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Abstract
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Cover Page Footnote

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1 EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL DIVIDEDNESS

'Identity' bores me, I am simply not interested in defending identity as a kind of — how shall I put it … essential, as a kind of necessary thing…. (Said 2002 3). That, plucked from the middle of a 1997 interview, is the voice of Edward Said, taking up the idea he expressed in *Culture and Imperialism* that instead of insisting too strongly on our ethnic or cultural (or whatever) identities we should be more concerned with 'knowing about others' (Said 1993 362). In a similarly sceptical vein, the following discussion of the issue of personal identity in Bessie Head's writing aims to test the validity of the concept and the explanatory force of alternative concepts. To this purpose I wish to inquire into two rather mundane ideas that, taken in conjunction, may point to a better understanding of this major twentieth-century African writer whose work and person are as puzzling as they are fascinating.

My starting point is with Bessie Head's often expressed insight that the only way to understand and possibly master her personal crises, her 'manifold disorders' (1990 8), was to relate them to the crisis of being a black/coloured woman in Southern Africa, and to the crisis of the continent in the aftermath of colonialism. Born in 1937 as the daughter of a white mother and a black father, Bessie was what apartheid ideology classed as racially mixed or coloured. While around 1900 coloureds in Natal had had the same legal status as whites, including the right to vote, their status was gradually eroded, till in the '30s and '40s the racist distinctions of the post-1948 order were firmly established.[1] In 'A gentle people', an essay written for *The New African* in 1963, Head considers the situation of the 'Cape Coloureds', celebrating their 'gentle and unaggressive personality' (1990 10) but criticising them for their political lethargy. Two decades later, in 'Notes from a quiet Backwater', published in *Drum* in 1982, Head confirms her involvement in the world out there even as she stylises herself in the role of a recluse:

> I need a quiet backwater and a sense of living as though I am barely alive on the earth, treading a small, careful pathway through life.
>
> All my work is scaled down to this personality need, with the universe itself seen through the eyes of small, individual life dramas. (1990 77)

Safe in her backwater she can observe the 'howling inferno' (1990 77) that is played out on the African stage. This biographico-political thesis (Olaussen

16) is at the same time a poetics of fiction. On the pathway of her life (hardly ever a carefully trodden one), Bessie Head moved anything but steadily from self-rejection to self-acceptance, and developed an understanding of identity in which originally prevailing ideas of wholeness were replaced by a highly contemporary concept of dividedness and self-creation. This second thesis is about the psychology and philosophy of self-perception. Both theses have to do with the representation and understanding of the conflictual relationship between self and other, and for Bessie Head this involves finding ways of recognising and accepting (in a cline of embrace and rejection) her own divided identity, as well as recognising and accepting (as above) those forces outside that sustain or threaten but most certainly shape this identity.

In view of Head's well-documented tendency to become suspicious and distrustful of the very people most intent on befriending and helping her it seems safe to say that it is probably not a fear of rejection of strangers and outsiders that lies at the bottom of her personal (and creative) problem. Her experience is tainted not with xenophobia but with the fear and distrust of those who are close to her — her friends, her neighbours, her own self even — and more generally the oppressive traditions of an Africa she yet felt to be hers. This paradoxical condition could be termed philophobia, a fear leading to alienation, and in the reigning culture of selfishness that Christopher Lasch once dubbed the 'culture of narcissism' (Lasch passim) it is not nearly as unusual as one might think.

The topic of identity will be discussed with reference to a selection of writings by Head, making use of more or less explicit statements by her narrators and characters rather than interpreting the complex ambiguity of her narrative strategies and structures. I will refer in some detail to a model of the self which has served well in social counselling and which I have found particularly helpful in studying and teaching autobiographical writing.

