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BY:
CHUKWUEMEKA CHRISTIAN EKEMEZIE

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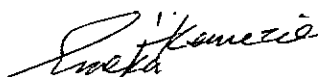Submitted to the
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EKEMEZIE, CHUKWUEMEKA CHRISTIAN
in the Department of English

CHUKWUEMEKA C. EKEMEZIE	_(signature)_	15-01-2009
AUTHOR'S NAME	**SIGNATURE**	**DATE**
EZEIGBO, T. AKACHI	_(signature)_	15-01-09
1ST SUPERVISOR'S NAME	**SIGNATURE**	**DATE**
2ND SUPERVISOR'S NAME	**SIGNATURE**	**DATE**
PATRICK OLOKO	_(signature)_	15/01/09
1ST INTERNAL EXAMINER	**SIGNATURE**	**DATE**
CHIMDI MADUAGWU	_(signature)_	15/01/09
2ND INTERNAL EXAMINER	**SIGNATURE**	**DATE**
OLU OBAFEMI	_(signature)_	15·01·09
EXTERNAL EXAMINER	**SIGNATURE**	**DATE**
C. J. Timothy Apoleele	_(signature)_	15/1/09
SPGS REPRESENTATIVE	**SIGNATURE**	**DATE**
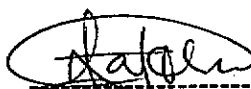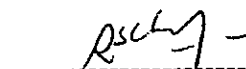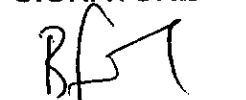
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Chukwuemeka C. Ekemezie

Department of English

University of Lagos, Akoka

January, 2009

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the memory of my late mother, Mrs. Peninah Ekemezie. To my immediate family also I dedicate the work, which I have been able to accomplish only by inconveniencing them and being sometimes "unreachable." Dr.(Mrs.) Vivian Ekemezie, Nonso Ekemezie, Richard Ekemezie, Tochukwu Ekemezie- you've all been my pillar of support as I pursued this work to the finishing point.

C.C. Ekemezie

ABSTRACT

This thesis has sought to approach Bessie Head's corpus of writings from the mythical angle, positing that the writer uses her mythical constructs to make valid and clear political statements. For one thing, not many critics have been able to locate, and annotate, the mythic elements in Head's literary works. For another thing, critics have not commented adequately on the author's use of myth for envisioning political and social changes. Unarguably, Head constantly seeks to create new "worlds" in which social segregation, political inequities and other forms of selective discrimination would be abolished.

Head, therefore, deliberately creates heroes and heroines who live sacrificial lives, patterned on the archetypal patterns set by mythical personas like Christ, Buddha, Osiris and Isis. Naturally, she also fashions adversarial figures like Maya, Al Capone, etc., whose sole aim is to occlude the positive vision of the mythical heroes and heroines in her short stories, novellas, novels, and historical writings. In accordance with the novelist's political vision of systemic change, however, the evil characters are usually thwarted in the scheme of things.

Such vile antagonists are subjected to Head's wry, sometimes caustic, humour; they are occasionally rendered as stock characters whom society must resist for it to advance to more egalitarian phases of human existence. In light of her artistic vision

of achieving social change through her writings, Head's art is rich in symbolism and resonance, in line with the deeper truths of life that her writings evoke. Her frankness of approach is particularly seen in the fact she does not shy away from contemning aggressive feminism, for instance, even if this directly pertains to her ilk. Instead, she proffers the concept of androgyny as the ideal mode of inter-gender relations. Such a balanced view of gender relations characterizes her overall artistic temperament.

In general, Head's prose is lucid, supple and loaded with political messages that are filtered through the prism of myth, thus enriching her art and deepening her vision.

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

This thesis, "Myth as Political Statement in Bessie Head's Fiction," seeks to establish and elucidate the links between myth and political action, or engagements of a political nature. The study shows how Bessie Head has employed myth as a tool for social mobilization and political change.

The above research title was chosen for this thesis because, in all her writings, Head uses the fabric of myth to make one political statement writ large – that all forms of discrimination globally should be discontinued and disparaged. Terry Eagleton has defined the political as "the way we organize our social life together and the power relations which this involves." In his words, "any body of theories concerned with human meaning, value, language, feeling and experience will inevitably engage with broader, deeper beliefs about the nature of human individuals and society, problems of power and sexuality, interpretations of past history, versions of the present and hopes for the future"(170). Such salient issues are, indeed, the very concerns that Head grapples with artistically in her writings. She also battles with such personal issues as alienation, marginalization and rejection. This study of Head's fiction traces how she fuses religious, cultural and ontological myths in defining and prescribing a progressive pathway for human existence.

The mythical nature of the experiences in Head's fiction tallies with the political orientation of her characters, in that myth provides philosophical and ethical, if not religious, backdrops to their actions. In *English Literature With World Masterpieces* (103), myth has been defined as a traditional story (sometimes of an anonymous origin)

that has its roots in cultural or national folk beliefs that rely on the supernatural to explain the mysteries of the world. This definition presupposes that cultural or national beliefs could be propagated universally as far as they condition and direct human conduct. Another assumption fostered by such beliefs is the prospect that they could be invested with the stamp of mystery, being organizing principles.

Myths differ from fairy tales because of the fact that they refer to a time that is different from ordinary time. The time sequence in myth is, therefore, extraordinary - usually the time before the conventional world came into existence. Myth is as such both rational-logical and intuitive-imaginative. However, contemporaneous myths are equally being created in each human epoch. This happens when human experience is elevated to a level beyond mundane contemplation. An act of sacrifice, a transcendent religious immersion, a sociological evolution, or a significantly transformative development in political experience could assume a mythic quality, perhaps because of the peculiar way such an experience grips people's imagination. Within this reified field of mythic experience, a tawdry, ordinary gesture, ritual or practice may acquire surreal significance.

In the Greek tradition, myth or *mythos* was always in opposition to *logos* (which denoted the rational and analytical mode of arriving at the true understanding of reality). Aristotle, recognizing *logos* as one of the tripods of rhetorical criticism, thought it was one of the means of achieving and sustaining clear language (cited in West and Turner, p.340). Aristotle at that time thought that the notion of *mythos* was subservient to *logos*. In *Dictionary of Folklore* (203), J.Simpson and S. Raul have defined myths as "stories about divine beings generally arrayed in a coherent system...." They feel that myth has the general sense of "untrue story, rumour." Mythos, in Homerian times, meant "just words" or "anything uttered as a story or a tale." However, myth, apart from denoting

God, also includes notions pertaining to issues of cultural and ideological implication, underscoring the identity or cohesiveness of family, kin, class, race, folks, society, state, government, party or religion.

Joseph Campbell (1988) makes the following comments about myth, in his interviews with Bill Moyers:

> The individual has to find an aspect of myth that relates to his own life. Myth basically serves four functions. The first is the mystical function— that is the one I've been speaking about, realizing what a wonder the universe is, and what a wonder you are, and experiencing awe before this mystery. Myth opens the world to the dimension of mystery, to the realization of the mystery that underlies all forms. If you lose that, you don't have a mythology. If mystery is manifest through all things, the universe becomes, as it were, a holy picture. You are always addressing the transcendent mystery through the conditions of your actual world.
>
> The second is a cosmological dimension, with which science is concerned—showing you what the shape of the universe is, but showing it in such a way that the mystery again comes through. Today we tend to think that scientists have all the answers. But the great ones tell us, "No, we haven't got all the answers. We're telling you how it works—but what is it?" You strike a match, what's fire? You can tell me about oxidation, but that doesn't tell me a thing.
>
> The third function is the sociological one—supporting and validating a certain social order. And, here's where myths vary enormously from place

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to place....It is the sociological function of myth that has taken over our world...(*Joseph Campbell: The Power of Myth*, p. 31).

Campbell's anatomical presentation of the functions of myth has been fully charted in Head's fictional writings, as this thesis shall presently explore. There are, of course, other dimensions of myth that Head embeds in her writings, aspects of which have, in some cases, tended to be hybridal in nature, owing to their historiographical content encapsulated in a fictional format.

In his monumental work on Plato (c.428-c.347 BC) and Aristotle (384-322 BC), Barker (195) has noted that, together with Xenophanes, the two doughty Greek philosophers tended to exalt reason above myth as a way of knowing reality. Socrates (c.470-c.399 BC), while undertaking a walk with a companion, is reported to have referred to mythic tales as "irrelevant things," which he could not bother to contemplate in his quest for self-knowledge. However, Barker equally observes that Aristotle later concluded that, in some of the early Greek creation myths, *logos* and *mythos* overlapped. The historical (praxis) and the mythical (*mythos*) could possibly find conjunction in the process of explicating or re-configuring human affairs, he surmised. In his "Introduction" to *Joseph Campbell: The Power of Myth*, Bill Moyers thus refers to the recuperative function of myth, as he discovers it in Campbell's gargantuan work on myth: 'He [Campbell] believed there is a "point of wisdom beyond the conflicts of illusion and truth by which lives can be put back together again"'(Campbell, with Moyers, 1987, xviii). This thesis will explore, among other pursuits, the confluence of praxis and imagination that is apparent in Head's writings.

BACKGROUND TO STUDY

There is a recurrent temptation for the casual reader to simplistically label Head as a woman writing on a mere rural tapestry, with her work centering on psychotic, egoistic figures possessed of a rather warped mentality. Some literary critics have variously described Head as not being sufficiently interested in issues that concern women, in spite of the fact that she is herself a woman. Other critics have accused Head of handling (in facetious and glib ways) the rather sizzling issues of apartheid and political oppression in the Southern Africa of her time.

It has become necessary, therefore, to undertake the sort of enquiry proposed by this research work to clear the fog of suspicion and bias hovering over the late author. Apart from underlining the idea that the Head was an astute mythic novelist, such an enquiry as this will also clearly demonstrate that she thought deeply about the political issues of her day, especially as they pertain to oppressive systems that tend to derogate from the humanity and dignity of people, not only in South Africa but also all over the world. This will put to rest certain assumptions that hold that myth and mythic studies are intangible, chimerical pursuits, having no bearing with practical, real-life situations. Another benefit of this research is that it will restitute Head in what James M. Garrett calls "the politics of narrative" in South Africa (1999).

In *Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature* (1981), for instance, Lewis Nkosi makes this reductionist observation concerning Head's writing: "Bessie Head is not a political novelist in any sense we can recognize; indeed, there is ample evidence that she is generally hostile to politics" (102). Nkosi had earlier said of Head: "for most of the time Bessie Head seems politically ignorant. She has only this moral fluency of an

intelligent, intensely lonely, individual that worries about the problems of belonging, of close interpersonal relationships, of love, value, and humanity" (99). The flaw in this rather exclusivist depiction of Head on Nkosi's part is that it equates the "political" with aggregated interests of a mass. Such narrowly conceived, canonical assertions as Nkosi's silence tendentially the voice of the individual (who, in fact, represents the side-of-the-turf interests) in society. Political problems are created every time hegemonistic interests silence the voice of the minority. It is ironic that Nkosi even permits Head the proprietary rights of dealing with issues that pertain to humanity, for it is hardly conceivable that such a preoccupation could divest itself of political involvement.

Another writer that questions Head's political commitment is Gillian Stead Eilersen (1991), who declares peskily:

> Had Head written only her first three novels, the discussion of necessity would have tailed off here. Head would have been accepted as one of the few African writers who did not involve herself politically in her writing but who achieved considerable success for being almost solely responsible for the "inward turning of the African novel (44).

Like Nkosi, Eilersen seems to shunt deliberately Head's artistic productions to the level of marginality and peripherality. One of the aims of this thesis is to prove that a writer of Head's stature cannot (indeed, should not) be subjected to such limiting, reductive classifications as critics like Nkosi and Eilersen have attempted to do.

WHO IS BESSIE HEAD?

Head (1937-1986), South African novelist, was born in Pietermaritzburg's Fort Napier Mental Institution in South Africa. Her mother, Bessie Amelia Emery (nee Birch), was placed there when she became pregnant by a black groom, who was working on her white father's farm. Head grew up in foster care until the age of thirteen when she was placed in an Anglican mission orphanage in Durban. There in the orphanage she received her secondary education and then subsequently trained as a teacher. She grew up as an adopted member of the Coloured community and lived mainly in Natal until adulthood. Little is known about Head's childhood; she herself was confused about her origins. Having qualified as a teacher, however, Head soon found out that teaching did not suit her temperament. She then dabbled into journalism, working in the early 1960s in Cape Town and Johannesburg, respectively, for the famous Drum stable. In 1961, she met and married a fellow journalist, Harold Head, with the ill-fated union producing Howard, their only child.

Head was to say later of the circumstances of her birth:

> First they received you from the mental hospital and sent you to a nur-
>
> -sing-home. A day later you were returned because you did not look
>
> white. They sent you to a Boer family.   A week later you were returned.
>
> The woman on the committee said: "what can we do with this child? Its
>
> mother is white (*A Question of Power*, 17).

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South Africa was not, therefore, a conducive place for Head. When the marriage with Harold crumbled in 1964, Head gave up her South African citizenship and took up a teaching post in Serowe, Botswana. When she lost the teaching job in Botswana, she turned to market gardening and writing, having been declared a refugee in that country. Eventually, in 1979, having been turned down before, she was granted Botswana citizenship. This development hugely gratified her, and her experiences in Botswana were to constitute a crucial factor that shaped, in part, her literary aesthetics and her ideological concerns. Nonetheless, she was continually plagued by mental instability, though she was able to publish works of remarkable quality that earned her international acclaim, even posthumously. Her torrid background, the issues they raised, and her own mental instability, had a profound influence on her fiction. Obviously, therefore, she found the Apartheid-controlled South Africa a life-throttling environment and sought to get away from it, as far as possible.

Botswana achieved independence in 1966. Head's first published novel, *When Rain Clouds Gather*, came out in 1968, and it reflects her own experience of departure from South Africa. It also graphically details her settlement in Botswana. The novel deals with political and spiritual exile, political corruption, and racial hatred. She published three other novels: *Maru* (1971), *A Question of Power* (1973), and *A Bewitched Crossroad* (1984). The citizenship in Botswana, which she had long craved, had brought her some of the peace and happiness that had proved so elusive. She published a history of the village she had settled in: *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind* (1981).

Head's works treat themes of race, gender, and mental illness with a variety of direct and powerful styles. She explores not only the racism that underwrites colonialism in Africa, but also the institutionalized racism felt by the Botswanans for the Bushmen, for example. Her short stories are gathered in the volumes, *The Collector of Treasures* (1977), *Tales of Tenderness and Power* (1989), and *A Woman Alone* (1990). The last two novels were published posthumously and include her essays and autobiographical pieces. The two novels reflect much of the inflection of the uroborial phase of myth, the oral phase that incorporates a lot of traditional life. This uroborial ambience of myth pervades the bulk of Head's fictional writings, as this thesis will presently demonstrate. __   __

Within the rustic setting hinted above, Head etches profound messages that she encapsulates in mythic modules of universal import. Indeed, Maxine Sample asserts that Head's writings "deal with issues of African womanhood while displaying a utopian vision of Africa free of economic, racial, and sexual oppression" (2003). Regardless of the deep and transformative insights that myth could yield in intellectual and ideological discourses, Sholes and Kellog (12) have presented the oral phase of mythic consciousness as consisting merely of "traditional plot which can be transmitted." This sort of superficial reading of the mythic experience would hardly do justice to Head's adroit and complex deployment of expanded time and space in her writings.

The "pastoral" background of Head's writings has taken in unsophisticated readers. Her first published novel, *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1969), is about the character, Makhaya, who escapes from South Africa to Botswana in the illusive quest for absolute freedom. In his adoptive country, however, Makhaya perceives anew the problems of the world, a

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perspective tinctured with the kind of political activism that launches him into agricultural, cooperative work. Behind this apparently ordinary background lies a deeper layer of meaning that bulges out in all of Head's literary works. Maru in *Maru* (1974) and Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* (1974) reflect the same sort of political engagement as Makhaya pursues in *When Rain Clouds Gather*. The other novels, the novellas and autobiographical writings by Head reveal this same preoccupation with political engagement.

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE CHOICE OF HEAD'S WORKS

Head's works offer the optimism of progress needed for the invigoration of today's human existence. In her writings, humanity will find the courage to confront evil (epitomized by some of the characters she has created) and to dismantle all forms of social discrimination, political exploitation (with all its associated levers of denigration) and economic expropriation. The proof of Head's artistic sophistication is her use of mythic motif and symbols to espouse her political messages. Indeed, Head is regarded as one of the pillars of African literature.

TYPES OF MYTH:

The single justification for delineating and explicating different types of myth in this thesis is that Head uses a combination of them in her novelistic and historiographic writings. She uses the myths to convey her dreams of changing the world for the benefit of humankind in general and unmasking the source of evil, with a view to eliminating it from the course of human affairs. Such universal myths, as are set forth in the books under review, resonate with the characters Head has created in her writings and help those characters to realize their mythic destinies.

A. COSMOGONIC MYTHS

Cosmogonic Myths are the most basic of all forms of myths in that they relate how the entire world came into being. The Cosmogonic Myth of a particular culture may be used as a template for tracing the origin of humankind. This will happen by a process of extrapolation. On the other hand, especially in regional studies, the Cosmogonic Myth of a certain cultural, racial or geographic group might provide valuable insights into the artistic or economic relations undertaken by such people, as autochthonous entities.

