EXISTENTIALISM IN THE NOVELS OF BESSIE HEAD

BY

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PG\Ph.D\12\64188

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA

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A Ph.D THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this work ñExistentialism in the Novels of Bessie Headò was carried out by Ojiakor Theodora Chinyere under the supervision of Prof. Ikenna Dieke and has not been submitted in any form, in any other University except University of Nigeria Nsukka.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Somtoo my daughter, with love.

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First, I glorify God Almighty for His goodness and mercies throughout the time of this programme.

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Ojiakor,T.C.

ABSTRACT

The study examines the influence of the existentialist themes in the novels of Bessie Head. Various studies have been done on the works of Bessie Head, especially with particular focus on the concept of identity, the exilic consciousness and on literary commitment, but none has analyzed, let alone subjected *Maru*, *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *A Question of Power* to the existentialist interpretation. The objective of this study is to explore the tremendous accuracy with which Bessie Head show- cases the conflict between the individual and society. The apartheid system has attacked the identity of Headôs characters and this informs the existential sensibility so discernible in her oeuvre. The study adopts the analytical research design. The data collected through content analysis is coded according to thematic concerns, the mode of characterization and the vision of the author. The findings reveal that being and becoming influence her commitment as reflected in her choice of characters that like her are cast in the in-between space. These characters shuttle between points of inclusion and exclusion. The quest for a universal identity that defies definition of race or tribe is shrouded in shackles of prejudice enshrined in the traditional outlook which must be dismantled in order to attain total liberty. However, this dream is encumbered with a lot of challenges thus reflecting the difficulty of erasing cultural differences. In conclusion, the novels are discussed from a largely existentialist perspective of hope in a utopian society.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

The African American and winner of the 1993 Nobel Prize in literature Toni Morrison, speaks eloquently of what she calls ña sense of rootednessò(339). What Morrison is referring to, is the gut sense of belonging to a common tradition of historical sensibility that binds writers of different background and different ideological leanings. For the African-American writers, the legacy of slavery, the throes of racial oppression, and the macabre paradox of Jim Crow politics in a free democratic society constitutes the background of that common tradition.

Morrison contends that for the African writer, his sense of rootedness is defined by his belonging to an ethnic and cultural group together with the sense of identity which it fosters and which invariably conditions his creative imagination. Writers like Achebe have the Igbo cultural tradition, Ngugið the kikuyu/Gikuyu culture, Pðbitekð the Ugandan Acoli tradition Kaneð the Islamic tradition of the diallobe.

For Bessie Head, however, Morrison suggests that there is this inordinate sense of detachment from the African cultural tradition because of the intervening forces of apartheid in her native South Africa. She does not share in the ancestral sensibilities of an African homestead because she has not been allowed to develop root in any tradition.

The issue is her nativity; Bessie Head bore the burden of a double illegitimate birth: in 1937 she was conceived out of wedlock and, in apartheid argot, across the colour bar. Simply by being born, she transgressed the racial and gender edicts of her society, a deviance that portended the torments of her later life. In her thirteenth year, Head learned that the man and woman whom she had presumed to be her parents bore no biological relation to her. That year, the South African state removed her from foster parental care and placed her in an orphanage. It was only then that her origin was revealed to her and quoting Susan Gardner:

> I was born on the 6th July 1937 in the Pietermaritzburg hospital....The reason for my peculiar birth place was that my mother was white, and she had acquired me from a black man. She was judged insane and committed to the mental hospital while pregnant(95).

Headôs mother, Bessie Amelia Emery, came from an upper-class white South African family renowned for breeding racehorses. The familyôs professional preoccupation with eugenics may well have compounded their deep-seated racial prejudices, when their daughter, on the rebound from a failed marriage, flouted racial and class taboos by entering into a sexual liaison with a black stable hand. When she fell pregnant, her parents had her locked away in a mental asylum on grounds of, in the words of Randolph Vigne, of ñpremature senile dementiaò (65). Emery gave birth to Head in the asylum and, six years later, in 1943, committed suicide there. Head never met her mother, nor did she ever learn the name of her father, who fled the Emery estate without a trace. By the age of thirteen, Head had known four sets of parents: her biological parents; the Afrikaans foster parents who returned her a week later because she looked ñstrangeò. According to Gillian Eilersen, ñdid the delicate

little fingernails have a brownish tinge? Were the wisps of hair too curly? The child is coloured, in fact quite black and native in appearanceò(9); the mixed-race foster parents into whose care she was delivered, and the South African state which, acting in loco parentis, removed the young girl from these second foster parents and placed her in an orphanage, as a ward of the state. Thus, from an early age, Head came to experience the family not as a natural form of belonging but as an unstable artifice, invented and reinvented in racist terms, and conditional upon the administrative designs of the nation-state. Elizabeth Odhiambo opines that:

> ...for writers like Kane, Achebe, Laye, Soyinka and others the knowledge emerging and experienced by them is anchored in shared collective tribal and ethnic identity. For Head on the other hand, the emergent knowledge is one constructed on the knife-edge categories of race, otherness and crippling alienation, a fact which discourages any kind of affinity or sympathetic rootedness(45).

Her estrangement from tradition placed her under relentless pressure to improvise a sense of community and ancestry, in her life and writing alike. Sandra Paquet, in her analysis of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Hurston and *Tar Baby* by Toni Morrison, emphasizes the necessity of ñknowing oneself in ancestral termsò (508). Caroline Rooney has portrayed Headôs novel, *A Question of Power,* as situated at the ñcrossroads of dispossessionò (118) ï a phrase that could be readily applied to her work as a whole.

The circumstances of Headôs birth are not the only forms of marginality she has to contend with: as a first generation coloured, an orphan, a changeling, a refugee,

a certified ñmad womanò, and a single mother, she led a profoundly disinherited life on almost every front. Moreover, as a soð called coloured woman engaging with rural themes in Southern Africa, Head wrote without the sustenance of any literary lineage. Many of the fundamental criteria for social membershipð notably those of family, race, and nationð characteristically assume or involve the authority of blood-lineage. Because Headôs relationship to all these categories was so radically and traumatically liminal, she could never live the illusion of their naturalness. As such, her work offers radical insight into the contingencies underlying efforts to secure membership or exclusion from society on grounds of nature or ancestry.

There are demographic groups in South Africað whites four million as at the height of apartheid. These whites are sub-divided into two subdivisions; the greater percentage refers to those that have Dutch ancestry, the Afrikaners. The second subdivision comprises the English and other European whites, including the Jews. The second group is the coloured comprising off springs of interracial marriage, Asiansð South Koreans, Chinese, Indians, Pakistanisð and finally the Blacks, the original owners of the land (25-30 million). Racially, Bessie was a member of the Cape Coloured community. While the statutory definition of coloured under apartheid has shifted over time, they have been persistently riven with contradictions. The state has variously sought to demarcate the category coloured on the basis of descent, percentage, physical appearance, language preference, cultural criteria, and general acceptance by the community. Of all the racial groups circumscribed by apartheid legislation, coloured have been most frequently represented through layered negotiations. The Population Registration Act of 1950, for example, defined a coloured as, in the words of Balibar and Wallerstein, someone ñwho in appearance is

obviously not white or Indian and who is not a member of an aboriginal race or African tribeò (74). And yet she never felt a part of the community because for reasons of geography and gender the coloured community was never available to her as a secure ground for identity. Head was raised in a Natal missionary orphanage in a largely Indian environment, some thousand kilometres from the epicentre of coloured culture in the Cape. She moved to the Cape in 1960 at the age of twenty-three, but struggled to fit in. In an unpublished interview with Cecil Abrahams:

> As a newcomer to the Cape, I thought I had found the ideal place for my mixed race soul. But I quickly and painfully learned that if you were not fully grounded in the colour brown, you would have to be excluded from the communityôs business and be ready to endure insult (4).

Headôs sense of familial and racial estrangement was intensified by the fact that, until the age of forty-two, she was also denied the moorings of nationality. Her first twenty-seven years were spent in South Africa as a disenfranchised coloured woman, and the next fifteen in Botswana where citizenship was withheld from her, forcing her to live as a stateless refugee. Thus Headôs identity was circumscribed on familial, racial, and national fronts by disinheritance, illegitimacy, and rootlessness.

In the face of these circumstances, her writing and life in the Botswanan village of Serowe were distinguished by an unremitting need to reconceive herself outside the natural matrix of familial, racial, and national traditions that formed the very grounds of her ostracism. Headôs prose is peopled largely with two types: characters whose sense of belonging is an unsettled precarious achievement rather

than a birth right and characters who risk or forfeit their inherited privileges by breaking with confining traditions.

The Historical Background of South African Existential Reality

The principle and dynamics of the racist apartheid ideology may not be understood in full if one fails to understand the historical factors that gave rise to it. South Africa was colonized by the English and Dutch in the seventeenth century. ñApartheidò, an Afrikaans word meaning in the words of Megan Shore, ñthe state of being apart,ò (36) was a system of racial segregation in South Africa enforced through legislation by the National Party (NP) governments, the party from 1948 to 1994, under which the rights of the majority black inhabitants were curtailed and Afrikaner minority rule was maintained.

Its history dates back to 1652, according to Barnabas Okolo, ñwhen Jan Van Riebeeck, an official of the Dutch East Indian Company, in search of a ñrefreshment depotò for company ships sailing on the Indian route, arrived at and settled in the Cape of Good Hopeò(30). By1688 there were already six hundred non-official European settlers, mainly farmers around the Cape and from then onwards, in the words of Eric Walker, ñthe number kept increasing steadily, and conflicts with the indigenous Khoisan people over territory had startedò (38).The number of these immigrants was increased further by the influx of French Huguenots as well as whites of German extraction, as the years went by. In 1795, the British in the quest for colonies all over Africa, seized and annexed the Cape. Political and military conflicts between the Dutch settlers and the British over South African territory became rife.

One of the salient incidents in the history of apartheid in South Africa, apart from the numerous bloody ethnic wars, is the historic ñGreat Trekò which was a political movement embarked upon by the Afrikaner farmers in 1836 to rid themselves of the encroachment of the British as well as to secure enough land for pasture. Prominent among the grievances of the Afrikaners, which are also what constitutes the germ of the apartheid policy, was the relative equality of treatment meted out alike to the Afrikaners and the blacks, by the British administration. The Afrikaners thus dreamt, according to Leo Marguard, of an ñindependent republican state in which there would be no equality between black and whiteò (9).The inward movement of the Afrikaners was met with stiff resistance from the indigenous Zulus, Swazis, Xhosas, Tswanas, Sothos, most of who had elaborately organized kingdoms complete with standing armies, but they all eventually fell to the superior arms of the Afrikaners. The discovery of diamonds in the area of the present-day Zimbabwe and Malawi escalated the conflict between the Afrikaners and the British imperialists as both groups went into the scramble for Southern Africa with renewed vigour, culminating in a major Anglo-Boer war of 1899.The Afrikaners were to secure many concessions at the treaty that ended the war, one of which was the recognition of the equality of the Afrikanersô language with English. These conflicts and their accompanying victories had a tremendous psychological boosting effect on the Afrikaners and played a crucial role in moulding their character. The racist character of the Afrikaner attitude came to the fore clearly in the words of Okolo, ñboth in 1902 and 1909 during the National Conventions of the four self-governing South African colonies, which ended with a final accord passed by the British Parliament known as the South African Act of 1909 and which paved the way for the Union of South

Africa by 1910ò (30). During the convention, the Boer colonies, namely, Transvaal and Orange Free States, refused to grant franchise to the non-European peoples in spite of the franchise that the latter enjoyed under the colonial British in the Cape Province and by the Act of 1909.This juridical denial of the non-whites of voting and of being voted for in the 1910 constitution was thus the first act in the entrenchment of white racial domination in South Africa.

With the enactment of apartheid laws in 1948, racial discrimination was institutionalized. Race laws touched every aspect of social life, including a prohibition of marriage between non-whites and whites, and the sanctioning of ``white-only'' jobs. In 1950, the Population Registration Act required that all South Africans be racially classified into one of three categories: white, black (African), or coloured (mixed decent). The coloured category included major sub-groups of Indians and Asians. Classification into these categories was based on appearance, social acceptance, and descent. Non-compliance with the race laws were dealt with harshly. All blacks were required to carry ñPass Booksò containing fingerprints, photo and information on access to non-black areas.

In 1951, the Bantu Authorities Act established a basis for ethnic government in African reserves, known as ñhomelands.ò These homelands were independent states to which each African was assigned by the government according to the record of origin (which was frequently inaccurate). All political rights, including voting, held by an African were restricted to the designated homelands. The idea was that they would be citizens of the homelands, losing their citizenship in South Africa and any right of involvement with the South African Parliament which held complete

hegemony over the homelands. From 1976 to 1981, four of these homelands were created, denationalizing nine million South Africans. Nevertheless, Africans living in the homelands needed passports to enter South Africa: aliens in their own country.

In 1953, the Public Safety Act and the Criminal Law Amendment Act were passed, which empowered the government to declare stringent states of emergency and increased penalties for protesting against or supporting the repeal of a law. The penalties included fines, imprisonment and whippings. In 1960, a large group of blacks in Sharpeville refused to carry their Passes; the government declared a state of emergency. The emergency lasted for 156 days, leaving 69 people dead and 187 people wounded.

The practical result of all these legislations has been the entrenchment of racial inequality and victimization, rendering the indigenous majority unstable and isolated. The aim of the ñPass Laws,ò for instance, is to create a permanent state of paranoia in the blacks, and to condition them to fear and insecurity. The migrant labour system imposed on them breaks down the cohesion that family co-habitation engenders. Okoloôs analysis supports this assertion when he says that:

> ...other effects of (migrant labour) system on the African and non-white population generally, are well-known. Such problems as the breakdown of the African family life due to the migrant system, the extreme poverty of Africans and the non-whites groups... frustrations and antagonism caused by lack of respect, absence of adequate amenities and opportunities, the enforced separation of people of different races, the economic imbalance, e.t.c are all inherent in the apartheid system (54).

The creation of Bantustans is to force blacks into these economically depleted zones and another ruse to keep them backwards in all areas of endeavour. The black man is not free to choose his life style. He is not free to raise a family and have an organic relationship with it devoid of spells of forced separations, or is he free to develop his physical, intellectual, moral and religious life as fully as he would. Above all, he is subject to a gamut of penalization, such as banning, confinements, detention, police assaults and spells of imprisonment for the least infringement of the apartheid decalogue. In the words of Horrell, et al, for example, ñbetween June 1969 and June 1970, 380 persons were tried for infringing laws relating to the production of identity documents by Africansõõ (142). According to Patrick Wilmot:

> ...between 1960-67 there were 4.5 million pass laws convictions and 120,000 convictions for refusal to be ejected from land or for strikes. Between 1952 and 1967, 1,000,000 strokes were impose on 200, 000 victims; in 1970 the police shot and killed 54 people and wounded 149, and 356 people died in prison. From June 1976 in Soweto to the time of writing (November 1976) over 600 Africans have been killed by the police, and the killing continues. If, as Fanon says, colonialism is violence in its natural state, apartheid represents the most perfect form of colonialism in the history of the world (10).

The viciousness of the system can also be seen in the famous Sharpeville massacres of 21st March, 1960 in which, according to Wilmot, ñsixty-nine blacks were shot dead, and one hundred and eighty-six others woundedò (9). Still the most

gruesome of these massacres was to take place in July 1976 in which over six hundred school pupils protesting the imposition of Afrikaans language as a compulsory subject of study were cold-bloodedly murdered.

The composite effect of all these legalistic restrictions and brutalities is that the blacks exist as unfulfilled, frustrated, and alienated people, driven totally by forces outside their control. According to Wilmot:

> Apartheid is a system of racial discrimination built atop an immense foundation of economic exploitation, political repression and cultural obliteration, established and maintained by ruthlessly organised and executed violence of European against Africa (xi).

As a system, the components of apartheid reinforce each other, interpenetrate each other, and make the end product of its operation more intense and fulsome in humiliation and terror. Apartheid as an evil policy sparked, according to Tom Lodge, ñsignificant internal resistance and violence, and a long arm trade embargo against South Africaò (20). Since 1950s, a series of uprising and protests was met with banning of opposition and imprisoning of anti-apartheid leaders. As unrest spread and became more effective and militarised, state organisation responded with repression and violence. Along with the sanctions placed on South Africans by the international community, this made it increasingly difficult for the government to maintain the regime.

Apartheid reforms in the 1980s failed to quell the mounting opposition, and in 1990 according to the British Broadcasting Coporation News: 2 February 1990

President Fredrick Willem de Clerk began negotiations to end apartheid, culminating in multi-racial democratic elections in 1994, won by the African National Congress under Nelson Mandela.

This malaise in which the oppressed are trapped in South Africa is perhaps no better expressed than by one of the concepts that run inter alia in Bessie Headôs works, ñexistential issuesò, which is generally perceived as a condition of estrangement and disharmony characterized by an absence of a milieu that is conducive for harmonious living. Headôs treatment on power relationships as they inform or are informed by exile identities seeking to subvert the nation are the particular concern of her novels, and the conclusions to these issues vary in progression from novel to history.

Head always wanted to be able to treat her characters as humans rather than people belonging to any raciallyð determined ideologies. This desire to have each person transcend racial loyalty, became, according to Huma Ibrahim, part of the exilic consciousness expounded by Headò (62). It was this profound commitment to humanity that constituted the fundamental basis of her focus in all her novels, short stories, and histories.

Definition and Analysis of Key Concept

This study will attempt a definition of my central conceptð Existentialism in all its manifestations and move on to list the key themes. These themes in turn are to be investigated as they connect the writings of Bessie Head. There has never been a general agreement on the definition of existentialism. The term is often seen as a

historical convenience as it was first applied to many philosophers in hindsight, long after they had died.

According to Steven Crowell, defining existentialism has been relatively difficult. A central proposition of Existentialism is that existence precedes essence, which means that the most important consideration for individuals is that they are individuals ï independently acting and responsible, conscious beings (existed) ï rather than what labels, roles, stereotypes, definitions or other preconceived categories the individuals fit (essence). The actual life of the individual is what constitutes what could be called his true essence instead of there being an arbitrarily attributed essence others use to define him. Thus human beings, through their own consciousness, create their own values and determine meaning to their lives. It is often claimed in this context that people define themselves, which is often perceived as stating that they can wish to be somethingð anything, a bird, for instance ï and then be it. According to most existentialist philosophers, however, this would constitute an inauthentic existence. Instead, the phrase should be taken to mean that people are defined only insofar as they act and that they are responsible for their actions. For example, someone who acts cruelly towards other people is, by that act, defined as a cruel person. Furthermore, by this action of cruelty, such persons are themselves responsible for their new identity (cruel persons). This is as opposed to their genes, or human nature, bearing the blame. Existentialism therefore, may be defined as the philosophical theory which holds that a further set of categories, governed by norms of authenticity, is necessary to grasp human existence. Although a highly diverse tradition of thought, seven themes can be identified that provide some sense of overall unity. These themes include: Dread, Alienation, Absurd, Freedom, Commitment,

Nothingness, and Existence. These themes can then provide us with an intellectual framework within which to discuss the novels of Bessie Head within the history of existentialism. Our strategy is to stress Bessie Headôs connection with these key existentialist concerns, which we introduce above. The themes come together in her work, although uncomfortable in the wake of apartheid, Head was nevertheless the very model of a public intellectual, writing tens of short pieces for public dissemination and taking resolutely independent and often controversial stand on major political events. Her writings are most clearly existentialist in character.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Various scholars have studied Bessie Headôs works with particular focus on the concept of identity, and exilic consciousness and came up with varied views. Cecil Abrahams, for instance, opines that the circumstance of Headôs birth propels her search for identity that led to existential themes in her writing. Corwin Mhalahlo, explores the perceived intricate relationship that exists between constructed identity, discrimination and violence as portrayed in Bessie Headôs trilogy from varying perspectives, including aspects of coloniality, materialist feminism and liminality. His major concern is with the affinities that exist between identity, discrimination and violence. Along the lines, John, La Rose examines the element of being and totality in Bessie Headôs *A Question of Power*. He argues that while Marxist criticism may be instructive in its provocation of materialist literary analysis, these readings may obfuscate pertinent discursive issues of individual ontology. The present study closely relates to La Roseôs in that it too, revolves around the question of being and becoming and how this informs individual commitment. La Roseôs view is also pertinent in that it recognises the need for further studies of Headôs work from varied perspectives; the

difference is that his argument is limited to *A Question of Power* only. Adding to the debate, Ikenna Dieke argues that Headôs *Maru*, more than *A Question of Power,* distils the very essence of her creative enterprise laced with an overriding concern for an investigation into the enigma of human prejudice. This is against Lloyd Brown who argues that ñ*A Question of Power* represents a touché in Headôs literary achievementò (175). Huma Ibrahim regards the novel as the most important work in the novelists attempt to navigate the troubled waters of transnational identities and her exilic consciousness which she calls Headôs ñpoint of engagementò(125).

From the above instances, it is evident that various studies have been conducted on Bessie Headôs works. A lot may have been done about the writings of Bessie Head, but to the knowledge of this researcher, there is little or no evidence of the exploration of existential themes in her works, especially in the three novels. Bessie Head is one of the African writers to have dealt with existentialism in her fiction. In this respect, her novels, *When Rain Clouds Gather*, *Maru* and *A Question of Power* attain a tremendous accuracy in showing the conflict between the individual and the society. The problem which this research recognizes, therefore, is that as all great writers, Bessie Headôs life and work has been examined by each generation of critics. But none has examined existentialism as a large topic in her novels and devoted an entire development of it.

1.3 Scope of the Study

The study is confined to the writings of Bessie Head. With respect to the writings of Bessie Head, this research work focuses on the three novels of Bessie

Head. The area of search is limited to investigating the themes of existentialism as it affects the socio-economic life of the characters and the vision of the writer.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to subject the novels under consideration to the existentialist theory. In specific terms, to explore the tremendous accuracy Bessie Head has shown in using the themes of existentialism to demonstrate the conflict between the individual and society, and to provide possible interpretations of her novels based on adhering or violating the themes of absurdity, authenticity, alienation, freedom, dread and trembling.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Existential perspectives are found in literature to varying degrees since 1922. Authors composed literature that contained, to varying degrees, elements of existential or proto-existential thought. Bessie Head is one of the African writers to have dealt with existentialism in her fiction. This study will therefore expose the reader to the deeper knowledge of Bessie Headôs fiction guided by the existential theory. This is because; being alive challenges our basic needs and calls into question the meaning and the structure of our existence. Headôs selected fiction, with its windows into the thoughts and feelings of the characters it portrays allows us a glimpse into the minds of the characters. This study will be important to prospective researchers as it will provide reliable information to guide their further search. Also

through the knowledge of the close kinship between the individual, society and the whole domain of existence, critics and interpreters alike will experience an enrichment of their experience. Analysts and readers alike will also benefit as new findings from Bessie Head has become a subject attracting increasing attention especially since her tragic demise in 1986. The fact that every conceivable bit of earlier writing is being published is a testimony to the increasing recognition of the complexity of Headôs writing.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Review of Related Literature

Scholars have studied Bessie Headôs works and made findings. This chapter concentrates on the review of criticisms, especially on the three selected novels under the present study. Cecil Abrahams in ñThe Tragic Life of Bessie Headò opines that it was in fact to escape South Africa to be freed of the taint of racism, which had been imposed on her by the whites that made Head leave the country. He says that the circumstances of Bessie Headôs birth, propels her for the search for identity that led to the existential themes in her writing. She is described as an orphan, the child of a white woman and a black man. Adopted by a white Afrikaner family but later returned when her black features revealed themselves. In *A Question of Power* which Abrahams consider her most successful and mature novel, Head depicts the peculiarity of her position as a South African writer.

After completing her teacherôs certificate and being involved for a short time as a teacher, she began moving restlessly in search of peace, a secure home. In an unpublished interview with Abrahams, Head had this to say:

> As a newcomer to the Cape, I thought I had found the ideal place for my mixed race soul. But I quickly and painfully learned that if you were not fully

> grounded in the colour brown, you would have to be excluded from the communityôs business and be ready to endure insult. I knew then that I would not find rest in the God-forsaken country (4).

Head, according to Abrahams, left her homeland not only because she detested apartheid, but chiefly because she hoped to find peace in another country far from the racial sickness of South Africa. It was the reason her first novel *When Rain Clouds Gather* set in Bostwana should emphasize so heavily the twin aspects of hope and despair.

Headôs fiction, he argues, is in so many ways an attempt by Head to come to some resolution of her mind with the questions of her racial identity and the particular burden that must be carried by those who are not a natural part of the indigenous society. Elizabeth, the heroine of *A Question of Power,* as in the case of Head, was an illegitimate and illegal relationship between a white woman in a mental institution and a black stable boy. Hence she makes her way like Head through life with the twin-stigmas of being coloured and being predisposed towards madness. These Abrahams conceives as the haunting presences in *A Question of Power*. It is Dan or Medusa figure of the novel who constantly flouts these two areas of seeming weakness into Elizabethôs face and which often causes her to doubt her ability to logically examine and thus to overcome the difficulties which are suggested. The attack on her race and herself in Botswana too, seems to her to be unjust and perverse. And instead of escaping once more the racial prejudice of man, Bessie seeks to examine the cause of the phenomenon of racism; hence she takes Elizabeth through the tortuous, lonely, journey of the soul, knowing that the answers are not to be found in ñpious ritual or

wisdom passed down by the sages, but the real battle front was living people, their personalities, and their treatment of each otherò (5).

In *When Rain Clouds Gather,* Makhaya, an exile from South Africa, finds it difficult at first to accept the genuine concern for goodness that is expressed by the English Gilbert Balfour. His natural instinct is to ñdistrust and dislikeé white peopleò (6) because he had seen their inhumanity in the slums of all the cities in South Africa where, ñblack men had to live and how a man walked out of his home to buy a pack of cigarettes and never returned and how his seemingly senseless murder gave a brief feeling of manhood to a man who had noneò (6).

Makhaya searches for an answer to his dilemma, but his inconclusive response continues to leave him bitter. He still sees himself as ñThe Black Dogò who is torturously tossed around by life.

In *Maru*, the writer looks at racial prejudice as practised against the San people, otherwise referred to in an ethnic slur as Masarwa or Bushmen. Abrahams opines that:

> ...in emphasizing racial prejudice by one black group against another, Head demonstrates that racism is not peculiar to whites only. She illustrates that because of their particular racial colour and physical features, the Masarwas, though a black race are regarded as the ñlow manò on the totem pole and must suffer all the injustices of that decreed position(6).

With this, Head concludes that racism has a deep, psychic depth which goes beyond the more noticeable, visible occurrences of hatefulness. All the races have

their monsters. You just have to look different from them,ñé then seemingly anything can be said and done to you as your outer appearance reduces you to the status of a non-human beingò (7).

The context of Headôs final statement in *Maru* is the world of frustration and bitterness which both Makhaya and she experienced. They had both imagined that by escaping to Botswana they would throw South Africa off, but they recognized that the past cannot be escaped; rather, it will haunt them and turn their Botswana exile into ñan illusion of freedomò. She thus concludes that from her exiled position she must carefully examine the question of racism in South Africa and, furthermore, she must propose her own solution.

Cecil Abrahams argues that Head differs with other South African writers, such as La Guma, regarding the solution to the problem of racism and the inhumanity of one group towards another, because she happened to have had a first-hand experience. Therefore, she seeks solutions in the dark recesses of the human soul. In so doing, her novels are progressive in their philosophical conclusion on the nature and source of evil. For her, Hell is to be overcome by exploring the inner personal hells that every person must experience and not by ñindistinct statements about evilò (8).