What does it mean to speak of 'the alien inside'? The everyday notion of the alien is of someone or something coming in from outside: the alien is the immigrant, the foreigner, the stranger, the person whose natural habitat and features are not the same as mine, and whose difference poses a threat. In the case of Bessie Head, the writer herself is the alien, and she has learned to experience herself as such. She is born apparently white but soon classified as coloured into a society which hysterically rejects miscegenation; she is rejected by her mother's family and again rejected by her first foster-parents. Through the legacy of alleged insanity inherited from her mother she is also an alien in self-respecting 'normal' society; she is an alien in South Africa before she leaves the country, and when she arrives in Botswana, she finds herself an alien again. Over ten years after moving to Botswana she will still write, 'I have never had a country' (1990 28). As one of her first person narrators puts it, 'I figure that I'm some of the mess Africa's in today' (1989 33) The 'messiness' is caused by being an insider and an outsider at the same time. Being a woman does not in itself make her an outsider, but her

conscious recognition of what it is to be a woman in Southern Africa and having to bear the burdens of illegitimacy and insanity and unwantedness, all add up to a sense of what Head ruefully called 'wearing borrowed clothes' (1989 141, 143). This multiple alienation in the external world is not directly my topic, however. Rather, it serves as a backdrop to the internal alienation which she experienced when external factors became projected onto her inner self and took effect there; an alienation which she repeatedly gives expression to in her different kinds of writing. In an early text, 'Let me tell a story now …' (first published in 1962), she relates how fragile her sense of self can become under the pressure of pushy, intrusive people who 'can bust your ego to bits' so that she feels herself becoming easy prey to the many enemies lying in wait for her (1989 16). This vulnerability of the self finds an analogue in the way Head sees other people, namely as 'complete mysteries' and fragments of whom she can only make sense by hastily 'piecing [them] together' (1989 16.).[2] Such an identity is not experienced as an assured and reliable state, either in oneself or in others. The divided self poses problems of practical living, of knowledge and of representation.

In everyday life such fragmentation may be troubling and even dangerous, as Head's life story amply confirms, but it leads her to the insight that there is a dividedness of the self which is beneficial and necessary. 'A person must have two minds,' Head says in one of Head's notes on 'Village People' (1989 55), and the figure called 'Snowball' gives her the opportunity to explain that in some people 'contradictory ideas could live in chaotic happiness' (1989 30). Contradiction is 'the other name of truth' (1989 30). This applies first to external contradiction, as when the protagonist of the story called 'Property' speaks out against the elders of his clan, and second it can be a sign of internal harmony, of being that rare kind of person in whom 'word and deed agree' (1989 70). Superficial harmony, as in the escapist paintings of Gladys Mgudlandlu, is a dangerous thing, for it tempts one away from facing what Head calls 'the permanent madness of reality' (1990 17). A more honest response would be to to declare one's own psychic torment. In the climactic phase of *Maru,* when the outsider, Margaret, breaks through to the realisation of her creative gifts, Head offers a highly suggestive antithetical phrase describing three of the paintings she has produced: 'A [single] theme ran through them. There was a pulsating glow of yellow light dominating pitch black objects' (1971 102). Here is a true reconciliation of opposites, the creation of something meaningful and whole out of the debris of a tormented body and soul. Contradiction can also be a sign of social health, as in the story 'Kgotla,' when the negotiation of conflicting arguments leads to the formal reinstatement of peace in the village, though the final point of this story is that the real solution is brought about by an outsider figure, the 'Sindebele woman', and that 'the finest things often come from far-off places ...' (1977 68). On the other hand, Snowball's 'chaotic happiness' can easily turn into something that Head repeatedly refers to as the storm centre, 'the dead calm centre of a storm that rages over the whole of

Southern Africa' (1989 37), or the storm in the 'normally calm centre' of a man's body, 'just near the heart' (1989 27).

The repetition of the storm metaphor here and elsewhere[3] confirms that Head sees the external — the condition of Africa — and the internal — the state of individual minds — as mirror images of each other. Writing about conflicts of the soul and of the mind may be traced to her life experiences, but above all it deserves recognition as a consciously developed strategy for writing about the ills of Africa and its people. To that extent, it is an analytical activity but it should be stressed that there is also a strong strain of creative prophecy in her work, a visionary habit of drafting utopias, for which the analysis of existing conditions is a necessary preparatory step.

