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Adetokunbo Pearse

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Abstract

No work in the corpus of African literature dealing with the theme of madness, for example Achebe's *Arrow of God*, Kofi Awoonor's *This Earth, My Brother*, or Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments*, captures the complexity and intensity of the insane mind as does Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*.¹ Bessie Head's thrust into the insane mind and her ability to speak the highly symbolic language of madness derives, it seems, from a combination of the painful personal experience of mental aberration and an interest in psychoanalytical theories.

Apartheid and Madness: Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*

No work in the corpus of African literature dealing with the theme of madness, for example Achebe's *Arrow of God*, Kofi Awoonor's *This Earth, My Brother*, or Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments*, captures the complexity and intensity of the insane mind as does Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*.¹ Bessie Head's thrust into the insane mind and her ability to speak the highly symbolic language of madness derives, it seems, from a combination of the painful personal experience of mental aberration and an interest in psychoanalytical theories.

In *A Question of Power*, Bessie Head uses the psychoanalysts' delimitation of the human mind into the conscious, the sub-conscious, and the un-conscious to portray the totality of her protagonist's experience. She depicts childhood experiences as central to the mental makeup of the adult. There are hints at physiological malfunctions which may have led to the character's mental illness, but the emphasis is on society, the situation of the parents in it, and how these become instrumental in the social instability, as well as the mental imbalance of the protagonist later on in life.

The novel is primarily concerned with, not so much Motabeng where the bulk of the action takes place, but with the protagonist's mental retentions of her South African experience. Consequently, the Elizabeth we meet in Motabeng is a character already predisposed to a mental breakdown. The village of Motabeng in Botswana is the scene of her mental collapse, but the major causes of the collapse are to be found in her history and her experience of life in South Africa.²

The theory developed by Elizabeth's critics during her growing-up years in South Africa was that because she was born in a mental hospital by a mother believed to be insane, and because her mother commits the insane crime of suicide, she herself was bound to go insane. Bessie Head's narrator undermines this argument of hereditary insanity by exposing the society's prejudicial treatment of Elizabeth, and by emphasizing the social background to Elizabeth's mother's supposed insanity.

In her narrative, Bessie Head takes much of the socio-cultural influences which instruct Elizabeth's sensibilities for granted. The emphasis of the narrative is on the psychological, hence the social factors responsible for the protagonists' psychology are made subsidiary to the effect they produce on the mind. Yet in order to understand the character's psychology, it will be necessary to analyse in some detail the society that is at least partially contributory to its formation. Much of *A Question of Power* dramatises Elizabeth's psychotic experiences. During these experiences, Bessie Head seems governed by the Freudian assertion that the sexual libido is central to man's psychic behaviour. 'It must be said, however, that she is more like Freud's revisionists who adopt a less orthodox approach to Freud's sexual theories recognising early sex frustrations as causative in some cases but insist that factors like «anxiety» or the current life situation are more relevant.'³ This latter aspect of Bessie Head's approach, akin to the Jungian culture-based theories of madness, becomes crucial in an analysis of the causes of Elizabeth's madness.

One of the remote, or subconscious causes of Elizabeth's aberration is the stigmatization of an insane mother. There is no clear 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 to impress upon Elizabeth her own latent insanity. The real reason for declaring Elizabeth's mother mad seems to lie in the cynical comment by Elizabeth's gaunt principal: 'your mother was a white woman. They had to lock her up, as she was having a child by the stable boy, who was a native' (p.16). The woman is therefore locked up as mad because of her affair with a native stable boy. What constitutes insanity in this case is

the breaking of South Africa's Immorality Amendment Act of 1957.⁴

The question of Elizabeth's mother's real state of mind becomes, however, subordinate to the effect which the stigma of an insane mother has on the young Elizabeth. The maternal family rejects both mother and child, as do various other families, white and black. The reason for this rejection is to be found in the Apartheid Law which forbids persons of black and white races from living together as a family. Hence, the white grandmother who demonstrates her filial ties to a coloured grandchild has to do so secretly.

The family's determination to dissociate itself from Elizabeth and her mother goes beyond the fear of the law. The system of Apartheid creates graver psychological distortions in its subjects. Since by this system blackness implies inferiority, Elizabeth's mother's association with a black man is social pollution. Also in this divisive society where peoples are compartmentalized, the pseudo-scientific theory often associated with debased negritude, which equates white with brain power and black with sexual potency, is very much alive. Elizabeth's mother's relationship with a native is therefore seen as sexual lust. Apart from the government's desire to keep the races apart, for political reasons, there is its desire to keep them apart for moral reasons. To the South African government, Elizabeth's parents are moral as well as political criminals. To the family, both mother and child are sources of social shame, and evidence of sexual depravity.