Bessie Headôs fiction leads back, again and again, to the corrupt, greedy and power- hungry elite politicians, tribal chiefs and teachers. She singles out the African politician in *When Rain Clouds Gather* JoasTsepe because Makhaya the protagonist had in South Africa regarded the African politician as the savoir of the oppressed.

In thinking that they have escaped the ñfilthò of South Africa, Makhaya and Elizabeth are challenged even more intensely to understand the causes for the South African ñfilthò and to transform it from deadness into a living hope. This is the ñbeautiful world of the futureò, that Sello prophesies for Elizabethôs future. The world of the future must be freed of Medusa power -seekers and elite authority. And to accomplish this task; Elizabeth and Makhaya must dedicate themselves to eradicating evil in all its forms. By so doing, they will discover the true meaning of ñgodsò. Sello says that the ógodsô are the ordinary people who have dedicated their lives to fighting evil. Bessie, therefore, opposed organized class action and sought solutions on the personal level and with this she differed with most other South African writers but Abrahams believes that her solution is as valid as in the South African reality as that of other writers, but regrets that because these solution were not possible in Bessieôs own lifetime adds to the tragedy of her painful existence.

Critical responses argue most critics to Bessie Head have generally focused on her third novel, *A Question of Power,* as the most significant work in her oeuvre. Mackenzie is, for instance, convinced that the novel, cathartic in its measured formulation, is ñpivotal to any examination of her life and worké ò (xi). Lloyd W. Brown suggests that *A Question of Power* represents a touché in Headôs literary achievement. Huma Ibrahim regards the novel as the most important work in the novelistôs attempt to navigate the troubled waters of transnational identities and her exilic consciousness, which she call ñHeadôs point of engagementò (125). Yet he proffered a different conclusion, a conclusion just as Bessie from the start in the words of Mackenzie, ñset herself on a path that was uniquely her ownò (xv).

Ikenna Dieke in an illuminating essay titled, ñBessie Headôs *Maru*: Identity, Pathology, and the Construction of Differenceò argues that Headôs *Maru* more than *A Question of Power* distils the very essence of her creative enterprise laced with an overriding concern for an investigation into the enigma of human prejudice. He points out that although *A Question of Power* can be said to be an important site for unravelling the strands of her anguished life story with instances of immense suffering, privation and crippling alienation, *Maru*, on the other hand, provides the fertile site for mounting a literary resistance to the mistaken ideology which often gave rise to the anguished life story. For, without this insane ideology there would not be crippling alienation. Without this ideology there would not be suffering and privation. Both the ideology and its accoutrements represent the same morbid state.

While *A Question of Power* can be related in terms of characteristic of a symptom, *Maru,* on the other hand, can be interpreted as the causes. Apart from this, Dieke gives a second reason why *Maru* may be viewed as the centre of Headôs point of engagement. This is tailored in Mackenzieôs word, ñ... she as a first generation child of bi-racial origin bore the full brunt of South Africaôs discriminatory legislationò (10). This is because Head, on a self-imposed exile from her native South Africa is supposed to find solace in Botswana and to achieve an authentic mode refusing to be stereotyped according to Sartreôs pour-soi (for itself) finds herself in the en-soi which can only attain significance by casting off the reified status into the process of becoming.

Botswana, on the other hand, ironically brings her yet again face to face with the old, recalcitrant demons of prejudice, an encounter far more unsettling in its stark horridness of entrance, because of who the players are ï victims and perpetrators alike

ï in this case between the Batswana, especially Totems, while the aggregate of the Blacks and the coloured of South Africa now become the Khoisan/Masarwa of Botswana.

The thrust of Diekeôs essay is to interpret *Maru* as an allegorical tale of rupture in which Bessie Head seriously interrogates the pathological construction of ethnic identity and subjectivity as it affects the San people of Botswana. The novelôs internal logic suggests that the ubiquity of the San people stereotyping is an unfortunate, yet, significant part of the larger cultureôs own perverse sense of collective self and nativity dovetailed into what Sander Gilman has described as the primitive ñillusionary image of the world divided into two camps,ò us and themò (2).

In the novel, Head uses the opportunity afforded by the arrival of the new teacher ï Margaret Cadmore ï herself a Masarwa and intensely proud of it, in the village of Dilepe, a remote Botswana stronghold to investigate the complex nature of human self-construction in general. Human prejudice she hypothesizes in part one of the novel has been in the country even before the white man culturally entrenched it in the African culture. She suggests that in prejudice, difference is constructed as an identity and that prejudice based on difference often in many societies is represented and codified as pathology and degeneration. This pathology and degeneration provides the pretext and justification for the oppression and exclusion of the members of various systems of differenceð racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities, gender, etc.

In looking at what Head describes as the white manôs mental outlook, Dieke turned to the Hegel-Heidegger-Sartre trichotomy as a point of departure to argue that *Maru,* on the one hand, is the story of one womanôs quest for conscience, conscience

here understood as the deliberate process of discovering her true authentic self. On the other hand, it is the story of the Bushmen who must rise from immanence and the inauthentic pit-holes of Das man and find themselves once again reopened to the possibility of collective self-authentication.

Many critics have called *Maru* a love story but Dieke argues that the love story is only a subplot that sub serves the larger allegorical purpose in the novel ï undermining an evil order in order to usher in a more humane, sympathetic order. Maruôs love for Margret, a Masarwa, and subsequent marriage to her is an attempt to weave what Dieke calls, ñthe Bessie Headôs monomythò. In this monomyth, there is a sense of the Masarwa emergence from oppression and marginality and a sense of their gradual participation in the fruits of Botswana promise and dream. He therefore takes exception to the conclusion of Cecil Abrahams that ñthe marriage does not change the prejudice and narrowness of the Botswana, they simply close their doors on their chief and withdraw their allegianceò (7). And insists instead that there is in that marriage certain exuberance, a will to change things for the better, one totem at a time, one individual at a time. Beneath the surface of fairy tale magic, lies supreme human confidence in the possibility of moral order, a moral order in which true equality and opportunity can manifest its genuine effulgence. To which Oladele Taiwo concurs when he says:

> Maruôs marriage to Margaret is presented not only as a personal act of enlightened self-interest. It is also a major political achievement. By it, the novelist makes an important statement of hope and redemption for all oppressed people in Africa elsewhere (192).

Finally, Head intimates that change in Botswana will manifest a three stage process ï birth, death, and rebirth. The novel recycles the heritage of common humanity by foregrounding change as an agathological instrument of establishing a new social and ideological frame of reference, for charting a truly egalitarian future for Botswana and the rest of mankind.

In ñA Method in the Madness,ò Margaret Davison discusses a new genre; the female Bildungsroman. She opines that in the last seventy-five years two womenôs novels skilfully combine this subject and genre. Jean Rhyôs *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Bessie Headôs *A Question of Power*. She argues that:

> Although they end in dramatically different ways and are stylistically at odds, both stories furnish disturbing visions of womenôs madness within similar colonial/cultural contexts and successfully challenge traditionally accepted social classification and narrative structure (20).

Confronted with the brutalizing effects of colonialism, both novels confirm the unrelenting hopefulness of the marginalized women. Torn between two cultures (a white Creole in the West Indies) and a (coloured in South Africa), these protagonists exist metaphorically as women of penumbra for whom marginalization is prescribed. To add fuel to the fires of ostracism, both are plagued by a genetic predisposition to madness traced back to their mothers. Davision agrees that Thomasô astute description of *Wide Sargasso Sea* as culturally determined ñpsycho-biographyò (350) is applicable to *A Question of Power.* Labelled and rejected in childhood, Antoinette and Elizabeth embark upon the critical and almost impossible quest for self-definition and self-actualization. Davision argues that Headôs protagonistôs madness acts as a

metaphoric period of gestation out of which she emerges reborn. Along the lines of gender politics, both novels examine the traditional problem of womenôs sexuality in the female bildungsroman. Comparing them within the maxim which Mphahlele calls ñthe tyranny of placeò (70). Elizabeth and Antoinette cannot escape madness because they have been socially defined as madness personified. Following the act of Rhyôs protagonist, Davision concludes that Antoinette followed the easy and known end most prevalent for womenôs novels of development: suicide.

Although Rhys and Head examine stigmatized women in similar circumstances, their final visions are separated by a wide sargasso sea. While Antoinette destroys both her prison and herself, Elizabeth rejects her deathlike state of madness and constructively reels towards life. She moves from introspection to a movement that stands in stark contrast to Antoinetteôs slow reel towards death activity ï a movement rarely accomplished in the female bildungsroman. As in the Osiris-Isis myth that Head employs as a central metaphor, Elizabeth (like the dismembered Osiris) successfully heals her fragmented self. Ultimately Elizabeth casts off the power war between several large, looming personalities ï Dan, the two Sellos and their various malicious accomplices like Medusa ï aside, dismantles the God-man power dialectic that subjugates all people, and embraces a humanitarian perspective based on total equality. She decisively adheres to Sello the monkôs belief that ñGod is people. Thereôs nothing up there. Itôs all down hereò(109). Through her external labour of building up her garden with the help of kenosi, Tom, and Eugene in the local industries project, she stakes her claims as an active inhabitant of Motabeng. She decisively throws off her marginalised status.

Their ultimate visions may differ, but Jean Rhys and Bessie Head, Carol argues convey similar message about male power and female powerlessness. Carol points out the weakness in the Bessieôs approach which she terms didactic. She says this stifles Headôs art. She explains that the reason for this is that ñ*A Question of Power* derives from the fact that Head translated her own experience of mental breakdown into story formò (45). Checking the method of madness in the two novels, Davision concludes that Headôs realistic portrait of insanity concludes more positively for this rare movement in African fiction. It is she who provides a more uplifting feminist vision and for this, Head must be highly commended.

Virginia Ola in ñPower of the Question of Good and Evil in Bessie Headôs Novelsò claims that Bessie Headôs three novels demonstrate the unleashing of a powerful imagination, willing to explore the inner recesses of the human personality to explore the significance of power of all forms in its make-up, and to map out the constant warring of the powerful forces of good and evil in each individual. This ambitious philosophical investigation is finally channelled towards the plight of the alienated and helpless individual in society, particularly his plight as an exile from an oppressive regime like that of South Africa.

Maru, the protagonist of Headôs *Maru*ôs love is haunted by ña low line of black boiling cloudsò, which manifests itself in vicious malicious moods occasioned by the guilt of its violation of Margaretôs first love which Maru, her husband, had executed without remorse. Maruôs victory of necessity is therefore tainted by evil and its agony follows him all the days of his life. In line with the first novel, *When Rain Clouds Gather,* it handles the issues of power and love, now enacted with all the storm and stress that accompany them.

This structure of the conflict of good and evil in human lives and society is central in Bessie Headôs vision and controls the structural landscape and characterization of her three novels. This dichotomy attains its most frightening dimension in *A Question of Power* from which readers emerge unable to establish any connection between the harrowing experience recorded and the pastoral scene which straddle those scenes. The dominant structural design of Headôs novels in spite of its beautiful scenery is described in what Head herself called ñtortuousò. In an attempt to come to grips with that same overpowering quality, especially in *A Question of Power,* Arthur Ravenscroft writes:

> It seems to me that Bessie Head...each novel both strikes out anew, and also reshoulders the same burden. It is as if one were observing a process that involves simultaneously progression, introgression, and circumgression; but also (and here I believe lies her particular creative power) organic growth in both her art and her central concerns. For all our being lured as readers into the labyrinth of Elizabethôs tortured mind in *A Question Power*, and then, as it were, left there to face with her the phantasmagoric riot of nightmare and horror, one nevertheless senses throughout that the imagination which unleashes this fevered torrent resides in a creative mind that is exceedingly tough (175).

She further claims,this toughness accounts, for the special bleakness which is found in her moral vision and view, despite their constant celebration of rural harmony, innocence, love and solidarity; qualities vital for the creation of the ñnew worldsò she advocate ceaselessly in her works. The cooperative in *When Rain Cloud Gather*, Maruôs marriage to the outcast, Margaret, in *Maru,* Elizabethôs healing of her

torturous experiences in *A Question of P*ower are such new worlds, at least, its possibility, which the characters attempt to create from the harsh, dry and highly tribal landscape of rural Botswana. Headôs vision includes a keen search for human, social, sexual and political values within a harmonious social order. The limitation of womenôs roles, their disadvantages and bruised self-image feature prominently in Headôs novels.

When Rain Clouds Gather deals with the search for roots from different perspectives, and as it affects others of different social backgrounds, all victims of political, tribal, sexual or even religious power. Makhaya, a young Zulu, fled into Botswana to escape anti-apartheid activities in South Africa. In the small village of refugees who, like himself, have suffered, endured great grievances, and are trying to make new ordered lives for themselves. Makhaya finally grows out of the hate which was gradually consuming his being. His eventual union with Paulina Sobeso symbolizes the victory of love over oppressive power. Brown describes it as ña healing moral growth, reflecting not only the creative purposefulness of individual members but also an unusual degree of harmony between the races and the sexesò (164). Commenting further on Headôs moral vision, Brown states:

> ...her moral idealism remains the most powerfully effective and most distinguishing feature of her three novels.... Her idealism nurtures her strength as a realistic novelist, enabling her to turn up rootedness into a vantage point from which she scrutinizes social institutions as they usually areð as they distort individual personality through power-oriented definitions of race, sex, religion, and individualism (160).

Makhayaôs transformation is important to Head, because it once more underscores her belief that the ravages of power can be destroyed if the good in man prevails over the evil in him, and if love is posited in place of power. In *Maru,* Head is exploring a state of moral ambiguity in which most human beings have a bit of the visionary and the demon in them, a balance of good and evil. Maru the schemer is not only different from Moleka, the arch manipulator, and Moleka who loves Margaret is not only different from the Maru who walks with gods and goddesses. Margaret symbolizes in her retention of her love for Moleka, even after marriage to Maru, Headôs ideal woman confronting the issue of male protectiveness, possession on one hand, and male crude power, on the other. The presence of Margaretôs secret yearnings for Moleka undermines the degree of Maruôs victory, and serves as a constant reminder to him of that dangerous aspect of his personality, the use of ruthless power for selfish reasons, which is the true demon that thwarts the effort of visionaries like himself to build a more humane society.

In *A Question of Power* described as her most complex, most ambitious and most profoundly frightening novel, the power-hungry demon is recreated in the character of Dan. Set in Motabeng, the events are filtered through the disturbed consciousness of Elizabeth, who in the process of the story undergoes a period of acute inner distress with repetitive cycles of nervous breakdown from which she recovers weaker and more frightened about the world around her. In the unfolding of her solitary mental drama, Elizabethôs nightmares are dominated by two characters, Sello and Dan. Sello stands for perfection in man, a later development of Maru, and by inference one of Headôs visionaries and a symbol of the good, but also stand for

evil in a very subtle way. Dan, on the other hand epitomises destructive male egoism and all that is vile, personally debasing and obscene. To explore the reality of this power machine in human history, Head takes a comprehensive imaginative sweep through world religions, cultures, and myths from Osiris, Medusa, Buddha and even Christ.

Through all these, Head explores the operations of evil in human affairs, for the question of good and evil according to Ola Virginia is an over-riding concern of *A Question of Power.* Elizabethôs recovery is a testimony of the ability of the human will to overcome evil after the soulôs journey through hell and purgatory. In conclusion, Ola opines that the humane society which Heads hopes for, can be achieved only by each individual confronting the horrors of history, as well as the horrors within himself, so that the demons of brute and naked power, cruelty and oppression may not wreck the work of visionaries engaged in the realization of this humane society.

In the article ñImagery in Bessie Headôs Works,ò Horace Goddard argues that in *Maru* and in *A Question of Power,* the protagonists are types that symbolize the forces of good and evil in a co-existential relation. Evil and good are archetypal and controlling images and provides some kind of unity to the plots of both novels. It is through the analysis of these polar, yet unifying forces, that Head challenges the reader to examine his own being and the world around him. In *A Question of Power*, the struggle for Elizabethôs soul by the forces of good and evil, becomes one of the unifying elements of the novel. In *Maru*, one of the unifying components is the dream with its multiple meanings, through which the gods speak to Maru. The rivalry between Maru and his friend, Moleka, mirrors the forces of good and evil in their

intensity, and portray Moleka as Maruôs alter ego in his evil aspect. The parting between Maru and Moleka is a spiritual and physical separation for Maru and Elizabeth. The utopian world created by their elopement is linked ostensibly to the forces of good, symbolically linked to the field of daisies that Maru planted. The floral image is one of the controlling motifs in the novel, representing the two extremes of human existence, life and death. In fact, when Maru and Margaret escape as man and wife, they leave behind the stymied world of oppression, brutality and petty chieftaincy. The elements such as the wind, the clouds and the ground in their changing forms, symbolise the political decisions that are imminent, and that will force Maru to abnegate his political responsibilities for a more compassionate way of life. He also argues that Head, through her principal female characters, forces the African black man to examine his relationship towards black women. The liberation of Maruôs marriage frees the Masarwa people from a physical and psychological prison which is confining, stultifying and dark. ñ... they started to run into the sunlight, then turned and looked at the dark, small roomò. They said, ñwe are not going back thereò (126).

The dark small room is symbolic of that world. On the other hand, ñthe sunlightò, which is the other unifying image in the novel, triumphs over the darkness. The connection between Margaret and Elizabeth as living out Headôs life of herself opines Gorddard believes that *A Question of Power* is a sequel to *Maru*. By way of dreams, imaginings and phantasmagoric musings, we get an understanding of the things that torment Elizabeth. What is seen are opposing forces of madness and sanity and good and evil which vie for possession of her soul. The controlling images correspond with those of light and darkness in *Maru*. These forces always tend to

redefine the identity of the protagonists. Elizabethôs psychoses are those of Africa, through which Head reminds us repeatedly that Africanôs leaders are repugnant and vicious; they despise the masses. Headôs statement in *A Question of Power* is that man is basically evil and corrupt. Power is obviously equated with darkness and evil, and light, with goodness. As the mood closes with Kenosi and Elizabeth sitting and sipping tea, dreaming in the light of two candles, albeit dim, shows the predominance of light over darkness, the controlling and unifying images of the two novels. But Head maintains that it is only the human mind reasoning, checking itself, can keep the forces of evil in check.

Daniel Gover in ñThe Fairy Tale and the Nightmareò says that Head in her first two novels, *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *Maru,* depicts love as a magical force from a fairy tale that overcomes insurmountable obstacles and unites people of different cultures and classes, which was shattered in her third novel, *A Question of Power*. He describes *A Question of Power* as an apocalyptic work, where the breakdown of a womanôs sanity is caused by the destructive sexuality and torture of men.

Maru is a rather strange love story; a story of the competition of two totems for one Bushwoman. The sexual love that Moleka represents is threatening and destructive; yet, the more positive and soulful love of Maru is very distant. Its power does not directly threaten Margaret, but it is also bound up with power and manipulation ï the power of a distant god. In the end, it brings about good rather than evil, but it also suggests that suffering is an essential part of life. Like Goddard, Gover suggests that *A Question of Power* is a sequel to *Maru,* when he said that in the character of Moleka and the threatening effect he has on Margaret, lay the seed that

will explode into flowers of evil in the third novel. He suggests Elizabeth as a continuation of Margaret, one innocent, the other more developed has aching need of love, which makes her more vulnerable to the torments of sexuality. And the two important male characters, Sello and Dan, also possess enormous power over Elizabeth. The battle ground shifts from the social world of the Botswana village to Elizabethôs inner life and becomes a struggle for her mind and soul. He also draws a parallel of Maru in Dan. But Danôs sexual drive is equated with an ambition to rule the world compared to Hitler or Napoleon, a drive for absolute power applied to evil ends.

In *Maru,* though male love was divided as in a fairy tale between the dangerous and unfaithful Moleka and the pure, safe Maru. Both possessed tremendous power over women, but fortunately Maru acted like a god in rescuing the heroine. In *A Question of Power*, however, evil predominates, men also dominate women and uncontrolled sexuality leads to destruction. In trying to focus on love as a purely idealistic force, Margaret was able to avoid the dangers of sex. But they certainly caught up to Elizabeth with a vengeance. Perhaps, on trying to ignore such natural inclinations completely, Headôs characters were left with only exaggerated and excessive versions of sexuality. Elizabeth is driven mad by images of Sello and Dan as child molesters ï having her son in mind all the time. Nightmarish exaggerations of evil in *A Question of Power* balance the fairy tale exaggerations of good in *Maru*.

He further accepts that the common thread that links Elizabeth to Margaret is powerlessness. It is the shared vulnerability of the subjugated racial minority ï the Bushman woman and the coloured from South Africa in Botswana, as well as the powerlessness of women in a male dominated society where sexual promiscuity is a

sign of male power. This last factor is considered by Bessie to be the major defect of a traditional African society like Botswana, which developed even further in her later collection of short stories. Gover argues that the women in Bessie Headôs fiction suffer a double, even a triple sense of powerlessness, as women and as blacks, who are also outsiders in a traditional African society. This is the reason Gover argues that they need a fairy tale of saving love to dream about and that they suffer madness as a result of racism, male- domination and irresponsible sexuality. Like the artist, Margaret who suffers to produce her work, Elizabeth is an idealist who suffers alienation and madness for her belief in the goodness of mankind. Elizabethôs acceptance at the end of the novel in a gesture of belonging is also a moving gesture of healing, in which the divided aspects of her character come together in a final act of self-acceptance and peace, when two finally become one.

In his study titled ñPath of Thunder: Meeting Bessie Head,ò Peter Nazareth discusses Head as an individual as well as Head as a writer. He is a scholar in the African Studies, and adviser to the International Writers Programme to which Head was invited in Iowa. This article explains a quarrel between himself and Head in which Head accused him of behaving in a condescending way to her. According to Nazareth, Bessie Headôs behaviour to him and the Israeli Telpaz Gideon is racist. Nazareth proves Eilersen wrong when she said that Bessie Head obliterated him from her mind after their quarrel saying, ñHead could not obliterate anything from her mind but would brood and brood and built it up into something horrific. Concerning *A Gesture of Belonging*: *letters from Bessie Head, 1965-1979*, edited by Vigne 1991 when he was asked in 1992 by *World Literature Today* to review it, Nazareth questions:

> Now that Bessie is dead, now that we feel bad she can write no more, are we going to idealize her and every scrap of her writing? Do we accept her insights into people and not give the later a chance to defend themselves? ... Who is ahead? Bessie, because the blurb says she is ñone of Africaôs greatest writersò? ... in Iowa Bessie showed no signs of knowing the nature of fiction (217).

Nazareth says Head asked John Cheever whether he wrote pornographically to make money when she read his novel *Falconer* (1977) and decided that accusation against Cheever was ironical when a few years later, he read *A Question of Power* and realised the same accusation could have been made - and indeed was made about Headôs *A Question of Power*. His point is that people assume that because Headôs writing was wonderful, so was she and therefore anyone she attacked was worthy of being attacked.

Nazareth decides that much of the chaos Bessie Head saw in her life was of her own making. Nazareth says Head had given the impression in lowa that her work was not political, that she was opposed to politics but he said, ñI found *Maru* to be very political, in that it sought to change the world in the wake of colonialismò(218).He refers to *Maru* as a novel of implosion. He also wrote about an essay of one of his studentsô Chen Kasher for his African literature class about the uncanny parallel Kasher drew between Elvisô ñHeartbreak Hotelò which Bessie always have him(Nazareth) play for her during the IWP:

> Like the jarring voice and guitar double-stops that introduce Elvisô ñHeartbreak Hotel,ò Bessie Headôs *Maru* begins with the clouds breaking the ñlong, sullen silence of the day.òAnd indeed there is a sense in both works of art of a powerful, a cathartic awakening: Elvisô gloomy depression is about to be broken by his voice (which is powerful, which will be heard) and the Masarwa, long mistreated, will be given such a voice that by the end of the novel ñit will no longer be possible to treat Masarwa people in an inhuman way without getting killed yourselfò. In both works, there is a sense that out of pain and frustration, healing, or at least change, must come, but it can only come through a communication between people and cultures (219).

Kasher points out later, when Maru talks Margret back to life, she feels: ñHe was not just anything but some kind of strange, sweet music you could hear over and over again, she was beginning to listenò (220).

For *When Rain Clouds Gather,* Nazareth opines Head was rewriting La Gumaôs *A Walk in the Night*. Her ñMakhayaò sound like ñMichaelò (as though said in an African language). But unlike Michael, Makhaya jumps the fence into Botswana, because he wants peace of mind and knows he is fragmented and violent inside. Michael does not know what is inside him, and does not know that staying within the pressure cooker means responding to it on its own terms. He argues that *When Rain Clouds Gather* has moment of intuition, of connections to the earth and the universe that cannot be explained through ñtraditionalò literary criticism.

A Question of Power is like a descent into a hell of the unconscious of the individual and of humanity as a whole in order to emerge, with the possibility of hope

and transformation. A novel, he argues like *Maru* which cannot be understood fully through ñleft brainò reasoning. He describes *A Question of Power* as an ambitious work arising out of Headôs suffering, which she transforms into art, art that may make us uncomfortable but which approaches the subject from the other end, the descent into hell, but she comes through. The emphasis at the end is on the new gods, the barefoot gods, who walk among the people.

Nazareth concludes that Bessie Head is mainly ñright brainò and very little ñleft brainò ï which she may have sometime realized because Maru is intuitive but likes to verify his intuitions so he uses Ranko, who has a camera in his brain. In *Maru*, he sees the beginnings of a combination of ñright brainò and ñleft brain,ò which he takes to mean that it is possible and necessary for literary criticism not too be exclusively ñleft brain,ò but a combination of the two, intuitive and analytical.

Micheal Borzaga in ñThe Rediscovery of the Extraordinary: *A Question of Power,*ò argues that to be traumatized means not so much to be haunted by a traumatic event as to inhabit a whole world with its own forces and rules. Elizabeth the main character in the novel is not mad as has been argued by many critics: she is deeply traumatized. The apartheid system has attacked her identity in an existential way, disrupting her relation to the polis and to herself. She is doubly colonized: from the apartheid institutions outside and by the perpetrators she has internalized inside. Trauma is thus conceived as a sort of implosion, as a painful, dialectical struggle between different temporalities, multiple contradictory worlds that translate into extraordinary, spectacular phenomena both at the level of the psyche as well as of the body. He described trauma as a violent, overwhelming event that interrupts the linear temporality of the self. As a matter of fact, the traumatic event is so overpowering that

it eludes a possible verbalization or representation; the event revealing itself only symptomatically and belatedly through flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, hyper arousal or stark avoidance. His study contends that trauma does not exist autonomously outside of consciousness as was the belief of western concept.