The first chapter of the Book of Genesis in the Bible, for instance, details the creation of the world, how the world proceeded from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*). Egyptian, Australian, Greek and Mayan myths speak of creation from nothing. References to these myths maybe gleaned from the following books: *Egyptian Mythology, Simon* Goodenough (1998); *Some Myths and Legends of the Australian* Aborigines, William Jenkyn Thomas (2007); *Greek Myths,* Robert Graves (1993), and *Mythology of Aztec &* *Maya,* David Jones (2007). Usually an all-powerful deity fashions the universe from nothing. This deity may, thereafter, either withdraw into a non-descript background or may gain centre-stage in the religious and cultural life of the people (as it is with the Hebrews' Jehovah).

However, creation may result as an emergence from the lower worlds. In some African myths, the act of creation ostensibly breaks forth from a fertile egg. The egg is thus a sort of 'placenta of the world.' Characteristically, most Cosmogonic Myths have the recurring motif of sacrifice. The sacrificial act is a projectile that releases human, plant and animal forms of life. Within the body of Cosmogonic Myths are also eschatological myths-- myths describing the end of the world or the coming of death into the world. Some of these eschatological myths provide, in the end, a sort of paradisiacal existence. There are

some myths, however, that provide for eternal torment for judged humankind. The Hebrew, Christian, Islamic, Zoroastrian myths embody the above two contrastive concepts. As this study will show later, Head appropriates in her writings Hebrew, Christian and Oriental myths, as well as Indo-European mythology, wherein there is provision for a universal conflagration and a final battle of the gods, before reconstitution and restitution could occur. This thesis explores the reconstitutive possibilities in Head's fiction.

B. MYTHS OF CULTURE HEROES

Myths of Culture Heroes describe the actions and the character of beings responsible for the discovery of a particular cultural artifact, a political tradition or a technological process. In Greek mythology, for example, Prometheus steals fire from the gods and becomes a prototype of human iconoclastic figures. We find Head's Maru playing a similar role when he defies tradition by marrying someone from a lower caste, his covert intention being the liberation of the Marsawas and their re-integration to the mainstream of society.

In the Dogon culture, the mythical blacksmith steals seeds for humankind from the granary of the gods. Those seeds presumably possess protean potential- the mystical capacity to regenerate and perpetuate human existence. In the Indonesian community of Seram, Hainuwele, from the orifices of her body, furnishes the community with a plethora of necessary and luxurious goods. In some cases, the Culture Hero may be the purveyor of the cornucopia, from which society is periodically renewed. These types of

myths deal with initiation or consummatory rituals. They talk of the possibility, as well as the agency, of temporal or social change, resulting in the emergence of new states.

C. MYTHS OF BIRTH AND REBIRTH

As different from the myth of Culture Heroes, Myths of Birth and Rebirth may integrate the concept of the emergence of an ideal society (millenarian myths), the revelation of a saviour (messianic myths) and eschatological themes. There is also the mythology of cargo cults, which portend that some luxurious mélange of goodies await humankind; typically, the Saviour figure is expected to bring about such bounties.

D. FOUNDATION MYTHS

Foundation Myths pertain to the founding of cities based on some cherished ideals. The cities so founded could exemplify manifestations of sacred power, or they could be dedicated to the exploits of specific culture heroes, like Romulus and Remus, in Rome, or the enigmatic hero Maru, in Head's eponymous novel, *Maru*.

THE RELEVANCE OF MYTH

Myth, as a significant matrix of aesthetic creations, will continue to enliven and deepen human intellectual and emotional engagements with literary constructs, which are modes of recreating or presenting reality. The appeal of myth, as a mere recourse to cultural rituals and beliefs, and as a bastion of received precepts and lore, would help to foster communal or cosmic oneness. However, when myth is used as a paradigm for charting progressive and development-oriented programmes, as Head has so adroitly shown in her writings, it then has practical relevance as a tool of social re-engineering. It becomes as such a lodestar for positive deployment of productive forces. According to Mircea Eliade

(194), although myths may be trivialized, and its value diminished by people, the use of myths in artistic creations could serve as a vehicle of returning to the beginning of time, thus helping humankind to rediscover and re-experience their very core values. In the words of Wendy Doniger (1998, 19), the use of myths as a means of abstraction "has a political aspect as well." Says Doniger:

> The wide-angle lens can be political and theological simultaneously, as when we realize the political implications of our own...assumptions or begin to respect the humanity of political others by appreciating their theologies [ideologies]. And myth is particularly qualified to forge these links. Using microscopes and telescopes to link daily reality with global--indeed, galaxial—politics, myths enable us to do what the bumper sticker urges: think globally, act locally (19).

This research will prove that Head, the focus of the study, appropriates in her novelistic writings all the above types of myths. While harking back to the protean values that under girded past African civilization, and while also excoriating aspects of that tradition that have become repugnant and debasing, Head has striven to draw attention to new modes of political and institutional organization. Her approach to myth has been integrative and eclectic, in keeping with her intention of conveying universal and timeless messages that make for inclusion, rather than exclusion.

Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (1973) and Claude Levi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind* (1972) have both helped to rekindle interest in the concept of myth in recent times. The two writers have enabled us to understand better the pragmatic possibilities of the mythic notion. Barthes equates myth with ideology (with the exception of a few differences), as

opposed to something ethereal and remote (Goring et al, 271). There seems to be a shift of emphasis and focus that identifies myth as a constituent part of a people's social and cultural make-up. This make-up conditions thought and behaviour. Barthes is one of those avant-gardist thinkers who believe that myth has ideological and socializing value. In holding forth this assumption, Barthes brings myth home to contemporary life, as part of the stuff and fabric of everyday life.

Levi-Strauss has also examined myth from this pragmatic perspective. Together with Barthes, he has reified myth and given it social and political relevance. Kenneth Burke, another ethnologist, thinks that myths have the power to pull back humanity from the brink of "aphasic and fundamental insecurity" (in Vickery, 49, 52).

Head, in her writings, evinces the sort of ideological import which myth has for both Barthes and Levi-Strauss. She employs the elements and filaments of myth to situate her characters and their actions in social and political contexts, wherein political affirmation becomes an imperative and dialectical choice. In this light, myth becomes a means of discovering and uncovering "ideological abuse", which then ought to be corrected or mediated through intervention and pragmatic action (Barthes 103).

The above pragmatic conception of life corresponds to Head's view that myth has a valorizing power. Myth constantly looks both to the present and to the future, redefining our moral and social bearings. As she sees it, our belief systems condition our actions. Therefore, we could actually re-order society by thinking and acting differently. Head fuses process (with its scientific rigours and trivia) with what Stanley Edgar Hyman has

termed "the timeless élan vital" – the vital force or impulse of life, that which defines life's moral essence (Vickery 66).

For an artist such as Head, myth affords not only "emotional patterning"; it also serves as a fulcrum for moral patterning, eliciting behavioural change (Vickery, x). In *The Myth of the State* (46), Cassirer has developed the thesis that myths are primarily emotional in origin and that their functions are mainly practical and social. In his view, myth promotes a feeling of unity or harmony among members of society, as well as a sense of unity or harmony with the whole of nature. For Cassirer, both the psychological and sociological aspects of myth fuse, in the transitional hiatus between principle and praxis. Myth thus becomes the promoter of social solidarity and communal advancement. In the words of F. R. Leavis, "a real literary interest is an interest in man, society and civilization..." (Goring et al, 365).

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

The research problem is this:

How to demonstrate that myths, which otherwise are adjudged intangible and flimsy, could be aesthetically employed as a means of projecting a new and equitable order of existence. The challenge, then, is to portray myth in concrete terms, thereby proving that mythology has patent relevance to human existence. Filling the gap occasioned by this research problem would constitute the contribution to knowledge that this research work is making.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

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a. To examine how intricately Head has used myth to make solid social and political statements.

b. To illustrate the manner in which Head's characters, who are usually mythic personas, protest against politically unjust systems.

c. To demonstrate that this peculiar use of myth enriches the author's art and lends her prominence among the major African (and indeed, world) literary figures.

d. To establish the notion that the motley of myths employed in Head's fiction reveals a template for social and political reengineering, thereby underscoring the contemporary relevance of myth.

LIMITATIONS

Getting access to the texts posthumously published on behalf of Head was particularly difficult. Even some of the author's earlier published novels and other writings were not easily available. However, visiting the British Council and the University of Ibadan's Library solved this problem. Similarly, I was able to get a copy of *The Cardinals with Meditations* during my visit to United States. This has filled a gap that had existed in the early stages of this research work. In addition, some lecturer friends, as well as some PhD students, lent me some of their prized materials. Further research via the Internet has equally opened vistas that otherwise would have remained shut to me.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

a. What was the political climate under which Head produced her writings?

b. How has she artistically articulated the political issues of her day?

c. How has Head interplayed myth and political issues?

d. How successful is the above-stated interplay of myth and literature

CHAPTER TWO:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Myths have been defined as the "symbolic descriptions of natural phenomena" (Kluckhohn, in Vickery, 33). Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconsciousness was vitally instrumental to the emergence of archetypal criticism, as has been noted earlier. This critical stance insists that civilized man preserves, though unconsciously, those pre-historic areas of knowledge that can be articulated obliquely through myth (Wilbur, 17).

The Jungian thesis derives its validity seemingly from the assertion that myth, far from being the dream of the inhibited individual, is the protoplasmic pattern of the race, which assures the individual's participation in the collective unconsciousness. The artist using myth as a vehicle of presentation would normally speak, out of his unconscious memory, a primordial truth (Holman, in Wilbur 17).

Some critics have defined myths as "group fantasies," wish fulfillment for a society that closely resembles dream patterns (Kluckhohn, in Vickery, 33). Dreams of those individuals that respond to the pool of the collective unconsciousness may be termed compensatory fantasies. When such dreams conduce to the common good, their roles, as private fantasies, change automatically to communal or societal myths. The group thus appropriates private rituals.

Certain catalytic forces compel the formation of new mythic models or moulds. Internal pressures, as much as external stimuli, may give rise to new cultural forms and new productive modes. Man can truly be, and is usually, challenged by contraries. Such contrary forces include, but are not limited to, pressures from other societies, biological

events (such as deaths, epidemics), changes in the physical landscape, the eclipse of political dispensations, personal or societal implosion, sexual threats or a co–mixture of the above factors. Man is always straining against lurking hostility. Myths, in effect, seek to reconcile creatively this sort of tension between familiarity and uncertainty (akin to Franz Fanon's "creative tension."

However, myths, in some respects, may not always brew effectively the broth of synthesis. In *The Implied Spider: Politics & Theology in Myth* (1998), Doniger makes a persuasive case for a subversive function for, and appreciation of, myth. She believes that myths could tread a reversible pathway of both syncretism and dissolution. In her view, the syncretistic process will naturally seek to reconstruct social reality to favour and reinforce establishmentalist forces. On the contrary, argues Doniger, the dissolutionist potency of myth subverts and then re-configures reality, dislodging the status quo or, at best, significantly modifying its salient elements and raison d'etre. In Doniger's words, "Myths do not merely reflect the eternal, reactionary archetypes or even the present hegemonistic *Zeitgeist*; they can subvert the dominant paradigm. Revolutionary myths express...not the status quo but the *fluxus quo*" (107).

In the same way that myths can bring about revolutionary ethos, they can equally lead to cultural and political adaptation. This adjustive mechanism produces and promotes "social responsibility" (Kluckhohn, in Vickery 41). Myths thus help to deliver and sustain cultural continuity and the stabilization of social and political institutions. They could therefore be seen as a way of envisaging, or envisioning, as opposed to ritual, which is mechanically repetitive. Because myths entail doing (praxis) and envisioning, they make for a transformative convergence at the juncture of solution seeking. Within

this ambience of political action, corrective or interventionist mediation could be undertaken to change the world order or to recuperate its vital forces.

The most effective defense against alien and disruptive reality is communal effort at salvation: a theme constantly harped upon by Head. It is only in one of her novels, *Maru*, that we find the exceptional case of vigorous, imaginative assertion of independence, combined with tough moral courage. Nevertheless, even Maru's act of patrician renunciation is a sort of submergence to the interest of a larger group located outside his immediate surroundings. For Head, therefore, submersion to the group's way of thinking, feeling and doing is the antidote for loneliness, alienation, social dislocation and the terror of the dark unknown.

According to Richard Chase, myth is a "blaze of reality" (in Vickery 72). It mixes with the magical elements to encompass those qualities and values that are poignant, tragic, beautiful, harmonious, settled, disturbed, comfortable, annoying, barren, harsh, consoling, splendid, fearful (Davey, in Vickery 70-1). Myth thus reflects the diffused, eclectic nature of both the human spirit and the complex experiences that such a spirit registers and embodies. Myth could at once mirror the pathos of the human spirit, the plight of the underdog, as well as the peaceful nature of human benevolence. Since literature is reflective of modes of collective beliefs and actions, it should be examined as constituting a writer's summation of the impelling social and political climates under which he or she respond to the literary impulse to create.

This response, argues Za-Ayem Agye, produces a specific interpretation of social phenomena — corresponding to the various class interests implicated therein (Emenyonu

127). Politics pervades every aspect of human behaviour and all layers of human relationship. It is about how power is acquired, shared and wielded at given levels. The literary effort could also reveal how power is sustained, as much as it beams a searchlight on the propriety or otherwise of the disposition of such power. Ideology, in the words of Benston (287), is a "system of beliefs or theories that usually serve as a guide to action and that may form the basis of socio-political programme."

To achieve her purpose of projecting a better-organized and more equitable human society, Head chooses the setting of Botswana as a sort of pastoral haven, situated beside the sweltering theatre of the Apartheid enclave, in the then Rhodesia and South Africa. Her escape to Botswana was for solace and moral rearmament. Her only available tools for fashioning a realignment of forces and a modification of structures are the corpus of her literary writings, recorded speeches, historiographic constructions, and autobiographical pieces. Even before the dismantling of colonialist structures, together with their systems of brutal suppression, Head had sought to neutralize all forms of perceived oppression in that political enclave. This she tried to do using the medium of myth. Maxine Sample says of Head's ideological views that they are "sometimes unpopular, but always sensational and cogent" (40). The sensationalism attributed to Head's art may inhere in her deliberate choice of bluntness, to shock the world out of complacency and anodyne orthodoxy. Similarly, the cogency of her art reflects its pragmatic and all-time relevance. The immensity of the truths embedded in her art may thus be ignored at one's peril.

In the view of Iwu Ikwubuzo (17), what should concern the myth analyst are the social, aesthetic and literary qualities of myth – how myth reflects the lives, values, experiences

and aspirations of people in literary constructs. Head attempts to encompass those sorts of human values and experiences in her writing, and she exposes the inadequacies of extremist views on both sides of the gender divide. She feels that such extremist views are flawed in that they exclude the right of others to be heard and evaluated as wholesome humans.

Amanze Obi is of the view that writers such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker have avoided such excessively tipped stances as stifle the human spirit. They adopt what he calls "sexual duality" in their writings to admit of complementary, rather than oppositional, functions of the two genders (192). It is upon such a balanced pedestal that Head also places most of her characters, male or female.

Head's fictional works contain what Isidore Okpewho has styled the "a-historical" elements, which address larger philosophical qualities of existence (*African Literature Today*, No: 13:1). She employs what E. M. Foster (1974) terms "fantasy and prophecy," qualities that affect the development of plot, settings, and characterization (102 – 3). Head's writings compare positively with works produced by writers like Herman Melville, Emile Bronte, and Virginia Woolf, who equally employ myth as a backdrop to their artistic creations.

Head particularly resembles Virginia Woolf. Woolf's novels all embody elements of mystery and the numinous. The two women each had neurotic problems, which they largely reflect in their artistic constructions. Since their writings contain elements of the mysterious, such works may be defined as gothic constructs. The gothic novel, according to C. H. Holman, is "a form of novel in which magic.., mystery are the chief

characteristics. Horrors abound, one may expect a suit of amour suddenly to come to life, while ghosts, clanking chains and charmed houses impart an uncanny atmosphere of terror" (333).

Such mythic details, as have been set forth above, could assume symbolic relevance. Head has used symbolism to explore political themes. Symbols like "pit", "room" or words like "control" and "prism" all acquire multi-layered meaning. Characters in Head's novelistic writings also play symbolic roles, which sometimes assume universal and teleological importance. They are perpetually striving to escape from the "pit" or to make more "room" for themselves and for others. They also prefer to see life through some holistic "prism", avoiding human and environmental "control" as much as possible.

In his "Using the Heart: The Symbolism of Individual Change in Bessie Head's *Maru*," Alan Ramon Ward (*Questia*, 2004) argues that Head works through the surface of ordinary events and agencies to incorporate elements and swathes of human experience that are more encompassing and far-reaching in nature. According to Ward, Maru as a character represents humanity in the course of the actions he undertakes. Maru's acts and intrigues happen at Dilepe quite all right, but their ripple effects are extendable to the rest of Botswana, and, implicatively, to Africa as a whole. Similarly, Ward is able to establish a symbolic leadership role for Margaret Cadmore, the heroine of *Maru*. Margaret has the "hopes of one day helping her people." Thus, her interpersonal relationships with representatives of the ruling class in Dilepe (Maru, Dikeledi, Moleka, Seth, and Pete) prepare her for the future role of savior to her people, the Marsawa. Desiree Lewis also traces the symbolic dimensions of Head's fiction in "Bessie Head's Freedoms," an online article that delineates the "topography" of "freedoms" in Head's writing, especially such

freedoms as shift the shape of cosmic reality, thereby toppling and supplanting entrenched forces of oppression. As Lewis perceives it, Head uses romance plots that "are allegorized as liberating relationships" (in reference to *The Cardinals* and some of Head's short stories). He thinks that food production in Head's writing have come to symbolize "triumphant creativity" on the part of the marginalized (par 8 2008). In fact, the above views on Head's writings expressed by Ward and Lewis underscore the symbolic and concentric texture of Head's fictional works—qualities that lend to her fiction a deep profundity and resonance.