2 SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND SELF-CREATION

The following discussion of self-consciousness and self-creation refers to arguments developed in Jonathan Glover's *I: The Philosophy and Psychology of Personal Identity.*[4] His book is about 'the ways people think of themselves' and 'about how far we create ourselves' (Glover 1988 13). In trying to work out answers to the question 'What is a person?' Glover uses ideas developed by Derek Parfit (1984) according to which personal identity is less important than survival, or continuing relation, and in which survival turns out to be partial rather than total (Glover 1988 102). In Parfit's words,

> What we value, in ourselves and others, is not the continued existence of the same particular brains and bodies. What we value are the various relations between ourselves and others, whom and what we love, our ambitions, achievements, commitments, emotions, memories, and several other psychological features. (284)

It is these forms of relatedness that ensure our continued existence or survival as persons, not any aspect of our being. Now if it is true that survival takes precedence over identity, do I have good cause to worry about losing my old self? Such a question is clearly important for an analysis of autobiographical writing, and of any kind of fiction in which the writer makes creative use of his or her own life experience. In Head's writing, the oscillation between reportage and fiction is a characteristic constructive and stylistic feature, that is evident in her book *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind* (1981) and her final novel, *A Bewitched Crossroad: An African Saga* (1984), as well as her other works. This merging of genres has some bearing on the question of how the unity of the self fares when it encounters and interacts with other selves, inside or outside of one's own self.

Glover expounds his ideas about what it means to 'be a person' on the basis of three claims. The first is that 'our natural belief that a person has an indivisible unity is mistaken' (Glover 1988 14). This claim has an important corollary: 'Understanding how to divide consciousness also suggests how we may be able to develop ways for people to share consciousness' (14). Bearing in mind what is known about Head's perceptions of herself and others, this could mean that

in learning to understand her own dividedness, and that of her continent, and in learning to write about this growth of self-understanding, she develops a way for others to share her consciousness. In particular, it could mean that she is learning to communicate a sense of wholeness in the making[5] that is necessary for herself as well as for Africa, a desire for wholeness reconciled with the historical experience of fragmentation.

Glover's second claim confirms this line of thinking: 'being a person requires self-consciousness' (1988 14) and having self-consciousness presupposes perceiving oneself as having a degree of unity. Note that unity is not an absolute, but a matter of degree, so that the five-year-old I once was and my present self, separated by fading and by reconstitution, are not entirely the same. Clearly, Bessie Head's writing is a form of expressing her consciousness of such a changing self and, as I have shown, her introspection leads her to discover both indications of unity, and elements that disrupt or threaten to disrupt this unity. However, while the philosopher can calmly accept the co-occurrence of unity and dividedness as being characteristic of any person, the long-suffering writer, under the pressure of conventional attitudes to personal identity, has reason to be worried by existential experiences of instability and disintegration. Head writes: 'There's nothing neat and tidy about me, like a nice social revolution. With me goes a mad, passionate, insane, screaming world of ten thousand devils and the man or God who lifts the lid off this suppressed world does so at his peril' (1990 47). On the other hand (and in the same text) she can discover in her fractured unity a quality which she memorably defines as 'That which is double-edged, That which is made of fire, That which is eternally alive' (1990 46, 49). The double-edged thing is 'Truth', with a capital T, the contrary of 'slushy emotions' which only parade as truth, and in the last resort it is a feminised god.[6]

The third claim on which Glover's analysis rests is that 'our natural beliefs about what our own unity consists in are mistaken' (Glover 1988 14). I take this to mean that even seemingly disruptive constituents like mad passions and screaming insanity do not really detract from unity of self. Up until the time she became aware of her mental deterioration, Head, like most of us, held naive assumptions about the nature of the self as something unified, stable and inheritable which were reinforced by people like the missionary who warned her that 'If you're not careful you'll get insane like your mother' (1990 4). It is not surprising that she adopted this outside view of herself as dangerously divided and possibly on the way to madness. As she began to project her self-analysis onto the alter egos whose voices may be heard in her letters and autobiographical writings, and then in a still more objectified form onto the fictional characters of her novels and tales, she gradually learned to leave the conventional beliefs behind her and to adopt the more complex positions described. In 'Some Notes on Novel Writing' she explains how she needs to 'concentrate directly on people' who are visible and external rather than on 'some hidden, unknown God or devil' (1990 63), invisible

and possibly internal, in order to be able to express her deeply experienced truths. In so doing she learns to understand herself, to bring 'the problem of evil closer to my own life', as she puts it (1990 63). In other words, by externalising and distancing her insights in narrative she can bring them back to bear directly on herself, but now without putting herself so immediately at risk.