He further asserts that *A Question of Power* is a unique document within South African Literature as the writer attempts the depiction of a phenomenology of trauma from within. It is difficult if not impossible to make quantitative, geometric statements about the nature and the effects of violence. Yet, what can be argued is that there are degrees of trauma, manifold shapes of the damages inflicted upon a subject that has been the victim of emotional, psychological and physical violence. He uses the metaphor of ordinary and extraordinary/spectacular/ghostly realm to describe the millions of people caught between the worlds of life. Using Elizabeth as a case in point, he contends that to be traumatized is to simultaneously inhabit these two worlds and to be torn between them. The traumatised subject always struggles to defeat the extraordinary in an attempt to return to a relatively safe and ordinary life. He went on to discuss Ndebeleôs famous essay, ñThe Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa,ò whereNdebele quotes passages from various black writers, and Borzaga curiously finds that Bessie Headôs remain unmentioned. But he finds a parallel between Ndebeleôs essays with Headôs novel, the struggle of Elizabeth, is exactly between two worlds, which in their nature corresponds to what Ndebele describes as the ordinary and the spectacular. In this prophetic novel, Bessie Head makes the crucial point that the brutal, spectacular, exhibitionist display of power that was typical of the apartheid system is still deeply rooted in the recesses of Elizabethôs mind and it keeps re-surfacing regularly in its full force. He further carries the

argument further from Ndebele by making the point that whenever one experiences the traumatic violence of the spectacular, and Elizabeth is an enigmatic example of it. Another symptom that manifests itself is also what we call a ódisorder of the imaginationô. He compares Ndebeleôs spectacular to what Mbembe Achille call, ñthe ghostly realmò (1).

He also describes the óordinaryô as the whole world that has been suppressed by the brutality of the apartheid system, ñthe deepest dreams for love, hope, compassion, newness, and justice,ò all aspects that have been ñsacrificed to the spectacle of group survivalò (47). Elizabethôs arduous path towards healing is nothing else than her attempt to accommodate the ordinary, a new world of compassion, knowledge, attention for details, the possibility of consciousness to grow again, to be eventually filled with content as well as a new order of imagination. The captivity of Elizabeth by Dan who dragged her into a hole interrupted her sleep for days and nights, his debasement and traumatic memories of humiliation and his menacing prophecies of death. All these examples from Headôs texts vividly reveal the degree of pain and distress Elizabeth has to bear when the past re-surfaces and re-presents itself. Head precisely depicts the banning and censoring effect that the extraordinary tries to keep on the ordinary. Often, Elizabeth feels so forlorn that pain becomes unbearable and she starts projecting Danôs action on innocent citizens of Serowe. This is one of the most significant moments in the novel. Head shows the workings of trauma and power in the human psyche which becomes a strongly social and political issue related to the whole community, not only to the traumatised subject. The garden in the novel is more than mere setting; it becomes a symbol of a slow return to earth and to life. The methods of transplantation that Elizabeth learns throughout the narrative are

symbolic of manôs necessity to excogitate always new expedients to keep his garden going.

Borzaga contends that *A Question of Power* lends itself particularly to a psychoanalytical interpretation. Numerous are the diagnoses that have been attached to Elizabeth (indirectly to Bessie Head): schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder. Flora Veit-Wild writes that the novel is ña prime example of madness being written into text, a real borderline novel in which the borders between body and mind, between sanity and insanity, between body and mind, between reality and unreality, are all blurredò (131). Borzaga concludes by saying that among precarious balances, elusive constellations, on a long-time scale, a tiny detail, the most ordinary manifestation of the ordinary could bear the potentiality of change, and the resistance of power.

Sophie Ogwudeôs essay, ñAn Exile Writing on Home: Protest and Commitment in the Works of Bessie Head,ò is concerned with examining the South African tale of inhumanity as told by a female member of the oppressed class. Bessie Headôs nativity which she considered most tragic in the racist society of South Africa offers a unique case study. Therefore, it is only reasonable to expect according to Sophie that if she writes, this must remain for her a mine of ideas.

Ogwude attempts to answer the question of Headôs relevance to her society against some critics who have to varying degrees argued that she has not made the nationalistic struggle of her home country her concern. Secondly, because the issue of relevance is central to any writer of any age, Ogwudeôs thesis as expanded in this study is that Head is politically committed, if not in the way others do it, but she

nonetheless ôarousesô, persuades and reproaches. She points at the style of Bessieôs writing which have not be given due attention as the basis on which she is negatively appraised. She insists Head refuses the already established conventions of political writing, preferring instead, the role of ña pioneer blazing a new trail into the futureò (4). Her goals are much broader than those of the ordinary protest writer and, as such, they demand different and diverse technique.

In trying to decipher Headôs style she approaches it through investigating the genres the writer has used in her work. She says these are the autobiography, utopia, history and the short story form. She maintains that Bessie Headôs first three novels are autobiographical. In *A Question of Power*, protest is embedded in the authorôs broodings which constitute what has largely been branded the unreal or mad world in the novel. In her autobiography, Head depicts historical realities, and blames the wanton preying of one black nation on another as the single most devastating factor in black South African history. The utopia seeks to transcend the present. The motivating force behind the realization of Headôs utopia is the scientific and technological supremacy vested in her major characters, including the female ones.

Her last major works, *Serowe, Village of the Rain Wind* and *A Bewitched Crossroad: an African Saga*, which are historical and non-fictional respectively, reveal the novelistôs resolution to challenging the image of the black man as an impotent/sufferer who is forever prone to aggression and forever engaged in unmatched battles against his militarily superior adversary. The portraits of Khama (1926-59) stand out among others. In revisiting history in this way, she achieves two major objectives. First, she presents us the possible way forward out of the

nightmarish reality of apartheid. Again, she uses the contrast technique to reveal to the South African, where indeed ótheô rain began to beat himô (71).

In Headôs vision lies her utopian possibility. But we know that todayôs utopia is tomorrowôs truth. To live with this utopia possibility in mind is for the black South African to live conscious of his black pride and integrity. And Ogwude affirms it an integral aspect of Headôs commitment to the black liberation efforts. She is consistent in her commitment to protest against oppression, be it political, racial, or sexual. The seeming difference between her and her many other contemporaries can perhaps be explained basically in that of style and Ogwude has shown that this difference does not and cannot denote the degree of commitment or otherwise.

James Garrett in the article, ñWriting Community: Bessie Head and the Politics of Narratives,ò states how important the issue of political commitment is to any South African author, critic and reader. Against this, he says the novels of Head are measured and found wanting. He quotes Nkosi and Headôs biographer, Eilersen, at length who says Head is more concerned with the personal and interpersonal realms of human experience.He agrees but where he argues they differ is in the automatic assumption that to focus on the personal is to ignore the political, that turning inwards necessitates a turning away from that which is outside. He suports this view by quoting Ola Virginia:

> Those critics who stress the personal and very private odyssey of the soul to the exclusion of the political and social world (and history) in which such odyssey take place are doing Head a great disservice by perpetuating the false

dichotomy between the public and private which has been used to dismiss Headôs work (39).

He also offers the criticism of Fredric Jameson of the perpetuation of these dichotomies from which he views the politics in Headôs first novel, *When Rain Clouds Gather*. He argues that Head mixed two forms/genres: romance and realism in the writing of *When Rain* Clouds *Gather*. He suggests that the incongruous mixing of romance and realism allows for the inclusion of alternative narratives within the structure of the text. The two alternatives he identifies as the utopia and the pastoral: the utopian towards a vision of a perfected future, and the pastoral towards a lost past. Of course, to posit an ideal either in the past or in the future is a deliberate political act, for the ideal can be seen as reaction or response to the real.

Eleni Coundouriotis in ñAuthority and Invention in the Fiction of Bessie Headò argues that Head maps what he calls ñstrategies of recuperationò(17), where the sympathetic third-person narrator acts to counter the constricting and damaging effects of various authorities (whether they be political, gendered, or cultural) on the self. He focused on *A Question of Power* and *Maru*, two works in which Head explicitly thematizes the relationship between authority and authorship. In *A Question of Power*, Head reinvents herself, an exiled coloured woman who has lived a marginal existence, suffering from mental illness, as a narrator with sympathetic control over the subject of her story. In *Maru*, Head pits the authority of a charismatic patriarch against the artist and her transcendent act of authorship. Margaretôs paintings are more efficacious in facilitating social change, because they help the character in the novel imagine a future without discrimination. According to him, Rob Nixon, has described Headôs fiction as having a compensatory function but prefers a vocabulary of retrieval

(and thus recuperation) to one of compensation as used by Nixon because retrieval suggests the putting back into motion of some existing potential for communal ties. He also said critics have repeatedly tried to describe what he has called the discursive environment of Headôs fiction as transparent. Linda Susan Bead has called it, ña deliberate, overarching, and unobtrusive consciousnessò (583). On closer inspection, however, Headôs narrator seems exceedingly meddlesome. In *A Question of Power,* both Elizabethôs land and sex (socially construed) are discursive spaces that Head must retrieve and impose her authority over.

Maru presents a similar argument for the transformative powers of creative expression. The community invented in *Maru* could be posited as a fictional solution to the problem of belonging posited at the end of *A Question of Power.* Maru in *Maru* constantly fantasizes about transforming the world around him and the critic argues his mental processes are analogous to authorship. Maruôs refusal to share his vision of a democratic Africa with his sister ultimately hampers him from realising it.

In a misconstrued (and specifically male) fashion, Maru values actions above words and does not understand that Headôs female characters understand, that a discursive environment is the necessary precondition for any social change. Headôs fiction begins, and does not end, with molestation. The assumption of authority is then posited as the goal, the recovery from molestation.

Shannon Young in the study, ñTherapeutic Insanity: The Transformative Vision of Bessie Headôs *A Question of Power,*ò argues that the bookôs title, *A Question of Power*, signals its most pressing concern: the way in which power is used, especially abused. The circumstances of Elizabethôs birth in apartheid South Africa

expose the problem of oppressive power. A person without the power to protect herself from an abusive system founded upon racism and sexism is consequently sacrificed. Elizabethôs treatment as a helpless infant and her motherôs treatment as a deviant female are potent examples of the injustice that a racist and oppressive society foists on individuals who in some way challenge the societyôs scaffolding of order and control. She has it that *A Question of Power* is Headôs most autobiographical novel through which Head expresses her anguish at being an outcast from the moment of her birth in a mental institution in 1937, where her mother was placed after it was discovered that she was unexpectedly pregnant for a coloured man. *A Question of Power* gives graphic account of the nature of the ñhowling inferno,ò (7) according to Ogwude that Head speaks of, and is a powerful record of what those existing on the more privileged end of the social spectrum would like to ignore. She reviews Jacqueline Roseôs, ñOn the Universality of Madnessò, where Rose asserts that Elizabeth embodies ñthe accumulation of history in the subconscious ... the potentially infinite expansion of the mindò (401). Young maintains Rose compares *A Question of Power* with Toni Morrisonôs *Beloved*, another ñnovel of transgenerational haunting, where the woman becomes the repository of an unspoken and unspeakable historyò (401). The narrator of *A Question of Power* observes of Elizabeth, ñpeople cried out so often in agony against racial hatred and oppression of all kinds. All their tears seemed to be piling up on her; the source or roots from which they had sprung were being exposed with a vehement violenceò (53). Rose notes that Headôs novel is the place where ñthe hidden and invisible of history accumulatesò (54). There is a ñreturn of the historical repressed... to the precise extent that when history has been robbed or diminished it starts to expand infinitely in the mindò (411). As a coloured woman,

Head is ostensibly a powerless person, positioned outside of the official history that those in power disseminate, and yet through her novel, she enables the repressed history to come forth with a force that is all the more potent because of its repression. In ñA Peculiar Shuttling Movementò: Madness, Passing and Trespassing in Bessie Headôs *A Question of Power*,ò Helen Kapstein examines the strategy behind Headôs use of the trope of madness, specifically as a way to enable her to escape social forms that are too confining, ñmadness is not divorced from reality, but the product of a historically and culturally specific set of circumstancesò (73). She notes that Head writes from a position of sanity, looking back at her experience of insanity so as to intentionally use madness as a way to ñtrespassò, or purposefully challenge societyôs norms that are too rigid and stigmatising: ñwhen the pathologizing gaze of society is inverted, and madness looks back, societyôs own pathologies emergeò (73).

Young asserts that Headôs narrative is more than anything else, a damning indictment of oppressive regimes and individuals. She also notes that Kwadwo Osei-Nyame, Jr. examines Headôs conflict between ñselfò and ñnationò and writes that Head through her novels, ñskilfully engages with the existential anxieties embedded in the notions of ñselfò and the ñindividualò vis-a-vis the politics of communal ideology and ñnationalismò (92). Osei-Nyame notes that Head was exceptional in comparison with other African writers since she was ñtotally rejected from her native homeò (92). Of Ross, Young says she writes, ñI am not sure that it is possible to read this book without feeling one go a little bit madò (404).

In ñConflict and Transformation in Bessie Headôs *A Question of Power*,ò Stephanie Newell notes two dominant, opposing views of history operate in the novel: on one side an ñepic and mythical historyò describes the universal conflict between

good and evil where ñElizabethôs soul is ñan open territory easily invaded by devils,ò who just move in, carry on, mess around with her sense of decency, compassion and normality,ò on the other side, is a ñcoexistentò and ñdemythologizedò reality when ñordinary villagersò interact ñwith each other and with nature,ò through their gardening ventureò (67).

Sophie Ogwude in ñProtest and Commitment in Bessie Headôs Utopia,ò likewise notes the two contrasting visions:

> Head makes the case that even in the face of abysmal human cruelty there could still be hope. The interior and nightmarish narrative in the text highlights the racial, emotional, and sexual abuse that account for Elizabethôs psychic turmoil and near mental disintegration. Yet in juxtaposing this tale against the normal everyday idyllic village life of Motabeng, the novelist presents the two contrasting choices expounded in the novel: one, the hell of a troubled social set-up manifested in an equally troubled personality, the other a wholesome society in which self-actualization is possible (74-75).

The garden is what Homi Bhabha theorizes as ñthe hybrid and interstitial, or in between space, which offers a counterpoint to hegemonic discourses and systems of representationò (2). In other words, Ogwude asserts that Head is absolutely determined to counter the existence of evil that condemns its victims to the ñanguish of rejection and ... isolationò with the vision that celebrates the human right of self determination nurtured through communal arrangements that are constructive, compassionate and reassuringò (71).

In ñCape Gooseberries and Giant Cauliflowers: Transplantation, Hybridity, and Growth in Bessie Headôs *A Question of Power*,ò Anissa Talahite describes the garden as Headôs fruitful attempt to ñredefine the relationship between the social world and the individual self,ò through the use of ñimages of transplantation and hybrid growthò that enable Elizabeth to emerge from a symbolic system of language that inculcated within her psyche feelings of worthlessness and invisibilityò (141). Young argues that the transplanted fruit symbolizes Elizabethôs rebirth as a vital social being, successfully integrated in an entirely different social order based upon terms of equality rather than oppression. In ñBeyond Duality: A Buddhist Reading of Bessie Headôs *A Question of Power*,ò June Campbell posits that Elizabethôs vulnerability to evil arises from her tendency to think in terms of duality in which the good is juxtaposed against the evil and consequently Elizabeth is perpetually being pulled into a vortex of evil and imbalance. However, Campbell writes that paradoxically Elizabethôs experience of ñothernessò as a coloured, unstable, female exile enables an inclusive understanding of world experience that shifts her psychological orientation to the ñmiddle wayò of Buddhist thought wherein the boundaries inherent in dualistic thinking are blurred and finally become irrelevant. Therefore, Elizabeth moves from exclusion to inclusion through a thorough transition in her mental development. According to Campbell:

> Perhaps it is not surprising that Head, a woman whose own life had been characterized by experiences of alienation and ócthernessô in her status as a female, coloured, exiled and mentally ill, should allude so frequently to the Buddha in her novel, and use his image as the symbolic mentor who speaks to her and helps her understand the meaning of her existence, and the

> psychological and moral dilemmas to which she is subject. The Buddhist path, often known as óthe middle way, exemplifies for Head an identification with a position which is away from extremesõ in her case the very personal trauma of being neither black nor white in South Africa, and occupying that unique middle ground which gives her a perspective on both sides (65).

Elizabethôs victory rests on her refusal to cooperate with systems of injustice. In addition, she has managed in the words of Betty Reardon to ñtranscend the polarised thinking that has buffeted her through much of the narrative by learning to accept the ótherô in herself as well as traits she has projected on enemies and criminals, or heroes and saintsò (255).

In ñApartheid and Madness: Bessie Headôs *A Question of Power*,ò Adetokunbo Pearse argues that in *A Question of Power*, Bessie Head uses the psychoanalystôs delimitation of the human mind into the conscious, the sub-conscious and the unconscious to portray the totality of her protagonistôs experience. She depicts childhood experiences as central to the mental makeup of the adult. The novel is primarily concerned with, not so much on Motabeng where the bulk of the action takes place, but with the protagonistôs mental retentions of her South African experience. Consequently, the Elizabeth we meet in Motabeng is a character already predisposed to a mental breakdown. One of the remote or subconscious causes of Elizabethôs aberration is the stigmatization of an insane mother. There is clearly no indication that the woman was actually mad. The only characters who allude to her madness are those members of the establishment who wish to use the point like the gaunt principal, who wish to use the point to impress upon Elizabeth her own latent

insanity: what constitutes insanity, in this case in the words of Roux is ñthe breaking of South Africaôs Immorality Amendment Act of 1957ò (441).

The system of Apartheid creates graver psychological distortions in its subjects. To the South African government, Elizabethôs parents are immoral as well as political criminals. Elizabeth therefore grows up experiencing both filial and societal rejection. And because Elizabeth is extremely sensitive to her social circumstances, the problem becomes bewildering. Elizabethôs psychosis is the dramatization of the attempt to reconcile these complexes (not being white/black) and the attempt to reconcile her complexes and her ambivalent attitude towards life constitutes, as Pearse maintains, the social and spiritual strivings at the core of the symbolic nightmarish passages of *A Question of Power*. Behind this abnormal psychology lies South African life, where existence was like living with permanent nervous tension. Here white people and black people are constantly in a state of war, with violent hatred and oppression as the weapon of war. Elizabeth goes to Botswana in search of repose. In Botswana she becomes an involuntary explorer of consciousness, inquiring into the nature of good and evil, into the essence of power. Insanity occurs out of the failure to bring the conscious and the subconscious to congruence.

Pearse maintains Head structures Elizabethôs madness along the lines of basic existential psychoanalysis. The characters, Sello, Medusa, and Dan are not real human characters of conventional literature; rather, they are aspects of Elizabethôs mind, concretised in her fertile imagination. The character, Elizabeth, who is critical of the evil of South African life is the conscious self, óSelloô is her subconscious, close to her and sharing her belief in goodness. Dan is her unconscious, reflecting the South

African collective unconscious pervaded by the forces of evil. óSello in the brown suitô and óMedusaô are the derivatives of her subconscious.

Headôs intention after all said and done in this book is quite didactic. She condemns human oppression and exploitation in all its facets. She wishes for a multi-racial society which utilises the workable aspects of both white and black cultures for the mutual good of all. Through her epic battle with the inner forces of evil, Elizabeth comes into the possession of certain life-sustaining truths. Through this spiritual enlightenment akin to Buddhist philosophy, Elizabeth becomes convinced that the power maniac is a fickle-minded individual; his pursuit of power being a smoke-screen for a deeply seated sense of inferiority and insecurity. The victim, on the other hand, is flexible and free. He is not afraid of losing since his position already constitutes his loss.

In conclusion, Pearse maintains that to the sensitive and concerned individual, especially, the socio-political system of apartheid creates perpetual tension in the society. The evil of life within the system can lead to a dissociation of the psyche. He also said that an in-depth analysis of Headôs narrative reveals that although her protagonist survives the pangs of madness and attains spiritual salvation, the chain of evil is not necessarily brokenð this is contrary to much critical viewð Christopher Heywoodôs ñTraditional Values in the novels of Bessie Headò, Ojo-Adeôs ñBessie Headôs Heroine, Victims or Villainsò, Jane Grantôs ñAn Appreciation; and Kolawole Ogungbesanôs The Cape Gooseberry also Grows in Botswanaò. These critics and their works all seem to be of the opinion that the individual salvation attained by Elizabeth at the end of the novel is symbolic of the beginnings of societal and spiritual liberation. To Pearse, this optimistic interpretation in his opinion fails to come to

terms with the overriding philosophy of the novel which implies that any attempt to deny the efficacy of diabolical forces in life, albeit unacceptable, is to falsify the human experience.

Although far from celebrating the indestructibility of apartheid, *A Question of Power* dramatizes in psycho-existentialist, its uncanny ability to threaten human sanity and disrupt social harmony and balance.

Elizabeth, N. Evasdaughter in ñBessie Headôs *A Question of Power* Read as a Marinerôs Guide to Paranoia,ò says that *A Question of Power,* whether considered an autobiographical novel or a third-person autobiography, is full of the authorôs experience of what was called at the time a ñnervous breakdownò. While an author cannot be diagnosed from a literary text, a character can be. Elizabeth, the centre of consciousness in *A Question ofPower*, meets the criteria set forth on the *Desk Reference to the Diagnostic Criteria from Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Third Edition (1982) for paranoid Schizophrenia. The narrative of her illness is presented by Head in such a way to offer us an incomparable understanding of paranoia and of the connection between this illness and victimization by the hostile. In spite of the assumption of many that psychoanalytic treatment is necessary to deal with paranoia, Head describes a successful process of self-healing. She describes the circumstances of Headôs birth and the heartlessness of the Protestant headmistress with her shocking revelation. Who isolated Head at the least offence searching for the traces of her motherôs supposed insanity. Evasdaughter insists that Elizabethôs side of the story is what we are getting in *A Question of Power*, and as such, it is a labour of reason striving to find justice in an irrational world. Elizabethôs marriage was as great a disaster as her schooling. Evasdaughter argues that

Elizabethôs memory of her husbandôs promiscuity and cruelty seems to her to be the source of her apparition, Dan. In Dan, promiscuity expresses and eventuates in the will to dominate and inflict misery. She argues that Elizabethôs husband is a version of Harold Head, whom Bessie Emery married in 1961, and by whom she had one son. She attributes Bessieôs loss of her job and the consequent nervous breakdown in Botswana, according to Bruner, to ñpartly culture shock and partly hostility among the Batswana towards half-breeds, members of other tribes, and women, with education and professional authorityò (224).

Cherry Wilhelm in the study titled, ñBessie Head: The Face of Africa,ò views *A Question of Power* as ñboth the most autobiographical and symbolic of Headôs three novelsò (3). The critic calls it symbolic autobiography as an apt term for a narrative about hallucinations, especially when, as in this case, hallucinatory personages represent and debate egalitarian and malicious power.

Wilhelm argues here that because Elizabeth lives in a freer more benign atmosphere, she was not in the hospital for long and is not really forced with drugs to conform. As a result, she eventually develops a realistic philosophy that brings her to health and happiness. Through the insights she derives from observing her friends, she finally is able to throw off her illness altogether. By the time she emerges from the ordeal, she sits down to record it. The resulting narrative is the whole of *A Question of Power*, for Elizabethôs notes are not enclosed in a frame written by a purported author. Towards the end of her notes, Elizabeth details the method of her self-healing, quite an original contribution. The writer maintains that *A Question of Power* should not be read as an uninformed fantasy about madness in Africa. Nancy Topping Bazin

has written of Elizabeth, ñshe is able to regain her sanity... by recognizing that she must not respond passively to those who wish to dominate herò (34).

As with all great writers, Bessie Headôs life and work has been examined by each generation of critics. But so far, a few have found Bessieôs existentialism as a large topic and devoted an entire development of it. In particular, the preceding review shows that existentialist principles have not been used in studying the selected novels under study. This observation has provided a fresh raison dôetre for this study.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

3.1Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis is anchored on existential theory. The term, ñExistentialism,ò was coined by the French Catholic Philosopher, Gabriel Marcel, according to Cooper, in the mid-1940s. Fulton had it, ñat first, when Marcel applied the term to him at a colloquium in 1945, Jean-Paul Sartre rejected itò (18-19). But later, he changed his mind and, on October 29, 1945, publicly adopted the existentialist label in a lecture to the club *Maintenant* in Paris. The lecture was published as *L' existentialisemeest unhumanisme* (Existentialism is a Humanism), a short book that did much to popularize existentialist thought. Existentialism as Sartre defined it in the words of Jonathan Webber, ñis an ethical theory; it is a form of humanism, which means that it takes humanity as the central ethical valueò (5). Beauvoir proclaims that the aim of existentialism is to save us ñfrom the morose disappointment and sulking that this cult of false idols brings aboutò (216). Some scholars argue, according to Steven Crowell that:

> The term should be used only to refer to the cultural movement in Europe in the 1940s and 1950s associated with the works of the philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvior, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Albert Camus. Other scholars extend the term to Kierkegaard, and yet others extend it as far back as Socrates (316).

However, the term in the words of Crowell, ñis often identified with the philosophical views of Jean-Paul Sartre. Although Jean-Paul Sartre adopted the term ñexistentialismò for his own philosophy in the 1940s, Marcelôs thoughts according to keen has been described as ñalmost diametrically opposed to that of Sartre.ò(24) Unlike Sartre, Marcel was a Christian, and became a catholic convert in 1929.

Existentialism provides a moving account of the agony of being in the world. The spirit of existentialism has a long history in philosophy, but it became a major movement in the second half of the 20th century. Existentialism is not a systematic body of thought like Marxism or Psychoanalysis; instead, it is more like an umbrella under which a very wide range of thinkers struggled with questions about the meaning of life.

Much of the appeal and popularity of Existentialism is due to the sense of confusion, the crisis, and the feeling of rejection and rootlessness that Europeans felt during World War II and its aftermath. Existentialismôs focus on each personôs role in creating meaning in their life was a major influence on the phenomenological and Humanistic traditions in psychology and on the ñhuman potentialò movement that emerged from them. Rene Descartes (1596-1650) said, ñConquer yourself rather than the worldò. To modern existentialism, this means that the world itself has no real meaning or purpose. It is not the unfolding expression of Human Destiny or a Divine plan, or even a set of natural laws. The only meaning is that which we create by acts of will. To have a meaningful life we have to act, but we should act without hope. Acting is meaningful, but it doesnôt create meaning that lasts beyond the acts themselves or beyond our own lifetime. You are what you are doing while you are doing it ï and then nothing. In the *Myth of Sisyphus,* Albert Camus uses the analogy

of the Greek myth of Sisyphus to demonstrate the futility of existence. In the myth, Sisyphus is condemned for eternity to roll a rock up a hill, but when he reaches the summit, the rock will roll to the bottom again. Camus believes that this existence is pointless but that Sisyphus ultimately finds meaning and purpose in his task, simply by continually applying himself to it.

Basically, existence is of two types: authentic and inauthentic forms of existence. Inauthentic existence is the being-for-itself, rising from the human beingsô bad faith, by which the human being moves away from the burden of responsibility, through his beliefs in dogma and his actions are predetermined. There is a striking contrast between the authentic and the inauthentic forms of being; the authentic being is the being of the human being and the inauthentic being is the being for things. Yet, authentic being is only rarely attained by the human being; still it is what the human being must strive to gain. The inauthentic being-in-itself is characteristically distinctive of things; it is what the human being is diseased with for his failure to see himself as, and act according as a free agent and his impotency to reject bad faith. Things are only what they are. But the human being is what can be. Things are determined, fixed, and rigid; the human being is free: he can add essence to his life in the course of his life, and he is in constant state of flux and is able to comprehend situation. The human being does not live in a predetermined world: he is free to realize his aims, to materialize his dreams; hence, he has only the destiny he forges for himself, because in this world nothing happens out of necessity.