In light of the above observations on Head's art, it is surprising that most present-day critics have overlooked the mythic quality of her art. Joanne Chase, for instance, sees *A Question of Power* as "a portrait of an insane woman" (*Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies* No 1, p.67). She fails to extrapolate from Elizabeth's dementia worthier preoccupations, values and possibilities. She prefers "particularization of character". Particularizing character portrayal does not agree with Head's preference to have her characters embody universal, unifying and symbolic values. Head herself is eclectic in the reaches of her novelistic artistry. As Linda Susan Beard observes in "Bessie Head's Syncretic Fictions" (in Ibrahim 1), "Bessie Head is a syncretic and synchronic genius, mixes media; she is a story-teller, historian, choreographer, agronomist, and chanteuse. Bessie Head is the orator of disconcerting paradox." A writer like Head, who is so robust and so complex in her artistic and ideological sensibilities, should not be read as solispsistically as Chase above has done

Maxine Sample (2003), in the introductory piece of the body of essays on Head that she edited, focuses mainly on the ways Head's life has been deeply affected by the

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"alienation, marginalization, and rejection that graced Head's entry into this world..."
(*Critical Essays on Bessie Head*, 2). Sample does not delve deeper to examine how these
excruciating personal experiences have helped Head to produce writings that advocate
new paradigms of political and interpersonal relationships. Equally, Sample does not
identify nor characterize Head's use of mythical elements in stringing her works together
to fashion a soteriological construct.

As a contributor to Sample's *Critical Essays on Bessie Head*, Maureen Fielding, focusing
on *When Rain Clouds Gather*, attempts to trace merely how Head utilizes space as a
therapeutic medium:

> Makhaya [the protagonist of *Rain Clouds*] struggles with his own tor-
>
> mented psyche....Meanwhile Makhaya not only helps Gilbert to
>
> achieve his practical aims, but he helps Paulina's daughter to complete
>
> her miniature version of a utopian village. As Makhaya engages in these
>
> tasks of transforming space, he transforms his own tortured heart into
>
> an open and loving one and comes to the conclusion that "God and
>
> agriculture were all mixed up"[180] ("Agriculture and Healing: Trans-
>
> forming Space, Transforming Trauma in Head's *When Rain Clouds*
>
> *Gather*, p.18).

Fielding's expurgatorial deployment of the agrarian motif above, a penumbra that
overcasts the rest of her critical writing on Head in the essay referenced above, presents a
limited view of Head's artistic and thematic sophistication.

Similar to the solipsistic manner in which Fielding examines Head's writings (solely
from a feminist perspective), Nancy Topping Bazin in her essay-- "Venturing into

Feminist Consciousness"-- believes that Head "chooses to focus on sexism rather than racism"(in Cecil Abrahams, 1990). Even though Bazin's view of the nature of Head's writings is partially true, such a perspective excludes, and glosses over, the structural elements of myth as a tool for delivering political messages and meaning. There is, thus, the problem of how to stitch up the hiatus between feminist themes, the mythical construct, and political message.

Such absence of organic linkage of tropes of myth, feminism, and political consciousness as is evident in Fielding's writing about Head above is also noticeable in Modupe Olaolu's critical writing entitled "Irony and Schizophrenia in Bessie Head's *Maru* (1984, 25:4, 69). Olaolu traces, and expounds upon, elements of irony and schizophrenia in *Maru*, arguing that the main characters in the novel (Maru, Moleka, Dikeledi, Margaret Cadmore, and Mrs. Cadmore) reflect in their various roles specific ambiguities engendered by Botswana and South African historical backgrounds. Olaolu finds that "cognitive dissonance" is a common thread running through schizophrenia and irony. In her view, the difference between the two terms is that whereas schizophrenia reflects a splitting of the capacity for thought (a cleavage of the mental functions), irony functions by a process of dissimulation that contextualizes and gestures meaning. Irony, she insists, admits a "hierarchy" in its plurality (3).

According to Olaolu, "Head employs the schizophrenic construct and the figure of irony in the representation of ambiguities, polyphones, binaries, and the misrecognition of the manifest and the concealed in a postcolonial Botswana setting" (4). In as much as Olaogun's definitions, and application to Head's *Maru*, of schizophrenia and irony are incisively and aptly done in her study of Head's fiction, her analysis barely highlights

"the mythic ambience" in *Maru*. She fails to delve into the political and mythic import of the narrative in that novel, nor do her prognostications on schizophrenia and irony as narrative and stylistic devices theorize definitively (or even generically) on how Head is able to use myth as a way of delivering her political messages of liberation and social change.

On her part, Joyce Johnson (2008) approaches Head purely from the aesthetic angle. She studiously eschews, or underplays, the mythic, the symbolic, the religious, and especially the political ramifications of Head's fiction. Linking Head's aesthetic timbre to the British female tradition in writing, Johnson writes approbationally of the author's comparable standing with such British authors as Jane Austin, Emily Bronte, and Emily Dickenson, who valorized and amplified female concerns and tackled issues of paternal exclusion of womenfolk from literary and political participation. Johnson's liminal characterization of Head's should never be excused because of other parts of her essay that present Head's writings rather limpidly.

In "Apartheid and Madness: Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*", Kumbo Pearse (*Kunapipi* Vol. V: No. 2. 52) adopts the psychoanalytical approach in explicating Head's most pithy novel. He fails to examine the ideological content of the writer's art. Similarly, Femi Ojo-Ade looks at Head's heroines and heroes from the point of view of the social and cultural dynamics that make people victims of the apartheid system (*Ba Shiru*: Vol. 8, 2, p. 75). To him, the heroines and heroes are psychologically alienated in South Africa and only gradually re-attune their minds to the problems of social commitment. Ojo-Ade does not comment on the visionary aspects of Head's art, which only the mythic approach could reveal. On the contrary, Head herself wants to reinstate

and rehabilitate the alienated fellows in society, to make them change-elements, bearers of the light of new modes of social and political relationships that she fosters in her writings. As such, her mythical characters would always rise from the ashes of disorientation to begin life anew and bring about healing and social cohesion.

In "The Novels of Bessie Head", a chapter in Heywood's *Aspects of South African Literature* (83), Arthur Ravenscroft stresses Head's preoccupation with the themes of alienation and power, choosing to explore the psychological dimension of Head's fiction. It is rather obliquely that he mentions the symbolic nature of the author's works. There is no attempt, however, to link symbol with mythic consciousness. Similarly, Hugh W. Hancock's "Head's *A Question of Power*" (*Explicator*, Fall 2000, 50) merely examines the themes of power, love and fear as these relate both to the exploiter/destroyer and the recipient/victim. There is no discernible attempt on Hancock's part to delineate and enunciate the ideological stance that Head consistently adopts in her fictional and historiographical productions: the possibility, if not the inevitability, of human emancipation from culturally and politically imposed tyranny.

On his part, Patrick Colm Hogan (1994) attempts to present his study of Head's *A Question of Power* from "Lacanian psychosis," which manifests when there is a dissociation of a person's personal identity from his or her collective identity. According to Hogan, this splintering of identities usually occurs when the traditions and mores of disenfranchised groups are denigrated, repressed or destroyed. Says Hogan, this sort of decimation or erosion of collective identity may lead to madness. In his view, "Though the political situation provided a matrix in which Elizabeth's psychic condition could develop, its structure is nonetheless that of psychosis, which is to say, a mental structure

open to psychological understanding"(2). Evidently, therefore, Hancock approaches Head purely from a psychological point of view. He eschews the possibility of examining critically the novelist's rather heightened mythic and political consciousness.

Only Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi and Mackenzie have managed to underpin the mythic features of Head's writings. In "Hidden Dimension of Bessie Head's Novels", Okonjo Ogunyemi acknowledges that *The Collector of Treasures* contains mythic components that pervade the atmosphere of the three major novels (in Asien and Ashaolu 163). She equally comments briefly on the metaphysical quality of African cosmology, portrayed as a constitutive part of Head's novelistic art. In his prefatory remarks to Head's *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings* (1990), Craig Mackenzie alludes to the mythopoetic quality of the author's art. He comments tangentially on Head's engagement with political issues, but there is no emphatic and extensive exploration of this strand of thought. On her part, Chioma Opara (2004) documents and emphasizes Head's disavowal of oppressive and patriarchal structures. Her approach is, therefore, mainly feminist-oriented, neglecting the sophisticated ways in which Head has tried to examine the political issues inherent in male-female relationships, as much as she does other inter-faces of a political nature.

In his account of an Iowa International Writing Program (IWP) encounter with Head in 1977, Peter Nazareth pinpoints the political nature of Head's *Maru*: "...I found Maru_to be very political in that it sought to change the world in the wake of colonialism" (*Research in African Literatures*, 7, 2008). While Nazareth, in this voyeuristic essay on Head's personality and artistic predilections, attempts to define, and then exorcise, the demon in the author's artistic make-up, he fails to identify the many-layered elements of

myth redolent in her fictional art. Rather, his focus rests on the symbolic and psychological forces traceable in Head's writings. To his credit, Nazareth, who now teaches the oeuvre of Head's writings at University of Iowa, recognizes that Head "has an elemental understanding of life when she writes fiction" (10).

Another writer that strives to underscore Head's commitment to social and feminist issues is Sophia Ogwude (1997) whose work on Head could be regarded as a sort of Magnum Opus. Nevertheless, Ogwude's work does not reckon with myth as an important component of Head's artistic vision. She would rather focus on the autobiographical and utopian contents of the novelist's writings. In her words, as rendered in "Protest and Commitment in Bessie Head's utopia," "...utopia is an imagined idealized place. Head uses the term in the two related senses- first as a good and idealized place endowed with providing the greatest amount of freedom and happiness in parts of Botswana, Southern Africa, and then as an ideal place that is nowhere...(1998, 2). Ogwude's intense fixation on utopia, divested of its political and mythical inflections and potential, beclouds the boundless possibilities for structural and political transformation that Head has embedded in her fictional and "factional" writings.

In the same tangential vein, Rosemary Townsend's work on *The Cardinals with Meditations and Stories* (1993) leans heavily on the blend of fictional and autobiographical aspects in that novel (65). She refers marginally to the theme of the love that develops between the forlorn girl, Mouse, and Johnny (who turns out to be her biological father). Townsend's work dwells on the dilemma faced by these two blood relatives. Because her approach to Head is largely psychoanalytical, she does not

identify nor articulate any mythopoeic patterns in that novel, or indeed in any other of Head's novels.

Obviously, therefore, past and current criticisms of Head have left lacunae in the areas of mythic interpretation of her writings and how they reflect her ideological commitment to African and global issues. It is such glaring gaps that this study hopes to fill up.

CHAPTER THREE:

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research work is based solely on the Malinowskian theory of the pragmatic function of myth, which views myths as a template for human consciousness, by which human conduct may be governed, mediated or modified. Bronislaw Malinowski (1926) has already shown the delicate fusion of myth with ritual: repetitive, patterned action. Recognizing that myths can be *ad hoc* and dynamic in nature, Malinowski believes that they are "constantly regenerated." In his view, the needs of the individual are satisfied by the social order within his culture, whose sole function is to satisfy human needs. That is to say, every social institution has a need to satisfy, and so does every item of culture. It is this same socializing function of myth that Claude Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes have identified and dwelt upon in their studies on myth.

The Greek word, mythos, as has been noted earlier, signified a traditional story of a people, entailing a practice, belief or natural phenomenon (Merriam Webster's *Collegiate Dictionary*, 770). Embedded in this definition is a certain view of the ideals associated with a particular society. Myth, therefore, connotes a way of life, a sort of orientation that defines and modifies behaviour, as much as it regulates cultural and political expressions.

According to *Microsoft Encarta* (2006), "Myth is a complex cultural phenomenon that can be approached from a number of viewpoints. In general, myth is a narrative that describes and portrays in symbolic language the origin of the basic elements and

assumptions of a culture. Mythic narrative relates, for example, how the world began, how humans and animals were created and how certain customs, gestures, or forms of human activities originated. Almost all cultures possess, or at one time possessed, and lived in terms of myths." In the light of the above insights on myth, it can be deduced that myth enables humanity to come to grips with its ontological and ethical dilemmas.

In the words of John B. Vickery, "the creating of myth, the mythopoeic faculty, is inherent in the thinking process and answers a basic human need (ix). The Jungian theory of "collective unconscious" (1875-19661) has underpinned the communal and universal quality of myth, lodged as it is within the "racial memory" of humanity. This meshed memory absorbs mythic archetypes by a process of historical diffusion. Jung thus hints at the possibility of there being some essential similarity of the human mind everywhere.

Through the vehicles of literature, orature, philosophy and religion, myth equips man to face the mysterious, the numinous essence of life with either dread or awe. It is thus possible that myth helps man to adopt a meaningful and positive way of life, in an age in which, ordinarily, life is harsh, short and brutish, according to Hobbesian thought (1657). At its highest form of aesthetic functionality, myth enables us to sharpen tangibly our appreciation of plot, setting, style, theme, structure and character in specific works of literature. The nature of myth is, therefore, ultimately reflective of the totality of man's experience, both at the mundane level and at the level of rarefied perception.

In *Joseph Campbell: The Power of Myth with Bill Moyers* (1988), Campbell is convinced that myth is a concept is ever evolving in nature and in scope. Says Campbell:

You can't predict what a myth is going to be any more than you can predict what you're going to dream tonight. Myths and dreams come from some place. They come from realizations of some kind that have then to find expression in symbolic form. And the only myth that is going to be worth thinking about in the immediate future is one that is talking about the planet, not the city, not these people, but the planet, and everybody on it (32).

Campbell's conception of the universality of mythic experiences is well embodied in Head's corpus of writings, which strives to envision a world that vastly improves the lot of humankind, irrespective of their particular race, geography, ideological leanings, class, or gender

According to Vickery, myth acquires manifold dimensions: psychological, rhetorical, semantic, religious, ideological, and sociological. This manifold potential is in direct clash with the common, simplistic interpretation of mythical experience (and of its discourse, too) as that body of knowledge wherein all difference, struggle and discord could resolve satisfactorily and totally (Cixous, in Moi 116). The conception of myth as a sort of wand that conjures up closure and unity is both false and provocative. It is possible to achieve artistic resolution of conflicts and schisms in mythic aesthetics. In fact, there could be mediatory pointers to an idealistic worldview or way of life, but such constructs do not, and cannot, eliminate human schisms, social distortions and psychological disorientation.

Myth always yields palliatives and schema for social change. Nonetheless, myth may be incapable of sustaining plain utopias. Although it may conduce to, or promote, a feeling

of unity or harmony among members of society, mythic ideologies do not always reveal a closed system. Life itself is in a constant flux, and myth, in a rather cyclic fashion, aims at keeping pace and maintaining an anticipatory and stabilizing hold on the vagaries of human experience. In fact, Roberto Calasso renders the double-edged, capricious, nature of myth (therapeutic as well as destructive) in this way:

> Myths are made up of actions that include their opposites within themselves. The hero kills the monster, but even as he does so we perceive that the opposite is also true: the monster kills the hero. The hero carries off the princess, yet even as he does we perceive that the opposite is also true: the hero deserts the princess....Even without its variants, the myth includes its opposites (1993).

Ernest Cassirer has endeavoured to pinpoint the sort of basic confusion broached above when he talks about "mythic law of metamorphosis", by which he means that everything tends to turn to everything else (in Vickery 10). Nevertheless, he also shifts from this metaphysical principle of cosmic sympathy to reveal the pragmatic function of myth as inhering in the promotion of social solidarity with nature in times of social crisis. In stressing the social function of myth, Cassirer tends to align himself with the Malinowskian theory of pragmatic relevance, which states that myth supervenes upon institutional rites in dealing with the crises of life.

Enlightenment scholars tried to make sense of the seemingly irrational and fantastic mythic stories. Their explanations included historical evolutionary theories—that human culture evolved from an early state of ignorance and irrationality to the modern culture of rationality—with myths seen as products of the early ages of ignorance and irrationality.

This attribution of irrationality to myth is, at best, as untenable as it is highly reductionist in nature. If anything, myth has practical relevance, in terms of its socializing and teleological import.

The Euhemeristic strand of mythical conception, on the other hand, advocates the egoistic presentation of historical figures and personalities as tyrants and bullies that tend to perversely wield power—whether political, sexual or spiritual. Such human quirks then assume a divine or hallowed status, in spite of their mortifying deformities of morality and candour. The Roman Emperor, Caligula, is one such historical figure whom Head execrates in *A Question of Power*. She also criticizes Adolph Hitler as another example of the Euhemeristic presentation of historical figures (*A Question of Power*).

This Euhemeristic conception of myth enunciated above is a reversal of Schelling's concept of Absolute Idealism, which holds that the mythological process is fundamentally a "theogonic process", by which God or the Absolute One reveals himself historically through human consciousness. Man's consciousness, in effect, transforms by a process of mythological polytheism, to reveal divine presence (in Bidney, Vickery 5). Examining myth from the point of view of Immanency undercuts the imperative for a multi-perspectivist stance, by which life can be experienced and explicated in all its roundedness. Such a limited perspective as Immanence ignores the pragmatic and transformative functions of myth, devoid of the element of *deus ex machina*.