Glover's concept of the necessarily divided self leads him to a second level of analysis on which the consequences of such a self-perception are explored. The main consequence is what he calls 'our active interest in what marks us off from other people' or 'self-creation' (Glover 1988 16), an idea familiarised as self-fashioning by New Historicist critics, but actually deriving from Nietzsche[7] and developed in the 1920s by phenomenological thinkers and especially sociologists of understanding such as Max Weber and Alfred Schütz.[8] Glover proposes three claims for our consideration. According to the first claim, 'the distinctiveness of a particular person is not something just given, but is something we partly create in the course of our lives' (Glover 1988 17). Note the quasi-novelistic elements of process and of composition in this definition of created distinctiveness. In *Maru,* after young Margaret is taken up by her missionary foster-mother in order to be shaped for her future task of educating the Masarwa, she experiences a vacuum of non-identity in which 'unlike other children, she was never able to say "I am this or that, my parents are this or that"'(15). Before she can at last become 'conscious of herself as a person' (15) she must learn to speak back and reject the pejorative categories of 'Bushman, mixed breed, half breed, low breed or bastard' (16) thrust upon her by others. It is through contradiction-as-education that she acquires a composite, novel identity:

> Her mind and heart were composed of a little bit of everything she had absorbed from Margaret Cadmore. It 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 nation. (20)

Margaret moves forward into more active phases of self-fashioning, first with the help of Dikeledi, and then self-reflexively, through recourse to her 'own inner resources' (1971 94). In each phase, she strives to reassert her identity (in powerful defiance of those who deny the Masarwa teacher any right to a fully formed and self-determined identity) and to redefine it (rebuking those who seek to check or curtail her growth). An instance of this redefinition occurs after the incident of the two goats, 'the Queen of Sheba and the Windscreen-wiper', when Margaret, looking downhill across the village, recognises that she 'belongs', or in Parfit's term, is 'related':

> She stood where she was, empty-handed, but something down there belonged to her in a way that triumphed over all barriers. Maybe it was not even love as people usually think of it. Maybe it was everything else; necessity, recognition, courage, friendship and strength. (99)

This catalogue of 'something' as 'everything else' is remarkably similar in content and structure to the forms of relatedness listed by Parfit, which emphasise incompletion and process as against essence and stasis.[9] One might note that Glover too replaces the static term identity by 'distinctiveness', that is, an essentialist term by a structuralist one. In doing this he implies that wholeness of self is a false model and an inappropriate ideal, a view that is supported by what he says elsewhere about the way a person edits, abridges and expands his/her own history in order to produce a coherent narrative (Glover 1988 149–52). This coherently narrated self depends decisively on the values that we express to ourselves and to others in communicating who we are.

Values are a central element of Glover's second claim for self-creation, which holds that we 'partly creat[e] ourselves in the light of our own values' (1988 17). This means that self-creation is not haphazard but goal-directed by the values that we believe we hold, and believe we are seen to hold by others. In her story 'The Collector of Treasures' (1977), Bessie Head contrasts two types of men: one type that 'could be broadly damned as evil' (91), the other having 'the power to create himself anew' by learning and practising the virtue that Head calls 'tenderness' (93). It is such value-forging powers, as well as the positive and negative values that we identify in other people and ourselves and by which we identify them and ourselves, that are central to any biographical and autobiographical text, and more generally the essence of all fictional genres — the novel is nothing if not a discourse of value. The project of partial self-creation according to values occurs in the course of introspection (which includes reading), or of conversation with others (which includes listening),[10] but if it remained mental and verbal and were not carried over into our actions, we would soon recognise it to be vacuous, and it would collapse. This is demonstrated in *Maru*, where Margaret's ongoing reconstruction of self is externalised in her painting, as the beauty she sees becomes the beauty she makes: 'There was a part of her mind that had saturated itself with things of such startling beauty and they pressed, in determined panorama, to take on living form' (101). Margaret experiences this ecstasy of creation as 'total collapse and breakdown' and 'torture' (101, 102), from which she returns weary but strong to 'her quiet, insignificant way' (101), stronger than ever before in the knowledge that her creativity has made her 'a millionaire' (102). Similarly, in 'The Collector of Treasures', it is the recognition of Dikeledi Mokopi's skills in knitting, sewing and weaving that leads to a revaluation powerful enough to absolve her of her guilt: '"You are a gifted person", her fellow-prisoner Kebonye remarks, and Dikeledi confirms: "All my friends say so … it was with these hands that I fed and reared my children"' (90). These women's skills in art and crafts and nurturing, shared in communal work and talk, are values through which they recreate their selves and resist the loss of identity previously inflicted on them.