Like transcendentalism of the nineteenth century, there are almost as many varieties of existentialism as there are individual writers to whom the word is applied. But without being facetious we might group them into two main kinds, the ungodly

and the godly. To take the ungodly or atheistic first, we would list as the chief spokesman among many others Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Simone de Beauvoir. Several of this important group of French writers had rigorous and significant experience in the resistance during the Nazi occupation of France in World War II. Out of the despair which comes with the collapse of their nation during those terrible years, they found unexpected strength in the single indomitable human spirit, which even under severe torture could maintain the spirit of resistance, the inextinguishable ability to say No. From this irreducible core in the human spirit, they erected after the war a philosophy which was a twentieth-century variation of the philosophy of Descartes. But instead of saying, ñI think; therefore, I am,ò they said, ñI can say No; therefore, I existò. This category does not agree with the existence of God or any supernatural powers. Unlike the theists whose man, to an extent has hope in God, the atheist sees man as something which has been meaninglessly placed into existence. Hence for them, the world is absurd, meaningless, and without purpose. They propagate that it is impossible to find answer to why we exist through the Supreme Being (God). To them, man is his own God. In an atheistic perspective, existentialism sees a godless universe with no meaning or justice inherent in the world. They often remain detached from life, whether it offers joys or tragedies, seeing little meaning in an unjust and meaningless universe in the face of manôs mortality.

Because the contemporary existentialist holds firm that man is the Alpha and Omega of his existence, Heidegger, one of their disciples insists that ñman is thrown into the world.ò This category is not concerned with where man came from or where he goes after death, it is only concerned with the presence of man on earth. So life

after death does not exist in their submission. Both thinkers however posit that man is faced with no other option than to make a choice through freewill. And it is the choice which man makes that determines the nature of his existence. Freedom to choose which way to live with the existential problems man comes across in his course of living on earth, but there exist clauses attached to this freedom-consequence and responsibility. Man is free to choose the way he lives, do things or carry out actions as long as he is aware that the result of his choice, is the burden of responsibility which he must bear, whether good or bad. Sartre refers to it as ñinfinite responsibilityò. This is why he posits that ñman can will nothing that he is alone, abandoned on earth in the midst of his infinite responsibilityò. This group is chiefly responsible for giving existentialism its status in the popular mind as a literary-philosophical cult.

Simone de Beauvior, the pre-eminent French writer, feminist and existentialist, in common with most existentialists, understands philosophy as praxis: involved action in the world and participation in the course of history. It is out of this understanding that her landmark book *The Second Sex,* is born. More than anything, *The Second Sex* constitutes a study in applied existentialism where the abstract concept, ówomanô, gives way to the examination of the lives of everyday persons struggling against oppression and humiliation. *The Second Sex* begins with most obvious questions: what is a woman? De Beauvior finds that at present there is no answer to that question. The reason is that tradition has always thought of woman as the ñotherò of man. It is only man that constitutes himself as the absolute, and woman defines herself only through him, ñShe is the inessential in front of the essentialò (6). Often women found themselves in a socio-cultural environment which denied them the very possibility of personal flourishing. At the same time, De Beauvior indeed

portrays some negative aspects of women, mentioning, for example, the womenôs attitude towards their fellow women. A further problem that women face is that of understanding themselves as a unity which often would enable them to assume the role of their choosing. They live dispersed among men, tied by homes, work, economic interests and social conditions to certain menð fathers, or husbandsð more closely than to other women.

The Second Sex sets out a feminist existentialism used to analyze the nature of being for the woman. Beauvior examines womenôs subordinate role as the ñotherò in her book. As an existentialist, de Beauvior believes that existence precedes essence; hence, one is not born a woman, but becomes one. Her analysis focuses on the Hegelian concept of the óOtherô. It is the social construction of women as the quintessential óOtherô that de Beauvior identifies as fundamental to womenôs oppression. De Beauvior asserted that women are as capable of choice as men, and thus can choose to elevate themselves, moving beyond the immanence to which they were previously resigned and reaching transcendence, a position in which one takes responsibility for oneself and the world, where one chooses oneôs freedom. This is the point the researcher wants to make between De Beauvior and Headôs characters.

Black existential philosophy is a branch of Africana philosophy and black philosophical thought emerging out of the critical thought of the African Diasporas. Black philosophical thought pertains to the ideas emerging from black-designated peoples. Such people include, for example, Australian Aboriginal people, who often refer to themselves as "black." There is thus also work in black existential philosophy from Australia, such as those organized through forums and articles by Danielle Davis

in the Oodgeroo Unit of Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane. W. E. B. Du Bois' notion of double consciousness has been revisited by many scholars as a notion doused in existentialism. Du Bois addressed several problems germane to black existential philosophy. He raised the question of black suffering as a philosophical problem. Was there meaning behind such suffering? He also observed that black people were often studied and addressed in public discussions as problems of the modern world instead of as people facing problems raised by modern life. Black people, he argued, often faced double standards in their efforts to achieve equality in the wake of enslavement, colonialism, and racial apartheid. This double standard led, he argued, to ñtwonessò and ñdouble consciousness.ò The twoness was the experience of being ñblackò and ñAmerican,ò where the two were treated as contradictory. Double consciousness followed in two forms. The first was of the experience of being seen from the perspective of white supremacy and anti-black racism. It was from the perspective of seeing themselves as lowly and inferior. The second, however, as Paget Henry argues, ñinvolves seeing the contradictions of a system that in effect blames the victimò. That form of double consciousness involves seeing the injustice of a social system that limits possibilities for some groups and creates advantages for others while expecting both to perform equally. That black people were imprisoned for challenging the injustices of a social system born on the memorable phrase, ñAll men are created equal...,ò is a case in point, and the subsequent criticism of whether ñmenò meant ñwomen tooò pushes this point further, as Frederick Douglass, Anna Julia Cooper, and other earlier 19th century black critical thinkers contended. Du Bois also raised the problem of history in the study of black existence. He noticed that double standards affected how history is told, and that

the misrepresentation of history as an apology for white supremacy and colonialism led to the degradation of black people as passive objects of history instead of makers of history. This occlusion depended on denying the struggles for freedom waged by black people in the effort to expand the reach of freedom in the modern world.

The danger of black suffering is that it could lead to a sense of pointlessness of black existence and a lack of self-worth. The proper starting point for the crucial debate about the prospects for blacks is an examination of the nihilism that increasingly pervades black communities. Nihilism is to be understood here not as a philosophic doctrine that there are no rational grounds for legitimate standards or authority; it is, far more, the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness. The frightening result is a numbing detachment from others and a self-destructive disposition toward the world. Life without meaning, hope, and love breeds a cold hearted, mean-spirited outlook that destroys both the individual and others.

Black suffering is also examined by the Martinican philosopher and psychiatrist, Frantz Fanon. In his book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, he argued that the modern world afforded no model of a normal black adult; instead, there are the pathologies of the black soul, which he calls a white construction. This problem placed black people in an alienated relationship with language, love, and even their inner dream life. Although he was careful to claim that there are exceptions to these claims, the general situation is as follows. Blacks who master the dominant language are treated either as not really black or receive much suspicion. Worse, they find themselves seeking white recognition, which affirms the role of whites as the standard

by which they are judged. The matter repeats itself with love. Black women and black men seeking white recognition do so, he argued, through asking for recognition from white male symbols of authority. That effort is self-deceiving. It makes such black women ask to be loved as white instead of as women, and it makes such black males fail to be men. Fanon also brings out the philosophical problem of reason and its relation to emotions by considering whether a flight into Negritude, the intellectual movement coined by Aime Cesaire, could enable blacks to love themselves by rejecting white reason. At the end of *Black Skin, White Masks*, he asked his body to make of him a man who questions. Fanon's point was that racism and colonialism attempted to over-determine black existence, but as a question, black existence faced possibility and could thus reach beyond what is imposed upon it. In *The Wretched of the Earth* , he returned to this question at the historical level by demanding the transformation of material circumstances and the development of new symbols with which to set afoot a new humanity.

Black existential philosophical thought was also influential in the South African anti-apartheid movement through the thought of Steve Bantu Biko. In *I Write What I Like*, Biko continues Fanon's project of thinking through alternative conceptions of humanity and offers his theory of Black Consciousness. Thus for Biko, all people of colourð indigenous Africans, Asians, mixed peoples, and whites who are "blackened" by their allegiance to anti-racismð are black. Biko presents here a political view of identity that resists a prior essence of black identity. One becomes black, reminiscent of Simone de Beauvoir's observation that one becomes a woman. South African philosophers influenced by Bikoôs existentialism include Noël Chabani

Manganyi. The influence of Bikoôs thought is also discussed in Andile, Mngxitama, Amanda Alexander, and Nigel Gibson .

Black existential philosophy came to the academy in the 1970s in the work of William R. Jones, who argued for a humanistic response to black suffering through facing the absurd as found in the thought of Albert Camus and dealing with the contradictions of theological beliefs pointed out by Jean-Paul Sartre. Jones drew upon existential philosophy to reject non-verifiable claims posed by black theology, where history is presented as God trying to liberate black people. Historical evidence, Jones suggests, says otherwise. Instead of relying on God, black people should take their lives and history into their own hands and build a better future for human kind. This is not to say that Jones took the position that blacks who believe in God should not love God. His point is that they should not rely on God for the elimination of injustice on earth.

A philosopher heavily influenced by Du Bois, Fanon, and Jones is Lewis Gordon, who argues that black existential philosophy:

> ...is marked by a centring of what is often known as the ósituationô of questioning or inquiry itself. Another term for situation is he lived or meaning context of concern. Implicit in the existential demand for recognizing the situation or lived-context of Africana people's being-in-the-world is the question of value raised by people who live that situation. A slave's situation can only be understood, for instance, through recognizing the fact that a slave experiences it. It is to regard the slave as a value-laden perspective in the world (3).

Gordon later argues in *Existentia Africana* that such a concern leads to a focus in black existential philosophy on problems of philosophical anthropology, liberation, and critical reflection on the justification of thought itself. The first asks the question, what is a human being? The second asks how one can become free. And the third is critical even of the methods used to justify the first two. Gordon argues that these questions make sense because enslaved, colonized, and dehumanized people are forced to question their humanity, and that leads to questioning the meaning of being human. He argues that concerns with liberation make sense for people who have been enslaved, colonized, and racially oppressed. Because these questions are posed as objects of inquiry and demand the transformation of consciousness such as the transition from Du Boisôs first form of double consciousness to the second, critical one, Gordon advocates a black existential phenomenological approach, which he sometimes called a postcolonial phenomenology.

There is also the growing area of black feminist existential philosophy. Foundations of this area of thought are in the 19th century and early 20th century thought of Anna Julia Cooper, who explored problems of human worth through challenging the double standards imposed upon black populations in general and black women in particular. She argued, in response to the racist claims of black worthlessness (that the world would be better off without black people), that the measure of worth should be based on the difference between contribution and investment. Since very little was actually invested in black people but so much was produced by them, she argued that black worth exceeds that of many whites. She used the same argument to defend the worth of black women.

Bessie Head and the Existential themes

The early 1980ôs in South Africa was a period still marked by apartheid politics, which made clear restrictions on art as well as on many other aspects of life. In such a heated context, artists and writers were often important figures in the resistance against state power and were expected by readers and critics to take clear political stance against the state and its inhuman politics. The logic of literary politics, influenced by literary existentialism, followed the schema according to which the author, Bethlehem opines, ñopposing apartheid through exposing itò (367). A part of such logic involved seeing the author as residing on the side of truth, whereas the state was inherently seen as corrupted. Existentialism, which arose in France, under Nazi occupation, has been an appealing philosophy for writers and intellectuals under similarly oppressive circumstances. Richard Peck argues that ñexistentialism maintains an extraordinary grip over white South African dissident writersò (67). He further maintains that ñthe resonance of this philosophy with the authorôs own ideas generally derives from a sense of historical correspondenceò (68). Existentialismôs emphasis on action provides the author with a sense of agency in a tyrannical state. For instance, it was the French political situation, and particularly the Algerian war (1954-62), that made a permanent impression on young Brinkôs mind, and in an interview with Bahgat Elnadi and Adel Rifaat, he credits existentialist author, Albert Camus, as the writer who triggered a change in his own political views, ñI was in

Paris at the time of the Algerian war and all the problems it caused in France, the time when Camus was writing about the Pieds Noirs, the French settlers in Algeriaò (5).

For Brink, French occupation of Algeria had political correlations with the white settlement in South Africa. In similar fashion, the researcher maintains that existentialist philosophy has appealed to black South African authors because of the countryôs state of almost perpetual crisis. Virtually all of Bessieôs novels are set within this crisis.The existentialist author is bound to act. For engaged authorsð who take their responsibility seriously and wish to initiate change in the worldð action takes the form of writing. Sartre writes in *What is Literature* that, ñthe óengagedô writer knows that words are action; he knows that to reveal is to change and that one can reveal only by planning to changeò (23). Sartre further claims that ñthe function of the writer is to act in such a way that nobody can be ignorant of the world and that nobody may say that he is innocent of what itôs all aboutò (24). In the context of apartheid politics in South Africa, various literary critics took a similar stance on the function of literature. Leon de knock, for instance, emphasizes the writersô desire ñto reveal the lie behind the moral sanctimony of separate developmentò (230). This concern is shared by Sarah Christie, Njabulo Ndebele, Athol Fugard, Nadine Gordimer, Lewis Nkosi who maintain that the power of South African literature comes from knowledge, and from a deep concern for social and political change.

Bessie Head is one of the South African authors whose ideas are very clearly related to existentialism. In this work, we shall adopt the existential theory to analyse the structure of the texts, especially the characters and the themes akin to this movement: alienation, rootlessness, marginalization, loneliness, fear, trembling, suicide, freedom, all recurrent themes in Headôs writing. In this respect, Headôs

novels *When Rain Clouds Gather*, *Maru* and *A Question of Power* attain a tremendous accuracy in showing the conflict between the individual and the society.

Alienation is the most comprehensive term to describe the mental and social state of some of Headôs characters. The term describes both the external and internal aspects of their problems. The word óalienationô bears the constant notion of being and feeling a stranger, an outsider. Many of her characters have the status of strangers inside the society they live in, and this situation creates friction, isolation, fear, anxiety and uneasiness in the life and mind of the characters. Also, according to Hegel, alienation is a characteristic feature of the modern man, his sense of inward estrangements of more or less conscious awareness that the inner being, the real ñIò, is alienated from the ñmeò, the person as an object in society.

Headôs protagonists have their inner beings disturbed and shattered by different causes: difficulty of adaptation, racial and class prejudices, traumatic memories, repressed feelings and unconventional philosophical or religious beliefs. The aim of her protagonists is to lessen their inner alienation and find a satisfactory peace of mind. It is apparent that Headôs thinking is influenced by Sartreôs philosophy of art. Such Sartrean terms as ñbeing in situationò serve to describe Bessie Headôs situation.She displays this in her choice of characters and incidents in her texts.

Head bore the burden of a double illegitimate birth: in 1937 she was conceived out of wedlock and, in apartheid slang, ñacross the colour bar.ò Simply by being born, she transgressed the racial and gender edicts of her society, a ñdevianceò that portended the torments of her later life. In her thirteenth year, Bessie learned that the man and woman whom she had presumed to be her parents bore no biological relation

to her. That year, the South African state removed her from foster parental care and placed her in an orphanage. It was only then that Headôs origins were revealed to her, in the words of Gardner:

> I was born on the 6th July 1937 in the Pietermaritzburg mental Hospitalé the reason for my peculiar birthplace was that my mother was white, and she acquired me from a black man. She was judged insane and committed to the mental hospital while pregnant (95).

The circumstances of Headôs birth were not the only forms of marginality she had to contend with: as a first generation ñcolouredò, an orphan, a changeling, a refugee, a certified ñmadwoman,ò and a single mother, she led a profoundly disinherited life on almost every front. Her chief characters argue for a humanistic response to black suffering through facing the absurd as found in the thought of Albert Camus and dealing with the contradictions of theological beliefs pointed out by Jean-Paul Sartre. Bessieôs works presents the examples of absurdism, anxiety and alienation in relation to the experience of blacks in apartheid South Africa. The identity of the major characters of the novels, figures based on Headôs own life, points to the trauma of black people receiving names that were forced on them from the violence of racism. That renaming was meant to inaugurate a loss of memory, and that process of dismemberment is explored in the works as the protagonists move from one abusive situation to another to a culminating reflection on living as an invisible leech of the system that produces light. This leads to the question of freedom, for the committed writer the concept of freedom originates from choice. Headôs writing bears in common with other existentialist writing which emphasizes the necessity to act. According to Peek, ñone is free to choose, and indeed condemned to such freedom;

therefore, one defines oneself by action, and good faith which seems to demand forms of action that are capable of enlarging human life and freedomò (73).For the writer, freedom and the choice it involves entails the action of committed writing, a critical act aimed at enabling other subjects to reflect critically on and actively challenge their own unfreedom. Margrate Cadmore in *Maru,* a Khoisan of Botswana, otherwise known by such ethnic slurs as Bushmen\Masarwa bears the full brunt of Botswanaôs societyôs exclusionary politics. But by imbuing her with the salvational role to save her people, Head made it a story of the Masarwa who must rise from immanence (unfreedom) and the inauthentic pit-holes of ñdasò man and find themselves once again reopened to the possibility of collective self-authentication (freedom). The focus of *A Question of Power,* for instance, is on the problem of good and evil, the novel attempts to explore the sources of evil to expose its true face, and to show the misery and suffering it inflicts on human life. Through the character, Elizabeth, we see how naked evil, when it invades an individualôs total being, can be the cause of psychic disorder and personality disintegration. During the monumental battle which takes place in her mind, Elizabeth tries to dispel the belief current in South Africa that might is right.

Because of the counter-intuitive way in which oppressed people must live to preserve the lives of their families and themselves, Frantz Fanon suggests that colonized groups (in particular, blacks) experience psychosis, where their actions do not reflect their desires. If the writer is the creator of text, then she/he is also the creator of character. Head acknowledges this in *A Woman Alone. Autobiographical Writings* when she says of *When Rain Clouds Gather*, ñI created a symbolic type of refugee personalityò (68). Characters are not only created in fiction but also serve to

talk for the writer. Patricia Sparck in Elliot observs, ñall fictioné ultimately constitutes autobiography, the artist inventing, whatever the purported aim of his creation, only a series of metaphors of the selfò (33). In Headôs novels under consideration, the chief characters become a particular point of focus for the writerôs purpose. The choice of Margaret in *Maru* in another instance is symbolic of the writerôs own experience. Ikenna Dieke points out that:

> Although *A Question of Power* can be said to be an important site for unravelling the strands of her anguished life story with instances of immense suffering, privation and crippling alienation, *Maru* on the other hand, provides the fertile site for mounting a literary resistance to the mistaken ideology which often gave rise to the anguished life storyé (13).

Headôs chief characters reflect her desires, experiences and aspirations. In some cases, she deliberately steers their actions along a predetermined course: ñI would deliberately create heroes and show their extreme willingness to abdicate from positions of power and absorb themselves in activities which would be of immense benefit to the peopleò (73). Makhaya in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, is one such character, a political refugee from South Africa who enters Botswana illegally, becomes a reliable assistant to Gilbert and struggles to help improve their standard of living while contending with the villainous chief, Matenga.

Through a detailed exploration of the many characters in the novels, the study shows the efficacy of such portraits for the writer with an existentialist agenda. Headôs point is to encourage the people to óactô; it is essential that she does not deify or demonize her characters; they must have the same concerns as her audience. Out of

the despair which comes with the collapse of all that she holds sacred, Head finds unexpected strength in the single indomitable human spirit which even under severe torture can maintain the spirit of resistance, the inextinguishable ability to say ñNoò. From this irreducible core in the human spirit, she creates for herself, under extremely hostile conditions, her ideal life. In the steadiness and peace of her own world, she can dream dreams a little ahead of the somewhat vicious clamour of revolution and the horrible stench of evil social systems. And instead of saying, ñI think; therefore, I am,ò she said, ñI can say No; therefore, I existò.

Such expressions in literature do not mean necessarily that the authors are conscious existentialist theorizers or in the words of Bigelow, ñeven that they know the writings of such theorizersò (178). Head may never have read Heidegger or Kierkegaard, but Headôs views of time and life areñexistentialò in these novels, because in recent years, existentialist theorizers have given such views a local habitation and a name. One of the attractions and one of the dangers of existential theme is that once one begins to look for them, he sees them everywhere. But if one applies restraint and discrimination, he will find that they illuminate much of contemporary literature and sometimes the literature of the past as well.

3.2 Methodology

The research will be conducted through an analytical research design. Analytical research, as a style of qualitative inquiry, is a non-interactive document research which describes and interprets the past or recent past from selected sources (Macmilliam & Schumaher). Existentialism serves as the theoretical framework for this study. Therefore, Existentialist key themes and their expressions in the novels of

Bessie Head will be examined from two main perspectives ï their manifestation in the actions and motivations of individual characters, and in the mass of the community. We will explore some of the basic ideas of existentialism largely from the perspectives of the atheists, of whom their spokesman was Jean- Paul Sartre. In the subsequent chapters of the study, we shall focus on throwing more light on how the theoretical viewpoints espoused by these theorists are given expression in the primary texts under study. Themes like facing the absurd, alienation, authenticity, freedom, anxiety, fear, and some others are deployed in interpreting characters like Margaret Cadmore, Makhaya, Maru and Elizabeth. These characters are seen to manifest various existential problems which unavoidably stemmed from the deep-rooted hostility of the society in ways that make their lives, actions and careers pitiable and most tragic.

Furthermore, the application of these ideas in the study on *When Rain Clouds Gather, Maru* and *A Question of Power* will show the more, the belongingness of the novels to the existential tradition. Existentialism, as mentioned in chapter one, is more of an umbrella under which a very wide range of thinkers struggled with questions about the meaning of life. Its focus on each personôs role in creating meaning in their life was a major influence to the choice of this study.

The first step the study will take is the application of the existential themes of alienation, authenticity and freedom to Headôs first two novels, *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *Maru* will be, taking *Maru* for instance, to describe how the protagonist, Margaret Cadmore, a khoisan of Botswana, otherwise known by such ethnic slurs as Marsawa/Barsawa/Bushmen bears the full brunt of Botswanaôs societyôs exclusionary politics. But by imbuing her with the salvational role to save her people, Head made it

a story of the Bushmen who must rise from immanence (unfreedom) and the inauthentic pit-holes of ñdasò man and find themselves once again re-opened to the possibility of collective self-authentication (freedom).

The second step is the analysis of the recurrence of such motifs as facing the absurd, anxiety and fear that culminated in Elizabethôs psychic disorder and personality disintegration in Headôs last novel, *A Question of Power*. Through a detailed examination of the characters and their motivations conveyed by emphasizing unstable identities, the struggle between good and evil, the hard-pressed protagonists whose lives are traumatic, secret fantasies, supernatural manifestations, hallucinations, etc, we will show the efficacy of such portraits for a writer with an existential agenda.

Chapter Four

Critical Analysis of the Existentialist Themes of Alienation, Authenticity and Freedom in *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *Maru*

4:1 Sartre and the Nature of Human Existence

The researcher has from the outset decided to examine the works under study with Sartreôs school of philosophical thought. Sartre is surely the central figure of existentialism. All the themes that we introduced in the previous chapters come together in his work. With the possible exception of Nietzche, his writings are the most widely anthologised (especially the lecture ñExistentialism is Humanismò), and his literary works are widely read (especially the novel *Nausea*) or performed. Sartre calls human existence the ñfor-itselfò, and the being of things the ñin-itselfò. And he suggests that a concern with the nature of existence, and more particularly a concern with the distinctive nature of human existence, is the defining existentialist theme. This may be related to the wider problem of how we are aware of our identity, and how we deploy ourselves on earth. If a man, according to Brink, ñallows his choices to be made for him, or assumes he is determined by impersonal forces of any kind, then he has slipped into inauthentic existenceò (96). Nietzche and Heidegger both suggest the possibility of an authentic being with others, both leave it seriously under-developed but Sartre believes that:

> ...my projects as a being can be realised only with the cooperation of others; however, that cooperation presupposes their freedom and their judgments

> about me must concern me. Therefore, permitting and nurturing the freedom of others must be a central part of all my projects (210).

Sartre thus commits himself against any form of political, social, religious or economic forms of subjugation. An authentic existence for Sartre therefore means two things. First, it is something like a style of existing- one that at every moment is anxious, and that means fully aware of the absurdity and fragility of its freedom. Second, though, there is some minimal level of content to any authentic project: whatever else my project is, it must also be a project of freedom for myself and for others. One cannot assume freedom in isolation from the freedom of others. Action in the words of Merleau-Ponty is ñparticipatory...my freedom is interwoven with that of others by way of the worldò (315). Whereas Headôs characters were always restricted by the brute fact of their existence, nevertheless they always aspire to overcome their situation, to choose their freedom and thus to recreate themselves. Existential wholeness is what is employed in this chapter, because it suggests a putting together of all the shattered pieces of the soul into a harmonious whole. Beauvoir opines,ñit is only the freedom of others that keeps each one of us from hardening in the absurdity of facticityò (71).

4:2 Exilic Consciousnesses: A Utopian Hope of Psychic Wholeness

Headôs *Maru* and *When Rain Clouds Gather* are explicit in their exploration of the nature of freedom under conditions of extreme social and personal pressure. The first study, on *When Rain Clouds Gather*, focuses on Makhaya and Gilbertôs alienation in a foreign country. It examines their battles and victories over a tribalist mentality and a harsh environment until their final settling down in their new home.

In this chapter, the researcher examines the alienation of Bessie Headôs protagonists and their quest to attain authentic and free existence. Alienation is the most comprehensive term to describe the mental state of some of Headôs characters. This term describes both the external and the internal aspects of their problems. From *alius,* ‘another,ô Latin, developed the forms *olienus,* óbelonging to another country,ô and *dienatus,* óestranged.ô The word óalienationô thus bears in the words of Ogungbesan ñthe constant notion of being and feeling a stranger, an outsider" (206). Many of Headôs characters have the status of stranger inside the society they live in and this situation creates friction, isolation and uneasiness in the life and mind of the new- comers. Also, according to Hegel in Ogungbesan, alienation is ña characteristic feature of the modern man, his sense of inward estrangements, of more or less conscious awareness that the inner being, the real ñ1ò is alienated from the ñme,ò the person as an object in societyò (206).

Many of Bessie Headôs protagonists have the status of strangers inside their societies as noted before. These characters are either exiles from another country, by force or by choice, or they simply come from another village or community. Their most difficult tasks are their own adaptation and their acceptance by the community. Bessie Head herself knew the situation well. In 1964, she voluntarily exiled herself to Serowe, Botswana, where she accepted a teaching post. She left South Africa on an exit permit (which allowed a citizen to leave but not to return). For fifteen years, she was a refugee. She was granted Botswana citizenship in 1979. Headôs protagonists have their inner beings disturbed and shattered by different causes: difficulty of adaptation, racial and class prejudices, traumatic memories, repressed feelings and unconventional philosophical or religious beliefs. The aim of

Headôs protagonists is to lessen their inner alienation and find satisfactory peace of mind. A good mental balance brings the characters to a healthier and happier existence. From Bessieôs exile experience came her first novel, *When Rain Clouds Gather*, whose protagonist, Makhaya, is a South African refugee. She used her husbandôs ñstruggle against the system, his determination to escape it, his exciting flight across the border into Bechuanalandò to introduce the character of Makhaya, according to Eilersen(96).