Elizabeth therefore grows up experiencing both filial and societal rejection. The effect of this rejection on her proves devastating in later life. Elizabeth's rejection is primarily due to her mixed colour. Not being black or white, and yet being both, the mulatto soon develops a distorted view of her position and role in society, especially in a society which classifies people not by what they are intrinsically, but by the colour of their skin. This distorted view of herself, encouraged by the divisive nature of her society, and the schism latent in Elizabeth's mulatto psychology become overt in her psychosis.

In Apartheid South Africa, the problems surrounding the half-caste child begin even before its conception. The union of black and white being illegal, the coming together of its parents is illegal, hence the child is the illegal product of an illegal affair. The child itself personifies a dilemma in a society where the individual is expected to be white or black, for easy classification. The dilemma is more the child's, however, as the government has the classification of 'coloured' or 'Boesman', i.e. bushman, ready for it. When the character involved is one who, like Elizabeth, is extremely sensitive to her social circumstances, the problem

becomes bewildering. With the white people she feels a sense of inferiority due to the streak of 'inferior' black in her. With black people she feels a sense of superiority due to the streak of 'superior' white in her. Not wishing to feel better or worse than anybody, she hates both black and white. Her complexes become even more complicated because she cannot enjoy the temporary purging of pent-up emotion through hating the other, for being white and black, she cannot afford to hate either. To do so would be to reject a part of herself. Finding herself in this double-bound situation, Elizabeth develops an ambivalent attitude to both black and white. Elizabeth's psychosis is the dramatization of the attempt to reconcile these complexes. And the attempt to reconcile her complexes and her ambivalent attitude towards life constitute the social and spiritual strivings at the core of the symbolic nightmarish passages of *A Question of Power*.

Elizabeth's associations and choices in adulthood reveal that she has to some extent accepted, and internalized, the sense of inferiority and evil imposed on her by society. 'Her identification figure is a mother, defined by society as mad, sexually depraved and evil. Because her mother is an unsatisfactory model for her behaviour and ego, Elizabeth herself develops a negative ego. With such a negative view of the self, the character soon develops vague feelings of destruction and decay due to belief in her own misdeeds.'⁵ Elizabeth's marriage points to an acceptance of guilt, and 'subconscious' wish for punishment. She marries a gangster just out of jail barely a week after their meeting, and for no apparent reason except a doubtful mutual interest in Eastern Philosophies. The man proves to be an irrepressible sexual pervert. Although Bessie Head condones neither the womanizing nor the homosexuality of Elizabeth's husband, she seems to infer that his sexual aberrance is due at least in part to the soul-stifling conditions of South African life. Like Elizabeth's husband, many of the coloured men are homosexual. The major reason for this is the society's imposition of an inferior status on the coloured men. The explanation given to Elizabeth by another character reveals this:

'How can a man be a man when he is called boy? I can barely retain my own manhood. I was walking down the road the other day with my girl, and the Boer Policeman said to me «Hey, boy where's your pass?» Am I a man to my girl or a boy?' (p.45)

The problem of the coloured South African's confused sexuality goes even deeper than this explanation. The man who is called a boy may develop a sense of insecurity to the point that he sees himself, not as a

'boy' with limited male status, but as a 'woman', who in most societies is constantly driven to seek the protection of a man for social and other forms of security. The homosexual men of whom Bessie Head writes are not 'boys'. They are 'female-males' who wear women's clothes, 'tied turbans round their heads, wore lipstick, fluttered their eyes and hands and talked in high, falsetto voices' (p.45). Yet another explanation may be added to this psychological dimension. The half-caste men having been labelled the products of a criminal sexual affair between white and black parents, are by implication themselves accused of sexual depravity. 'The homosexual acts of these men may therefore be seen as a demonstration of their negative acceptance of the role imposed on them by society.'⁶ These men are accepting, on the one hand, the role of the subjected female and, on the other, the role of the sexual pervert. Elizabeth's own sexual difficulties, which Bessie Head treats as symptoms of her psychosis, are similar to those of these men.

Behind this abnormal psychology lies South African life, where existence 'was like living with permanent nervous tension...' (p.19). Here white people and black people are constantly in a state of war, with violent hatred and oppression as the weapon of war. As the narrator says, 'the whitepower structure does not see people, humanity, compassion or tenderness'. All it sees is its own power. The power maniacs aspire to be gods with the power of life and death over people. 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.