Neither the Euhemeristic conception of myth nor the thesis of the Absolute Ideal makes a complete statement about the ideal nature of the mythopoeic consciousness. They are flawed to the extent that they adopt a rather limiting standpoint to issues of life. In the

same vein, the sexual fixity of Sigmund Freud, in his pursuit of the theory of animal drives, links myth with amoral elements (1895). As such, Freud's view is unrepresentative of the finest of mythic sensibilities, the sort that Head embodies in her artistic worldview. The same tag could be placed on Carl Jung's theory of "collective consciousness". The much-touted "racial memory" might never have unequivocal predictive validity. Its verifiability has already been circumscribed in critical thinking (Ruthven 206). Both Freud and Jung's theories are flawed to the extent that they are limiting concepts–they disavow other possibilities of cognition. However, in fairness to Jung, his theory of archetypal images has continued to resonate in much of cross–cultural studies.

The present study hopes to adopt from the Jungian school only the aspect of hero-making, which will serve as a window into the Headian projection of a new world order based on pragmatic ideals. This study actually dwells on the structuralist ideals of mythic construct. Simply put, this structuralist paradigm holds that myth is a valid tool of social engineering and social cohesion (the functionalist role assigned to myth by Manilowski). However, the present study has also examined closely the Levi-Straussian notion that myth should not be treated discretely but should be studied as a relational concept capable of eliciting a holistic, composite perspective. Levi-Strauss' principle of "binary differentiation" finds an echo in the binary, oppositional pull that can be located in both the thematic and character presentations of Head's fiction.

In light of the above-stated preference for a relational, rather than discrete, consideration of human experience in the Headian worldview, Northrop Frye's taxonomical approach to mythic criticism would not be suitable. Such a stiff grid as Frye suggests narrowly

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diminishes the capacious reach of the human experience, negating the ambient diffusions to which Head's fiction robustly responds (Frye, in Newton 2003). Applying narrow labels tends to limit the scope of Head's artistic vision. Frye's approach would restrict the dilatory spirit of, say, Mary and Elizabeth in, respectively, *Maru* and *A Question of Power*. These are two figures wishing to transcend boundaries, whether social or psychic. Thus, while this thesis adopts Malinowski's structuralist presentation of myth as an organizing principle, it also blends with Levi-Strauss' thinking that mythic studies should be done from a relational, composite angle.

The fluidity, the overlapping, that Phillip Wheelwright's semantic approach to myth suggests would equally be fully explored in unearthing the intricacies of inter–boundary experience, which Head's fiction allows. Head's writings defy socially rigid boundaries that clamp people into materialist, class, feminist, racial or political cells, replete with biases and bigotry. Owing to her ideological orientation, Head is wont to explode and discredit such false limitations as were prevalent in the Southern African enclave in which she lived. It is precisely because of this iconoclastic nature of Head's artistic temper that Wheelwright's classificatory model of myth has not been used in this study.

Therefore, this research work on the political function of myth in *Head's fiction* will utilize the integrative approach, showing how artistic consciousness could stimulate and create wholeness in human relationships and in political systems. Such an integrative approach to mythic study is, in the main, restorative, correctional and eclectic. Ruthven refers to this revisionist approach to art when he hints that a writer may transcend mimesis to project reality that is grander than normal purview would permit (19).

Indeed, Head's fiction should not be assessed by strictly realist standards. The mythical cast of her novelistic, historical and autobiographical writings precludes empirical evaluation. A peculiar characteristic of her writing is that the characters and actions develop by a process of interfusion and parallelism. The term, mythopoetic, is a hybrid derived from the works of Martin Foss and Ernest Cassirer. Head's writings could be said to incorporate Foss's and Cassirer's fused notions of mythopoesis.

In *Symbol and Metaphor in Human Experience*, Foss distinguishes two styles of cognition: the "sensationalistic" and the "rationalistic" (135). In *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer identifies two styles that resemble Foss's "the mythical" and "the empirical-theoretical" (186). "Mythopoetic" is thus invested with some of the value in Foss's myth and art and with aspects of Cassirer's sensationalism. Much as myth has its discrete, cause-and-effect relationships, these are non-specifiable within the time and space of the real world. Consequently, in presenting mythic experience, language becomes connotative or symbolic, and the narrative perspective or storyline may be skewed to inflect such resonant dimensions.

In terms of thematic pursuits, Head strives to chart a new path all the time. She lends her voice vociferously to the burning issues of her day. As a novelist par excellence, she anticipates in her works a state that is near paradisiacal. All of Head's writings, then, project a refined view of human existence in which hatred, bigotry, inferiority and wickedness are eliminated or, at the worst, thwarted. In her worldview, good and bad might co-occur, in a sort of lineal continuum, which all the same has antithetical implication. In the end, the good always gains moral ascendancy over the forces of evil..

This study will lucidly show, through the research findings, that Head's writings reflect humanistic and humanizing qualities, such as would help to solve a multiplicity of economic, racial, administrative and political problems that have, over the years, plagued the African continent. The findings that will be presented later would have been arrived at using the multi–perspective approach to mythic studies, an approach that is really ·eclectic and relational in nature.

METHODOLOGY

This research is hinged on textual and extra-textual analyses. The research has therefore relied much on library work, involving a close examination of various works on the author and an incisive study of her primary texts. These textual analyses have been done using the theoretical framework formulated above- namely, the functional role assigned to myth by Malinowski in his writing- *Myth in Primitive Society* (1926), among other related works.

SOURCES OF MATERIALS

For the purpose of this study, which is text-based, we have looked at ten books written by the author, some of which were published posthumously. These ten texts form the foundation for this study. We have equally relied on literary journals, and other books on literary criticism to obtain a composite perspective on this vibrant, but mainly undervalued, author.

One has demonstrated in the course of this study that myth best suits the explication of the manifold ideologies being explored by Head, because it yields the integrative perspective that holds, in a sort of creative tension, the disparate ideological elements

under contemplation. Indeed, Head's writing are profoundly enriched by this quality of creative tension.

Therefore, the methodology for this research derives, naturally, from the theoretical position canvassed above. The theoretical framework of the structuralist function of myth has been used to analyze and interpret the texts under study. Accordingly, this research illustrates how Head's novels, novellas, autobiographical pieces and historical writings incorporate mythical elements that indicate the sort of changes the author wishes to effect in society. *The Collector of Treasures* and *A Bewitched Crossroad* will form the focal points of this research because they contain, in elaborate terms, the archetypal and mythic elements that define and under-gird Head's artistic worldview. The various forms of myth embedded in these two books have been identified and explicated as they pertain to, and impinge upon, the author's overall artistic designs. Such myths include myths of provenance, agrarian myths, myths of death and rebirth, feminist myths, renewal (transformational) and trans-migratory myths.

As stated earlier, Head, contrary to the widely held view that she is unconcerned with feminist causes, is positively engaged in advancing feminist interests. However, as Chapter Five of the thesis would show, Head prefers an androgynous paradigm for male-female relationship. She neither supports assertive maleness nor favours restive and intemperate femaleness. This advocacy of a healthy fusion of the genders can be gleaned from such works as *The Collector of Treasures, A Bewitched Crossroad, Maru, When the Rain Clouds Gather, A Question of Power, A Woman Alone – Autobiographical Writings* and *The Cardinals*.

This thesis has shown, moreover, that Head presents her typical heroes or heroines as people capable of making the ultimate sacrifice for the good of society. The mythic hero or heroine would not merely reign from Olympian heights: he or she must stoop in service in order to achieve social change. Thus, in all of her writings, Head makes strident political statements, the import of which bears practical relevance up until today.

One of the central objectives of this thesis, therefore, is to show how the themes of self-consciousness (awareness of one's social and cosmic roles) and empowerment are congenitally linked as the scaffold for social and political change. Head's heroes and heroines are people who deeply and acutely perceive and interpret phenomena in all their starkness. They are then inspired to seek correction of perceived dislocations and infringements. In the light of the potential for social and political change which myth embodies, an attempt has been made to establish the relevance of myth. The relevance of myth needs to be reasserted, given the many scientific and technological breakthroughs in today's world that tend to superannuate, undermine, or make irrelevant, the idea that myth is a vital part of human consciousness and a legitimate tool for social change.

Head has three major novels – *Maru, When Rain Clouds Gather* and *A Question of Power*. There is also a posthumous novella, *The Cardinals: With Meditations and Stories* (1995). She equally has a collection of short stories – *The Collector of Treasures* (1977) that ties in organically with both *A Bewitched Crossroad: An African Saga* (1984) and *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind* (1981). There is, in addition, an autobiographical piece – *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings* (1990). This later book details the myriad of influences impinging upon the artist's creative mind. Head equally has many essays and letters in numerous journals (local and international).

The above corpus of literary productions by Head forms the primary texts. They have been analyzed in-depth to reveal both their artistic contents and their thematic pursuits, especially as they relate to the theoretical framework set forth above. There are, in addition, associated critical reviews, writings and exegeses on Head and on the totality of her artistic creations. These form the secondary texts. Located in various books and journals, those secondary materials have been consulted in the course of this research, and they add both berth and pith to the present contemplation of Head's fiction, enabling one to put in context the social, intellectual and philosophical forces that have helped to shape her artistic temper.

CHAPTER FOUR

ASPECTS OF THE MYTHIC VISION IN *THE COLLECTOR OF TREASURES AND A BEWITCHED CROSSROAD*

Whatever the uncertainties, the task of mapping the life of an author like Bessie Head undoubtedly becomes an investigation in the enigma of human prejudice (Mackenzie, in Head,1990 xiii).

Head has transmuted the oral word of her fellow Botswanans into the written word in her volume of short stories, *The Collector of Treasures and Botswana Village Tales* (1977) and in *A Bewitched Crossroad* (1984). Botswana, "where life is a little bit of everything" (Head, in Emenyeonu 1986), thoroughly fascinated her with its sparely furnished huts, its agricultural and pastoral rhythm and its religions steeped in ritual wonder, sacrifice and superstitions.

Believing in the past glory of the Botswana society, Head intends, through her writings, to effect a sort of psychological and moral therapy in the psyche of the disoriented members of the South African (indeed, African) society of which she is a part. Her aim is to show them the rich and benevolent aspects of their heritage and its huge potential for greatness. Similarly, she strives to expose the savage and retrogressive aspects of African culture.

Accordingly, *The Collector of Treasures* and *A Bewitched Crossroad* contain prophetic and visionary aspects (as well as mythic dimensions). These features appear in greater

force in the major works – *When Rain Clouds Gather*, *Maru*, *A Question of Power*, *Serowe: Village of the Rain Clouds*, *A Woman Alone*, *Tales of Tenderness and Power*, and *The Cardinals*. The collection of short stories, the autobiographical and historical writings, as well as the novels and the novellas, visualize not merely a utopian hereafter but a pragmatically projected future in which the African grandeur is not vitiated by bloodbath, cruelty, and exploitation. Rather, such a future will be characterized by a sanguine determination and a commitment to help in common ventures, to accept what new practices are beneficial, to retain those aspects of African heritage that are as credible as they are relevant. Such envisioned future will jettison those aspects that are redundant and dehumanizing, or are morally debasing.

In revealing the existence of the immemorial and invaluable values of Botswana tradition, Head celebrates in both *The Collector of Treasures* and *A Bewitched Crossroad* the mythic qualities of African culture. Traditional marriage, political institutions (and the positive evolutions they have undergone), religious traditions and even agricultural institutions and practices all embody and reflect mythic qualities and characteristics. In "Ancient Migration," one of the stories in *The Collector of Treasures*, the character, Rankwana, poses the ultimate feminist challenge for women (pp. 72-102), just as Dikeledi, in the story, "The Collector of Treasures," makes a political statement I her struggles as a mother taking care of her three children, without any help from Garesego, her irresponsible husband. Dikeledi struggles with the weight of her problems, though she is marginalized and prevented from participating in public political activities. Head, thus, seeks to recast the historical relevance of women like Dikeledi and Rankwana, who are portrayed as mythical heroines that have to overcome great odds in order to change the public perception of womanhood. Indeed, Dikeledi's cutting off of Garesego's genitals is

symbolic of a defeat of the forces of evil in human nature. Such evil forces must be vanquished before the mythic personas will realize their comic goals, in this case, a subversive dismantling of the old order.

In fact, some of the stories in *The Collector of Treasures*, and quite a handful of the tales in *A Bewitched Crossroad*, appear grand, noble, and timeless, in consonance with an experience of a mystical character. The archetypal conflict between good and evil, or between light and darkness, consistently characterizes the stories and the sketches, imbuing them with a didactic (and sometimes dialectical) *atmosphere*. Moreover, the theme of salvation (whether of the self or of the collective) imbues the stories with some dynamism. This dynamic ambience in Head's fiction underscores the idea that she is concerned with the improvement of the general human situation.

Accordingly, the stories in *The Collector of Treasures* and the sketches *in A Bewitched Crossroad* swing between the pole of evil, sorcery, witchcraft, greed and the pole of human happiness achieved through psychic and moral rebirth, cultural liberation, political innovation and scientific progress. In addition, all these are themes equally explored in the novels, the novellas, and the historical pieces.

Therefore, it can be inferred that the volume of short stories and the autobiographical and historical vignettes, rather than concluding or post-dating the full-blown fictional materials by the author, foreground and prefigure them. Thus, an organic knot unites the short stories, the sketches and the novels in terms of theme, plot, characterization, narrative viewpoint and structure. Such stories and sketches are therefore nothing but the "Headian world" rendered in capsules and sometimes in cinematographic forms. The

present research has consequently taken *The Collector of Treasures* and *A Bewitched Crossroad* as prefacing or anticipating the novels.

Structurally, *The Collector of Treasures* divides easily into three sections: portraits of individuals, sketches of traditional life, and depictions of the upheaval and the stress in modern families. In all the stories and the vignettes, however, either Head is disparaging a particular myth that is no longer relevant or she is asserting an archetypal pattern of action that still has contemporary and political relevance.

The story, "Village Saint", is an example of tales about individual characters and illustrates a theme repeatedly harped on by Head, that evil often masquerades as good and that the exterior facade has to be peeled off to expose the enigma of evil lurking inside the self. The story begins with an ironical comment that belies the title of the story itself: "People were never fooled by facades" (13).

Mma-Mompati, with her exquisite public relation, is saintly on the outside and in her public activities, but she is a dreadful nag at home. When she can no longer control her son, she becomes hostile toward her daughter-in-law, whom she thinks is the cause of the disfavour she has newly found with her son.

Mma-Mompati refuses the young girl access to tap water, compelling her to walk a long distance to fetch water. As a result, people are shocked that a venerable personality like Mma-Mompati, who affects the image of a virtuous and benign matron, could be indeed petty and mean. An analogous situation to the above will be found in *A Question of Power*,

where the evil Dan is able to deceive Elizabeth with his outward show of saintliness, whereas he is seriously afflicting her psyche with pain.

Head criticizes this sort of mistreatment, which borders on dis-empowerment. Her thinking is that women equally display wickedness and meanness to their own species. Cruelty, to her, is neither gender-driven nor gender-specific. It is rather human-specific and must therefore be confronted using global and multi-faceted approaches. Oppression of any sort is unacceptable to the novelist. It is this position of Head's that ought to be taken into consideration by those critics who berate her for not making any vociferous avowal for the feminist cause.

Feminism, to Head, is limited in that it is not a global forum for addressing all forms of oppression and mistreatment. It is therefore subsumable under studies or endeavours aimed at eliciting, in a catholic sense, all forms of inequities and political imbalances. Under a mythic umbrella that casts a sort of universal penumbra on all facets of human organization, feminism is a vital framework. Myth will usually help a writer to broaden his or her vista to include issues of race, gender, political and social inequities, as well as considerations that border on morality and ethics. As a monolithic theory, myth will primarily center political focus and dissolve the subtle distinctions between issues of race, gender, class, and ethnicity. "The Village Saint" presents the feminine persona of Mma-Mompati from such a balanced or unbiased perspective. Head criticizes Mma-Mompati's odious qualities of abrasive behavior and her intolerant nature, on occasion; however, Head also presents Mma-Mompati as a courageous woman who defies socially rigid boundaries to assert her views that women's voices in society should be heard, and not smothered by paternistic pressure.

The next story of great significance in *The Collector of Treasures* is that which concerns the woman, Galethebege. Galethebege comes to learn that evil and good are mixed together. This theme is embodied in "Heaven is Closed". Excommunicated from church for marrying an "unbeliever" (Rolakae), Galethebege is shocked about her ostracism, but does not lose her faith in an eventual heaven from which she would not be excluded, contrary to what the local priest had told her. Head puts it this way: "it was beyond her (Galethebege) to reason that the missionary was the representative of both God and something evil" (p.11).

On the contrary, Rolakae, regarded as filthy and evil, is a representative of an ancient stream of holiness that people had lived with before any white man set foot in the land (12). The paradox is that while the evil and heartless priest pretends to be a saint, the virtuous Rolakae is vilified and portrayed as evil. The point being made here by Head is that people ought not to use their revered and exalted positions to oppress other people or to exclude them from the common weal. To Head, this is simply abuse of power. In her view, political power (even of a religious hue) should not be used to oppress and devalue other people.