Values not only have a guiding function in self-creation —— self-creation itself is a value. That is the gist of Glover's third claim, when he insists that 'our

partial creation of ourselves is central to what we are like' (Glover 1988 18). By this he means that self-shaping is something that we value highly in itself, that it is retrospectively a valuable thing for us to have shaped ourselves, however imperfect the result may be. This attitude towards self-creation is important beyond the self for the contribution it makes to the establishment and dissemination of value(s) in society: it contributes towards a society which is self-creative and capable of development on the basis of values made explicit, tested, revised and taught. This is fully in accord with the way Head almost inextricably links her autobiographical reflections with the gradual narrative shaping of identities in her books, and with the overall theme of building a better world for men and women to live in.

3 SELF-RELATED ACTIVITIES

For the study of (auto)biographical texts of all kinds (including projections of a writer's self into fictional characters) it is useful to distinguish between a number of self-related activities: self-perception, self-creation, rejection of self and self-acceptance.[11] These can occur in sequence, in any order, or can be simultaneous or overlapping; but you cannot have one of them without the others. As we scrutinise ourselves, we will accept some elements and reject or wish to modify others, and in this we are influenced by other people's responses to us, responses which form a 'continuous corrective feedback' (Glover 1988 176). For each self-category there can also be one deriving from or referring to the other. For example, Head links self-creation, literary creativity and self-esteem very clearly in her 1975 'Preface' to the story 'Witchcraft', when she speaks of the 'ideal life' she 'forcefully created' for herself in Serowe, at last enabling her to 'dream dreams a little ahead' and create 'new worlds out of nothing' (1990 28). In *A Question of Power,* just as Elizabeth sees and judges herself, so she is seen and judged from the outside by Dan and Sello, and further she is rejected or accepted by the people around her and is to some extent created, or shaped, or constructed by others. Her autonomy is neither total nor final, since it is subject to the limitations and definitions exercised upon her by others. For example, when her headmistress reveals the truth about her mother, Elizabeth does not understand what she is being told, and the narrator explains, with retrospective emphasis, that 'She had always thought of herself as […]' (16). This statement indicates that what one is (or is seen by others to be), and what one believes oneself to be, are unlikely to coincide. When self-perception and the view from outside diverge so dramatically, an existential crisis is bound to ensue, at least in a culture that does not accept such divergence.[12] In an institution like the mission school the outside view, with its authoritarian claims to official truth and educational experience, will take precedence and condemn Elizabeth's (or Head's) private view as false or even wicked. It is this formative early experience of Head's that leads me to conjecture that for her the most threatening 'other' was decreed to be inside herself, inside her shameful family history. Too weak to reject the account given

by her headmistress, Elizabeth has no alternative but to turn against herself. The result is self-doubt and self-hatred and the painstaking examination of the conflict of good and evil impulses inside her. Later, in the course of her adult experience as a journalist, wife and teacher in South Africa and Botswana, she grew to learn that her identity and self-confidence were threatened just as much by forces located outside her, in the anonymous or individual representatives of the ideologies of apartheid and masculinity and acquisition which tore individuals apart and also fractured families, communities and nations. What the relation between the two threats might be was yet another matter.