The questions which Elizabeth ponders on may be summarized thus: Given the South African situation where 'the whites have imposed a whole range of jargon to define their humanity as opposed to the non-humanity of black people',⁷ how does one relate to oneself, and how does one relate to others in the society? These questions, though sociological, attain spiritual proportions because of the Buddhist philosophy which Bessie Head expounds in the novel. 'By this faith, spiritual focus is placed on man's relationship to man and to the human condition, not to an unknown deity.'⁸

Since according to the guiding philosophy of the novel, man's well-being with the world begins with his well-being with himself, Elizabeth's well-being is tested with probings about her self-image. The reactions to these probings often take the form of sexual symbolism. Various references and inferences are made to Elizabeth not having a vagina, or of having an ineffectual one.

This sexual negation is what symbolises the negative view of the self.

The second pertinent question with which Elizabeth's subconscious confronts her is her relationship to society. Here too Elizabeth's relationship proves to be perjured. Both of these negative revelations upset Elizabeth. But according to the narrator, it is the question of her negative relationship to the African society which 'pulled the ground right from under Elizabeth's feet'. When Medusa declares: «Africa is troubled waters, you know. I'm a powerful swimmer in troubled waters. You'll only drown here. You're not linked up to the people. You don't know any African languages» (p.44), she is implying that Elizabeth is doomed in many ways. Such a prospect is frightening for Elizabeth, because it means she truly becomes a 'non-being'; since she is unacceptable to whites and blacks alike, she can only be identified with the coloured homosexual men whom she has herself mentally annihilated. It will also mean that like the oppressors, whom she detests, she too has developed the superiority complex of the power maniac who prides himself on his detachment from black culture. The seriousness of the mental conflict which surrounds her relationship to black people culminates in her first mental breakdown.

Although Elizabeth is not party to the oppressive machinery of the South African power structure, she shares in its burden of guilt. As Lilian Feder says in her book, *Madness and Literature*, the threatening fantasy figure is usually an internalised agent of guilt and fear. Elizabeth hates herself as she does everybody else. This feeling which is at first 'repressed', boils over during her exile in Motabeng.

Elizabeth's search for repose in Motabeng is disturbed by her mental retentions of South African life. She has stored in her mind the contempt, melancholy, and despair which had instructed her life in South Africa. Suspecting that she is transferring this negative view of life on Motabeng society, she embarks on a mental battle to stop herself. In South Africa, Elizabeth's conscious and subconscious were agreed on hating the society. In Motabeng, however, a conflict arises between the conscious effort to love the new society, and the subconscious state of hatred. Insanity occurs out of the failure to bring the conscious and the subconscious to congruence.

Elizabeth's first impressions of Motabeng appear to have been blemished by the bleak experience of her life in South Africa. The Motabeng that she sees is 'a place with harsh outlines and stark, black trees ... a great big village of mud huts' (p.20). Although the narrator tells us that the people's witchery 'seemed to Elizabeth the only savagely cruel side to an otherwise beautiful society', Elizabeth's observation of the physical and cultural aspects of Motabeng reveals a greater rejection of

the village.⁹ She finds the 'pitch-black darkness of the Motabeng night terrifying'. To her, the life of the Motabeng farmer is a gruesome one. And in spite of interest in farming, 'she cancelled totally the idea of being that kind of farmer who earned her year's supply of food in breakneck battles with dangerous wild animals' (p.60). Realising that in this gruesome confrontation of man with various aspects of his environment there is more benevolence than disdainful detachment, Elizabeth begins to compare life in Motabeng with that of her native South Africa, and to see the positive aspects of Motabeng village life. The Motabeng people are friendly towards one another, and are an easy-going people. In South Africa, on the other hand, the people are unfriendly and are impatient with one another. Whereas the Motabengs greet one another with 'my friend' or 'wait a bit', the South Africans give each other 'the kind of greeting one dog gives another, 'Hey, Kaffir, get out of the way' (p.21).

In spite of her infatuation with Motabeng life, Elizabeth finds that she cannot share in its peace and community feeling. She is excluded from the community partly because of the people's cautious attitude to strangers, especially those like Elizabeth who would not confide in them through mutual gossip of village life, but more essentially because of her own attitude of withdrawal, a sort of defence mechanism, conditioned by her early experience of societal rejection.

When Elizabeth collapses into madness, it is without any apparent reason. She suddenly begins to rave against a man she hardly knows. The significant thing about her action here is the animosity she shows towards the man for no other reason than that he is black. The 'provoking agent' on the occasion of her first breakdown is a black face, a vivid reminder of the colour conflict in her subconscious. Since colour conflict is not a major issue in Motabeng, and yet so vital in the onset of Elizabeth's madness, the causes of her psychosis must be traced to South Africa where the colour problem is an integral aspect of daily life. What comes through Elizabeth's psychotic episodes in Motabeng is the dramatization of her subconscious where the memory of South African life lives in symbolic form.