In "Jacob: The Story of a Faith-Healing Priest", we find another story depicting individual life. Jacob, an epitome of humility, is a selfless, charitable, loving man, though poor. As a mythic hero, he is modeled on the character of Christ. He undergoes a period of tribulations, when God allows thieves to loot his property and despoil him. Necessarily, he is expected to emerge triumphant. As was characteristic of Christ and Buddha (who

during preparations for redemptive work were made to undergo periods of seclusion), Jacob's wife deserts him during his moment of dire trial, and he cannot communicate his exceptional experience to his friends and neighbors.

At his hour of trial, Jacob's wife features as a temptress, the weaver of illusions. Job's wife in the Old Testament of the Bible played a similar role: she urged her husband to denounce God and die. Like Job's wife, Jacob's wife is a woman of fickle mind who is denied the deep truths and the dark mysteries of life.

Following the archetypal plot of the mythic quest, in which a barrier (physical or psychic) must be crossed, Jacob travels to Makaleng, renouncing and abandoning his wife and his two daughters. Migration to a new locale is a mythic imperative, which, if it must yield mystical enlightenment, would entail renunciation of the mundane concerns that tend to weigh down the soaring spirit.

In the next chapter, we will find the hero of *When Rain Clouds Gather* making a similar renunciation of the *I* factor. This amounts to a sort of shedding of power or, at least, a tempering of its raw force. In obedience to a divine call, Jacob moves beyond personal and narrow interests. God talks to him from time to time:

> ... His God, in moments of inspirations, appeared to be the width and depth of his own experience and suffering. This he in turn called voice which had come to him at all the turning points of his life, forcing him into strange and incomprehensible acts (25).

The above scenario also compares well with the situation in *Maru*, in which the protagonist – a veritable mythic hero – listens to, and acts in accordance with, the voices of the gods speaking to him inside. The voice heard by a mythic hero or heroine would most likely prompt him or her to carry out certain revolutionary missions or pursuits. This situation applies to Jacob, the priest.

Once settled in Makalang, Jacob founds a church as an avenue of humanitarian and spiritual service. Never for once soliciting for members, his principal votives and allies are children. This implies that his ministry is not materially oriented but is tailored to serving the needy in society:

> Soon it became a not-uncommon sight to see Jacob trailing behind a group
>
> of children, all singing and making their way to a hut to help someone in
>
> sorrow. In all cases, the sorrow or ailment would be removed and people
>
> would quickly rise up and go about their daily business (27).

Jacob, in effect, performs the role of a redeemer, the agent of good, light and peace. He chooses Johannah, his second wife, through mystical intuition. After Johannah's first visit, Jacob predicts, and accurately so, that she would return. The marriage between the two people paves the way for a new mode of relationship based on reciprocity, mutual trust, hard - work and meekness of mind.

Just as Jacob's journey to Makaleng affords him spiritual insight, Johannah's trip to that same town offers her a means of personal salvation. She is not only freed from social scorn, she also achieves social security. Moreover, the marriage between Jacob and

Johannah leads to the consummation of Jacob's life, which a harsh upbringing had distorted.

Makhaya in *When Rain Clouds Gather* achieves a similarly fulfilling experience after he gets married to Pauline. Nevertheless, the marriage between Jacob and Johannah could be viewed from another angle – the political integration of the black and the white races. Since Jacob (the hero) is a mulatto, he represents the successful blend of the two racial groups. Therefore, the tie with Johanna assures an even greater form of inter-racial diffusion. Head persistently clamours in her writings for a harmonious relationship of the various racial and ethnic groups.

If Jacob is the symbolic personification of good and divine salvation, then Prophet Lebojang, the devil's advocate, is symbolic of infernal darkness. His prophecies are statements of doom because they cause death and destruction. Essentially materialistic, his prophecies foment trouble rather than instill peace of mind. His opposition to Jacob assumes a monomaniacal intensity as he employs magic, poison, witchcraft, and other stratagems to fight Jacob. Just as Melville's Ahab in *Moby Dick* (Eds. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker, 2001) does not relent in his hatred of the white whale, so does Lebojang relentlessly hunt Jacob, until he himself is exposed as a cannibal who sustains his psychic powers with ritual murder. Implicated in a case of ritual sacrifice, he is sentenced to death and people are shocked at the way he has confounded the affairs of God with devilish interests.

Therefore, 'Jacob: The Story of A Faith-Healing Priest" illustrates the following themes and archetypal patterns: the perennial contention between good and evil; the emergence

of a mythic hero after the rigours of destitution, elemental trials and monster battle, and the eventual vindication of the divine will. In anticipation of what the novels would embody, or following from such an anticipatory inclusion, the hero and the villain in this story feature as moral opposites and thereby give a dialectical touch to the plot of the story.

As an instance of stories painting traditional life, "The Deep River: A story of Ancient Tribal Migration" reveals the traditional pacifist and philosophical attitudes to dissent. Such attitudes bespeak of some sort of political pragmatism: finding practical, equitable and creative solutions to knotty political problems.

In this story, dissent occasions the migration or departure of the fractious members of society in order to forestall bloodshed. The people of Talaote, known previously as the people of Monemapee, used to have a collective identity:

> the people lived without faces except for their chief, whose face was the face of all the people (1).

Though this sort of monolithic image might suggest solidarity and unanimity of interests, there are underlying inflections of tyranny of the majority. This facade of collective solidarity cracks under the weight of problems of illegitimacy and power tussle, which arise in the course of time.

Power politics as a theme has constantly worried Head, who feels that the inordinate quest for power, with its inherent potential for divisiveness, could degenerate to a situation where "monsters would merely change roles...black faces would simply replace

white faces of cruelty, hate and greed and ... the people would bleed forever" (Emenyeonu 86).

Thus, Sembele, heir to the kingship in the land of Taloate, is torn between the demands of his royal position and the emotional, as well as spiritual, strain of a love affair he had conducted in secret for long. His choice of Rakwana as wife is a personal sacrifice too "out of the way and shocking" to the people of Taloate (5). Very few leaders in real life can make this sort of colossal sacrifice in pursuit of something as seemingly intangible as love. The example that best applies to this type of situation concerns the Duke of Windsor, Albert Edward (Edward VII), who abdicated the British throne in order to marry an American consort. The lesson inherent in the Duke of Windsor's story is the idea that the mythic hero or heroine, in Head's artistic conception, should be ready to give up something vital in order to gain something else of surpassing value.

The character, Maru, in the eponymous novel *Maru*, makes a similar sacrifice when he foregoes his royal status and privilege to marry Margaret Cadmore, a woman of ostensibly lower birth. As a revolutionary, a pathfinder evolving a new way of life for humankind, Sembele, in this short story about tribal migration, defies the traditional order, which demands that he renounces Rakwana and her child. In other words, he relinquishes social and political advantage in order to gain spiritual and psychological satisfaction.

"Looking for Rain-God" is another story describing traditional life, but what Head presents here is a view of traditional life in a moribund condition. The story dramatizes the acute dilemma faced by a family threatened with extinction in the arid region of

Botswana. Faced with the nagging wails of women and children and afraid of the coming onslaught of drought, Mokgobja and his son conspire with the women to sacrifice Ramedi's two daughters, Neo and Boseyong, to an imaginary rain-god, whom the old man Mokgobja has exhumed from his clogged memory.

In the end, disaster results from this exhumation of effete divinity on Mokgobja's part. No rains come and the two men return from their misadventure, shocked and enervated by guilt. Mokgobja and his accomplice are finally indicted for murder. In this story, Head indicates the evil and tragic consequences of relying on the assumed truth of fossilized myths. Ritual murder and ritual sacrifice are unacceptable to the author as a means of social transformation and economic recovery, even though she may sympathize with the emotional and psychological motivation overlaying such practices. In this particular instance, ritual murder occurs because of a perceived need to preserve a lineage about to be eclipsed by the ravaging drought. Head is subtly suggesting in this story that a more pragmatic political intervention could help to clear this fog of traditional ritualism. The modern scientific practices of irrigation and the use of fertilizers could help to assure that agricultural business is not threatened. Such modern practices, in effect, constitute a new brand of mythic culture sprouting from the desiccated soil of a moribund traditional mode of subsistence, with all its supporting superstitions and rituals.

In fact, the story, "Looking for a Rain God" demonstrates, among several things, Head's belief that modern people should increasingly avail themselves of the immense benefits of science. Only hard work and the application of the results of scientific research, not just a senseless belief in a mystical being of unlimited powers, could salvage man, Head seems to say.

Though the natural forces may interfere in the affairs of men, only humans themselves would bring about their very salvation. Moreover, belief in such phantoms as rain gods would only pave the way for exploiters like "witch-doctors" and talisman-makers. This notion conforms to Head's anthropomorphic view of divinity.

What Head does in the above story is, therefore, a curious job of demystification in order to enlighten people. Myth, in the hands of a seasoned artist, performs dual functions. Seen from a teleological perspective, it is a guiding and integrative principle employed as a lodestar to indicate a new path, a new mode of perception. As such and this is where the second function inheres, new myths are used to destroy old myths or old patterns of thinking and acting. Myth, according to Northrop Frye (Vickery, 91), has a social cause, apart from its formal functions. The social cause would stem from the social and cultural demands, which circumscribe and characterize the production of a work of art. Those social and cultural forces condition human thought and human action, producing a story or a pattern of behaviour that is symbolic. Therefore, when old myths become dysfunctional or redundant, they are discarded for new forms of mythic codes.

In this particular story under review, Mma-Mabele liberates herself from the tyranny of traditional belief in witchcraft. Similarly, in the story titled "Witchcraft," the author exposes the destructive potency of witchcraft, which is employed by power-seekers to introduce and sustain a structure that entails "absolute control over the people" (47). For Mma-Mabele, respite from her ailment comes neither from the Tswana lore and custom enmeshed in witchcraft delirium nor from the Christian ethos. Her physiological

condition of malnutrition must be improved by hard work and a better feeding arrangement.

Once she becomes aware of this fact, Mma-Mabele leaves her sickbed and goes back to work for personal salvation and for the benefit of others dependent on her. This stance on the character's part accords with Head's attempt to truthfully record, and then repudiate, the sordid historical circumstances of South Africa. .

It is this conviction about the need for moral responsibility that propels the author to affirm the worth of individual existence and individual consciousness. In seeking to project this quotidian and ordinary form of existence as a vehicle for attaining universal well being, Head recreates the world order. It is utopia turned on its head.

Utopia for Head, then, ceases to be merely an escapist concept: it evolves into a paradigmatic quest for a saner and more beneficent mode of living. Thus, in the story 'Witchcraft', a mythified rendition of scientific progress is substituted for the myth of over-arching witchcraft and ritual sacrifice. In the traditional society that forms the backdrop to Head's "Looking for a Rain God," there is a shared experience regarding the need for change in the status quo. Doniger makes the following comment about shared experiences as the bedrock of myth in human societies:

> Accounting for mythological themes that appear in different cultures
> by assuming that they derive from certain shared human expe-
> riences frees us from the obligation of specifying a mechanism
> (such as C. G. Jung's collective unconscious, or more respecta-
> bly—but not more convincingly—historical diffusion) by which

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a universal theme might be perpetrated (54).

Apart from "Looking for a Rain God," "Kgotla" is another story in Head's *The Collector of Treasures* dealing with a shared experience of an aspect of traditional life that is already receding. Faced with the conventional, but tortuous and sluggish, way of adjudicating matters within the traditional framework of the Kgotla (the people's parliament), "the Sindebele woman" introduces a new and forthright system of settling disputes. Head wants to see a situation in which the traditional customs that are found unwieldy and non-practical will be made to yield to more pragmatic approaches and practices. In all her writings, the novels and the novellas inclusive, often the outsider generates change. The inter-boundary perspective provides vistas that are often more sophisticated, because they are rather inclusive, eclectic and modified by a more enlightened perception of issues. The persona ensconced in the cocoon of the déjà vu may be impervious to the imperatives of change. However, the unbiased, unblinkered outsider is apt to pinpoint quickly the need for change within the subsisting arrangement.

In the "Kgotla," "the Sindebele woman" provides the illuminating clue, which had eluded even such a seasoned Kgotla-member as Kelapile. "The Sindebele woman" jolts the people out of their cultural complacency. Complacency, as we know, usually breeds stagnation and lethargy. Only people with questing and expansive minds - usually expatriates - can offer different and dynamic perspectives.

In *Maru*, we shall see how the expatriate heroine, Margaret Cadmore, effects change in the old order of things at Dilepe. Makhaya and Gilbert will equally be seen in *When Rain Clouds Gather* as they revolutionize the agricultural practice in Golema-Mmidi.

Similarly, in *A Question of Power* we shall find Tom, Eugene and Elizabeth galvanizing the people of Motabeng into cooperative work. Incidentally, these characters are all expatriates. The peripatetic experience in mythic consciousness yields illumination, greater understanding and subversion of retrogressive rules in social, political and moral conduct.

In the story, "The Wind and a Boy," Head mourns the imminent disappearance of the mythic and pastoral phase of village life. The placid rhythm of village life is soon shattered by the accidents owing to modern contraptions like cars and bicycles. The boy, Friedman, who patterns his life on the myth of Robin Hood, aspires to be the hero of his people. His ambition is to be the purveyor of bounties, a type of culture hero. In his action, there is an expression of political intent-- the dream to improve the lot of his people. The mythic hero usually seeks to bring about social and political change.

Abandoning his childhood pranks, the boy in this particular story begins to cater for his grandmother's needs and even extends his idealistic love to animals, "all his activities were touchingly in aid of, or in defense of, the people" (*The Collector of Treasures*, 13). Because of this bubbling desire to help people, Friedman requires the services of a bicycle to facilitate his humanitarian work. Nevertheless, while he is on one of his trips to the city for provisions, he is crushed to death by a careering truck. Head depicts two things through this story: how the idealism of mythic heroes or heroines could fire up the imagination of people, making them execute altruistic tasks; how, nevertheless, such idealism could be deflated through the quirks of fate or through human failing. The erasure of idealism in the story is occasioned by the intrusion of modern civilization into a world of mythic and pastoral orientation. The moral here is that man should learn to

govern or control the destructive elements of his immediate environment. If city life destroys the mythic imagination, it equally destroys long-held communal and filial values.

"The special One" records the upheaval that could arise in family life. The story is about the unhappiness of a woman whose husband has stopped caring for her. There is here a feminist concern for the plight of women. Head believes essentially that the two sexes should be mutually supportive. Any ascendant assumption or manipulation on the part of either the male or the female partner is unacceptable to the writer. The story here shows how selfish and unconscionable men could drum up flimsy, traditional sentiments in order to discredit their wives. Gaenametse's husband dubs her a sex-maniac, who even demands sex during menstruation.

However, the reader is allowed to witness Gaenametse's triumph when she finds the "special one". Unable to hide her passion, she conducts secret affairs with young men and later finds another husband in the person of a priest – the "special one". Head is not merely unfurling the feminist mantra here. She rather seems to say that men do matter and are the raison d'être of women's existence. This is the androgynous stance, of which more shall be said later. At any rate, she does not support the abandonment of the women by the men. This attitude underlines, for example, her depiction of such female characters as Elizabeth and Kenobi in *A Question of Power*. Though the two women were each deserted by their husbands, the author shows them admirably coping, and independently of men. Nervous breakdown is averted by mutual support among the womenfolk and through meaningful association with the type of men that would value what women represent. Indeed, "The Special One" apparently bears testimony to Head's belief that

women can be the mythic vessels for social transformation. Men, it would seem, are being enjoined by the author to relate with women in a respectful and reciprocal manner. This would strike a moral, as well as, political balance.

In the title story of the collection, "The Collector of Treasures," Head appears to be condemning the extreme feminist stance, which she thinks can be quite counter-productive, especially when women take the law into their hands. Dikeledi Makopi (whose name means "rain") dares to cut off the "special parts" of her brutal and irresponsible husband. As Dikeledi sees it, "Our men do not think that we need tenderness and care" (89). For her, the most valuable possessions in life are heartfelt love and moral uprightness. When her cellmate, Kebonye, tells her, "We must help each other... This is a terrible world. There is only misery here," Dikeledi realizes she has found another "treasure": "She had always found gold amidst the ash, deep love that joined her heart to hearts of others.... She was the collector of such treasures" (91).

The moral thrust of the above story lies in the thought that the world is a vast stretch of evil. This evil, in the author's view, must be rooted out. People like Kebonye, who help to nip evil in the bud and inculcate humanistic values in other people, are "gems," whereas people like Dikeledi (the beneficiaries of human kindness) are "the collectors" of such "treasures" of human goodness. The story, then, illustrates the perennial, archetypal clash between good and evil, each represented by an archetypal agent or character.

According to the author, there are two kinds of people. On the one hand, there are those who create misery and chaos. On the other hand, there are people that utilize their personal potential and resources to improve the human condition. These latter sorts of

people are the redeemers of humankind. The first sort of people lives a bestial life and their purpose in life is to administer death and cause destruction in all possible forms. They are the evil forces that a hero or heroine must fight in order to qualify for deification. Being of a devilish nature, such people have existed in all ages: in the pre-colonial period, during the colonial times, and in the independence and post-independence phases. In other words, evil is a timeless phenomenon perpetuating itself by exploiting the lapses and the shortcomings in human nature and the weaknesses in human institutions.

Monstrous objects, devices, measures, strategies, contraptions and inventions projected in cartoons and in fictional writings reflect the warts and the twists of human consciousness, in both their latent and manifest forms. Such projections reflect evil and corruption: a tendency and disposition to which man is perfunctorily prone. In human experience, therefore, may be found the pains and the foibles that myths universally comprehend and propagate.