When Rain Clouds Gather is a story about a political refugee from South Africa, Makhaya Maseko, who enters Botswana illegally and settles in the rural town of Golema Mmidi. The town is inhabited almost exclusively by women for most of the year, as the men take their cattle to graze for extended periods away from the town. The villagers are aided in agricultural development by an Englishman, Gilbert Balfour, whose attempts to modernise agriculture and get the people to abandon subsistence farming are frustrated by the ineffectiveness of the local government, by the prejudices of the Batswana people and by the chief of the town, Matenge. Matenge bears a grudge against Gilbert for destroying his cattle speculation business through the establishment of co-operative for the cattle farmers.

Makhaya finds a father figure in the village in the name of Dinorego, who is the father of Gilbertôs love interest and eventual bride, Maria. Makhaya, shares with the very religious Mma-Millipede, a deep resentment of all the years of living under apartheid. Mma-Millipede tries unsuccessfully to drain Makhaya of his bitterness by preaching the gospel to him from her Tswana Bible. The novel takes its title from the strange phenomenon of rain clouds that regularly gather in Golema Mmidi although no rain falls, and the town suffers a drought for most of the year.

Makhayaôs escape from South Africa to Botswana is the beginning of a quest for an authentic existence. He cannot find happiness and peace in a country which forces him everyday to fil1 his heart with hate in order to survive. He leaves South Africa because he refuses to marry and have children in a country where black men are called óboyô, ódogô and ókaffirô *(*WRCG 16). Makhaya also ñsimply feels like moving out of a part of Africa that is mentally and spiritually dead through the constant perpetuation of false beliefsò (WRCG 16). Makhaya leaves his country with the hope of finding a better world in which he would be free and where he would find at last ñthe road of peace of mindò (WRCG 20). However, Makhaya is deluded by the illusion that everything is going to sort itself out because he is in a free country. But additional disintegration and more ñshatteringò of his sou1 occur before he attains freedom. This chapter will focus on Makayaôs, Gilbert and Margrateôs search for inner peace and especially on the alienating concepts of refugeeism, prejudices and tribalism which threaten their quests. It will also take into consideration Makhayaôs, Gilbertôs and Margaretôs already existing alienation, resulting from hateful traumatic past and ideological leanings.

When Makaya arrives for the first time in Botswana, he becomes stateless. He cannot return to South Africa and he has no status in Botswana. He then becomes a refugee and must live with this difficult situation. In Bechuanaland, refugees were kept in specific villages to keep them together and to restrict their movements. They had to report regularly to the police station and their refugee dole kept them poor. But Makhayaôs story is optimistic in the sense that, in spite of the politicians, he is well accepted by the villagers while most of the time refugees are not always popular with the local population (Eilersen88). It is nevertheless true that the setting of the story in

the village of Golema Mmidi plays an important role. The local population is quite different from the typical, rural one,ñit was not a village in the usual meaning of being composed of large tribal or family groupings. Golema Mmidi consisted of individuals who had fled there to escape the tragedies of lifeò (WRCG 22). Makhayaôs integration is facilitated by an uncommon population of exiled individuals. Gilbert Balfour and Georges Appleby-Smith are British (WRCG 23), while Dinorego, Mma-Millipede and Pauline Sebeso are from the northern part of Botswana (WRCG 68, 75). The population is friendly and Makhaya is well accepted. Gilbert, the white agricultural expert, gives him a job the first day of his arrival. And also George Appleby-Smith, a British colonial police officer, not only grants him political asylum but ñsticks his neck outò for him so that he immigrates in Botswana. Makhayaôs adaptation could have therefore been easy was it not for two important factors: his own inner alienation and the tribalism he encounters.

Makhaya is in search of peace of mind. However, he does not trust himself and other people enough to make this search easy. He begins his quest with a negative attitude and believes that he will never find what he is looking for in Botswana and still less in the small village of Golema Mmidi. His first intention is to pass through Botswana, ñI also ought to be passing through because Iôm a refugeeò (WRCG 30). Makhaya does not know how to listen óto the voices in his heartô which are guiding him to his inner peace. ñBut whatever it was, he simply and silently decided that all this dryness and bleakness amounted to home and that somehow he had come to the end of a journeyò (WRCG 17).

Makhaya soon forgets this promise and it will take all the tenderness and humanity of some villagers to remind him of it. Makhayaôs negative attitude is the

result of a long and traumatic existence in South Africa. Apartheid destroyed Makhayaôs existence and caused deep psychological scar as, ñhis nerves werenôt so good, too easily jangled by the irritations of living ... the inner part of him was a jumble of chaotic discordò (WRCG 7). Makhayaôs life has been one of humiliation, hatred and revenge, while deep into his heart he is kind and gentle. He calls himself the Black Dog:

> ...a Frankenstein monster, only animated by the white man for his own needs.... He hates the white man in a strange way. It was not anything subtle or sly or mean, but a powerful accumulation of years and years and centuries and centuries of silence (WRCG 133).

Makhaya concentrates his thoughts and energy on that hatred, turning it into plans of destruction. South Africa made him a potential murderer. Not so long ago, he had been sent to jail for, ñwalking about with little pieces of paper describing how he was going to blow everything upò (WRCG 19). On his arriva1 in Botswana, Makhaya still has that ówild elementô in him and wishes to kill Matenge because, ñhe has seen and faced death too often to be afraid of it, and taking another manôs life meant little to himò (WRCG 66). This life of fear and hatred shaped a part of Makhayaôs personality and he learned to distrust people; he had a trick ñof slightly averting his face as though no man was his brother or worthy of trustò (WRCG 7). In South Africa, it allowed him to survive, but in Botswana it makes him arrogant and difficult to please and approach. When he meets Gilbert for the first time, he cannot conceive at first that a white person could be good and even less that he could be his friend. Makhaya also speaks impertinently to George Appleby-Smith, who is only trying

to help him, and he cannot believe that the latter will really óstick his neck out for himô (WRCG 61). Makhaya also prefers to avoid the villagers and when Paulina sends him her greetings through her little girl, he replies rudely and sends back a cruel message (WRCG 78).

Another error Makhaya makes because of his South African conditioning is his association of exile with freedom. He thinks that merely stepping into Botswana will change everything and that he will be totally free. Worse, he arrives with an individualistic and egotistical definition of freedom, ñI donôt care about people. I donôt care about anything, not even the white man. I want to feel what it is like to live in a free country and then maybe some of the evils in my life will correct themselvesò (WRCG I0) The sources of his turmoil are both political and social; disillusioned, he wishes according to Uledi-Kamanga,ñto distance himself from both people and politicsò (29). It explains why in the ñworst tribal country in the worldò (WRCG I0), where the community takes precedence over the individual, Makhaya feels alienated. It is only later that he will partially recognize in the words of Abrahams that ñthe past cannot be escaped, that the tyranny of the place South Africa will haunt him and turn his Botswana exile into óan illusion of freedomôò (137).

Makhayaôs search for ease from his existential issues is not an easy quest, because he has to abandon the absolutes he learned in South Africa and change his ówildô and brutal attitude for a softer one. In addition to this hard task, he must also adapt to a very different kind of life. He must get used to the transition between a free country and one in which apartheid exists and between an urban and a rural society. Makhaya arrives in Botswana with modern ideas and prejudices about the country and thinks, like Gilbert, that he can change people overnight. Makhayaôs main reproach of

Botswana is its tribalist system, and his obstinacy in seeing only disadvantages, prevents him from seeing how this type of political organization can help him attain inner peace. Therefore, at the beginning of the novel, tribalism alienates him and threatens his psychic freedom.

When Rain Clouds Gather depicts a tribal structure that alienates al1 but its leader. At the beginning of the novel, Makhayaôs adopted position on the matter is clear, ñ... he laughed sarcastically at the thought of calling himself a Zulu .... But look here, old man. Iôm no tribalist ... 1 have a list of grievances against the tribeò (WRCG 9). Later in the novel, this list is revealed to us. The first criticism is about the position held by women of the tribe, ñThe ancestors made many errors and one of the most bitter making things was that they relegated to men a superior position in the tribe, while women were regarded, in a congenital sense, as being an inferior form of human life. To this day, women still suffered from all the calamities that befall an inferior form of human lifeò (WRCG 92). Makhaya rejects the ancestral attitude to women. He believes in gender equality and at his fatherôs death he puts his personal belief into practice as, ñhe made many changes in the home, foremost of which was that his sisters should address him by his first name and associate with him as equals and friendsò (WRCG 15). Also, he is unashamed to do what is called ñwomanôs workò; he, for example, lights the fire and makes tea. At first, Makhaya feels alienated because, as he says to Gilbert, he is trying ñto run into óa wife and childrenô but he cannot imagine that in a tribal community like Golema Mmidi, there exists a woman, when married who will still have a life of her ownò (WRCG 32). To attain psychic freedom, Makhaya will have to stop focusing solely on the negative aspects of his social environment.

Makhayaôs second criticism about tribalism is the all-powerful position held by tribal chiefs. The village of Golema Mmidi is ruled by chief Matenge, an avaricious and unpopular leader. His power is nevertheless limited because he must defer to his elder brother, paramount chief Sekoto. Sekoto is described as a ñvery charming man with three great loves: fast cars, good food and pretty girlsò (WRGC 49). He is a good man insofar as he does not abuse his power, which is one reason for his popularity among the villagers. However, a paramount chief is a parasite for the people, and because Sekoto is a chief, ñhe lives off the slave labour of the poor. His lands are ploughed free of charge by the poor. He is washed, bathed, and fed on the poor, in return for which he handed out old clothes and maize rationsò (WRCG 24).

Sekoto and Matenge hate each other, and the war that exists between the two brothers prevents the villagers from suffering too much from Matengeôs evil. But on the other hand, both chiefs use the villagers as a means to destroy each other, thus alienating specific individuals. In the first place, Matenge transferred his hate on Dinorego, ñwho had refused to sit on his advisory councilò (WRCG 45). Then he turned his hatred on Gilbert Balfour, who soon becomes the scapegoat of the two brothers. Sekoto is much afraid of Gilbertôs ideas to uplift the poor; therefore, he sends him to Golema Mmidi with the hope that Matenge will destroy him. On the other hand, Sekoto will also be satisfied if it is Gilbert who destroys Matenge. Sekoto and Matenge epitomize well the rigidities of tribalism. Both chiefs are selfish and self-centred and their only concern is to keep their powerful and privileged positions, thus threatening the well-being and freedom of some of their subjects.

Gilbert is the character who suffers most from tribal practices. He is the foreigner who believes in progress and development in a traditional village where

people are quite pleased with their way of life and are particularly suspicious of everything new. Gilbert, like Makhaya, is also looking for his own peace of mind, and his quest brought him to Botswana, where he believes he can find psychological equilibrium. Gilbert has an optimistic view of life and wants to work hard for the good of humanity. He was dissatisfied with life in England, and, in order to find his inner peace, he had to leave, ñIôm running away from England. You know what Englandôs like? Itôs full of nice, orderly queues, and everybody lines up in these queues for a place and position in the world. 1 let al1 that go hang and hopped outò (WRCG 32). Gilbert finds his stability in hard work, humility and helping people. In England, he could not feel free because of the hypocritical mentality of the upper middle class, from which he comes (WRCG 102). His quest, like Makhayaôs, is not an easy one. Sekoto and Matenge keep turning his projects down and because he is a foreigner, the community is suspicious of him. His experiences in Golema Mmidi have been a mixture of frustrations and victories.

When Gilbert arrives for the first time in Golema Mmidi, he has two challenges: getting the villagers on his side so that they can put into practice his ideas of development and overcoming Matengeôs opposition to his projects. Matenge is the symbol of anti progress; he is afraid to lose his powerful position and its advantages; therefore, he must by al1 means keep the people poor and uneducated. According to Dinorego, ñPeople have long been ready to try out new ideas, but everything was delayed because of the fight that was going on between chief Matenge and Gilbertò (WRCG 26). But everything is not that simple to Gilbert, who knows that centuries of habits, beliefs and superstitions are hard to change, thus:

> ...three years of uphill battling had already made clear to him his own limitations in putting his ideas across to people, and he had also learned that change, if it was to take place at all, would in some way have to follow the natural course of peopleôs lives rather than impose itself in a sudden and dramatic way from the top. He hadnôt the kind of personality that could handle people, because everything in him was submerged to the work he was doing. He lacked sympathy, patience and understanding. *(*WRCG 30)

Gilbert met his first difficulty when he misunderstands the complexity of the land tenure system. Chief Sekoto allowed him to fence the land, but Matenge and the villagers took it as an offence. He also had to fight racial and class prejudices evident in peopleôs eating habits, ñ...certain minority tribes, traditionally considered inferior, had long had a liking for millet and had always grown it as part of the seasonôs crops. Therefore, other tribes who considered themselves superior would not grow it nor eat it (WRGC 41). Gilbert also denounced the ócattle-post traditionô, in which men as well as young boys live in isolated lonely conditions, when agriculture could have provided them better living conditions.

In spite of al1 the difficulties he encounters, Gilbert never gives up and his tenacity brings him small victories which finally lead him to the end of his journey. Gilbert lives in Golema Mmidi three years before he begins to appreciate the results of his experimental farming. He has a hard time trying to adjust himself and his ideas to the people, but he turns some traditional habits to his advantage. He understands that the agricultural revolution ñwould depend in the long run on the women of the countryò (WRCG 43). Women are the backbone of agriculture and are on the land

every day of the year, while men ñshuttle to and fro with the cattleò (WRCG 43). It is therefore necessary for Gilbert to instruct women with the help of ñsomeone with the necessary mental and emotional alienation from tribalismò like Makhaya (WRCG 30). Gilbertôs quest starts and ends in Golema Mmidi, and the name of the village is the proof of his agricultural success. Usually, villages are named after important chiefs or events. Golema Mmidi means óto grow cropsô. Here the name of the village is judicious and symbolic; it calls for a change in tradition.

Agriculture means two important modifications: the replacement of tribal migration with permanent settlements, which will result in changes to family life, and provide more than the bare necessities, even profit with tobacco export. Also it forecasts a change in womenôs social standing, for it promises to offer them more power through economic independence. By the end of the novel, by showing concrete results to the returning husbands, Gilbert manages to change some aspects of the traditionalist mentality. Gilbertôs work in the village is not finished, but the hardest part has been accomplished. His inner peace is no more threatened by the fear of failure.

Gilbert finds wholeness not only in the success of his work, but also in his personal love life. Once again, Gilbert had to be very patient and his wedding with Maria at the end marks another step in his quest. Maria has agreed to marry Gilbert only after she has completed her education. Gilbert teaches her English in exchange for Tswana lessons. His love for Maria and her promise help him in his quest and keep his hopes and dreams intact. His marriage brings him real stability; he is no longer a stranger and possesses the same rights as any villager. This confers confidence, an asset for his humanitarian work. Gilbert finds freedom and lively

existence more easily than Makhaya, because he is untroubled by inner torment. Gilbert is a very down-to-earth person and his only aim in life is to be useful to his fellow men (WRCG 81). Therefore, he spontaneously helps people in need without asking any questions or without wondering whether the person is untrustworthy. Unlike Makhayaôs, Gilbertôs background contains ñinnocence and a lack of understanding evilò (WRCG 97).

To find his peace of mind, Makhaya must leave aside his feelings of hate and regain his innocence and his natural goodness as Dinorego ñfelt in Makhayaôs attitude and utterances a horror of life, and it was as though he was trying to flee this horror and replace it with innocence, trust, and respectò (WRCG 97). Makhaya needs time and the right environment to be able to feel and express love, and, being in Golema Mmidi is exactly what he needs. Gilbertôs farming cooperative also makes Makhaya realize, for example, how ironic it is to use dynamite to kill people while it could be used to save hundreds of them. In Golema Mmidi, he uses dynamite to make dams that will bring water to the village, while ñnot so very long ago, he had come out of jail for wanting to use this very dynamite against the enemies of human dignityò (WRCG 137).

In Golema Mmidi, violence and hatred become unnecessary, because it is believed that evil destroys itself. Dinorego explains to Makhaya, ñin this country there is a great tolerance of evil. It is because of death that we tolerate evil. Al1 meet death in the end and because of death we make allowance for evil though we do not like itò (WRCG 27). Matengeôs sudden death is another lesson not only for Makhayaôs understanding of his own alienation from the more humane parts of his nature, but also one more step towards its healing. Angry at Matenge, he seriously wishes to kill

him. Again, the irony comes with Makhayaôs cutting down Matengeôs body from the rafter after his suicide:

> The God with no shoes, with his queer, inverted reasoning, had brought Makhaya, a real and potential murderer, face to face with the body of Matenge just hanging there and hanging there. óDonôt you see?ô he said softly. óMurder is small-minded businessô (WRCG 186).

This final event is another lesson for Makhaya and it modifies his radical thinking. Makhaya has just witnessed the importance of the community, which is one positive aspect of tribalism. What causes Matengeôs death is the pacifist attitude of the whole community. Al1 the villagers find themselves at the village centre and, ñthey were at last of the same mindò (WRCG 176) and ñMatenge had to barricade himself up, not because the villagers were about to rise up and tear him to shreds, but because he was an evil pervert and knew itò (WRCG 177).

At first, Makhaya sees only the disadvantages of tribalism, and for him the community is synonymous with the oppression of the individual. Because Makhaya is looking for freedom, the last thing he wants in Botswana is to be oppressed. In Golema Mmidi he learns that to belong to a community is a need every individual feels and that belonging does not enslave people, when it is based on respect for one another. In fact, it is the essential link missing in Makhayaôs life. For a lonely refugee, a stateless person like Makhaya, it is at last the feeling of belonging and the end of the journey, and what Makhayaôs heart calls at the beginning, a ñhomeò (WRCG 17). Makhaya finally comes to term with his society (WRCG164). He finds in Golema Mmidi the perfect community which suits his needs. He accepts life in this locality

because it is not an ordinary one as, ñthere were too many independent-minded people there, and tragedies of life had liberated them from the environmental control of the tribeò (WRGC145). Throughout the novel, the little village is described as if it was a promised land and symbolises the end of Makhayaôs journey.

According to Makhaya, Golema Mmidi is ña whole new, astonishing worldò (35); it ñseems a dream he had evoked out of his consciousness to help him live, to help make life tolerableò (WRCG137). Golema Mmidi has the advantage of being a community where people are respectful of one another, strangers are well integrated and progress is acceptable when it is for the good of the people.

A cardinal trait of Golema Mmidiôs community is itôs sharing, both material and spiritual. To belong to the community, Makhaya must accept to open himself to the people and sacrifice some of his freedom in order to gain happiness and peace of mind. When he left South Africa, Makhayaôs main objective was to find freedom at all cost, but now, ñit wasnôt a new freedom that he silently worked towards but a putting together of the scattered fragments of his life into a coherent and disciplined wholeò (122). To achieve this, he is ready to try and involve himself, physically at first with agriculture, then emotionally with some of the communityôs residents. Makhaya is afraid of any relationship, because life in South Africa had conditioned him not to trust anyone because betrayal was never far away. Therefore, at the beginning, he is afraid to become emotionally involved with others, because he fears pain and betrayal. However, it is human generosity that he is looking for; it is what ñmakes life seem sane to himò (61), and to fully appreciate it, he must also implicate himself. At first he is reticent with people like George Appleby-Smith who are kind to him or people who wish to know him better, like Paulina or Mma-Millipede. But

Makhaya soon discovers the human generosity of the people of the community, and he is at first repelled by it because, ñit meant that if you loved people you had to allow a complete invasion by them of your life, and he wasnôt built to face invasions of any kindò (WRCG 71). Makhaya nevertheless wishes he could put an end to his painful isolation and return some of this generosity. But to do so, he needs ñto undo the complexity of hatred and humiliation that had dominated his life for so longò (WRCG 71).

Makhayaôs alienation from his emotions is too strong to be resolved immediately. Moreover, he is unable to replace his hatred with goodness all at once and by himself. In this regard he needs to be guided, and Mma-Millipede will be his teacher throughout the novel. Mma-Millipede has been a victim of the crude and brutal power that Bessie Head criticizes in all her novels. She was initially forced into an unwanted marriage with a chiefôs son, Ramogodi, whom the author describes as ña drunkard and dissipated boasterò (WRCG 68). Eventually she is divorced by the same Ramogodi, who soon falls in love with his younger brotherôs new wife and marries her after the offended brother hangs himself.

Through her own resourcefulness, she settles down to a new life in Golema Mmidi. Her early exposure to some amount of missionary education has also had an impact on her personality:

> Perhaps Mma-Millipede was one of those rare individuals with a distinct personality at birth. In any event, she was able to grasp the religion of the missionaries and use its message to adorn and enrich her own originality of thought and expand the natural kindness of her heart (WRCG 68)

Mma-Millipede emerges from her harrowing experience wiser and more generous. Her kindness and concern for everybody soon make her the mother of all. She watches, counsels the young, and participates in their problems. Makhaya is the greatest beneficiary of the old womanôs wisdom and love. Makhaya has a natural predisposition to attain authenticity for, unlike Matenge, ñhe has the sun inside him al1 the timeò (WRCG 65), and he ñunderstands anything that appealed to his generosity because in the depths of him, he is a lover of his fellowmenò (WRCG 130). Mma-Millipedeôs attitude towards him is that of a mother, and her kindness ñseems like mountains of affection for the lonely Makhayaò (WRCG 71).

But Makhaya is looking for answers about ñhow to live well and sanelyò (WRCG 71), and Mma-Millipede tries her best to help him. She has never encountered so much hatred and agony in a person, and at first, she is herself ñuncertain if there is anything in her own life with which to counter this hatredò (WRCG 129). Mma-Millipede knows that Makhaya is looking for answers about goodness to counteract his hatred, and at first, she thinks she can help him by repeating what she has read in the Bible. But what Makhaya needs is the ñdirect people-caring,ò and he believes that ñpeople could do without religions and Godsò (WRCG 134). Mma-Millipede consequently guides Makhaya ñwithout referring to the Bibleò (WRCG 13 1); she draws on her own understanding of the Bible, her own feelings and experiences to guide him. One of the most important messages she reveals to him is that ñgenerosity of mind and sou1is realò (WRCG 132). Makhaya, with this, ñtreasure in his pocket, is able to catch hold of an invisible thread of Mma-Miliipedeôs life and attach it to his own, thus transforming his loneliness into togethernessò (WRCG 132). Mma-Millipede ñrelieves Makhayaôs heart of much of its

ashes, frustrations, and griefò (WRCG 126) and puts him on the road to peace of mind. In Botswana, away from the tumult of South Africa, he can hear and listen to the inner voice of his heart which:

> ...keeps telling you that your way is right for you, that the process of rising up from darkness is an intensely personal and private one, and that if you can find a society that leaves the individual to develop freely you ought to choose that society as your home (WRCG 80).

In Golema-Mmidi, Makhaya finds such a community and no longer needs to put all his energy into fighting for his individuality. Consequently, this new freedom allows him to open himself to the people around him and to begin to work for the good of humankind. Makhaya is now ready to turn towards people for his salvation. He realizes that:

> People are the central part of the universe of Africa**,** and the world stood still because of this ... He feels, too, that al1 the tensions, jealousies, frustrations, and endless petty bickering which make up the sum total of al1 human relationships were in reality unnecessary *(*WRCG135).

In fact, this belief is necessary to his own survival, and in order to keep it alive, he ñcombines the good in Gilbert with the good in his own societyò (WRCG 135). Makhaya discovers the importance of dependable friendships and the vital need to believe in people. He chooses his place in the society and wants to stay among the poor ordinary people (WRCG 171). He now sees in poverty and tribalism a way of life that suits him and makes him feel peaceful, ñthe poverty and tribalism of Africa were a blessing if people could develop sharing everything with each otherò (WRCG

156). In Golema Mmidi, people are already working to create such a world and this revolution also belongs ñto young people like Gilbert and Makhayaò (WRCG 180). Makhaya finally understands Mma-Millipedeôs words about brotherhood. In a community where people are respectful of one another, ñyou looked on the other man as your brother, you could not bear that he should want for anything or live in darknessò (WRCG 180).

In him, we observe Bessie Headôs belief that man contains his own divinity and therefore people should treat one another as gods. Makhaya expresses this idea for the first time to Paulina, ñ...sometimes I think I am Godò (WRCG 143), and he believes that everyone has a god inside and that peopleôs lives depend on their capacity to listen to the voices of their own god. In Makhayaôs case, his god made him take ña long and perilous journey along a road where everyone threw things at you. Then he said you were small-minded if you wanted to throw things backò (WRCG 186). At Matengeôs death, Makhaya knows that another oppressor wil1 come and that he would probably wish to kill him too. But Makhaya undergoes a transformation, for he not only attains his peace, he also learns how to listen to his inner god.

At the end of the novel, Makhaya finally trusts himself and he knows that his god ñwould so much entangle this stupid young man with marriage and babies and children that he would always have to think not twice but several hundred times, before he came to knocking anyone downò (WRCG 187). Makhaya is now at peace and to find happiness, he needs a woman who will ñeasily become a part of his inner harmony and peaceò (WRCG33). His marriage proposal to Paulina marks the concrete end of his journey as:

> ... he had rejected in his mind and heart a world full of ailments and faults. He had run and run away from it, but now the time had come when he could run and hide no longer and would have to turn round and face al1 that he had run away from. Loving one woman had brought him to this realization: that it was only people who could bring the real rewards of living, that it was only people who give love and happiness (WRCG 163).

The final union of this impetuous woman with the reserved Makhaya marks the end of the refugeeôs morbid speculations on the oppressors and the oppressed and his journey towards self discovery, peace and happiness.

When Rain Clouds Gather is Bessie Headôs first attempt at exploring the personal quest. In this novel, Bessie Head merely suggests her ideasð the anthropomorphic view of god and the precarious balance of good and evil in every individualð without going further in her reflection. In *Maru* and *A Question of Power,* she extends her exploration of these ideas. Makhayaôs story is very optimistic. The happiness he finds at the end is to some extent naive and reminiscent of fairy tales. Bessie Headôs second novel *Maru* is probably her attempt to nuance this optimistic vision. The quest for mental stability is essential but not found so easily.

4:3 Permanent Madness of Reality under Apartheid: The Khosain of Southern Africa

With all of Headôs South African experience, she longed to write an enduring novel on the hideousness of racial prejudice. But she also wanted the book to be, ñso beautiful and so magical that I, as a writer, would long to read and re-read itò (14). She achieved that in *Maru. Maru* is an intensely moral idealist novel providing a site

for literary resistance to a culturally and ethnically engendered stereotypism. Head makes Margaret, the protagonist of *Maru*, the victim of such prejudices. By definition, ñMasarwa is the equivalent of ónigger;ô it is a contemptuous term and means, obliquely, a low filthy nationò (*Maru* 12). Masarwas are the most downtrodden and despised of black people; they are even reduced to the status of non-human beings. They are at the bottom of the óhierarchyô, as Headôs narrator describes it:

> ... if the white man thought that Asians were a low, filthy nation, Asians could still smile with relief - at least, they were not Africans. And if the white man thought Africans were a low, filthy nation, Africans in Southern Africa could still smile - at least, they were not Bushmen (*Maru* 10-11).