The focus of *A Question of Power* 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.¹⁰ Through the character Elizabeth we see how naked evil, when it invades an individual's 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.

Bessie Head structures Elizabeth's madness along the lines of basic Existential Psychoanalysis. The characters Sello, Medusa, and Dan are not the real human characters of conventional literature, rather they are aspects of Elizabeth's 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 evils of South African life is the conscious self. 'Sello' 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 the derivatives of her subconscious.¹¹

Elizabeth's nightmarish 'journeys into the soul' begin with a dialogue with her subconscious 'Sello'. 'Sello' encourages her to proceed on her inquiry with the argument that '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' (p.34). Sello's 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 Elizabeth's mind are only surpassed by 'Dan', Elizabeth's unconscious who may be called the anti-christ 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. They tell her 'she hadn't a vagina', 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, man's 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. It is in this spirit of segregation that 'Medusa' identifies Elizabeth rigidly with the coloured homosexual men, and accuses her of hating Africans. By

'Medusa's' rigid classification of people, a coloured person cannot survive in Africa, cannot know Africa, and cannot love, or be loved by Africans. Such a prospect would destroy Elizabeth's 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 ends. 'Dan' promises to love and protect Elizabeth. He feigns humility and tries to win her trust by it. 'Dan's' declared innocence proves to be a deception. 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. 'Dan's' appeal for trust is designed to unarm her, so that her consciousness may be more easily assailed with 'a ruthless concentration on the obscene'. 'Dan's' assault takes the form of flagrant images of corrupting, of child molestation and rape, of homosexuality, bestiality, incest and death.

Being Elizabeth's unconscious, 'Dan's' 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. 'Dan's' strategy is to destroy any sense of love or respect Elizabeth may have for herself, and thereby destroy her love and respect for others. This 'Dan' does by flaunting before her his perverted love affairs and sexual lust. This is meant to remind her of her sexual depravity on the one hand, and of her sexual inferiority on the other. Dan reduces love to mindless, loveless copulation. For a while, this perverted version of love is all that is available to Elizabeth. Finding it unacceptable, Elizabeth is compelled to live without love, even though love is an essential factor in her search for spiritual fulfilment.

In 'Dan's' stunted visions everything and everyone is perverted. He tries to fill Elizabeth's soul with the pervading influence of evil, not only by associating himself and Elizabeth with evil, but by including the whole of Africa in the charade. This vision of 'Dan's' 'began to make all things African vile and obscene. The social defects of Africa are first the African man's loose, carefree sexuality' (p.137). It also accuses the African of savage cruelty, which according to him has its origins in the balance of terror created by witchcraft practices.

Elizabeth says it is the accusation that she is dissociated from the African world that discomforts her the most. What comes through the narrative, however, is her obsession with sexual perversion, and the tortuous effect it has on her. At points of deep psychosis, it is images of

sexual lust and sexual perversion which swamp her unconscious. The preoccupation with sex and its perversion seems influenced by the author's belief that sex, rather than being merely an expression of sensual lust, should be seen in the religious sense as the consummation of the unity of man and woman.

Although not as well entrenched as the forces of evil in South Africa, the racist oppressors have their counterparts in Motabeng. These are the 'power people' like Camilla. Camilla is egocentric and aggressive. She is always determined to impress on all around her a sense of her own superiority. Camilla seems obsessed with the need to negate the Africans. She declares with her accustomed air of self-importance, 'I don't understand these people. They don't know anything at all, and they're «so lazy»' (p.78). She relishes in contrasting this alleged ignorance of the Africans with the heightened culture of her own Danish society. Elizabeth draws a polarity between Camilla's 'scatter-brained assertion of self-importance' and 'small-boys' air of quiet, authoritative manly calm'. With Camilla's arrival, the vegetable garden is turned from a heaven to 'the most miserable place on earth'. Small boys' presence, on the other hand, radiates peaceful growth.

The novel itself is structured along similar lines of polarity. The episodes which present Elizabeth's 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 therapy to come back into the rhythm of the normal world. Elizabeth's 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 Eugene's 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' and '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 charac-

ters like 'Small-boy' and Bergette; between the simplicity of the latter, and the former's tendency to regard complexity and incomprehensibility as the height of good taste.

Bessie Head's intention in *A Question of Power* is quite 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. 'She wishes for a multi-racial society which utilises the workable aspects of both white and black cultures for the mutual good of all.'¹² The co-operation 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 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.