The human mind is always striving to project itself toward transcendent and absolute power. The wish to conquer and thoroughly dominate stems from the natural human urge to master events, vistas, corpuses, spaces, situations or climes. It is a compulsion to become god without sometimes the holiness and discipline that this position entails. Where this mastery (when it is gained) is absolute, novel, ground-breaking, and pervasive, the end-result might be genius at work, ennobling the human condition. However, whenever such an effort at mastery falls flat on its face, it translates to abuse of process, abuse of power and privilege, which devalues human sensibility and morality. From this obverse perspective, mediocrity and failure are the ensuing results. This is the

cause of social dislocations. Social dislocations arise from a recognition (supported by patent facts and historical details) that all of people's effort at total mastery and absolute control of their environment proves to be in vain. Such efforts at absolute control are driven often by a debilitating and disorientating perception of reality. The "tin god" in us humans fails in the face of the hard-core reality of quotidian existence. Such a stark realization, where the mind is still sane and wholesome, might engender a sense of humility – a sort of spiritual illumination or catharsis that instills awe.

On the contrary, where such awareness of the implicated impotence of human effort implodes within a crude and bestial mind, there might be further debasing to meanness, wickedness, and other pernicious manifestations. This implosion is probably the root of human wickedness, savagery, and sickly dominance, which erode and smother all forms of goodness and delicacy of mind. A personality possessed of this sort of disorientation soon assumes a puerile sense of "godlikeness" – the Euhemeristic sort that encourages the morphing of human tyrants and despots into demi-gods that haunt "lesser" mortals, who must then be cowed into submission. The above is a summation of what Freud, Marx, Nietzsche and Sassure have challenged regarding our assumptions of what is natural in their examination of manifest and latent structures of the mind (Kauffman 2). Fascism and all autocratic practices emanate from this anosmic denial of the naturally inherent virtues of human, economic, social and political rights.

Mokopi, a character in "The Collector of Treasures," represents men of evil nature. His vileness disquiets Paul Thebolo, his moral foil, who tells him: "You defile life .... There is nothing else in your world but defilement" (*The Collector of Treasures*, 100). Garesego's lecherous life exhibits a tendency to wickedness. In his case, as in the case of

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Moleka (*Maru*) or Dan (*A Question of Power*), extreme sexuality implies moral perversion and an immoderate display of power. Misuse of power of any shade or ramification is a theme that worries Head and which she disparages in all of her writings. In her view, the two vices of sexual perversion and political repression intersect at the centre of moral imbalance.

Paul Thebolo, on the contrary, is the agent of light. He represents men of a kind, gentle and loving nature. Head calls him "A poem of tenderness" (101). He is a man capable of renewing himself through, in William Wordsworth's phrase, "little, little acts of kindness." Because of his kindly disposition towards people, he is honoured and respected. At least, Dikeledi, his neighbour, regards him as a mythic hero. Paul apparently possesses the kind of mystical potential embodied in Manu, whom he resembles in his all-knowing and ruminative nature. Like Maru, Paul has a way of communicating messages with his eyes. He can impress instantly and easily his god-like nature on people around him. As befits a mythic hero, he willingly accepts responsibility for Dikeledi's children after the latter is imprisoned for killing her husband, who had been extremely cruel to her. Indeed, Paul's contact with Dikeledi ennobles her life and affords her a deeper insight into human nature. Dikeledi wants to cherish and preserve from Garesogo's defilement such "nuggets" as she has acquired from Thebolo. A connoisseur of human kindness, she avidly fights to keep her morality from being soiled by the human rankness represented by people like Mokopi. In killing her way-ward husband, Dikeledi, therefore, shows a willingness to take her destiny in hand and attain personal salvation – the psychological cleansing of the mind, even though the consequence of her action is possible death.

Another character in the mold of Paul Thebolo is introduced in the last story, "Hunting." With his tractor, Tholo makes hunting easier for the village people around him. An urbane, cool-headed man, he is impressive in his all-comprehending stance about issues of practical existence. Regarded as a chief, he nevertheless prefers to live an ordinary and simple life.

Kelebone, one of the characters in "Hunting," observes that Tholo has "the true power of life" (105). Thato, Tholo's wife, notes that he arouses worship, not love (105). Thus, we have in Tholo a personality who declines his high position in order to serve and who, consequently, inspires admiration and awe on account of the mystical aura radiating from a seemingly plain and ordinary personality. His mythical antecedents include Christ, Buddha, Prometheus and Theseus—mythical characters that dramatize selfless and redemptive service in their careers.

So generous is Tholo that he never refuses requests for help. Rather, he freely shares what he has with needy people. His vision is the formation of an egalitarian society. To the extent that he aims to alter the prevailing social and economic arrangements, he is a culture hero or a mythic hero. To demonstrate the cosmic significance of his role, he is said to be at peace with all nature. In this, he resembles Maru, who also achieves a mystical at-oneness with his surroundings. Significantly, Tholo marries Thato – a woman of the same psychic and spiritual make-up as he himself. This is the complementary quality of characterization, which a majority of the stories in *The Collector of Treasures* illustrates.

Head intends to achieve her ideals by creating characters like Tholo, Thato, Paul, Dikeledi, Jacob and Sembele, who set the pace and the tone in the envisioned new order of human existence. In "Hunting", "Tholo and Thato are presented as characters willing to help people. By their examples of hard work, forthrightness, and fellow feeling, Head wishes to make people improve their spiritual, economic and social commitment. Hunting, therefore, is a symbolic activity through which men of heroic destiny can reach out and serve humanity. Hunting, thus, becomes a politically symbolic act of using mythic archetypes to think globally, as Doniger asserts in "Myth as Political Lenses," a section of *The Implied Spider* (61). Says Doniger:

> But the process of generalization, of abstraction from local detail,
>
> has a political aspect as well: it is where we begin to look beyond
>
> our selfish personal concerns and think globally, environmentally,
>
> think of the future, think of what is happening elsewhere on the
>
> planet earth, think of the consequences of what we say and do and
>
> write for people very different from our own.

Implied in Doniger's, and by extension, Head's, thoughts on the political resonance of little acts of empathy is the idea that humans are entrusted with the welfare of their fellows. Doniger, in this regard, urges people to "think globally, act locally" (61). He is, in fact, convinced that myths contain both telescopic and microscopic "lenses" through which we can contact and process experience.

As if borrowing from Doniger's concept of the political implication of even the least, and the most commonplace, of human actions (or even inaction), Head infuses *The Collector of Treasures*, with instances of collective consciousness and communally shared imagination. The choice of materials and the figures for inclusion are eclectic, but each

material or figure finds a place within the overall framework of Head's mythic vision. This framework, as a working principle and as a structural or formalistic standard, entails "the presence of the timeless and immemorial" (Head, in Emenyeonu 146). Given the oral atmosphere of the stories, they mostly appear to be removed from that grainy feel of reality with which most people are familiar. The same gothic or "romantic," otherworldly feeling can be perceived in the three novels, the biographical pieces, the historical novels, the novellas, and the vignettes. The characters in the stories, though they may be ordinary farmers or down-to-earth teachers, are larger-than-life in outlook because even their actions of abstract and symbolic value are cosmically extendable and interpretable.

Not only this, there is a parallel between the collaborative nature of the Kgotla and the public nature of *The Collector of Treasures* (Okonjo Ogunyemi, in Emenyonu 101). Just as the Keota's open-endedness permits diverse voices to be heard, so does Head's collection of stories in this volume under review present the varied aspects of mythical conception of society. *The Collector of Treasures* marks, indeed, a progression from the oral milieu, with its etiological orientation, to the dizzying pace of urbanized living, with its disoriented values. The oral phase, characterized by a mythopoeic quality, reveals a flow of speech with soporific lilt. However, within the modern phase, individuated words signal fragmentation and divisiveness. Further, the oral environment, as presented in the stories describing traditional life. The stories, too, are marked by simplicity, being mainly didactic and redolent of local colour. A languid pace of life is easily evoked by the image of the bovine ox or the cranky wagon or the over-looped Kgotla. Not so with the newly emergent milieu, where rootless characters like Garesogo Mokopi exhibit careering and heady motion, which spawn queer and perverted ways of life.

While Head would want to see a purification or modification of the oral phase of human life – which is mainly marked by cohesiveness – she would equally want to have in place a modern society in which the benefits of scientific research would be appropriated without their destructive or harmful potential. Such a society would eschew and destroy the egregious practices of witchcraft and sorcery; it would also contend frontally the phenomena of ignorance and human wickedness.

Agricultural revolution becomes, therefore, a symbolic expression of the surge of the human spirit towards utopian ideals. Negative issues like power politics, sex –mania and the greed for material possessions, might circumscribe such soaring of the mind. Therefore, myth, as a literary device and as a tool for philosophical and ethical exegesis, has enabled Head to perform the difficult tasks of purifying the human psyche and proffering new models of social, political and economic participation. Therefore, if ever it could be argued that *The Collector of Treasures* is not gestation–ground for Head's major literary works, then it could never be denied that the novels provide the meat that constitutes both subject and the texture of the short stories. It is the same objective of psychic restoration and the same vision of a futuristic state of human perfection that inform all of the writer's works.

II.   *A BEWITCHED CROSSROAD*: TRADITIONAL ETHOS AS BACKDROP

TO HEAD'S MYTHIC VISION

Head's works express the struggle for individual identity within a community in the face of difficult social conditions. Just like other female authors of African descent, Head has written about the African society, especially the Botswana society.. She has endeavored to mirror the traditions of Africa and the upheavals caused by colonialism and urbanization. Similarly, the cultural and material realities of women's lives in Africa have not escaped her attention.

A Bewitched Crossroad: An African Saga (1984) is, certainly, one of the vehicles through which Head has projected her viewpoints. According to Timothy J. Reiss (in Kauffman, 34), a writer's choice of truth characterizes and particularizes a social or cultural environment, composing, in turn, its reality. It is the reality of traditional African life (including its interface with modernist trends and influences) that Head has striven to engage with and re-order through her peculiar way of perceiving things.

Head's non-fictional novels provide a cathartic evaluation of the evil influences that molded the sensibilities of Africans in pre-colonial times, and which possibly predisposed them to certain pernicious patterns of living. She seeks to establish the cultural dynamics that have shaped the African people's consciousness. Primordial evil has tended to corrupt the fine sensibilities of some of the virtuous leaders from Africa. Other leaders, however, have escaped this corruptive influence. Head regards such leaders as role models, people whose careers mirror those of mythic role personas.

Head identifies among all races and classes of people the essential capacity for evil. In her view, only willful ablution through personal sacrifice, or through communal service, could purge one of the contaminations of power mania and sexual overdrive. Head argues that the whites and the blacks are equally guilty of this sort of congenital remiss, a point well illustrated in *A Bewitched Crossroad*.

The use of historical materials enables Head to recount past occurrences with a view to showing past mistakes and indicating the right course of future events. She, in effect, points out the way forward. Therefore, the argument could be made that Head uses historical material to achieve social reconstruction within, and through, her writings of multiple genres.

In *A Bewitched Crossroad*, Head tells the story of Sebina (Motshiping), who takes over the leadership of his people at the death of Motswaing, his father. Sebina proceeds to change the ambulant practice of his people for a more sedentary and settled form. He does the pragmatic thing by seeking the protection of more powerful and more "hawkish" rulers neighbouring his people.

Soon, Sebina's people suffer Matebele brutality and tyranny, but his turning to Khama the Great saves them from annihilation. Even in this story, Head focuses on man's inhumanity to man. The Matebele people represent archetypal and entrenched evil. Their repressive rule indicates the idea that the white man (who represents Western civilization) does not have a monopoly over wicked acts. Black people equally exhibit wickedness. Head's intention is to fight wickedness wherever it is found. Evil occurs wherever real

love is lacking. To her, sacrificial love, based on cooperative work, would invariably lead to the recuperation of man's brutalized and repressed psyche.

Sebina, through his pacifist actions, typifies the Maru-like figure, the sort of person who quests for the authentic values that would chart the way forward for an African renaissance. In effect, Sebina symbolizes the good shepherd. Through this character's exemplary conduct, Head criticizes greed and ingratitude in the collection of stories in *A Bewitched Crossroad.*

For the whites, as for the blacks in the South African enclave, eschewing oppression of any shade is essential for the restoration of the basic human values of compassion, empathy and trust. Khama and Sebina are two of a kind: they each want a peaceful, integrated and contented society. Like Maru in *Maru,* they believe in mental exertion as a trouble-shooting mechanism. They are invested with the finest strains of African grandeur and nobility.

One of the evil practices that Head attacks in her writings is ritual sacrifice. She thinks that such an obnoxious practice emanates from ignorance. As she sees it, ritual sacrifice (and such related vices) is an evil and spurious arrangement that never gets any problem solved. Manipulative and wily people exploit the gullibility of their fellow humans whenever they perform barbaric rituals that involve bloodletting. Head believes that proper education will help to dismantle such life-denying structures and traditional practices.

Khama lived at a bewitched crossroad where the dehumanizing aspects of tradition clashed with common sense and broadness of mind. His mission, it seems, was to stamp out witchcraft, sorcery and other voyeuristic practices that tended to constrict and obfuscate the mind, shunting it into dastardly behaviour. Khama was concerned about the man "who was nothing", and he abolished such retrogressive laws as the bogwera, which normally entailed that a scapegoat be killed. He equally restored dignity to womanhood by abolishing bogadi (bride price), which bound a woman irrevocably to her husband, even after her husband's death. Women under Khama's rule were thus allowed to inherit property from patrimony- something that was unheard of earlier on.

The self-help projects that Khama began within his community improved the economic conditions of his people: "Kama was a gift of God to the people. He was not educated ... he only had a Tswana education but he was in religion and rule what they call a sage (*Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind* 9). He encouraged his people to pursue self-help projects as a means of financial and economic empowerment.

The peeling of the nihilistic cover provided by Ngwale, the rain god, makes it possible for the Matebele warriors to conquer the bewildered city of the Tswana people, led by their demented king, Vanambo Tumbale. Here, a negative Tswana myth is being subverted. The rain god is de-mystified and is shown to be impotent and unreliable in the current scheme of things.

Head is particularly sensitive in handling the issue of change. In her view, change could be implosive if not properly and sensibly handled. For characters like Makhaya, Elizabeth, Maru, and Eugene, change of social milieu launches them into different

spheres of experience. In the case of Makhaya and Eugene, change introduces them to agronomic politics and the cause of inter-racial integration. On the other hand, the moral and psychological dilemma posed by change could engender personality distortion, as can be seen in the case of Elizabeth in *A Question of Power*.

Thus, Head's literary writings indicate that mythic figures would usually initiate change by undertaking quests aimed at redefining cultural boundaries and social (political) limitations. Most of her characters' effort at bridging (or even transcending) the physical boundaries of locales parallels their attempts to overcome psychological and spiritual limitations. James Joyce's concept of secular epiphany would apply here particularly. Stephen Dedalus, Joyce's mythical hero in *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (2004) crosses the threshold of interstitial experience when he finds commonplace voyeurisms sudden flashes of perception and insight. A character, in the process of indulging in inter-boundary experience, attains illumination – an insight into the essence of human existence. This is at once an exhilarating (liberating) and uplifting experience. Unlike Joyce's hero, Stephen Dedalus, Head's heroes or heroines do not experience the giddy spell of sensuous existence as a prelude to psychological maturity. They are usually people seared by the rigours of political injustice, for which they seek solution.

In sum, therefore, *A Bewitched Crossroad*, as much as *The Collector of Treasures* provides the sort of philosophical motifs that are then developed more elaborately in the major works by the author. They embody essential elements of the thematic and stylistic aspects of the novelist's art, which is especially steeped in myth.

CHAPTER FIVE:

FEMINISM AND MYTH: THE BALANCING FORCE OF ANDROGYNY

Sexuality and all appertaining inflections of womanhood are issues that Bessie Head has

engaged head-on in all her writings. The continual mistreatment of women was a

source of grave worry for her. She riled at the fact that women were discriminated against

and were dis-empowered because of their sex. On the other hand, she would not tolerate a

situation where women became over-assertive and virulent, deliberately diminishing, or

undermining, the male potency and relevance. The above balanced view of gender

relations reveals Head's ideological orientation regarding feminist issues. According to

Nancy Topping Bazin in "Venturing into Feminist Consciousness" (in Abrahams, 51),

"To Bessie Head whose daily life was shaped by the racist practices of South Africa and

the sexist attitudes of the men she lived with, the question of who has the power is indeed

important."

Ruth Robbins (72) has made a distinction between poetics and politics, as these terms

relate to feminism. According to her, poetics captures the theoretical and stylistic

concerns of a literary work, while politics deals with its ideological concerns, its

interpretative bent. It is the contention of the present writer that Head's works should be

assessed according to the politics they identify with and express, for it is foreseeable that

she would have concurred with the notion that culture, society and historical

interpretations define gender, thus making it a politically rendered concept..