The novelôs internal logic suggests that the mass of the Sans people stereotyping is an unfortunate yet significant part of the larger cultureôs own perverse sense of collective self and nation drummed into what Sander Gilman has described as the primitive ñillusionary image of the world divided into two camps, óus and themôò(2). In part one of the novel Head talks about what she describes as ñthe white manôs mental outlookò (*Maru* 10-11). Here difference is constructed as an identity. Identity based on difference, quite often in many cultures and society, is seen or represented as justification for the oppression and exclusion of the members of the various systems of differenceð racial, ethnic, and sexual, minorities, women etc. The question that arises is, why is difference based on identity reason for oppression and humiliation? The answer lies beyond the bounds of the Masarwa world, and judging from the universal tone of the novel, and also beyond the bounds of any one nation or racial community. Instead, the answer seems to lie in understanding the fundamental

nature of human material consciousness, particularly, the material consciousness of óselfô in relationship to óOtherô.

For answers to what Head describes as ñthe white manôs mental outlook,ò we turn to Hegel. Hegel sees human consciousness as operating in a divided arena. On the one hand, you have the transcendent or observing ego; on the other, is the fixed self or the observed ego. Sartre renames this divided consciousness as pour-soi and en-soi. Hegel and Sartre contend that the two sides are in a perpetual dialectic, asserting that the transcendent ego (pour-soi) attempts to move beyond the fixed ego (the en-soi), but at the same time needs the en-soi as an object against which to measure or define itself. Hegel insists that self-consciousness forever needs or desires other people to prove or validate its existence, if only by the negative proof that it is not the other consciousness. Hence this affirmation-denial takes the form of master-slave relationship, the master seeing the existence of the slave as the veritable truth of his certainty of himself.

Weighing in on the issue, Martin Heidegger posits two kinds of existence between which the self (Dasein) is in perpetual tension. The one existence he identifies as the object-level existenceð existence as an object, living in an alienated, reified mode of existence. The other is existence as projective, creative and transcending subjectð existence as subject. He adds that to live on the object - level of existence, óthe they-selfô is to live in an inauthentic mode. It is to conform to the dictatorship of the ñtheyò, a conformity which annihilates its own sense of self, authentic individuality in the public sphere. On the other hand, Heidegger argues that to live on the subject-level of existence is to live in an authentic mode with a supreme, sometimes narcissistic sense of oneôs self. It is a self which has individualized itself

from the general crowd, which has achieved self-actualization through the paraphernalia of the authentic mode. It is a self which, for all intents and purposes, has achieved conscience. In the words of John MacQuarrie,ñconscienceò for Heidegger is, precisely the disclosure to someone of what he ought to be, of his authentic selfò (32).

For Jean-Paul Sartre, the self exists in a dyad- the pour-soi (for-itself) and the en-soi (in-itself). The one is the imperial ego, eternally self-projective, self-creative and self-evolving, refusing to be fixed or stereotyped; the other is the static, stock persona, the reified, contingent, immanent object-self, a false construction of the one. In order to constitute itself as a subject, pour-soi must cast the Other as object. ñIt is by the very fact of being that I exclude the Other. The Other is the one who excludes me by being himself, the one whom I exclude by being myselfò (212). Sartre views the dyad also in a perpetual agon. The only way, Sartre argues that the en-soi can attain significance is that it too must get out of the reified status into the process of becoming. It is this participation in Josephine Donovanôs opinion in the agonistic process that constitutes human freedom, human liberation.

Using the Hegel- Heidegger- Sartre trichotomy as a point of departure, the researcher argues that Headôs *Maru*, on one hand, is the story of one womanôs quest for conscience, conscience here understood as the deliberate process of discovering her true authentic self. But on another level, it is the story of the Masarwa who must rise from immanence and the inauthentic pit-holes of das Man and find themselves once again reopened to the possibility of collective self-authentication. The inland village of Dilepe is the heartland of the Totems, the village nobility. As the members of nobility, the Totems are the lords of the socially stratified Dilepe as a microcosm of

the larger Botswana society. Most of them keep the San people (the so called Masarwa) as slaves in their household. Social stratification in Dilepe has a discernible tripartite structure. At the top are the Totems themselves, those transcendent egos, eternally self- projective pour-soi, who have taken it upon themselves to cast everyone else as Other. At the bottom of the social stratification is the tribe of the Masarwa or Bushmen who bear the full brunt of Botswana societyôs exclusionary politics. The Masarwas as well as the half-breeds share this status in Botswana.

The protagonist, Margaret Cadmore from the time she was a child up till her adulthood, has been tortured with persistent reminders that she is an en-soi, a Bushman, a mixed breed or a low breed. Margaret faces an identity problem that goes back to her childhood. Her adoption by Margaret Cadmore senior, the wife of the English missionary George Cadmore, did not erase the fact that she belongs to the Masarwa nation, and beginning with her attendance at the mission school, people and children never cease to torture her. She quickly takes on the role of the victim and keeps that role all her life. She is a Bushman and therefore ñhas no weapon of words or personality, only a permanent silence and a face which revealed no emotionò (*Maru* 17). Margaret does not understand her persecutors, especially when in their minds the word Bushman means so much while in hers it does not. This word is also very important to Margaret Cadmore senior who burdens Margaret with the task of helping her people one day (*Maru* 17). Margaretôs persecutors forced her into an ethnic group while in her heart, ñshe was a little bit of everything in the whole universe, because the woman who had educated her was the universe itselfò (*Maru* 20). ñIt was hardly African or anything but something new and universal, a type of

personality that would be unable to fit into a definition of something as narrow as tribe or race or nationò (*Maru* 16).

And yet she knows full well that she inherited a saviour role, one that would lead her people from the status of the reified en-soi to the transcendent position of the pour-soi. Once uttered, it has created a purpose in her young mind. But Margaret, in order to fulfil that salvational role for herself and her people, must get out of the reified status into the process of becoming. Being trained as a teacher and being deployed to a teaching post is the first toddler step towards that process of becoming.

When Margaret arrives in Dilepe, there is instant internal disquiet, a commotion of sorts. Although everybody recognizes the fact that she has an impeccable record as a budding intellectual, yet her entry causes a stir, all due to the fact of her identity, her ethnicity. Here Bessie Head reminds us that the secret of identity is not only that of sex as Michel Foucault opines in *The Secret of Sexuality* but also the secret of ethnicity and race. The reason for the disquiet that follows in the wake of Margaretôs arrival in Dilepe is that her entry into the stronghold of the Totems is about to dislodge the age-long infamous binary tradition of ñusò versus ñthem.ò We are told that:

> In Botswana they say Zebra, Lions, Buffalo and Bushmen live in the Kalahari Desert. If you can catch a Zebra, you can walk up to it, forcefully open its mouth and examine its teeth. The Zebra is not supposed to mind because it is an animal (*Maru* 11).

Comparing the San people to animals is part of the dominant cultureôs calculated attempt to deny them their basic humanity. And Margaretôs entry into Dilepe is Bessie Headôs own way of helping the San people reclaim their humanity

and subjectivity, and for Margaret, fulfil part of her salvational role. In Botswana, the Totems and their kind are presumed to be the normal human subjects, while the Masarwa, because of their association with beasts, are seen as biological curiosities. In fact, Head goes one step further and suggests that these perceived differences are invested with hierarchical meanings, with the Totems and their kind occupying the imperial position of master and transcendent egos, and the Masarwa, that of slave and immanent object-selves. Head further demonstrates not only the folly and inanity of such categorization, but also that it exacts a heavy political cost on the Masarwa as it justifies a social order that ensures that the Totems and the their kind as insiders are kept in and the Masarwa as outsiders are locked out.

Thus when one of their privileged own, Maru, heir to the traditional throne of Dilepe, jumps ship, Head appears to have created Margaret Cadmore with the sole purpose of interrogating the Botswana societyôs binary racial paradigm, the Batswana racialism as the authorised discourse of knowledge and the parallel concepts of Bantu purity, health and pathology as the dominant paradigms of this kind of demented knowledge. The result is that as Maru sets his seductive eyes on the young, beautiful Margaret, we begin to see the first crack in that amorphous, nefarious paradigm. We begin to see the first flicker of hope that, maybe, the exclusionary politics of Dilepe, as a microcosm of the larger Botswana society, is beginning to falter. By allowing Maru to fall in love with Margaret, Head appears to reject the iniquitous propensity of the Totems to normalise at will certain identities (their own) and categorize others (the Masarwa/Bushmen) as signs of pathology and degeneracy. Maruôs renunciation of his high privileged position to marry Margaret, an act that stuns the villagers, represents an outgrowth/ingrowth of his encounter with the noumenal world, the realm of the

gods. As a beyonder, the gods are constantly speaking to his heart and reminding him that he need not be like his fellow Batswana trapped behind the prison gate of prejudice. Maru knows full well ótha t some blot of human wrong had to happen to force him to identify himself with the many wrongs of mankindô (*Maru*, 8). The gods constantly admonish him to ñdo things outside any narrow enclosure or social orderò (*Maru*, 109).

From the outset, Margaret is cast as an outsider, in keeping with the exclusionary politics in Dilepe with respect to the status of the en-soi which she and her people are forced to live and endure on a daily basis not only in Dilepe but also in the whole of Botswana society. Earlier on readers have had a bitter taste of the typical tragic life of a Masarwa, the inherited wretched life of degradation and debasement, in the heart-wrenching story of Magaretôs biological mother at the hospital. The occasion is the death of her San mother at the outskirts of a remote village following the birth of Margaret. In keeping with the fate of the Masarwa in this society, her motherôs corpse is virtually ignored after it was brought into the hospital ward. Apparently, no one wants to have anything to do with it, once they learn that she is a Masarwa. Subsequently, the missionaries are called in to handle her corpse. The person upon whose shoulders the responsibility of planning the funeral rests is no other than Margaret Cadmore, the wife of the English missionary, George Cadmore. By naming Margaret after herself and by putting her through school, Mrs Cadmore reclaims her humanity and significance selfhood. Thomas Szasz describes the treatment meted out by the so called ñgood normal folksò on to those marginal folks as ñexistential cannibalism,ò and ends by asking a very poignant and weighty question, ñCan we create meaning for our lives without demeaning the lives of

others?ò(287) In a similar vein, Cadmore senior sees very clearly the existential cannibalism of the hospital supervisor, and especially the nurses, their coldness and soullessness in shoving the unwashed dead womanôs body in the small back room where the slop pails are kept. In an angry, thunderous voice and fit of conscience, she orders the nurses to wash the dead womanôs body immediately. And later in a reflective, somewhat plaintive monologue with her husband she laments, ñI wonder where these people are buried? They donôt seem to be at all a part of the life of this countryò (*Maru*, 13). Additionally Bessie Head tells us, ñshe took in also the hatred of the fortunate and that if they hated even a dead body how much more did they hate those of the womanôs tribe who were still alive.ò (*Maru*, 15) The truth, Head reminds us, is that what operates in Dilepe and the larger society is oppression, pure and simple. A visitor can see it; a sojourner can discern it. Anne Bishop agrees with Bessie Head when she concludes in her book by saying that ñpower over class and hierarchy are fundamental components of all oppressionò (7). They constitute the basic class structure in which all other forms of oppression operate.

In the novel, the most egregious example of this power-over is Pete, the principal of the Dilepe school, where Margaret has been assigned. He is the most perturbed by her presence. Almost to the point of having a nervous breakdown, Pete frets about, unable to conceal his intense displeasure that a Masarwa has been sent to his school. He requests a meeting with Seth:

> Thereôs been some chicanery... I have a Masarwa on my staff. Seth replies: They [the Totems] going to blame me... I only look at qualifications. She was

> top of the class the whole way through. How the hell did she get in? God, Pete, this is a mess. (*Maru*,41)

Margaret longs for a peaceful job and life, and she is naive enough to believe that she will have both in Dilepe. She spends the three-hour journey to the village mentally shopping and she is amazed at the kindness of the driver who tells her not to be afraid of the world, because people cannot harm her (*Maru* 22). The truth is that she ought to be afraid, because people have the right to oppress her and they can choose to be kind or wicked. The driver is probably respectful to her as she is a school teacher and he is unaware that she is a Bushman. Luckily for Margaret, the first person in Dilepe to whom she confides her Masarwa origin is Dikeledi, a quiet but ñdrastic revolutionaryò (*Maru,* 25)**,** who finally approves Margaretôs decision about revealing her identity. Margaret is unable to lie and, for her own sake and sanity, it is better for her to reveal her real identity. But she fails to understand the complexity of the problem. When Dikeledi asks Margaret not to tell anyone that she is a Masarwa and to pretend that she is a coloured, Margaret answers that she has nothing to be ashamed of (*Maru,* 24). It is not so much the shame Dikeledi has in mind, but the trouble this revelation will cause in the village and, ñit wasnôt for her own sake either that Dikeledi drew in a sharp, hissing breathò (*Maru*, 25).

Margaret eventually understands the situation when she endures the cruelty of the schoolôs principal, Pete. In *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* cited earlier by Gilman, Pete is a perfect example of what she calls the pathological personality. But it is too late and she must receive the blows without, surprisingly, having been prepared. When Moleka asks for the bed he lent her on her

arrival, she now realises that she can lose her job and be driven out of the village. (*Maru* 61) Her existence as well as her life is endangered and her salvation is now in the hands of the people around her. Bessie Head depicts her as an eternal victim, who is always fated to be saved.

Many have suffered and died because negative images of their people were established in the institutions with the power to imprison, kill, forcefully hospitalize, take jobs and homes away and separate people who love one another. The best example in the novel of both stereotyping and ideological power is the obnoxious behaviour of Margaretôs students in the classroom. Words had spread quickly round that a Masarwa teacher has been assigned to the LeSeding school. So the pupils, who obviously have learned the stereotypes of the San people from their parents, have come to class ready to insult Margaret with their virulence and obnoxious demeanour. No sooner had Margaret walked into the classroom than the assault began. The principal Pete had engineered and stage-managed the whole freak show:

> But as she closed the door and walked to the table to call the roll, a deathly silence fell upon the children. She looked up. A boy at the far end of the room had his hand raised. She knew there was something wrong... Now they all stared at her with fascination and attention. A cold sweat broke out, down her back.
>
> ñYes?ò She asked, unsmiling.
>
> The boy shook his head and laughed to himself. ñI am thinking about a certain matter,ò he said.

Then he looked directly into her face with an insolent stare: ñTell me,ò he said, ñSince when is a Bushy a teacher?ò

> The room heaved a little and the whole room of children blanked out before her. Yet she still stood upright with wide open eyes. From a distance their voices sounded like a confused roar: ñYou are a Bushman,ò they chanted. ñYou are a Bushman.ò (*Maru*, 45-46)

> The assault continues unabated until Dikeledi, her mentor, comes flying into Margaretôs classroom, and in a rage that sounds like the clap of thunder, she curses at the pupils: ñStop it! Stop it! Iôll smash you all to pieces! She is your teacher! She is your teacher!ò (*Maru,* 46)

Dikeledi, in doing so, interferes with Peteôs well-prepared plan. Then the teachers of the senior classes seize this opportunity to pull out ótheir back-stabbing knivesô and ridicule the principal for his failed attempt against Margaret. However, what really helps Margaret is public opinion. The next day, the people of the village notice that the ñnew mistress has dignity and respect for everyone.ò (*Maru*, 51) The villagers then swallow the shock about Margaret being a Bushman and begin debating the matter, ñthey were trying to accustom their hearts to their children being taught by a Masarwa.ò(*Maru,* 53)

Molekaôs reaction to Margaretôs presence as a teacher is on the contrary, very clumsy and unhelpful to Margaret. He invites al1 his Masarwa slaves to sit with him at his table and shares a plate of food and a fork with one of them. Because he is of royal blood, Molekaôs conduct frightens the villagers, for, if they are ready to make a concession to one Masarwa, they are not ready to do the same to al1 the Masarwas.

Maru quickly understands the situation and adopts another strategy, one that includes patience, lies and witchcraft.

Maruôs first step is to placate public opinion and promote his own interest. Instead of improving the status of his Masarwa slaves, as Moleka does, he diminishes Margaretôs privileged position by asking her to return the bed she had borrowed. Meanwhile, he is ready to set off a number of ñbombsò in the village, ñsome would explode soon, some a little laterò (*Maru* 60). His first ñbombsò are to get rid of the people who can immediately harm Margaret, people like Pete, the principal; Seth, the education supervisor; and Morafi, Maruôs younger brother. To do so, Maru does not hesitate to use ñwitchcraftò, which is, in fact, to employ superstition to induce psychological fear and terror in peopleôs minds. Two of Maruôs men threaten Pete and Seth in the name of Tladi, an African demon. Pete and Seth are intelligent and they are well aware that Maru is behind al1 this but, ñthey only knew, as others before them had known, that somehow they were on his bad side and that life was not worth living if you were on the bad side of Maru. Heôd terrorize you into the graveò (*Maru* 92). The three men flee and Dikeledi becomes the principal of Leseding School. Margaret now has her life and job secured in the village. Her existence is no longer threatened by external factors; instead, her mental equilibrium is shaken by a powerful troubled inner life. When Margaret feels threatened it becomes obvious that she has a double personality:

> If anyone approached Margaret Cadmore, she slowly raised her hand as if to ward off a blow... She was a shadow behind which lived another personality of great vigour and vitality. She raised her hand to hide this second image from sight, but the two constantly tripped up

> each other... You were never sure whether she was greater than you, or inferior, because of this constant flux and inter-change between her two images (*Maru*,71).

One side of her personality results from her ethnicity. She has become so used to rejection that her weapon is to keep silent, because she has no power of any kind in the society. Therefore, she creates a mask to please society (an arrogant Marsawa would have only made things worse) and keeps her real personality secret. This public image has nevertheless been so firmly implanted in Margaretôs mind since her childhood that it has become an essential part of her. Margaretôs psyche is threatened by her difficulty in keeping the balance between these two conflicting forces which coexist in her. On one hand, consciously, and because she is forced to by society, she has to keep her image of the silent Masarwa. On the other hand, unconsciously, her repressed self and fecund inner life are fighting to annul this fake image.

At the beginning of the novel, Margaretôs mental equilibrium seems stable. The new life she is going to begin in Dilepe forces her to concentrate on external observation and on her role in this new community, thus, shadowing her inner life. Margaret is determined to keep her real identity as a Masarwa and this is probably what prevents her from going insane. She is naive insofar as she cannot lie to people and to herself, and this trait empowers her. The image she gives of herself to people has become natural and almost unconscious. Society has shaped Margaretôs outer temperament and made her discreet, shy, obedient and silent. On her arriva1 in Dilepe, she does not think of pretending to be a coloured, as Dikeledi suggests, because she is haunted by Margaret Cadmore seniorôs word, ñthey are wrong. You

will have to live with your appearance for the rest of your life. There is nothing you can do to change itò (*Maru*,18). Margaret does not have the necessary strength and personality to pretend to be someone else. She does not know how to be important and dignified. She is so amazed at the driverôs kindness that, ñshe cries one tearò (*Maru*, 22). However, this new situation does not last long for Margaret, and as soon as the whole community knows that she is a Masarwa, she finds herself again in the familiar role of the persecuted victim. Margaret reverts to the external kind of life she is used to. She isolates herself in her house at the top of the hill and observes the village life. She is not a part of the village and belongs nowhere (*Maru,*93). She neither asks nor hopes for anything and everything around her is quiet and harmonious.

Because she falls in love with Moleka, Margaret loses her alienating sense of isolation and finds a temporary peace of mind. The loneliness in her life is replaced by the pleasant feeling that someone cares for her:

> Moleka made her feel as though she were the most important person on earth, when no one ever really cared whether she was dead or alive, and she had been so lonely. The loneliness had disappeared like the mist before the warmth of a rising sun. ... She was really no longer lonely (*Maru,*30-31).

The village of Dilepe seems to Margaret ñthe most beautiful village on earthò because Moleka lives in it (*Maru* 31). Margaret feels that ñsomething has stabilized her,ò but this rationalization deludes her and she fails to see the precariousness of this stability (*Maru*,31).

Margaret has been trained by her foster-mother for a lonely life; Margaret Cadmore senior was herself a living example of someone who knew how to draw on her own inner strength (*Maru* 94). Margaretôs identity as a Masarwa and her childhood education also make her strong and powerful enough to face a tormented life. ñGood sense and logical argumentsò sum up what Margaret Cadmore senior mainly taught Margaret. The white woman knew nevertheless that they:

> ...would never be the sole solutions to the difficulties the child would later encounter, but they would create a dedicated scholar and enable the child to gain control over the only part of her life that would be hers, her mind and soul. She would have to take them and apply them to the experience gained in a hostile and cruel society. They would mean in the end that almost anything could be thrown into her mind and life and she would have the capacity, within herself, to survive both heaven and hell. (*Maru,* 16)

Love and friendship are two completely new feelings for Margaret. During childhood, she never felt the love of her foster-mother. According to her, Margaret Cadmore was ñan educator of childrenò, but also ña scientist in her heart with a lot of fond, pet theories, one of her favourite, sweeping theories being: environment everything; heredity nothingò *(Maru*,15). Therefore, Margaret always felt like the guinea pig of an important ñexperimentò led by her saviour, thus:

> The relationship between her and the woman was never that of a child and its mother. It was as though later she was a semi-servant in the house, yet at the same time treated as an equal, by being given things servants donôt usually get: kisses on the cheeks and toes at bedtime, a

> bedtime story, long walks into the bush to observe the behaviour through binoculars of birds; and lots of reading material (*Maru*,16-17).

Margaret Cadmore senior treated Margaret like a human being, but she never showed her any real feelings, as the scene of her departure demonstrates, ñThe old white-haired lady was retiring to England.... She came in a car with pretty floral dresses and a pair of white shoes and practical last minute advice... The old plump lady pretended to cry, dabbing at dry eyes with a dry handkerchiefò (*Maru,* 19). Having always been treated by the people around her as if she were an animal or a thing; Margaret experiences for the first time in Dilepe the joy of having and receiving human feelings. But the discovery of her own feelings will threaten Margaretôs existential wholeness.

She experiences for the first time the joy and the torment engendered by real friendship. Margaret and Dikeledi have both two very different, even opposed, attitudes and personalities and this is probably what helps to cement their friendship. Dikelediôs physical appearance is first of al1 in sharp contrast with Margaretôs, for, ñshe has a long, thin delicate face, with a small mouth and is startling and unexpected in her elegance .... She has a way of looking at people with one quick, wide stare, then immediately looking away into a far-off distance as though she did not particularly want anything from life or peopleò (*Maru,* 23). Margaret, on the contrary, ñlooks half like a Chinese and half like an African and half God knows whatò (*Maru*, 23), and when she speaks to people she usually keeps her head bent (*Maru,* 47) and searches the ground with her eyes (*Maru,* 52). During their first encounter, Margaret is amazed at Dikelediôs ñimportanceò and the way people wait on her, hand and foot. It makes

Margaret uneasy because, ñShe canôt be what 1 think she is, an ordinary person like myselfò (*Maru,* 26). However, despite her social status, Dikeledi is kind toward and protective of Margaret. Dikeledi not only gives Margaret a place and a status in the community, judging by these saying, ñôthere goes the friend of Mistress Dikeled,ô She had no life outside those wordsò (*Maru*, 93). She also raises Margaretôs low self-esteem by treating her as an equal. Therefore, taken in this sense, Dikelediôs friendship is beneficial to Margaretôs existence as, ñMargaret grew in strength of purpose and personality ... perhaps Dikelediôs love...brought to the forefront the hidden and more powerful woman who dwelt behind the insignificant shadowò (*Maru,* 112).

Margaret is so used to loneliness and silence that she does not know how to communicate with people and knows even less how to talk about herself and her feelings. When people approach her, she keeps silent or answers faintly to the questions asked (*Maru* 27) or answers foolishly, as on the day Ranko talks to her and she replies she has lost her handbag while it is on her arm (*Maru*, 51). However, fear or anger makes Margaret bolder and causes her hidden personality to take over temporarily. When Moleka shows her the accommodation, she is so afraid of scorpions that she asks Moleka not to remove the table (*Maru,* 29). Also, after Dikeledi regains the control of her classroom, she talks, probably for the first time in her life, about what she really feels at this moment, thus relieving herself of a suppressed emotion. As the narrator puts it:

> ...before you came in, 1 thought 1 had a stick in my hands and was breaking their necks. 1 kept on thinking: How am 1 going to explain her death? 1

> thought 1 had killed a little girl in the front desk who laughed, because 1 clearly saw myself grab her and break her neck with a stick (*Maru,* 47).

The atmosphere between Margaret and Dikeledi ñis so relaxed,ò (*Maru,* 24), that Margaret has no difficulty putting her trust in her new friend and discloses in part what troubles her. Dikelediôs friendship reassures Margaret somewhat; there is someone to rely on in the event of danger.

The classroom scene illustrates the fact that, as with the Batswana society in which the shaping of stereotypes is more than a mere casual preoccupation, Dilepe in particular and Botswana society in general have manufactured a set of vocabulary of images and beliefs about the San people, the externalised Other. The derogatory names suggest the use of what Gilman calls ñroot metaphorsò (22) in the construction of binary categories in the culture, which in turn subserve the morbid intentionality of classifying the Other. Furthermore, the derogation erects false categories of difference and somehow suggests that the Masarwa are the puns in the sickening game of structuring perceptions in terms of binary difference. For as Gilman also notes, the concept of difference is needed to distinguish the healthy and the sick, or as Head says in the novel, to erect ñfalse barriers people usually erect toward each otherò (38).

Maruôs love for Margaret, a Masarwa and subsequent marriage to her is Bessieôs attempt to create a more humane order of the Masarwaôs emergence from oppression and marginality and a sense of their gradual participation in the fruits of Botswana promise and dream. The novel thus ends in a note of rebirth, the possibility of leaving one kind of life behind and passing on to an entirely new existence. By getting married and eloping, both Maru and Margaret serve the function of leaving

one life behind to seek a new existence, a place where a second chance is possible, where they can start life anew and be, in a sense, reborn. As Taiwo argues:

> Maruôs marriage to Margaret is presented not only as a personal act of enlightened self-interest. It is a major political achievement. By it the novelist makes an important statement of hope and redemption for all oppressed people in Africa and elsewhere (192).

Irrevocably, Bessie Head intimates that change in Botswana will come by way of fundamental dismantling of the apparatuses of prejudice and exclusivism, a dismantling of a mind-set inimical to a segement of the Botswana population. It will manifest a three stage process, according to Dieke:

> ...birth, death, and rebirth. The birth is that of the prejudice lodged in the hearts of men, women and children. The death implies that a new life, a new society to emerge, this prejudicial culture has to die. Confronting ethnic prejudice in Botswana is like descending into darkness and danger, and this descent represents what amounts to death, casting off established social attitudes towards the Masarwa. (8)

Head invests Margaret with an air of mystery, which complements Maruôs mysterious personality. In addition, Margaret possesses a mine of inner strength and individuality which is her legacy from her British foster-mother. She represents Bessie Headôs ideal woman, and in her retention of her love for Moleka even after her marriage to Maru, she symbolises Headôs ideal woman confronting the issues of male possession, on one hand, and crude male power, on the other .

