach, which examines literature in terms of the ethical values it conveys, and was supported by a functional perspective that explains how figurative language operates to communicate meaning within a cultural context. Through these interpretive lenses, the study has shown that the poem presents truthfulness as a symbol of wisdom, stability and fulfilment, while jealousy is depicted as destructive, irrational and socially disruptive. The use of metaphor and personification enables the poem to transform abstract moral principles into vivid and culturally meaningful representations, thereby reinforcing its didactic purpose within the Tshivenḓa literary tradition.

The findings further show that Ratshiṱanga's work functions not only as artistic expression but also as a means for moral education. The victory of honesty over jealousy, the harmful effects of envy, the lasting importance of moral integrity and the ethical duty of human choice all mirror values that are fundamental to Tshivenḓa cultural philosophy. From a moral-critical point of view, the poem demonstrates how literature can encourage ethical thought by revealing vice and promoting virtue. From a functional viewpoint, the poem shows how figurative language acts as a communicative tool by making moral ideas clear, memorable and culturally meaningful.

The study also highlights the importance of analysing African-language poetry within appropriate critical frameworks. The combination of a moral-critical approach with insights from a functional perspective has made it possible to examine both the ethical significance and the linguistic function of figurative

language in the poem. This complementary approach shows that metaphor and personification are not merely decorative devices but structural elements that shape meaning and reinforce cultural values.

In light of these findings, the article recommends that further research be conducted on Tshivenḓa poetry and other African-language literatures using approaches that consider both moral interpretation and the functional role of language. Such studies may explore additional poems, authors and themes to deepen scholarly understanding of how indigenous literary traditions communicate philosophical and ethical ideas. Expanding research in this field will contribute to the broader recognition of African literature as a significant source of moral knowledge, cultural identity and artistic expression.

In conclusion, the application of a moral-critical approach, supported by a functional perspective on figurative language, has shown that *Vhungoho na Vivho* is both a literary and a moral text. Ratshiṱanga's poem demonstrates how poetic language can be used to express ethical principles, guide human behaviour and preserve cultural wisdom. The study therefore affirms that Tshivenḓa poetry is not only aesthetically rich but also ethically meaningful, serving as an important medium for transmitting moral values and philosophical insights across generations.

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Mmbulaheni L. Mudau: Conceptualisation, Investigation, Writing – original draft. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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