Illustrations of these activities of the self are to be found in many of Head's texts, such as 'The Village Saint' (1977 13–18). As Jonathan Glover explains, 'consciously shaping our own characteristics is self-creation' (Glover 1988 131). In this story we are told how Mma Mompati systematically constructs her identity as a 'saint' by behaving 'just like any English lady, with polished etiquette and the professional smile of the highborn who don't really give a damn about people or anything' (14). This kind of self-creation is identified by the narrator as being the erection of a façade, behind which the wise can recognise 'the real person' (13). The shift in the first paragraph from 'People were never fooled by façades' to 'She had a long reign of twenty-six years, and a fool-proof façade' shows how ironical Head's use of the metaphor is — people may be fooled by façades, but no façade is fool-proof for ever. The point of the story is that Mma Mompati is not the only person to have such a carefully constructed double identity — her very similar son (Mompati meaning 'little travelling companion') and her seemingly dissimilar daughter-in-law, Mary Pule, outdo her. Mary not only sees through the 'little game' that Mma Mompati has been playing for so long but she herself plays 'a hard game' (17) against it. By revealing the truth to the villagers about Mma Mompati, Mary topples her from the throne of saintly first lady and then ascends the pinnacle from where she can govern Mompati, who will continue to impose his cheap morality upon the villagers, who will continue to be fooled by his façade.

Glover suggests that self-creation may have a socio-biological dimension, in that it accompanies the process of leaving one's parental family and of possibly preparing to live with a partner, an idea illustrated in 'The Village Saint'. In a similar way, the themes of marital crisis and breakdown, and the whole troubled topic of sexuality, which are both prominent in Head's vita as well as her work, are associated with phases of self-rejection alternating with self-recreation. This was the case when she left Harold Head and South Africa (Eilersen 62) and carried her disillusionment and unhappiness with her to Botswana where 'the real Southern African dialogues took place' (1990 55), outer and inner dialogues which redefined her conception of what it meant to be a woman. The association of departure and self-refashioning is repeated in further situations, as when a person's social environment is upset (Head's sense of losing one friend after another, [Eilersen

60]), when she changes jobs (Head gives up journalism for teaching, [Eilersen 62, 70ff.]), alters her political alignment or religious persuasion (Head dabbles with Hinduism, [Eilersen 33–35]) and, most visibly, leaves her country of birth and goes into exile (Head's one-way exit permit in 1969, [Eilersen 62ff.]). There is clearly a pattern in which personal crisis and departure are linked with a reassessment of identity and gender role; but is this always a process of increasing happiness and self-determination, an experience of success in taking charge of one's own life (Glover 1988 129ff.)? Probably not, and in the case of Head there are at least two reasons why. For one, the periods of calm between the crises and the moves are too short, and each new phase of self-creation contains the frustrating memory of an earlier phase which did not culminate in success. Second, Head is always aware of her legacy of mental illness, a burden she can never shake off. Third, each move to another place, into a new job or project, means having to come to terms with new people, new demands, new obstacles, as was most noticeably the case when she arrived in Serowe (Eilersen 66).

In *A Question of Power,* before the narrator begins her narrative proper, she draws her readers into a complex meditation on identity. She distinguishes between identity as a man, as an African, and as a member of mankind, in that ascending order. A man's place in his local society and his place within humanity as a whole are at issue, but reflections on place, which is momentarily static, presuppose an account of how his self has become what it is for the moment, that is, something dynamic. Actually, the movement from one place to another, whether individual or in the form of group migration, is a frequent topic and always connected with the issue of changing identity. This 'soul evolution,' as Head also calls it, is seen to be dependent on a man's relation to society, the arena in which he can shape himself. In the case of Sello, the hero figure, he can learn to rid himself of 'his own personal poisons — pride and arrogance and egoism of the soul' (Head 1974 11). Dan, on the other, hand is a man who is unable to develop and who flaunts his vices in the face of his victim, which he typically and drastically does by 'flaying his powerful penis in the air and saying: 'Look, I'm going to show you how I sleep with B ...' (1974 13). This contrasting view of the two men's selves and development is compared with the self-perception attempted by Elizabeth, the female 'pivot' between Sello and Dan, and characterised as an 'examination of inner hells [...] meant to end all hells forever' (1974 12). The problem is that while the two men are at liberty to explore and express their inner selves, and to do this in very different ways, the pivotal woman figure is subjugated by the masculine 'mechanics of power' (1974 13), which breaking the metaphor of balance scales and pivot means that 'both men flung unpleasant details at her in sustained ferocity' while she 'had no time to examine her own hell' (1974 12). The question, and it is part of the question of power, is how the female figure can ever hope to fight free of such domination. For she cannot afford to suffer in passive silence: in a 'Letter from South Africa' Head considers 'the dangerous state of mind of being wrapped

up in your own troubles and miseries. You cannot think. You cannot live. It's just yourself all the time' (1990 14). Such self-absorption, she recognises, may seem to enhance the self but actually weakens it: 'Yes, maybe I am going to pieces because I was never the type to rush around doing things. I just sat around talking all the time [...]' (1990, 14). With hindsight we can see how Head's talking was a prelude to her writing, and that it is in the writing that she begins to 'do things' like examining her self and her relation to others from an outside perspective.