The beginning and the ending of the novel inform this death-rebirth dialectic. The first paragraph of the novel reads like this:

> THE RAINS WERE so late that year. But throughout that hot, dry summer those black storm cloud cling in the thick folds of brooding darkness along the low horizon. There seemed to be a secret in their activity, because each evening they broke the long, sullen silence of the day, and sent soft rumbles of thunder and flickering slicks of lightening across the empty sky. They were not promising rain. They were prisoners pushed back, in trapped coils of boiling cloud. (*Maru*, 5)

This beginning suggests a manôs later awakening to a new life preceded by a symbolic death. Watching the darkening sky, readers are given this picture of descent into a dark realm, a dismal underworld of prejudice, crippling alienation, unauthentic existence that has imprisoned everyone, victims and villains alike. At the end, we witness an emergence from darkness into daylight, the brooding sky clears up a bit, and life resumes its tempo with a new vigour. The novel shares in the new- fangled optimism, where:

> People like the Batswana, who did not know that the wind of freedom had also reached people of Masarwa tribe, were in for an unpleasant surprise because it would be no longer possible to treat Masarwa people in an inhuman way without getting killed yourself. (*Maru,* 127)

Bessie Headôs *Maru* is thus an important action-filled work, which rewrites the Masarwa into significant existence. She articulates and voices the suppressed and the silenced in Botswana society and, in so doing, displaces the hegemonic logos of the

Batswana, thus unleashing an alternative potential in the life and work of Margaret Cadmore.

Chapter Five

Critical Reading of the Existentialist themes of Absurdity, Fear and Trembling in Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*

5:1 The Absurd as Unstoppable in an Individual's Existence

According to absurdists, humans historically attempt to find meaning in their lives. Traditionally, this search results in one of two conclusions: either that life is meaningless, or life contains within it a purpose set forth by a higher powerð a belief in God, or adherence to some religion or other concepts. In philosophy, ñthe Absurdò refers to the conflict between (i) the human tendency to seek inherent value and meaning in life and (ii) the human inability to find any. In this context, absurd does not mean, according to Silentio Johannes, ñlogically impossibleò, but rather, ñhumanly impossibleò (17). The universe and the human mind do not each separately cause the absurd, but rather, the absurd arises. As a philosophy, absurdism explores the fundamental nature of the absurd and how individuals, once becoming conscious of the absurd, should respond to it. The absurdist philosopher, Albert Camus, stated that ñindividuals should embrace the absurd condition of human existence while also defiantly continuing to explore and search for meaningò (41). It means then that difficulties abound and going by Brink, ñman must forge a self that is his own out of these unpropitious circumstances, by self- creationò (90).

The absurd has its origin in the work of the 19th century Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, who chose to confront the crisis that humans face with the absurd by proffering a solution in which one believes in the existence of a reality that is beyond the absurd, and, as such, has meaning. He stated that the belief in anything

beyond the absurd requires an irrational and unproven but perhaps necessary religious acceptance, commonly referred to as a ñleap of faith.ò However, Camus regarded this solution as a ñphilosophical suicideò (40), rejecting both this and physical suicide. He gave a solution in which one accepts the absurd and continues to live in spite of it, believing that by accepting the absurd, one can achieve absolute freedom from fear and trembling. He also proffered that by recognizing no religion or other moral constraints and by revolting against the absurd while simultaneously accepting it as unstoppable, one could possibly be content with the personal meaning constructed in the process. According to Camus, oneôs freedom ï and the opportunity to give life meaning ï lies in the recognition of absurdity. If the absurd experience is truly the realization that the universe is fundamentally devoid of absolutes, then we, as individuals, are truly free. ñTo live without appeal,ò (55) as he puts it, is a philosophical move to define absolutes and universals subjectively, rather than objectively. The freedom of humans is thus established in a humanôs natural ability and opportunity to create their own meaning and purpose; to decide (or think) for him or herself. The individual becomes the most precious unit of existence, representing a set of unique ideals that can be characterized as an entire universe in its own right. In acknowledging the absurdity of seeking any inherent meaning, but continuing this search regardless, one can be happy, gradually developing meaning from the search alone. Using the analogy of the famous *Myth of Sisyphus*, cited earlier in the study, Camus believes that in as much as this existence for Sisyphus is pointless, but that he ultimately finds meaning and purpose in his task, simply by continually applying himself to it.

5:2 The Uncanny and Pathological Circumstances of Apartheid's Incarceration

A Question of Power implicitly reveals as the overriding theme of the novel a displaced, marginalised woman struggling for what she perceives as her rights in a hostile and absurd environment. Headôs last novel is undeniably her most intricate and intense work. It signals a crisis in the authorôs personal life in that her alienation from traditional African society in Botswana induces in her an inclination towards introspection. Sarvan, among numerous critics calls *A Question of Power* ña strongly autobiographical workò (82). Much of the novelôs subject matter mirrors Headôs external situation; it verbalizes her feeling of otherness, of being an outcast who neither trusts nor relates to people. She herself has commented on its personal nature by stating in Marguard:

> ...in *A Question of Power* the work-out is subtleð the whole process of breakdown and destruction is outlined there ... Iôd lost, in *A Question of Power,* the certainty of my own goodness. The novel was written under pressure. I was alarmed (53).

It may be noted that the nightmarish mental tortures of Elizabeth closely corresponds with the authorôs own precarious psychological existence. Indeed, the physical details, the psychedelic images, environment of death, ambiguous bodies, supernatural manifestations and the emotionally-charged passages can come only from one whose writing is grounded in the knowledge of personal experience. In an interview with Andrew Peek, Head discloses:

> *A Question of Power* was lived for three years, a whole chunk of living experience suddenly compressed into a short novel ... I had lived so precariously, and if I could know how to survive, between good and evil, l would offer these

> insights to mankind. How I could survive torture and cruelty because this seems to be so much human history (6).

Furthermore, in a letter to Janet Grant, she confesses that ñit was with desperation that I recorded the horror in *A Question of Power* ... but my true position is a very detached one ... I have my doubts about Africa being a home for people in the real sense of the wordò (44). Bessie Head thus depicts her own struggle between the poles of sanity and insanity as a journey into psychic regions. Elizabethôs, quoting Townsend nightmarish ñrollercoasterò journey (113), encompasses a finding of herself as a coloured from South Africa, as well as an acceptance of her new country, Botswana, and its people. This wrestling with her physical and spiritual environment assumes a broadly moral nature: in the process of re-interpreting her own life story, Elizabeth is also tackling the basic question of good and evil**.**

The novel whether considered an autobiographical novel or a third-person autobiography, is full of the authorôs experience of what was called, at the time, a ñnervous breakdown.ò The primary persona and the stage of the paranoiac conflict in *A Question Power* are as we have indicated, Elizabeth, an immigrant to Botswana from South Africa. Her life history and that of Bessie Head are nearly, if not completely, identical. Bessie Emery was born in the Pietermaritzburg mental hospital, where her white, English, ñvery upper classò mother had been locked away after conceiving this child with a black groom. According to Nicholas Lee, ña coloured couple accepted the baby as a foster child. But at thirteen, when her mother died, Bessie received a legacy marked for her educationò (38). She attended a British orphanage school, at Umbilo Road High School. All this was also true of Elizabeth, who confides in us that the Protestant headmistress was the first to tell her that her

foster mother was not her real mother, adding that her real mother had been insane. This headmistress used to watch Elizabeth for signs of insanity and would assign isolation to her for infractions that were punished in other ways in other children. *(*QP 15-6).

This is true of Bessie as well as of Elizabeth and that both Elizabeth as narrator-writer and Head as author included these events because of their relevance to the central narrative problem: How much dignity can an African black woman have? As Eleanor Hawarden has pointed out in her study of prejudice in the classroom, teachers in South Africa has transmitted hostility and prejudice by distorting history, by referring to innate qualities, and not referring to non whites who have a point of view or positive traits (37-8). This is the cultural situation in which Elizabeth could be punished in a dramatically different way than were the other students, with what result can be imagined:

> ...the other children soon noticed something unusual about Elizabethôs isolation periods. They could fight and scratch and bite each other, but if she did likewise she was locked up. They took to kicking at her with deliberate malice as she sat in a corner reading a book. None of the prefects would listen to her side of the story. (QP 16)

Elizabethôs side of the story is what we are getting in *A Question of Power,* and as such, it is a labour of reason striving to find justice in an irrational and absurd world. Head uses Elizabethôs exile to model the absurdity of apartheidôs national governance. She is in-memorably exiled and dismissed from South African culture. South Africaôs assignation of shame onto Elizabeth culminates in her mental breakdown. She identifies South Africaôs narrative as the source of her persecution,

and the outcome of her exposure to it causes her madness. The text shifts with Elizabethôs experience of exile from South Africa; her mental state deteriorates as a result of being ostracized. The narrative portrays Elizabethôs mad condition as a result of South African racial discrimination which induces fear, trembling and the ideas that suffocate her identity. The contrast between the freedoms of Botswana, the misery of South Africa is also mentioned by Elizabeth (QP20-1). But in Botswana, Elizabeth, like Bessie, loses her teaching job and suffers a nervous breakdown. The cause in both cases in the words of Charlotte Bruner is, ñpartly culture shock and partly hostility among the Batswana towards half-breeds, members of other tribes, women with education and professional authorityò (224). Elizabeth, like Bessie, finds shelter and work in a non profit agricultural organization with an international staff. Although *A Question of Power* focuses on Elizabethôs mental struggle, its structure is determined by the two male protagonists who dominate each of the novelôs two sections and literally, Ola stated, ñturn the protagonistôs mind into a battleground as they compete for the domination and possession of her personalityò (19). The novel starts with a description of Sello, but the second paragraph already emphasizes his mental kinship with Elizabeth, thus:

> ...the manôs name was Sello. A woman in the village of Motabeng paralleled his inner development. Most of what applied to Sello applied to her, because they were twin souls with closely-linked destinies and the same capacity to submerge other preoccupations in a pursuit after the things of the soul. It was an insane pursuit this time (11-12).

The same paragraph introduces Dan. Bessie Head immediately exposes the thematic concerns of the novel by referring to madness and to the fact that the ñthree

of them shared the strange journey into hellò (12). The novel covers the period of about three years in Elizabethôs life when she experiences two nervous breakdowns. She loses her teaching post when her control snaps in a public office, letting her scream abuse at the people around her. She is hospitalized for a short period after which she joins the Motabeng Secondary Project as a volunteer gardener. However, her fantasies and nightmares increase until she is placed in an asylum for seven months, where she contemplates suicide and infanticide. The novel thus relates how in Botswana, ñmentally, the normal and the abnormal blended completely in Elizabethôs mindò (QP15). Because the male characters are usually seen through Elizabethôs distorted and turbulent mind, they are presented ambivalently.

A Question of Power shifts to mirror the psychological duress in Elizabethôs narrative due to the psychological trauma as social outcast. Elizabeth begins to imagine the Sello and Dan personas and has trouble distinguishing reality as an outcast in Botswana. Bessie Head uses Elizabethôs internal thoughts as the terrain that the reader traverses in order to discover the history of colonial ideology and how it is hurtfully embedded in South African culture.

In this novel, Bessie Head uses the psychoanalystsô delimitation of the human mind into the conscious, the sub-conscious, and the un-conscious articulated by Freud to portray the totality of her protagonistôs experience. According to Freud, opined Gay Peter, ñchildhood traumas and past experiences are at the origin of many psychological disordersò (117-8). Therefore, the past has to be replayed and analysed. The novel is concerned with, not so much as Motabeng where the bulk of the action takes place, but with the protagonistôs mental retention of her South African experience. In Bessie Headôs novel, her protagonist has painful memories she must

accept and cope with. Apartheid, racism and the experience of being a source of social shame and evidence of sexual depravity are some of the recurrent memories which disturb the mental equilibrium of the major character.

The problems surrounding the half-caste child begin even before conception. To compound Bessieôs protagonist, she is predisposed to madness supposedly inherited from a mother believed to be insane, and who committed the insane crime of suicide in a mental institution. Bessie Headôs protagonist undermines this assertion of hereditary insanity by exposing the societyôs prejudicial treatment of Elizabeth as is explained earlier, and by emphasizing the social background to Elizabethôs motherôs supposed insanity. Freudôs interest in neuroses and hysteria is also very pertinent for this study because, according to Gay, ñElizabethôs behaviour is characterized by the symptoms of such illnessesò (255). Finally, Freud draws an interesting analogy in Gay, ñbetween the authorôs creations and his/ her dreams and fantasiesò (440-43).

In this novel, as is stated above, Bessie Head explores through her protagonist her own psyche, and in so doing her dreams and fantasies. Bessie Headôs *A Question of Power* is all the more interesting because the quest she gave to her protagonist has been; Eilsersen posits, ñin some respects her own questò (149). For this reason her writings are closely interrelated, they are inspired by the different phases of psychological growth Head went through as she confronts the absurd realities of her life. Eilersen writes that ñBessie is ... reworking her own experiences in her three novels which have been progressively intensified. Seen together, they constitute a trilogy; an untraditional trilogy in that the movement is inward rather than forwardò (148).

In *A Question of Power*, Elizabethôs quest as she confronts the absurd requires two essential steps: one, a complete disintegration, through which Elizabeth must get rid of truths she considered as absolutes; and two, a reconstruction, which will reintegrate her fragmented self and give her a new vision of herself and the world. Elizabeth is shattered by the concepts of good and evil. Her psyche wrongly divides these two notions by projecting two hallucinatory characters: Sello and Dan**.**

Elizabeth is also shattered by a bitter past which still haunts her, an uncertain birth origin, a traumatic experience of apartheid in a coloured community in South Africa and an unsuccessfu1 marriage. She is also torn by her wish to believe in an individual philosophy, which is in opposition to the principles of the Christian religion in which she has been brought up. Elizabethôs present and future are also maddening, because they do not provide a satisfactory answer to her problem of identity and to her family situation.

Myth, allegory and symbolism are also of prime importance in the construction of Elizabethôs anguished mental state as they serve to unify the seemingly loose threads in the novel. According to Joyce Johnson, ñthe novel functions on two levels: the personal and universalò (199). In stressing Elizabethôs quest to be liberated from the suffering caused by prejudice and oppression, the writer extends her discourse to include the oppression of a whole society. Bessie Head widens Elizabethôs search for a guiding philosophy to give meaning to her own life and to that of a society attempting to define its goals. She does so by employing symbolic paradigms in African, Eastern and Western mythologies, coupled with psychological, philosophical and religious concepts and symbols. She masterfully uses allegorical figures, such as Medusa, to deconstruct the myth of manôs fall from

and return to God, in other words, the myth of polarity. In this respect, Sello and Medusa, together with Dan, may be viewed as allegorical figures which represent the polarities of good and evil accompanying Elizabeth on her nightmarish journey towards and out of her mental breakdown. Elizabeth, however, succeeds in her quest to liberate herself from this bondage. Towards the end of her notes, Elizabeth details the method of herself-healing, quite an original contribution. Elizabeth reports thereafter that she has been able to return to familiar ground, to leave the still- surging persecutory hallucinations and walk away from the inner voices of self-hatred as she had already left those of self- divination.

Linda Beard observes that in this novel, the ñfundamental absolute to be dismantled ...is the myth of polarityò (268). Headôs dismantling of the myth also rests on the use of dreams, imaginings and phantasmagoric musing in which myth and allegory merge. Beginning with the novelôs epigraph from D. H. Lawrenceôs poem, ñGod,ò Head warns the reader of the danger of ñdisintegrative knowledgeò, which pulls one away from ñGodò and towards ñthe abyss.ò This is the fundamental polarity on which the narrative rests and which, moreover, Head uses to dismantle the myth of polarity itself. In allegorical fashion, Sello the monk and Dan seem to represent the extremes of goodness and evil in this anatomy of a nervous breakdown and journey through the underworld. Such neat categories, however, are illusory, as Elizabeth learns, in particular, in her relationship with Sello the monk. Both Sello and Dan drive her to the brink of psychological disintegration, but with different ends. Dan would annihilate her; Sello would destroy her illusions. Nevertheless, each would strip her of something, as the poor in the beginning of the novel ñturned to Elizabeth and permanently stripped her of any vesture garments she might have acquiredò (32). That

is a mimic foreshadowing of the ñkatabolismò to which Lawrence refers in ñGod.ò Sello the monk, as Elizabeth realizes retrospectively could have warned her:

> Here I am, about to strip myself of my spectacular array of vesture garments as they said I ought to, and to show you my own abyss. There are so many terrible lessons you have to learn this time; that the title God, in its absolute all-powerful form, is a disaster to its holder, the all-seeing eye is the greatest temptation. It turns a man into a wild debaucher, a maddened and wilful persecutor of his fellow men (QP36-7).

But he does not. He cannot. Even at this point in the narrative, we are unsure as to what it is Selloôs statements might refer. It is essential to the efficacy of the whole experience that Elizabeth and we do not understand. Elizabeth must be gradually denuded of any absolutes she holds. These are the illusions to which Sello will address himself. It is the absolutes themselves, which comprise the dangerous ñdisintegrative knowledgeò about which we are initially warned.

The novel attempts to explore, in the words of Jane Grant, ñthe sources of evil, to expose its true face, and to show the misery and suffering it inflicts on human lifeò (25-6). Through the character, Elizabeth, we see how naked evil, when it invades an individualôs total being, can be the cause of psychic disorder and personality disintegration. During the monumental battle, which takes place in her mind, Elizabeth tries to dispel the belief current in South Africa that might is right. She tries to instil in her psyche the Buddhist belief in the righteousness of the meek and lowly. The ensuing psychological battle involves her whole being and in the end transforms her into a new personality.

The characters, Sello, Medusa, and Dan are not the real human characters of conventional literature; rather, they are aspects of Elizabethôs mind, concretized in her fertile imagination. These ghoulish characters, visible only to Elizabeth, are the personified equivalent of her inner being; the subconscious, and the unconscious. The character, Elizabeth, who is critical of the evil of South African life is the conscious self. Sello the monk is her subconscious, close to her and sharing her belief in goodness. Dan is her unconscious, reflecting the South African collective unconscious, pervaded by the forces of evil. Sello in the brown suit and Medusa are according to Pearse, ñthe derivatives of her subconsciousò (88).

Elizabethôs nightmarish journeys into the soul begin with a dialogue with her subconscious Sello the monk. Sello encourages her to proceed on her inquiry with the argument that, ñEverything was evil until I broke down and cried. It is when you cry, in the blackest hour of despair, that you stumble on a source of goodnessò (34). Selloôs positive influence, with the figure of the Buddha playing a prominent role, does not last long, however, before the negative derivatives of the subconscious, Sello in the brown suit, and the wild-eyed Medusa, take over her subconscious. The images of evil and corruption which these present in Elizabethôs mind are only surpassed by Dan, Elizabethôs unconscious who may be called the antiChrist figure in the novel. The wild-eyed Medusa is boastful, aggressive, depraved and power-drunk. Like the power maniacs of South Africa, Medusa and Sello in the brown suit are narrow-minded dictators, who feel insecure in a flexible universe. No one is good or right but themselves. They are all powerful and all-knowing, everyone else is insignificant. In their attempt to negate Elizabeth, Sello in the brown suit and Medusa accuse Elizabeth of sexual inadequacy; loath her and for more than once urged her to kill herself and

her little boy. No matter what she does, neither she nor her son will ever be accepted by the Batwana (87). They tell her, óshe hadnôt a vaginaô, and they identify her with the sexual perversion of homosexuality. The aspect of their assault which Elizabeth finds most disturbing is their attack on her social inadequacy. To Elizabeth, manôs relationship to man is the core of human spirituality. This accusation of social failure, therefore, constitutes an accusation of spiritual insufficiency.

Her accusers played on her experiences in South Africa where there is permanent tension between the people of differing races, where people are compartmentalized. It is in this spirit of segregation that Medusa identifies Elizabeth rigidly with the coloured homosexual men, and accuses her of hating Africans. By Medusaôs rigid classification of people, a coloured person cannot survive in Africa, cannot know Africa, and cannot love, or be loved by Africans. For the verbal-minded, her pain is perhaps most concisely expressed in this passage:

> He pressed several buttons at the same time:
>
> You are supposed to feel jealous.
>
> You are inferior as a coloured.
>
> You havenôt got what that girl has got.
>
> The records went round and round in her head the whole day (127).

Such a prospect would destroy Elizabethôs soul, for her search is for a universal brotherhood of man.

While Sello in the brown suit and Medusa are openly hostile to Elizabeth, and openly declare their lust for power, Dan uses subtler methods to achieve the same end. Dan promises to love and protect Elizabeth. He feigns humility and tries to win her trust by it. Danôs declared innocence proves to be a deception. The Eden he

promised Elizabeth quickly shatters into a cruel style of polygamy compounded of the manôs claim to divine rights over the emotions of the female he is with, his deliberate flaunting of favouritism and his sadistic frustration of the womanôs desire (115-17), which has been portrayed in Buchi Emechetaôs *The Joys of Motherhood* (20-2). Dan is very soon dangling two hooked lines near Elizabeth, telling her that he has to go with other women, because of her white blood and her sexual inadequacy, but not to leave him because he needs her (147). His method of perpetrating evil is similar to that of the mythical trickster god who appears to men in a medley of forms, setting people against one another and leaving death and destruction in his trail. Danôs appeal for trust is designed to unarm her, so that her consciousness may be more easily assailed with a ruthless concentration on the obscene. Danôs assault takes the form of flagrant images of corrupting, of child molestation and rape, of homosexuality, bestiality, incest and death.

Being Elizabethôs unconscious, Danôs power over Elizabeth is more profound than that of Sello in the brown suit and Medusa, both aspects of the subconscious. Dan goes to the roots of her being, and it is from this fundamental level that he launches his attack. Danôs strategy is to destroy any sense of love or respect Elizabeth may have for herself, and thereby destroy her love and respect for others. Elizabeth introduces us to him:

> ...he knew exactly what he wanted. He knew exactly what he was doing. He knew exactly who was going to die and how he was going to pick up the thirty pieces of silver at the end of the job. He was in it for money. The things of the soul were the greatest money-spinning business on earth. Treasures in heaven could be turned into real cash (QP103).

The language used here to describe Dan is an excellent complement to the description given. With short, rapid-fire declarative sentences, Bessie Head underscores the absoluteness of Danôs perspective on the world. The allusion to Judasô betrayal of Jesus reinforces the negative. A great debaucher, Dan is symbolized by a giant phallus. The terrible orgiastic scenes he orchestrates with a gallery of seventy-one ñNice-Times Girlsò, whom Elizabeth names B. The Womb, Miss Sewing Machine, Miss Wriggly- Bottom, Miss Body Beautiful, Miss Pelican Beak, Madam Loose- Bottom, the Sugar Plum Fairy, e.t.c, illustrate that exploitative power. This ñking of sexò (168) and, ñking of womenò (149), enacts his copulative dramas in front of Elizabeth as a way of asserting her inferiority, both as a woman and as a Coloured South African. Dan operates a metaphoric phonograph and a cinema which strive to reinforce inferiority in Elizabethôs own mind. His final assault is an attempt to coax her into psycho-sexual self-destruction and physical suicide. His ñwas not a creative function; it was deathò (19). But Headôs tale is not a simple one.

To begin with, Sello is a composite made up of several parts; Sello has numerous avatars. In addition to Sello the monk and the numerous other holy manifestations of Sello, there is ñthe living manò (27), who is ña crop farmer and cattle breederò (28) and a ñwonderful family manò (29). This Sello is an actual resident of Motabeng; from the novelôs beginning to its end, however, the reader cannot be sure whether or not Elizabeth ever has any real contact with this Sello. The readerôs ability to really test the accuracy of Elizabethôs perception of the Motabeng crop farmer is severely limited by the fact that the narrator is undergoing a nervous

breakdown. In the book, ñher so-called analytic mind was being shattered to piecesò (52). Elizabeth ñwas not sure if she were awake or asleepò; ñoften after that the dividing line between dream perceptions and waking reality was to become confusedò (22). But there is yet another side to Sello. This one is a ñreplicaò of the monk, ñexcept that the man was clothed in a brown suitò (37). Elizabeth muses on the duality of Selloôs character during an early hospitalization for her breakdown. Shortly after the nurse administers a shot, Sello again visits Elizabeth. He takes her to ña deep cesspit ... filled almost to the brim with excretaò (53). After that, ñHe caught hold of her roughly behind the neck and pushed her face near the stench. It was so high, so powerful, that her neck nearly snapped off her head at the encounter. She whimpered in fright. She heard him say fiercely, ñShe made it. Iôm cleaning it up. Come, Iôll show you what you madeôò (53). Then Sello transforms himself into ñan enormous sky bird,ò while Elizabeth asks herself and us, ñwas there ever a man whose heights and depths were so extreme they were totally disassociated from each other? ...ò (QP53)

Sello is not alone, however, in possessing contradictory avatars. Dan, the ñpower-maniac,ò is likewise composed of other selves. To some degree, he and Sello are twin-souls. There seems to be no difference between the brown-suited Selloôs treatment of Elizabeth and the attacks aimed at her by Dan. A few pages earlier than the scene described above, Dan had announced to Elizabeth that he and Sello were ñfriends who shared everything, including visions ...ò (QP46).

Part Two of the novel is, in many ways, a re-enactment of the visions of Part One, interpreted the second time through Danôs perspective. In that respect, Dan and Sello share the fundamental material. At one point, Dan illustrates this dramatically:

> Dan was clothed in a soft, white cloth, resembling the one Sello wore. He had on a pair of sandals. . . . He folded his hands softly in front of him, his face wore a sad, still expression: óYou see,ô it said, ócatôs the essence of me, in my soul I am the monk ... (QP115).

Part of the reason behind Danôs recreation of visions earlier presented by Sello is ñto show how deeply he had been involved all along in Selloôs activitiesò (QP119). The two supernatural souls are not, in fact, completely distinct from one another.

Sello and Dan are involved in an allegorical battle and Elizabeth is in the centre of the power struggle. At the same time, however, Bessie Head is not writing a tale about the conflict between an absolute good and evil. In fact, it is Elizabethôs perception of Sello and Dan, in absolute terms, that contributes most to her confusion and pain. Goodness and evil are interspersed throughout. That is the significance behind the allusions in the narrative to King David, the psalmist-adulterer-murderer and to the Christian Ku Klux Klan. Both Sello and Dan lead Elizabeth into an abyss. Thus, they share a common bond in their roles as destroyers. Selloôs call to Elizabeth, however, has death as its means, but not its end. Dan inadvertently helps Elizabeth to understand the whole by teaching her the lesson of opposites. Elizabeth said of him, ñhe was one of the greatest teachers sheôd worked with, but he taught by defaultð he taught iron and steel self-control through sheer, wild, abandoned debauchery ...ò (QP202). Selloôs target is the illusion of absolutes, and the positing of Dan and Sello as strictly polar entities is one example of that illusion.

Part of Elizabethôs soul-evolution can be measured by her movement away from compartmentalized, polar definitions. Her definition of God is an important

indicator of that development. Very early in the novel, out of the shifting patterns of tenderness and cooperation before her gaze she observes:

> God is the totality of all great souls and their achievements; the achievementsare not that of one single, individual soul, but of many souls who all worked to make up the soul of God, and this might be called God or the Godsò (QP54).

When Sello in the brown suit makes his next appearance to Elizabeth, she recognizes that ñhis initial presentation of constructive goodness in images and pictures had been a put-together whole of observations and tentative feelers ...ò (QP62). Medusa is there to balance out the picture. If Elizabeth ñaccepted as true the small chunks of the past thrown at her by Sello, then the meditations under the Bodhi tree were as precarious and uncertain as any venture in life. God was no security for the soulò (QP65).