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 good for the betterment of man. And heaven is not a remote unseen, but a world-society inspired by man's 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 'thunderbolt-wielding' 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 society's power maniacs.

The socio-political system of apartheid 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 Eugene's disturbing but valid observation that 'South Africans usually suffered from some form of mental aberration' (p.58). An in-depth analysis of Bessie Head's narrative reveals that although her protagonist survives the pangs of madness and attains spiritual salvation, the chain of evil is not necessarily broken.¹³ When at the end of the story we are told of the protagonist: 'As she fell asleep, she placed one soft hand over her

land. It was a gesture of belonging' (p.206), it would appear that she has made her peace with Motabeng. But viewed in the total human construct of the novel's philosophy, this apparent reconciliation can only be at best arbitrary, even escapist. For Elizabeth as an individual, Motabeng serves as a soothing counter-force to the depressive environment of South Africa. But using Motabeng, which is not the scene of the cause of her aberration as much as the scene of its cure, suggests that the real causes of anxiety and tension are still quite intact. The pervading tone of the narrative echoes strongly Bessie Head's primordial fear that 'most of what one clearly despises has the power to control the world and inflict suffering'.¹⁴ Although far from celebrating the indestructibility of apartheid, *A Question of Power* dramatizes in psycho-existentialist terms its uncanny ability to threaten human sanity and disrupt social harmony and balance.

NOTES

1. Bessie Head, *A Question of Power* (London: Heinemann, 1974). All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
2. See also 'Some Notes on Novel Writing', an address presented by Bessie Head to the Writers Workshop of the UBLS (Gaborone campus), April 1976, published in Sepho Sepamla, ed., *New Classic*, No 5, 1978 (pp.1-4), and 'Conversations with Bessie', typescript interview with Betty Fradkin referred to in Christopher Heywood's 'Traditional Values in the Novels of Bessie Head', in Daniel Massa, ed., *Individual and Community in Commonwealth Literature* (Malta: University of Malta Press, 1973), p.13, all of which show that the turmoil worked out through Elizabeth in Botswana is really fashioned by Bessie Head's South African experience.
3. S.E. Hyman, 'Psychoanalysis and Tragedy' in Benjamin Nelson, ed., *Freud and the Twentieth Century* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958), p.172.
4. Edward Roux, *Time Longer than Rope: A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), p.441.
5. J.K. Myers and B.H. Roberts, *Family and Class Dynamics in Mental Illness* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), p.231.

These two authors in their research show how a person's psychology is greatly affected by the society's assessment of the adult (usually a parent) on whom he models himself as a child, i.e. his 'identification figure'.

6. *Ibid.*, pp.231-5.
7. In Bessie Head's letter to Christopher Heywood, dated 13 May 1978.
8. Trevor Ling, *The Buddha* (London: Maurice Temple Smith Ltd., 1973), pp.116-21.
9. Elizabeth's resentment of the poverty of Motabeng and of being initially rejected by the people of that village is natural. This would be similar to Bessie Head's reaction to the feelings of alienation which Jane Grant, in 'Bessie Head, an Appreciation' in

Abigail Mozley, ed., *Bananas*, No 22, August 1980 (London), pp.25-6, says Ms Head first experienced in Botswana. *A Question of Power*, we are told by Jane Grant on Bessie Head's authority, is autobiographical.

10. Jane Grant, *op. cit.*
11. My analysis is here guided by the general psychoanalytical division of man into the conscious, the subconscious, and the unconscious, or the ego, the super-ego, and the id, and more specifically by Harry Slochower in 'Contemporary Psychoanalytical Theories on Creativity in the Arts' in Joseph Strelka, ed., *Literary Criticism and Psychology* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 1976), pp.207-19, which demonstrates the peculiar relationship between these levels of the human mind.
12. Bessie Head, 'Some Notes on Novel Writing' (*op. cit.*); evil, this article suggests, is like Medusa, the many-headed gorgon of Greek mythology, which has the uncanny ability of self-reproduction.
13. Much critical comment, it would appear, disagrees with this view. See for example Christopher Heywood's 'Traditional Values in the Novels of Bessie Head' (*op. cit.*); A. Ravenscroft, 'The Novels of Bessie Head' in C. Heywood, ed., *Aspects of South African Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1976); Ojo-Ade's 'Bessie Head's Heroine, Victim or Villain' in *Bashiru*, No 5, 1978; Jane Grant's 'An Appreciation'; and Kola Wole Ogungbesan's 'The Cape Gooseberry also Grows in Botswana' in Yande Diob, ed., *Présence Africaine*, No 109, 1979. These critics 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. This optimistic interpretation in my 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.
14. Bessie Head's letter to Christopher Heywood, May 1978.

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