Head is concerned generally with the plight of the underdog and the downtrodden

members of society, those elements who, in communication studies, may be classified

within either Standpoint Theory or Muted Group Theory (West and Turner, 2007). Standpoint Theory, adapted by Nancy C. M. Hartsock (1997) and Julia T. Wood (2004) from Karl Marx's and Georg Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel's writings, is predicated on the notion that people are situated in specific social locations. The positions they occupy depend on their membership of social groups (poor, men, women, wealthy, educated, African, European, et cetera). According to Standpoint Theory, individuals view and relate with social situations from particular vantage points. Usually, vantage points that oppose entrenched power structures become "standpoints." Those at the lowest rungs of the social ladder, say these theorists, see more than their own position and are thus likely to be more empathic than others in the social spectrum are. In the sixteenth-century, writers like Dr. Johnson and Boswell had argued that masculinity "expressed a traditional conviction that the differences between men and women arise from natural causes to organize the cultural order" (Jehlen, in Lentricchia and McLaughlin, 1990). However, latter-day critics are rethinking the veracity of such a belief held by intellectuals like Johnson and Boswell. There are presently some vociferous, and sometimes stridently insurgent, viewpoints that insist upon the idea that the biological coloration of gender should be erased, in place of culturally imposed boundaries that limit human potential and that can rank with any dialogue that examines issues of race, class and religious marginalization.

Nonetheless, the notion that women are a part of the marginalized segments of society does not compel Head to join forces with fiery feminist avant-gardes, who may prefer a more trenchant projection of the female perspective. In the words of Ruthven, the old assumption had always been that "Man needs no definition; he is the norm against which woman is defined as an aberration, a pathological condition associated with complaints

and 'weeping' and 'pains". Ruthven's view is critical of stereotypical rendering of male or female typologies. Such typologies, according to Jehlen (in Lentricchia and McLaughlin, 265), that depict the categorization or characterization of masculinity in transcendent terms tend to submerge the "complexities of human difference."

Questions about feminism in Head's writings are geared toward re-evaluating and correcting (where possible) such stereotypical assumptions of male transcendence and female baseness. 'Feminisms,' asserts Robbins, are "political discourses which uncover the assumptions of oppression, whatever their grounds, diagnose the problem, and offer alternative versions of livable realities" (p. 7). Hidden in Robbins' assertion above is the hint that femininity refers not to a set of inherent attributes but to a culturally defined situation. In spite of the potential of gender discourse to signal and initialize paradigmatic shifts in social and political interrelationships, some critics erroneously underplay the significance of gender as a focalizer for political and intellectual engagement. Especially with regard to Head's fiction, certain diatribes have been cast, suggesting that she did not show sufficient commitment to issues that concerned women. Those sorts of barbed imputations are far from the true picture, for Head deeply engages with feminine issues, but she entwines them also with intuitive commentaries on race and class. As Myra Jehlen comments in "Gender," an essay in *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Lentricchia and McLaughlin, 1987):

> ...gender is both an embedded assumption and functions as a touchtone
> for others. It is logically impossible to interrogate gender—to transform
> it from axiom to objects of scrutiny and critical term—without also
> interrogating race and class. The introduction of gender into the critical
> discussion multiplies its concerns and categories by those of

historiography to produce a newly encompassing account of cultural consciousness that is also newly self-conscious.

The import of Jehlen's commentary on gender above is to validate the sorts of consciousness and deliberative approach that writers like Head encode in their creative writings.

In recent times, Ellen Showalter has sought to find a suitable terminology that can rescue the feminine or femininity from its stereotypical linkage with inferiority and subsidiary status (204). The gynocentric emphasis spawned by her has been primed to valorize female (womanish) values, while derogating aspects of masculinity, especially any purported usurpation of space in "phallocentric" terms. Gynocentric critics think that sexual brutality and sexual dominance (phallocetrism) pervade every form of social discourse, as well as and social and cultural structures. In her weighty book, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1972), Mary Wollstonecraft uncovers the systematic inequality of women in all areas of life – the family, work, culture, economics, the law, education, etc. She further queries the ideological structures that helped to support such inequality. Rosemary Hennessy, on her part, has noted that the issue of political equality is often unevenly articulated within one social formation empowering some women at the expense of others... (153). Such a notion has remained a contentious issue in critical thinking. The image and typology of womankind has suffered some battering and sometimes a little bit of 'masochistic massaging,' all through the ages. Simone de Beauvoir (in Kauffmann, 268) has identified five mythic categories of woman:

a. Woman as danger

b. The eternal Feminine – considered as a threat to virile masculinity.

c. Woman as "animal", indulging in, and consumed by, phallic animalism.

d. Woman as a mass of contradictions – dangerous Siren, temptress and a figure of redemption.

e. The concrete figure symbolized in poetry and love; "flesh and blood" entities with social limitations.

The above categories of mythic femaleness identified as prevalent practices by de Beauvoir are as absurd as they are rationally and biologically false. Such fallacious images of women slam people within contexts for social vilification and discrimination. This is exactly what Mary Poovey has in mind when she states that "patriarchal institutions construct gendered identities for everyone and use gender as a principle of discrimination" (in Stanton & Stewart, 1995). Writers like Head have strenuously resisted this tendency to use gender as a cultural or political bludgeon against women especially. At any rate, some critics erroneously underplay the significance of gender as a focalizer for political and intellectual engagement.

To de Beauvoir, most of these representations of women are false and unrealistic because they each imbue woman with a certain mysteriousness that denies her a sense of subjectivity and essential humanity. They are fallacies sustained as myths of social organization. Head well recognizes such false depictions of womanhood for purely exploitative purposes, and she thus creates female characters that, through their actions, refuse to accept docilely the way society has defined and projected them. Head, as if in agreement with the tenets of Standpoint Theory, criticizes the status quo of male dominance and female devaluation, and oppression. However, she does not merely

criticize the prevailing social and political milieus of her time; she also suggests new ways of organizing social life in a more equitable way.

In the very first of her fictional writings, *The Cardinals* (1993), published posthumously, Head makes a concerted, but painfully ambiguous attempt at interrogating the paternal and masculine orders of power. For this purpose, she first strips maternal privileging of the frills and allowances that her other novels would project for the white "mother figures" that bear the taint of psychotic debasement, for daring to entangle sexually with males of lower social strata. Initially, the protagonist, Mouse (who lives innocently in an incestuous relationship with Johnny, her biological father) appears to surrender willingly her gendered sensibilities to the authoritarian, masculine world that is seemingly normative and superior. Mouse, perhaps, realizes that her tagging onto the obtrusive and domineering guidance of Johnny (who not only wants to access, and inscribe on, her mind, but who as well wants to ravage her sexually) could help her attain maturation and initiation into the art and craft of writing. Mouse looses her voice to Johnny, who indirectly shapes the narrative that she researches and inscribes textually.

At this point, neither Mouse nor her mother, Ruby, is willing to defy the social taboos embodied in the Immorality Act (1927, amended in 1950) and in the social ethos governing and defining incestuous relations. Her unknown self, meantime, is shrouded in her act of deliberate acquiescence in a system, and particularly a relationship, that masks her identity and personal history. Ruby and her daughter, Mouse, are thus denied the moral authority of symbolically reprising against, and imprecating, acts of repression, denial, and exclusion. Maternal narrative is subsumed structurally and strategically under paternal subjectivity, in order to birth the artistic independence of the female persona.

This gendered synthesis in *The Cardinals* is what Head ultimately projects in her overall writing project within her lifetime: the practice of androgynous co-existence and mutual dependence of the male and the female genders. Says Lewis Desiree in "The Cardinals and Bessie Head's allegories of self":

> *The Cardinals* repeatedly affirms a masculine world whose authority is persuasively inscribed in the texts that Mouse confronts and imbibes through the act of writing. Accepting the fictions of female inferiority and of masculinity as a desired model, the central woman character will therefore acquire an identity that silences her unknown self. But the text also hints at the limited path of Mouse's entry into writing with its insistent delineation of the power hierarchies of her world....While Johnny will allow Mouse to escape culturally ascribed silence for a public domain of self-defining authority, her freedom will be achieved at the cost of discovering an textual space and identity that cannot be discovered in dominant narratives (*World Literature Today*, p.4, 1996).

Knowing the tilted nature of supercilious attributions to womanhood, what Head wants, therefore, is recognition of woman's humanity, even though in *The Cardinals* she does not at first forcefully extract and insist on such recognition. She would reject the mythical stereotypes of femininity that Mary Ellmann (in Toril Moi—*Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*) has herself repudiated. According to Ellmann, the fallacious images of women represented in textual productions reproduce are themselves reproduced by a false sexual analogy. These stereotypes are those pertaining to formlessness, instability, confinement, piety, materiality, sexuality, spirituality,

irrationality, pliability, shrewdness and witchcraft. Entrapping women in such male-constructed straitjackets would rob them of the virtue of social responsibility. On her part, Maxine Sample has erroneously argued that Head depicts "female as centre and male as periphery" (39). This is far from the androgenic bent of Head's conception of gender. Indeed, characters like Gilbert and Makhaya (*When Rain Clouds Gather*) strive to not only empower womenfolk but also bring men back from the periphery of social, economic and political irrelevance.

The notion of patriarchy that devalues womanhood has resulted in virulent rebuttals by trenchant feminist critics and novelists who, in return, attempt to expend the male potency, either in literary creations or in other artistic works. Kate Millet (Sexual Politics, 2000) is typical of such angry critics who rankle with the assumption that women are passive victims in the clutches of strong male writers that use sex as a means of power control. Female novelists like Buchi Emecheta (b.1944) and Flora Nwapa (1931-1993) deliberately paint scenarios in which reverse female oppression and male marginality is the norm in social relationships. This, however, is not the road that Head takes in making her case for a restitution of the ideals of womanhood.

Head, in her writings, explodes those myths, as have been highlighted above, that denigrate women and expend their self-worth. Linda Kauffman (1990) qualifies as "ossified and hardly liberal humanism" any social arrangement that denies people their human and basic rights. In Kauffman's view, such humanism is bereft of *joie de vivre*. As if in support of Kauffmann's view on the insupportability of "illiberal humanism," Head intends not only to purge the human psyche of such wickedness and folly, she equally seeks to forge a balance between subjectivity (self-consciousness) and the otherness of

people around ("alterity"). This well accords with the epochal distinctions made by Martin Buber in his "I-Thou", "I-It" categorizations of the communication experience (Trans. Kaufmann, 1970). In Buber's thinking, recognizing the otherness of the people we are relating with will ultimately humanize us. Viewing people (whether male or female) through the "I-It" prism devalues our common humanity and erodes the essential ingredients that will make human communication wholesome and meaningful. Moreover, there is some suggestion of superciliousness and haughtiness inherent in such a polarizing distinction of selves, bodies and entities. Head, in fact, deprecates those very polarizing tendencies in her writings.

Untenable to Head is Hannah More's view that the female mind is "incapable of sustained attention; is ornamental rather than logical; superficial, not deep; anecdotal, not analytical; suitable for the invention of fanciful fictions, but unable to philosophize or to think with clarity "(in Kauffman 14). Not for Head either is the thinking that women should "naturally" be excluded from culture because they are passive recipients. Nor would she advocate that they should be given "centrist stances". She would rather want to see women playing a symmetrical role to that of the men, taking a cue from Watzlawick, et al, 1967). This symmetrical representation of male-female interactions is equable with the notion of androgyny that Head has consciously advocated in al her fictional and non-fictional writings.

As far as Head is concerned, the African woman (indeed, any woman) might be on the fringe of society; yet she ought to be respected. A woman's social position of "subsidiarity" is to Head an incidental, tangential circumstance that should in no way

detract from her basic humanity. Head makes the same argument on behalf of the man as a social and political type.

As she sees it, man's putative superiority might become his moral albatross–a huge psychological burden that might disable him from heroic pursuits and noble accomplishments, compelling him to hobble down to a position of prostrate political irrelevance. As a corollary, Head disavows the sort of raillery and vapid vituperations adopted by truculent feminists, such as Emecheta, de Beauvior, or Millet (whose polemics are heady and caustic). These women vehemently canvas issues that resolve to the ultimate advantage of women. Instead of this sort of stilted arrogation of value to the female archetype, Head, on the other hand, adopts a subtle ironic approach that problematizes social and political issues, with a view to achieving a holistic balance in their resolution. In this, she resembles Virginia Woolf, who condemns rank expressions of female anger in literature and criticism. Woolf sees such abrasive anger as a distortion and a pollution of aesthetic purity. Like Head, Woolf sees androgyny as an ideology of rapprochement.

Indeed, Head's heroines are sensitive to male abrasiveness. Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* cannot cope emotionally with the putrescent sexuality and stifling dominance of Dan and Sello-in-the-brown-suit. Assailed by the continual ranting of these two characters, she sinks into madness for a period, but is rescued by Sello and the Indian sage, who nudge her back to the realm of social responsibility. In seeking to present a reasonable and balanced image of womanhood, Head does not expend, or arrest, the development of her heroes or heroines, unlike what Doris Lessing, Emily Bronte, and Sylvia Plath do in their writings.

In this vein, Head may lampoon grotesque behaviour, without indulging in obtuse recrimination or endorsing coercive male privilege and male presumptuousness. The perspective she provides is one that unifies the gendered species as mutually supportive entities. She desires a reintegration of women to the political mainstream. In her view, "the world of the intellect, both politically and spiritually, had been entirely male-dominated. Tradition obliterated a woman as thinking, feeling human being and defined her position in the society in the following terms: a woman is sacred only if she knows her place, which is her yard, as a mother of children and housewife" (*A Bewitched Crossroad*, 165). Apart from espousing actions of political affirmation, Head advises women to help one another by embarking on collective female labour (*When Rain Clouds Gather*, 104). She says further of women:

> No man ever worked harder than (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 dust of husks, and they often, in addition to broadcasting the seed when the early rains fell, took over the task of the men and also ploughed the land with oxen (*When Rain Clouds Gather*, 104 – 105).

The effect of Head's approach to the feminism cause (including her incipient repudiation of the mythically generated feminine mystique) is to critique any orientation that tends to encourage the aesthetics of fear in the psyche of women. Her approach, it would seem, seeks for an adjustive stance that charts a progressive direction, making for justice for all humanity, irrespective of gender or race. Where necessary, this orientation compels Head to initiate a remapping and/or revamping of social and moral values.

Head seems to aver that progressive self-development would lead to progressive communal development. She resolutely decries social and political arrangements whereby people suffer exploitation, denial and exclusion. To her, it is possible (indeed, desirable and just) that people of all cultures should project in their varied lives principles and qualities that are not dependent on the value judgments of other people. In her view, neither past nor present inequities should be recycled and reinforced by rationalization and a timid retreat to platitudes and traditional practices. The rational and pragmatic thing to do in combating injustice is to immediately confront it, discredit it or subvert it. To Head, this is the moral imperative, the moral choice which literature ought to embody and reflect. Whenever individual sensibility of justice tallies with the ethical rules enjoined by Divinity, society would then experience real progress. To paraphrase Head's thoughts on the need for social justness, what is required in the present day is a re-humanized epistemology of existence. Referring explicitly to Makhaya in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, Ravenscroft thus comments of this notion of re-humanized existence:

> Against a political backdrop of self-indulgent, self-owning traditional
>
> chiefs and self-seeking, new politicians more interested in power than
>
> people, the village of Golema Mmidi is offered as a difficult alternative:
>
> not so much a rural utopia for the Africa of the future to aim at, as a means
>
> of personal and economic independence and interdependence, where the
>
> qualities that count are benign austerity, reverence for the lives of ordinary
>
> people...and, above all, the ability to break out of the prison of selfhood
>
> without destroying individual privacy and integrity (p. 175).

In furtherance of this new epistemological re-orientation, Head advocates in her writings a reciprocal empowerment of males and females. This makes for a diversified perspective of cultural and personal experiences, offering a fulsome insight into collective experience. Perspectivism, as a mode of perception, achieves a manifold appraisal of reality. Myth yields this perspectivist insight as a methodology – replacing dichotomies with multiple stances that lead to an earnest and rounded understatement of human existence. As such, knowing and doing become collective and interwoven endeavors, with knowledge transformed from an authoritative fiat to a relativist and integral construct. The rigours of "verisimilitude" are thus dispensed with in favour of relational ways of cognition and expression. According to Messer–Davidow (in Kauffman 88), viewpoints that denigrate or exclude the experiences and perspectives of other people – viewpoints such as racism and misogynistic dispositions and habits – are flawed by their non-inclusive, one-sided, scopes.

The mythic methodology is particularly amenable to the concept of *bricolage* in that (like *bricolage*) it has an expansive reach and a profound depth that encompasses shifting and complex variables, not frigidities or constants. *Bricolage* proceeds by a process of revelation, by elaboration. *Bricolage* is a French term that refers to the construction or creation of a work from a diverse range of things that happen to be available. Myth, as a political tool, may concretize cultural and social issues that have pejorative coloration, thus revealing them as being no longer untenable; it may also encompass and highlight gender-marking (coding) or other forms of interruption that are racially or sexually engineered. In encompassing such discrete, and yet interwoven, social components, myth tends to present them as a kaleidoscopic spectrum, in which can be seen organic, composite phases of the human experience.

The issues of racism, classes and sexism are intertwined and do feed on one another. Myth may help to centrally situate and refocus the issues that society has tended to treat marginally, or which it has shelved in archival recesses. Myth is thus one sure vehicle of incorporating, explicating and therapeutically relating the cultural differentia of race, gender, and class in order to make for the kind of diversity that recognizes the otherness, the values, of people that are alienated externally and organically.

As much as Head strives to accomplish, through myth, a communal framework for open discussion and debate among individuals living together (to enable them to fight jointly economic, social and political ills), she equally uses feminism to introduce structural or organizing principles, to provide a model for cultural and social re-orientation through a nurturing of a sense of the collective. Within the collective, individual consciousness is melted. Myths, after all, mostly tell stories of heroes and heroines who make signal contributions to a particular community. The actions of such mythic heroes and heroines certainly benefit the entire society within artistic contemplation.