Elizabethôs involvement shortly thereafter in the Motabeng Secondary Schoolôs agricultural project is not, as it first seems, a disconnected tangential thesis on crop rotation in Botswana. The methods of transplantation, according to Michela Borzaga, that Elizabeth learns throughout the narrative are ñsymbolic of manôs necessity to excogitate always new expedients to keep his garden goingò (32). This is the fertile ground where an alternate to Elizabethôs polar vision can be worked through. This is the place where Elizabeth comes ñinto contact with the wonderful strangeness of human natureò (QP72). These are the ópower peopleô like Camilla. Camilla is egocentric and aggressive. She is always determined to impress on all around her a sense of her own superiority. Camilla is obsessed with the need to negate the Africans. She declares with her accustomed air of self-importance, ñI donôt

understand these people. They donôt know anything at all, and theyôre so lazyò (QP78). She relishes in contrasting this alleged ignorance of Africans with the heightened culture of her own Danish society. Elizabeth draws a polarity between Camillaôs scatter-brained assertion of self-importance and small-boyôs air of quiet, authoritative manly calm. Her encounter with the Danish ñRattle-tongue,ò Camilla, is at first, only a continuation of absolute definitions. ñElizabeth looked at her with anguish. Human relationships with her were starkly black and white. She hated in a final way and loved in a final way. She had spent all her life running away from the type of white person like Camillaò (QP77). She veers back and forth about her attitude toward the Dane, ñone minute she really loved the half-mad woman, the next, she loathed her ...ò (QP79). Elizabeth is not yet freed from the need to define in absolute terms. ñShe was to ...come to an odd conclusion about Danesð they were either very, very bad or so impossibly God-like that they out-stripped the rest of mankind in humanityò (QP80). This is still the hyperbolic valuation that we see in Elizabethôs definition of God above.

Such polar perspectives account, to a large extent, for the pain of Elizabethôs disintegrative experience. She stretches herself between extremes and is, therefore, very vulnerable to the question asked by one of Danôs recordings, ñWhat sort of gymnast was she supposed to be, so overstrained between concepts of good and evil?ò (QP109) Elizabethôs salvational encounter with the human and mystical Birgette is the beginning of the revision of her thinking. She tells the young agricultural volunteer:

> God isnôt a magical formula for me.... God isnôt a switched-on, mysterious, unknown current I can turn to and, by doing so; feel secure in my own

> nobility. Itôs you I feel secure about, strangely, as though we will encounter each other again in some other life and nothing would have shaken your nobility. But mine, my destiny is full of doubt, full of doom. I am being dragged down, without my willing, into a whirlpool of horrors. I prefer nobility and goodness but a preference isnôt enough; there are forces who make a mockery of my preferences (QP85).

Although not as well-entrenched as the forces of evil in South Africa, the racialist oppressors have their counterparts in Motabeng for example is Camilla. With Camillaôs arrival, the vegetable garden is turned from a heaven to óthe most miserable place on earthô. Small boysô presence, on the other hand, radiates peaceful growth.

The novel itself is structured along similar lines of polarity as discussed above. The episodes which present Elizabethôs inner life are characterized by images of darkness, of death and destruction. Those that deal with her outer life show her in the life-creating process of farming; where community involvement is used as a therapy to come back into the rhythm of the normal world. Elizabethôs association with vegetable gardening brings her in contact with the wonderful strangeness of human nature, with the life force of the bright green leaves. Her involvement with Eugeneôs local industries workgroup contributes to this creative aspect of her life. We also learn that, unlike in the torment of her inner life, where Dan debases everything and everyone, among the Setswana, people are kings and queens to each other, and there is spirituality in everything. Through her inner torment in the hands of Medusa, Sello in the brown suite, Dan, and her working experiences with the vegetable garden and various community self-help projects, Elizabeth finds a necessary contrast between

the forces of evil and those of good. She is aware of the differences between the initial Sello, that part of her consciousness that believes in the essential goodness of all men, and the later Sello, and other negative derivatives of the subconscious and unconscious, such as Dan and Medusa who treat all of life with derision. In her life experiences, she draws a line between the insensitive and mechanical approach to life of characters like Camilla, and the unassuming attitude of characters, like Small-boy and Birgette; between the simplicity of the latter, and the formerôs tendency to regard complexity and incomprehensibility as the height of good taste.

In the narrative, Head devotes much space to the discussion of crop rotation and irrigation. We encounter, in effect, a short treatise on vegetable gardening. All of this is, however, part of Elizabethôs metaphysical education. It all works toward ñthe total de-mystifying of all illusionsò (QP86). The dismantling of those illusions and the literal and symbolic disintegration of Elizabethôs psyche are all preparations for the redemptive role she will play. As the Virgin crushed the head of the serpent, Elizabethôs ordinariness will defeat the power-maniac who has wed his own absolutism to his ñwill to evilò (QP199). It is because of her mystical gifts and her own special calling that Sello the monk initially selected Elizabeth to do battle with the diabolical power maniac. Sello explains that special vocation:

> There are a set of people in my age-group and a set of people in your age-group. The first group brought about dark times. We had to dream a nobler dream, and the people of that dream belong to your age-group. Everything was wrong. Everything was evil until I broke down and cried. It is when you cry, in the blackest hour of despair that you stumble on a source of goodness. There were a few of us who cried like that. Then we said: óSend us perfection.ô

> They sent you. Then we asked: óWhat is perfection?ô And they said: óLoveô (QP34).

Elizabeth is a new messianic figure. To the degree that she and Sello the monk share a divinity of soul, they are indeed soul-mates as she perceived earlier. Dan is her potential soul-mate. (In one of her nightmare experiences in Part Two, Elizabeth notes of her torturer, ñThe person wasnôt asserting evil. He was saying he had the potential to be evil ...ô (QP116). Dan is what Elizabeth could become if she retained her beliefs in absolutes. That is why Sello thought Elizabeth ñneeded the insight into absolute evilò (QP200). That is the reason, too, behind Selloôs decision not to let Elizabeth see the incredible power she does possess. ñIf the things of the soul are really a question of power, then anyone in possession of power of the spirit could be Lucifer,ò he explains to her (QP199). In fact, it is the overwhelming power of love and of Elizabethôs simplicity that defeats Danôs arrogance. The combat itself, however, has necessitated a systematic inner breakdown for Elizabeth. The literal nervous breakdown for which she is hospitalized is accompanied by a deliberate disintegrative process throughout. That is the cost of the redemption Elizabeth brings. Elizabeth experiences the death that is an intrinsic part of the mystery of salvation. In one of her early encounters with the ñvast company of holy peopleò (QP31), she recognizes that common bond between them:

> They had still, sad, fire-washed faces. The meaning of the stillness, sadness and intensity of expression did not reach her till some time later, when Sello exposed a detail of his past. It was death. It was the expression of people who had been killed and killed again in one cause after another for the liberation of

> mankind. She thought at that time: ñwhy, an absolute title has been shared. There are several hundred thousand people who are óGodô (QP31).

The death-to-life cycle is reinforced over and over again in this novel. That, indeed, is the mystery at the heart of the Osiris-Isis-Horus myth to which the narrative so often alludes. At the heart of the disintegrative process is the seed for Elizabethôs soul-evolution. She is dying in order to become God and the prophet of God.

Elizabethôs paranoia does not seem to us an inexplicable mystery of science. Her narrative reveals its cause to be an overload of memories and observations that are in violent conflict with one another. Instead of shattering under the chaos, she develops a series of beliefs adequate to her experience of society and self. The first of these beliefs comes from her realization that she feels more solidarity with blacks than with whites. When the psychiatrist at the mental hospital assumes the opposite and makes racists remark to her about the staff (QP184-4), she finds she cannot identify with that position any longer. The second comes in feedback from her American friend, Tom, to the effect that she is not a Borgia but, in fact, loves everyone and loves even the vegetables in the garden (QP188). This might not be crucial if she had not been so discouraged by her anger as to fear she might have become hateful. Her interpretation of the impact of this comment of Tomôs, looking back to it, is, ñher soul-death was really over in that instant, though she did not realize it. He seemed to have, in an intangible way, seen her sitting inside a coffin, reached down and pulled her out. The rest she did herselfò (QP188).

One of the things she did was to buy her son a football and watch him play with it, instead of killing herself at the time that Dan had appointed (QP194). The next is to write an apology to Mrs. Jones and when Mrs. Jones appears, to allow seeing the old ladyôs love (QP196). The most important step Elizabeth takes is to bring the Buddhist monk, Sello, who initiated the whole series of hallucinations and then stopped appearing into the room at the same time as Dan. Selloôs judgement of Dan expresses Elizabethôs decision to reject Dan permanently as a part of her, ñOh, Iôve never seen such savage cruelty! ... Elizabeth, love isnôt like that. Love is two people mutually feeding each other, not one living on the soul of the other like a ghoul!ò (QP197) When he hears this, Dan walks out, slamming the door hard (QP198), and as Cherry Wilhem points out, this ñbreaks the spell of psychic dominationò (8). At this moment, as Elizabeth later recalled, ñthe storm in her head subsided,ò and ñshe ... felt a sensation of being lifted and flung clear out of purgatoryò (QP198). Through all this, she reflects what Ravencroft claims to be her creatorôs ñtoughness of mindò in ñher confrontation of the horrors in history and the horrors within herselfò (185).

Bessie Headôs intention in *A Question of Power* is didactic. She preaches against racial discrimination and social segregation. She preaches against a life obsessed with the pursuit of material wealth and power. She condemns human oppression and exploitation in all its facets. In the opinion of Gran; ñShe wishes for a multi-racial society which utilises the workable aspects of both white and black cultures for the mutual good of allò (25-6). The alliance between Eugene, Crunner, Kenosi, Tom, Woody and Elizabeth herself on various self-help projects exemplifies this. Through her epic battle with the inner forces of evil, the character, Elizabeth comes into the possession of certain life-sustaining truths. Through this spiritual

enlightenment akin to Buddhist philosophy, Elizabeth becomes convinced that the power maniac is really a fickle-minded individual; his pursuit of power being a smoke-screen for a deeply seated sense of insecurity. The victim, on the other hand, is flexible and free. He is not afraid of losing, since his position already constitutes his loss. Only through humility and sacrifice can one aspire to love. Love is giving, not taking, nor expecting to be given in return. God is not a great unknown, but an everyman who does well for the betterment of man. And heaven is not a remote unseen, but a world society inspired by manôs great ideals such as freedom of thought and expression, democracy and human rights. By this philosophy, religion is a function in which all of mankind participates, for man is God, and God, man.

The God-head is achieved through humility and love of man, through contribution to the maintenance of love and peace within society. By this token, the óthunderbolt-wieldingô gods who drive people to religion through fear are nullified. These gods, the all-knowing, all-powerful gods who jealously guard what they believe is their monopoly of power and wisdom are the avaricious precursors of societyôs power maniacs. Through the choice of this doubly exiled South African, Head destroyed yet another compartmentalization. She does this when she dismisses Dan and his morbid accusation of not being black towards the end of the novel:

> Iôve got my concentration elsewhere... Itôs in mankind in general, and black people fit in there, not as special freaks and oddities outside the scheme of things, with labels like Black Power or any other rubbish of that kind... Any heaven, like a Black-Power heaven, that existed for a few individuals alone was pointless and useless (QP133).

Elizabeth looks beyond the fragment to the whole. That whole comprises not only the ñdemonò and the ñgoddessò (QP43), but also the several trinities: Father, Son, Holy Spirit; the Hindu Trimurti; Sello, Dan and Elizabeth.

In the opinion of Camus stated earlier, there is no negating the absurd in the lives of mortals, but it can be surmounted by the individualôs action. The atmosphere of South Africa creates perpetual tension in the society. To the sensitive and concerned individual, especially, the conflicts and evils of life within the system can lead to a dissociation of the psyche. It is this destructive tendency of apartheid that leads to Eugeneôs disturbing but valid observation that ñSouth Africans usually suffered from some form of mental aberrationò (QP58).

The reading of Bessie Headôs narrative reveals the researcherôs stand on the unstopability of the absurd which is exemplified in the conclusion that although her protagonist survives the pangs of madness and attains wholeness, the chain of evil is not broken. When at the end of the story we are told of the protagonist, ñAs she fell asleep, she placed one soft hand over her land. It was a gesture of belongingò (QP206); it would appear that she has made her peace with Motabeng. But viewed from the philosophy of the absurd, for Elizabeth as an individual, Motabeng serves as a soothing counter-force to the depressive environment of South Africa.

Using Motabeng, which is not the scene of the cause of her aberration as that of the cure, suggests that the real causes of anxiety and tension are still quite intact. The pervading tone of the narrative echoes strongly Bessie Headôs fear that most of what one clearly despises has the power to control the world and inflict suffering. Her narrative is more than anything else a damning indictment of apartheid, dramatized in psycho-existentialist terms, its power to threaten human sanity and disrupt social

peace and balance. Although Elizabethôs agonized state may be described as, according to Evasdaughter, ña trajectory of paranoid schizophrenia, observed from withinò (74), the novel ends with her attainment of a great degree of mental wellbeing. Her well known final words signify female tenderness and reflect her acceptance of the brotherhood of mankind thus:

> It was quite the opposite in Africa. There was no direct push against those rigid, false social systems of class and caste. She had fallen from the very beginning into the warm brotherhood of man; because when a people wanted everyone to be ordinary it was just another way of saying man loved man. As she fell asleep, she placed one soft hand over her land. It was a gesture of belonging (QP206).

She also finds spiritual consolation when she realizes: ñThere is only one God and his name is Man. And Elizabeth is his prophetò (QP206). She feels healed. ñA peaceful, meditative privacy settled on her mind; her painful, broken nerve-ends quietly knit togetherò (QP206).

Chapter Six

Findings and Conclusion

6.1 Contributions to Knowledge

An interesting, if relatively unknown, episode marks the then literary history of South Africa. In the sixties, the Sestigers, a literary organisation comprising young and talented Afrikaans like Andre Brink and Etiénne Leroux, was created and commissioned by the state in a massive propaganda campaign to promote South African literature. The groupôs main objective was, in the words of Nadine Gordimer in Heywood to, ñbroaden the hitherto parochial limits of Afrikaans fictionò (111). Hailed as the avant garde of South African literature, the Sestigers chose to write about existentialist issues; their works explored themes such as manôs relationship with God or the purpose and meaning of human existence. What it did not do, however, was to address the immediate realities of South African life. In other words, their literature neglected the ugliness, brutality, inequality, and oppression which constitute the social reality the country.

It may be noted that until 1974 not one writer from this elite circle faced censorship or was banned. Yet, despite official encouragement from the government, within a short span of time, the popularity of the artists waned and the group eventually died a natural death. With the exception of Brink, whose writing began to take on a more socialistic slant, the Sestigers with their abstract pieces of writings faded into relative obscurity. What is worth noting is that the groupôs ardent avowal to the aesthetic notion of ñart for artôs sakeò and its simultaneous avoidance of confrontation with social issues made its literary efforts appear contrived, affected,

and even pretentious. The following comment by Nadine Gordimer in Heywood, on Etienne Leroux, one the most prominent among the prose writers, is telling, ñEtienne Leroux is God, an infinitely detached Olympian observer amusing himself by recording all those absurd and dirty flamboyant little battles and copulations way, way down on earthò (112).

In contrast to the swift demise of the aestheticism of the Sestigers is the durable survival of the more conventionally realistic literary works of Nadine Gordimer, Alex La Guma, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Dennis Brutus, and Bessie Head. In fact, the works by these literary artists have not merely survived; they are flourishing in an appeal to a readership that extends far beyond the borders of South Africa. And this is so, in spite of the many legal restrictions imposed on the authors. An explanation to this paradoxical situation may be found in the differences that immediately distinguish the two categories of writers.

As a South African author, Bessie Head has chosen to write in the tradition of social realism. Drawing her artistic inspiration from the social circumstances surrounding her own life, she addresses the central issue which prevails in South Africað the question of power and oppression, mass starvation and poverty, persecution and death and above all, the continuing questions concerning blacks suffering. It also seems to us that Head should be credited with an autobiography that is as analytic as it is symbolic, that successfully uses the resources of fiction to construct a persuasive interpretation of the absurd and paranoia as a reaction to power and of its cure as among the powers of goodness. By sitting down that evening to record her mental debates, Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* is able to interpret her hallucinations to herself, looking both to their causes in her daily life and at their positions in the sequence. Perhaps by writing this account she hopes to consolidate her sanity, to recall its elements for future use. It

may be that she hopes, or that Bessie Head hopes to give other mariners a guide for such storms. Of course, Head may want Elizabethôs discoveries to be useful to others. As Ravencsroft, suggests that the horrors within Elizabeth, ñlie unacknowledged within every human consciousnessò (185). Although she is writing autobiography, Elizabeth clearly recognizes the universal value of her experience. She wants to tell Europeans that she, like other Africans, has a contribution to make, especially in the avoidance of self-inflation and dominance (134-5). Moreover, her bouts with madness have taught her the things she has not yet learned by the time she first broke down, and that is how not to internalize socially imposed debarment. She expresses her new wisdom in a wealth of ways. The most comical, perhaps, is her reversal of a Muhammadan statement, ñthere is only one God and his name is Man. And Elizabeth is his prophetò (QP206). She believes we have to give up the idea of a separate God because, ñthe basic error seemed to be a relegation of all things holy to some unseen Being in the sky. Since man was not holy to man; he could be tortured for his complexion, he could be misused, degraded and killedò (QP205).

Her insight into the connection between religion and cruelty is not only the element of this joke, however. There is also the comic reversal of our rules about great holiness. We are not permitted to say we are prophets or exalted in any way, even should this be true, we are not allowed to have mixed bloods or women among our spiritual teachers. Paradoxically, the madness of this female who ñfailedò as a wife and teacher, this mulatto who ñfailedò as a white and as a black, has led her to a way of healing our universal existential tendencies.

ii Redefining the Status of Women

Bessie Head is a crusader for sexual and social justice for all men and women. Her favourite theme is the drama of interpersonal relationships, and their possibility for individual growth and regeneration. She explores not only social harmony, but also what is unique in each individual who contributes to it. In the realization of this task, she employs an imagination, power and an original grasp of style which match her forceful moral vision. It is easy to encapsulate the central issues of all Bessie Headôs novels into the vital issues of power and identity. She truly approaches her characters as individuals, and with her usual sensitivity and thoroughness, journeys through the innermost recesses of their lives. The product of this exploration is the emergence of that uniqueness which makes each of them special.

To Bessie Head, South Africa typifies power in its highest form, and the revulsion with which she views such a moral wasteland has aroused in her a special reverence for human life and dignity. Headôs characters are refugees, exiles, victims, all of whom are involved in a personal and very private odyssey of the soul from which they finally emerge regenerated, as well as spiritually and psychologically enriched. Through them Head explores the limitations of colonized people who are subjected to existential problems and especially of womenôs roles, their disadvantages, and their bruised self-image, while celebrating their occasional successes. Bessie saw herself as the paradigm of the African woman struggling against entrenched social and sexual prejudices. As an exile in Botswana, she has come to know the realities of alienation, racial prejudices, facing the absurd, fear, anxiety and victimization.

Rather than experiencing nothing but the living death of total deracination from the different pasts and cultures to which she was exposed, she created for herself from them a living life through her writing, which provided a horizontal space in which she could survive. In this way, she also empowered herself to move across boundaries and feel a degree of freedom from the categories imposed upon her. Head notes that:

> ...in a part of the world where everyone tends to be placed according to their skin colour, I had the good fortune to be born of unknown parents. People of all races brought me up. Sometimes I feel like an African, sometimes like a German, sometimes like a Zulu. If I could fulfil my purpose at a later date, I shall be the truly international human being (141).

Bessie Head knew that, ñIf I have sunk to the depths I can also rise to the heightsò (116) and the meaning and purpose she intended to fulfil through her determination and courage was to assert her humanity through her writing and survive as far as possible on her own terms. All of her writings, then, served to establish her humanity and that of her characters against the forces of those who would extinguish it

Through her female characters, Margrate Cadmore, Dikeledi, Mma-Milipede, Paulina Sebeso, Maria and Elizabeth, Bessie Head presents us with her ideal; they are all tough, resolute and are endowed with shrewd common sense. Their relationship with men is on an equal footing. This goes back to De Beauviorôs assertion that one is not born a woman but becomes one. De Beauvior contends that it is the social construction of women as the quintessential Other that is fundamental to womenôs oppression. Headôs female characters stand out from the generality of Botswana

women, whom she criticizes for acquiescing in their oppression, for remaining their same old ótribal selves, docile and inferiorô (WRCG:68), despite their exposure to the opportunity of missionary education. Head laments such a wasted opportunity by women who are naturally disposed to hard work. Nevertheless, her final picture of them remains admirable:

> It was always like this. Any little thing was an adventure. They were capable of pitching themselves into the hardest, most sustained labor with perhaps the same joy that society women in other parts of the world experience when they organise fetes or tea parties. No men ever worked harder than Botswana women, for the whole burden of providing food for big families rested on them. It was their sticks that thrashed the corn at harvesting time and their winnowing baskets that filled the air for miles and miles around with the dust of husks, and they often, in addition to broadcasting the seed when the early rains fell, took over the tasks of the men and also ploughed the land with oxen (WRCG104).

Maruôs unwillingness to exercise his power in a traditional sense correlates with his deeply problematic refusal to talk. In a crucial scene where Maru negotiates his sense of difference with his sister, Dikeledi, the narrator explains to us Maruôs thoughts:

> ...should he bother to explain to Dikeledi the language of the voices of the gods who spoke of tomorrow? That they were opening doors on all sides, for every living thing on earth, that there would be a day when everyone would be free and no one the slave of another? (M 68-9)

Maruôs refusal to share his visions of a democratic Africa with his sister ultimately hampers him from realizing it. In a misconstrued and specifically male fashion, Maru values actions above words and the relegation of women. He does not understand what Headôs female characters understand, that a sympathetic discursive environment is the necessary precondition for any social change.

Between prince Ramagodi and chief Matenge of *When Rain Clouds Gather* and Moleka of *Maru*, the image of women is that of a sexual object to be abused at will. Makhaya of *When Rain Clouds Gather* and Maru of *Maru*, however, stand for the new male humaneness which insists on seeing women as equal partners. They understood that women are as capable of choice as men, and thus can choose to elevate themselves, moving beyond the immanence to which they were previously resigned and reaching transcendence, a position in which one takes responsibility for oneself and the world, where one chooses oneôs freedom.

iii The Humanistic Vision of Bessie Head

Existentialism began as a movement to heal manôs soul. As Nietzsche in Brink notes that, ñthe disease of contemporary man was that his soul had gone stale, he was fed up and that all about there was a bad smell...ò (106). This óbad smellô is smelt powerfully in Bessie Headôs South Africa, and it is a manifestation of frustrated needs, or blocked potentialities, a loss of a sense of manôs creative dynamics. She explores the existential themes from several angles, because it is her own quest she is recording and analysing; her writings are somewhat fictionalized versions of her problems. Her three novels are al1 inspired by her life and the basis of the stories are taken from her own experiences. Thus the solutions she suggests for attaining an

authentic living and wholeness differ from one novel to another and there is an obvious evolution in her philosophy and way of thinking.

When Rain Clouds Gather is her first attempt to understand the alienation of refugees and foreigners, when they find themselves in a new and different environment. Her own experience as a refugee was difficult, but she did believe, at that time, that she could easily adapt herself. She gave to Makhaya her own hopes of finding in Botswana, the promised land. The optimistic vision of *When Rain Clouds Gather* is therefore Headôs own positive look on her new life in Botswana. However, Makhayaôs fairy-tale turned into a deceptive reality for Bessie Head. Unlike Makhaya, she felt rejected from the community and did not find a husband and a father for her child. She realised that her issues was not as easily solved as she imagined it in *When Rain Clouds Gather* and that she had to go further in her exploration.

Maru is a depiction of Headôs disillusionment. There she tackles again the problem of racial prejudices, but she makes sure that her protagonist would not adapt or be accepted by the community. This suggests that she blamed the people of her community for their inhospitable attitude and also felt different from the people of the village. Like Maru and Margaret, she thought she had parapsychological powers and turned to the exploration of the human psyche in search of answers. *Maru* is her first examination of the human mind in terms of power and capacity. But *Maru* is also a transitional novel, between *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *A Question of Power*, in the sense that external environment still plays an important role. In this novel, Bessie Head still believed in the fairy-tale love story and gave Margaret, the stereotyped poor and persecuted girl, a loving husband, Maru, who is ironically a king. Of the three novels analysed in this thesis, *Maru* is the most unrealistic. Bessie Headôs confusion

in *Maru* is that she wanted her novel to be both a protest against racial prejudices and the continuity of her quest to attain an authentic living out of the existential problems she is facing.

In *A Question of Power*, the external environment is secondary and madness comes from psychological problems. It is important to keep in mind that Head probably suffered from neurosis and that she realised that people around her were not the only ones responsible for her problems. She then focused only on herself and explored her own psyche. She examined her consciousness and the repressed memories and wishes hidden in her unconscious. However, the reader soon realises, through the character of Elizabeth that Headôs disintegration derives from sociological trauma. Head not only suffered from apartheid in South Africa, but she also accepted as true the racial and sexual prejudices of both races and, considering her already existent mental illness, it only aggravated her trauma.

6:2 Conclusion

This dissertation has investigated the themes that the term existentialism espouses and has shown the various ways the existential themes of alienation, anxiety, fear, authenticity and the absurd have dominated the search for identity and commitment in the writings of South African Bessie Head. The word existence comes from the root, óexsistere,ô meaning literally óto stand out,ô óto emerge,ô and in this we see the intentional notion at the heart of existentialism. The human being is to be seen in the words of Brink,

> not as a static object or a collection of attributes or sensations, but as emerging and becoming.... Whatever may be the said about my material substance, as

> described by my anatomy or chemistry or physics, I exist. I am in existence, in space and in time, at a given moment, and my problem is how I am to be aware of this, and what I shall do about it (118).

The circumstances of life in Southern Africa destroy the psyche of Africans in an existential manner. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. South Africaôs absolute power rendered the black subhumans with their rights violated. The great injustices against their dignity reduce them to a state of inferiority, rage and hatred. A major conclusion drawn is that the existential search for a humanistic response to black suffering motivates literary creativity. The essence of Bessie Headôs writing is the unravelling of her sad life story and her expression of the need to belong in an environment of peace and mutual understanding. The strong affinity that she has with the characters she creates emerges in her effort to depict an ideal world of existence. Her prose is suffused with organic metaphors of rootedness and rootlessness, of blooming and withering, of production under drought conditions and of herself as a Cape gooseberry transplanted to Serowe, all of them drawn from an intimacy with her society. The characters fragmented and alienated worked out strategies for survival and recognition through self-assertion. Another conclusion drawn from this study is that the quest for a universal identity that defies definitions of race or tribe should be enshrouded in the traditional outlook in other to attain total liberty for both the whites and blacks. The creation of Margaret and Elizabeth, borderline characters that, as the writer acknowledges, was hardly African but something new and universal, types of personalities that would be unable to fit into a definition of something as narrow as tribe or race or nation, seems to reflect the

writerôs most personal conviction, the desire for a race free society in which everybody projects a global identity.

6:3 Recommendations

One, Bessie Head may have never read Heidegger or Kierkegaard, but we call her views of time and life existential in her novels, therefore, it is recommended that works of other African writers be examined with the theory of existentialism as they inform black identity and to understand the various intricate strategies they would use to preserve their existence.

Two, there are many subjects that still need to be explored; they were beyond the scope of this study. They include a more detailed examination of the parallels between the authorôs life and her work, a study of how realistic her characters are and the function of the fairy-tale structure in her novels.

Three, Africans should be encouraged to widen their study of blacksô literary texts in order to be equipped with the where withal of protecting their self worth against any trick of being looked down on by other races. Black existence cannot be explored better without referring to literature.

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