4 SUMMARY: SELF ACCEPTANCE AND INCLUSION

This essay suggests that Bessie Head's writing amounts to a considered refutation of two cherished but mistaken beliefs about the self. The first of these is the notion that a unity of the mind is conceivable and desirable, and without it a person would not exist, and the second is the notion that what might be thought of as evil, dangerous, despicable, alien or just different can be overcome by excluding it from a person's self-understanding and self-definition. Both Glover and Head suggest, on the contrary, that a self-analysis leading to self-condemnation and the exclusion of some parts of the self from the perception of who one is must in the long run be destructive. For Bessie Head, writing fiction offered some strategies for ridding herself of undesirable qualities, for example in the invention of villains like Dan (in *A Question of Power*) or Chief Matenge (in *When Rain Clouds Gather*). Ultimately more interesting as strategies for containing personal dividedness are the single figures and dual or quadruple constellations demonstrated in *Maru* and in *A Question of Power,* which reconcile contradictory features and finally constitute entities of greater truth to lived experience and greater explanatory power than any singular hero or villain. Exclusion is overcome in favour of inclusion, which can take many forms, of which one of the most important is the capacity to embrace the other in a tenderness or compassion transcending mere love, in which '[t]he depths of human feeling and tenderness are never explored' (Head 1989 52).

I have also tried to show that Bessie Head's ideas on these subjects are very close to the systematic arguments of a professional philosopher, without there being any direct link between the two. I have not been arguing that Head is a philosopher, but I do think that in her tortured life and in the tortuous processes of writing she achieved remarkably consistent and highly original way of exploring and representing truths about what it means to be a person.

NOTES

[1]   The main source of biographical data is Gillian Stead Eilersen's magnificent *Bessie Head — Thunder Behind Her Ears: Her Life and Writing,* where the concept of colour is discussed in connection with the circumstances of Bessie's birth on pp. 8–11. A concise account of the development of race classification in South Africa up to the 1940s is given by Nigel Worden in *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Segregation and Aparthei*, pp. 74–106.

2   The jigsaw metaphor recurs in the opening paragraph of *A Question of Power,* 11.

3   Also in 'The Coming of the Christ-Child' (1989 132).

4   For a brief assessment of his work cf. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy,* ed. Ted Honderich, Oxford: OUP, 1995, *s.v.* Jonathan Glover.

5   On the concept of wholeness as a process, see David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order,* Ch. 3, pp. 48–64.

6   Head relates the idea of 'That which is double-edged' to memories of the woman from America whom she glorifies as 'my "Nigra" Goddess', whereas 'there's something wrong with God, expressed as masculine' (1990 46).

7   Jonathan Glover gives a critical appraisal of Nietzsche's concept of self-creation in *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century,* esp. Ch. 2, pp. 11–18.

8   See Martin Brasser on Husserl, Buber, Rosenzweig and especially Edith Stein (137–51); and for an introductory account of the construction of personal identity in a social context see Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, especially Part III, pp. 194 –204**.**

9   The use of catalogue, proforms ('something', 'everything' 'nothing', anything') and the hyponymic 'all' is an extraordinary combination of adjunctive structures that signals how important this passage is for the assertion of an identity in the course of being reconstructed. On the theory of adjunctivity see Gohrbandt, *Textanlässe, Lesetätigkeiten*.

10   See Martin Buber's philosophy of genuine dialogue in *I and Thou*.

11   On the construction of self and being human as 'the composing of meaning' see Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self*. Dennis W. Petrie's *Ultimately Fiction: Design in Modern American Literary Biography* elaborates a closely related concept of 'design'.

12   Divergent perception from within, without and 'nowhere' is a central topic in Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, which also contains an illuminating discussion of Parfit's ideas on identity.

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