Certain rhetorical questions pop up now. Does talking about oneself help to meet the needs of the community? Does such talking have expurgatorial effects? Is the personal political? Assumedly, the process of sharing one's predicament may bring about enlightenment that might usher in needed change. Sharing of thoughts engenders psychic release and may elicit empathy, a necessary ingredient for social and political changes and exchanges within the commonweal. In *The Carl Rogers Reader* (Eds. Kirschenbaum and Henderson, 1989), Carl Rogers harps on the need for empathy as a critical ingredient in any successful dyadic relationship, harking back to Buber's model of "I-Thou" as a

proof of empathic bonding in human communication. Empathic bonding, in effect, can only be achieved through a subsumation to the *bricolage* principle, to the imperative of adopting a pragmatic attitude of conscious inclusiveness in inter-human relations. Therefore, *bricolage* is an ideal literary tool for forging a transformative code for mutual dependence.

Bricolage, as a literary principle, encourages "glissade": a force that releases mobility, adaptability and versatility. It enables an individual artist (or centre of consciousness) to move from one thing (or status) to the other without feeling embarrassed or intimated. "Glissade" is a political toga that feminists need to don in order to overcome feelings of inferiority or bashfulness as they consciously strive to better their culturally stipulated states of subsidiarity.

Men may not easily accept such glissading potential on the part of womenfolk. Men tend to lose their senses in the pursuit of professionalism and hegemony, which themselves possess some inflection of absence of empathy. In the words of Gerald M. Machean, the erotic of domination "attempts to extract surplus value that rewards some people while denying others" (in Kauffman, 148).

Society exploits women at three levels:

(a)   The level of knowledge acquisition (skill development)

(b)   Denial of capital control (the capacity for expropriation of proceeds of capital)

(c)   Loss of power advantage

Every other form of gender-based exploitation (or domination) stems from the above three platforms. Sexual violence, rape, shabby widowhood conditions, inheritance

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thieveries are all inherent in the defective and lopsided power arrangements that are culturally ordained and sustained.

Denial of economic advantage and frustration of financial empowerment are further steps toward entrenching political disenfranchisement. There can be thus no discontinuities between "women oppression," as a filmy, generic stuff, and "oppression" under the logic of capital. Loss of capital (capital dis-empowerment) braids with other forms of cultural oppression.

For real change to occur, then, there must be a re-designing of institutions, with a view to reintegrating women, as well as other people marginalized economically, socially and politically. The marginalized people will need to be empowered both within existing structures and in such new structures as might become exigent in the future. In the case of women, it does not necessarily mean that biological roles would have to change. Aside from situations where monosexual or asexual choices are made, such biological peculiarities as are found in the different sexes could be said to be natural, almost immutable. Nevertheless, neither maternity nor paternity should be a hobbling experience. Each of those gender typologies does have ennobling and mutually supportive potential. That is Head's argument. The process of achieving a level-playing ground for the two genders of male and female might entail a homologous interfusion of female political struggle and efforts at dismantling racial divides or class stratification.

Head, therefore, does not hold a constricted view of feminism. To her, there ought to be a broader vista through which society could articulate issues of feminism. Feminism, as a political mantra, is limited in that it is not a global forum for addressing all forms of

oppression and mistreatment. It is, therefore, subsumable under studies aimed at eliciting, in a catholic sense, all forms of inequities and political imbalances. Under a mythic umbrella that casts a universal penumbra on all facets of human organization, feminism assumes then a vital frame. In fact, Head's view on feminism is in consonance with that of Toril Moi as regards its political potential:

> Feminism, then, is something more than the effort to express women's experience. It is at once a relatively comprehensive analysis of power relations between the sexes, and the effort to change or undo any power system that authorizes and condones male power over women. I see feminism as a political position (Kauffman, 182-3).

Therefore, myth will help a writer to broaden his or her vista to include issues of race, political and social inequities, as well as considerations of gender. Myth, as a monolithic, but polyvalent, theory would primarily center critical focus and dissolve the subtle distinctions between issues of race, class and ethnicity. The androgynous use of myth shuns intimations of "sovereignty" or "expenditure" as modes of reacting to what Patricia Yaegar has termed "horizontal sublime", as opposed to "vertical sublime" (in Kauffman 19). "Sovereignty" appears to chart female independence from man, whereas, "expenditure" nurtures the capacity and the predilection to bye-pass the male medium of power expression, rendering man effete and irrelevant. Neither of the two approaches (evident in Emecheta's novels, for example) is acceptable to Head, who finds them flawed and dehumanizing. Similarly, Head would want nothing to do with Irigary's anticipation of "ecstasy" and "empowerment" as modes of rendering the feminine essence.

As Head sees it, the farcical and serious modes of perception are complementary aspects of consciousness that ought never to be dissociated. A man or a woman would be bereft of their truest elements if they were to polarize these two faculties, pursuing the one at the expense of the other. These faculties (which correspond to the female and male dispositions) should interfuse creatively to create a wholesome balance. Thus, beneath every façade of farce is some serious statement about life, with all its drollness and foibles.

Similarly, permeating through every strand of serious stuff are its burlesque dimensions, complements, and ramifications. Life without humor is bleak moroseness. Even in tragic situations, there are occasions or triggers for the hilarious. Thus, it was possible in Aeschylus (*Oresteia* c. 458 B.C.) for the Apollonian and the Dionysian cults to hold concurrently, with none vitiating or undermining the other. That is the creative, cathartic resolution forged by the bundling of the monoliths of Chorus and the Furies. Their organic coupling earns Aegisthus the reprieve needed for establishing a democratic, communal solution for a thorny, generational problem. It is a healthy tension. The difference perceived in the male-female panels (rather than leading to a dichotomous split) should open up contiguities and positive bridging.

The sort of influx of power that the Romantic Sublime evokes mimics pathetically such contiguous relationships hinted above as ideal modes of ties between the sexes. The Romantic Sublime seeks to transcend the normative, human structures, lifting the burden of the past. This sort of giddy access to power, influence and transport appears somewhat contrived. There is no pattern of natural leveraging or emergence. Such a heady transport to unchecked power invariably has catastrophic results.

Elizabeth Bishop (1984) envisions in the Romantic Sublime a situation in which empowerment dis-empowers others and is rather not supportive and inclusive of the "other." (*The Complete Poems*, 67). In "Pleasure, Pain, and Ethical Responsibility: A Felt-Situated Reading of *Menace II Society*" (1994), Hilary E. Davis refers to a lack of this somewhat supportive embrace (what she calls "shared anotherness") in Romantic feminine aesthetics. This quest for feminine empowerment is dissimilar to what Head achieves with her characterization, whether male or female. Whereas Bishop's personas attain, at certain moments, a palpable influx of power, Head's characters are often socially powerless people. If anything, they tend to relinquish or abdicate the elevated positions they occupy, because of their hard personal choices that, nonetheless, have wider social and communal implications. The Romantic Sublime is idyllic and a trifle facile, whereas Head's characters, in their bucolic exteriority, attain the "rustic sublime" in the sense that their agrarian choices, mundane as they may seem, kindle some flames of altruism and fellow feeling. The actions of Head's heroes or heroines evoke vibrant stillness, a paradoxical situation. The ecstatic transport, for each of Head's mythic protagonists, resides in selfless service. They are not given to feisty and vigorous hectoring that reveals a craving for empowerment. At any rate, in the careers of mythical personas, there might be brief moments of transcendence and epiphany, as has been noted earlier. However, this transcendent efflux is usually a shared experience.

Patricia Yaegar describes as "failed sublime" attempts to incorporate the sublime into feminine discourse (in Kauffman 201). The cause of this failure she attributes to masculine (phallic) interposition or counter-sublime. However, another apposite consideration vitiates the so-called "female sublime". The female sublime is not a

monolithic construct: in other words, it cannot reasonably subsume all the differentiated female taxonomy into one whole ensemble. Such a putative attempt at erasure of differences would woefully fail because there are several points of cleavage in the social fabric that notch the different ways cultural and political accents have established planks of stratification among even people of the same gender. The differences of social status, class, race and affectional dispositions would have to be configured and comprehended.

Apparently, then, only a mythic superstructure could afford to give the needed ambience capable of engaging each of such discrete components, and yet unifying them under the rubric of literary aesthetics. Such incorporation of differentia does not signify overreaching appropriation of space or media (what Yaegar has called "masculine interposition"). Rather, it evinces or yields reciprocity and interdependence – the sort which perspectivism, as a tool, could truly avail. Arguably, therefore, Head's fictions embody the reciprocity and the perspectivism that myth best projects and delivers as a means of explicating gendered discourse.

Head, in her treatment of feminist issues, is in most respects similar to Virginia Woolf. Both women strove to infuse biographical elements into their writings. Both suffered mental dislocation at various stages in their writing careers. Both, incidentally, believe that an androgynous balance should be maintained between the male and the female sexes. The two female writers also prefer the unconventional mode of artistic rendition. Says Woolf:

> If a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose,
>
> not what he must; if he would base his own work upon his own feelings,

and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, tragedy, no love, interest or catastrophe in the accepted style(146).

Bergson agrees entirely with Woolf's conception of time as a malleable and tractable narrative element, noting that literary works ought to ignore or explode conventional time in order to establish an expansive and boundary-destroying artistic form (in Vogler, 54). Art, therefore, both in its formalistic and thematic pursuits, ought to forge a sense of liberation: that sense of freedom from the limits of time and space. In all her writings, Head renders and fosters this sense of a-historicity and inter-boundary crossings, in order to sustain a measure of narrative and focal fluidity. She, thus, adopts Woolf's style of exploding conventional time in the narrative experience.

Woolf's preoccupation in *To the Lighthouse* (1977) is to engender this liberating aspect of fictional writing in which the "semi-mystic" life of woman tends to obliterate time, or else relate with it creatively and robustly. In this, she compares closely with Head, whose characters transcend the portals of temporal existence to chart destinies that defy conventions and considerations of linearity.

Woolf, who berates the Newtonian concept of absolutes of space and time, opts instead for Einstein's postulation of a sort of fluidity in the order of phenomena, as is rooted in human experience. She believes that this fluid configuration is capable of spawning a multiplicity of perspectives that may be found in a single experience. Life and death cohere in one sensation; love and hate revolve on the same hinge of perception or attitude, approach and withdrawal, awe and horror.

According to Woolf (in Vogler, 55), "Beauty is part ugliness; amusement part disgust; pleasure part pain". In furtherance of this enunciation, Woolf thinks that the story being narrated by an author must surround life all at once as a "luminous halo." This quality imbues the story with a fluid, numinous quality. Woolf considers it the novelist's duty to reflect the varying, unknown and uncircumscribed spirit of man. It is the sort of feeling, which Joseph Conrad's Marlow experiences in *Heart of Darkness* (1902). Conrad, like Head and Woolf, experiments with narrative structures and creates characters whose destinies mirror archetypal careers in mythic tales.

Just as Head has adopted "double characters" as a core narrative element (*A Question of Power* and *Maru*, as examples), so does Woolf incorporate in her writings the creation or telling of the story in the story itself. All of Head's writings, argues Mackenzie, is characterized by a quest for experimentation in the narrative format (*A Woman Alone*, iv). He sees the writer's works as assuming a certain quality of "indeterminacy".

Doris Lessing and Woolf resemble Head in their habit of centering of women, vis a vis the men, and in highlighting women who emancipate themselves from male intimidation. Lessing is impatient with women who self-destruct or who needlessly waste their potential (this can be seen, for instance, in the story of Mary in *The grass is singing* 1950). Woolf, on her part, creates Lily Briscoe and Mrs. Ramsay (*To the Lighthouse* 1927) as strong characters that stamp their personalities on the thoughts of the other characters. Nonetheless, she does not create male puppets that gravitate towards any female termagant who must be reverenced. Rather, the marble-like Mrs. Ramsay undergoes temperamental change and opts for a more humanistic view of life,

comprehending in this transformation a balanced view of women as moral and physical complements to men.

Thus, Head's presentation of feminism does not essentially seek to undermine the masculine essence. Her androgynous presentation rather attacks the excrescences of male domination and male oppression, while presenting more delectable male archetypes, figures who, through their actions, enable a person to create "himself anew (*The Collector of Treasures*, 93), by responding to the chord of tenderness. On the obverse side, Head does not spare the excesses of feminism, especially its testicle-crushing antics in, say, the case of Dikeledi and Garesego in "The Collector of Treasures"(*The Collector of Treasures*).

Therefore, Head's version of an androgynous representation of woman-man relationships insists that the two sexes could provide mutual support for each other. In this kind of arrangement, men support emotionally and physically abused women, as Tholo does for his consort in the short story "Hunting" (*The Collector of Treasures*). Khama the Great and Chief Sebina also represent compassion, respect and wisdom in dealing with women, especially in the way they have handled matters such as bride price and inheritance. Paulina and Makhaya, Elizabeth and Sello, Maru and Margaret, Bakhor and Sebina are but a few of female and male prototypes existing in mutually supportive situations. While such men support their female consorts, the women themselves work hard to fulfill their own destinies as bearers of light and vessels of solace.

In this wise, Head explodes the myth of passive feminism, as well as the myth of erotic feminine persona. She creates female characters who determine their own destinies, free

from sex-determined and culture-bound roles, with the attendant restrictions that these superficial structures could impose. Such female characters are portrayed as builders of the homestead and people on whom society's salvation depends.

Sophia Ogwude (1977) believes that Head's writings are "introspective" and "philosophical". However, it may be wrong to emphasize introspection as being unduly definitive of Head's fiction because the novelist uses introspection as an intuitive mechanism for rendering relational and developmental solutions and paradigms. There is a strong likelihood of mistaking introspection for psychological interpretation. The autobiographical elements embedded in Head's writings may create the illusion of psychological introspection. Admittedly, some of the characters in Head's novelistic writings forge strong inter-personal relationships; however, their actions result in some transcendence to communal and universal concerns. The emphasis is not merely on their personal experience but on how their experiences lead to the improvement of communal welfare. In the case of most of Head's characters, personal ego is usually singed and emptied out, before the personas can realize their mythic goals and fulfill their archetypal destinies.

Therefore, an argument could be safely made that, in terms of aesthetic appeal and structural elegance, Head's novels, histories and autobiographical writings do not make for that "erotic" experience which Roland Barthes has termed "jouissance" (the action for the general pleasure of reading without the threat of the one interpretation). There might be stylistic and structural infelicities that could hinder pleasurable reading, the sort that one might encounter in "cliff- hanger" stories that deal with pornographic arousal, voyeuristic access, crime detection, horror, or banal mystery. Head embeds in her stories

acerbic under-meanings and undercurrents that might not sit well with the ordinary literary critic, whose chief interest is merely in the primary layer of textual meaning and delectable rendition.

In fact, Head encodes certain under-meanings in her works in language that has mythic meaning. Yemi Ogunbiyi imbued language with the function of semantic assignment, disavowing it as merely an index of style (45). Lillian Robinson (in Kauffman 68) has declared that power is the issue in the politics of literature, as it is in the politics of anything else. As such, she is critical of literature that permits and reflects the denigration, exclusion and alienation of other people. In this vein, the under-currents and the under-meanings in Head's writings enable her to discover and articulate instances of political exploitation and social marginalization.

One of the primary functions of literature, as a critical part of its aesthetic properties, is to re-humanize life. Ellen Messer-Davidow thus disparages formalistic views of the essence of literature:

> For in treating formal properties rather than authors, readers or characters and in using differential reasoning to separate form from such analogues as behaviour, politics, or myth, a critic does seem to dehumanize literature (in Kauffman 69).

Through literature (especially through the lens of myth), it is a possible to undertake an exhaustive examination of phenomena, leading to a cleansing of noxious emotions,

feelings, and complexes. It should then be possible to revisit prejudice and acts of intolerance and to expose them as being no longer suitable and justifiable options.

Commenting on the relevance of the artist, especially one that grapples with politically nuanced issues, Romanus Egudu has this to say:

> The artist is a member of society, and the content and style of his work are affected by social reality .... One's response to a literary work may not be a simple course of physical action (and it does not have to be); it may be only a mental or emotional reaction, which can ultimately lead to action – physical or intellectual (15).

Seeing that literature can elicit political, physical or intellectual action on the part the consumers, as Egudu deduces in the excerpt above, the artist working on the feminist terrain must respond positively and creatively to issues pertaining to marginalization. Positive affirmation as a remediative mechanism entails, among other things, an honest audit of the woman condition in modern times – uncovering the blemishes and celebrating the victories, no matter how marginal or transient. Creative reaction to the imperfections in human arrangements and institutions involves a process of ideological formulation that would introduce patent change in the feminine condition, including conceptual formulations about womanhood in general terms. Such an artistic response to social conditions should also comprehend, and anticipate, other forms of social exclusion and denial. Arguably, in the corpus of her writings, Head adopts the type of artistic orientation described above.

In fact, Head, in her lifetime, refused to don the toga of "feminist". In fact, she would shun any such meretricious dramatization, even though she is artistically and ideologically concerned about what happens to women like her, both as gendered species and as allegorical representations of generic man undergoing any sort of mistreatment. Classificatory nomenclature, therefore, could never enclose nor exclude Head as an exponent of tokens that have to be memorized and reproduced on demand, before access, acceptance or privilege might be granted in social and political contexts. Her preoccupation with political, economic and mental liberation of humanity is sweeping, though hardly superficial. Head's writings, thus, constitute a catholic commitment to achieving freedom for the oppressed people wherever they may be found, regardless of class, race, sex, culture or social status.

Thus, autobiographical details in Head's work provoke in the reader empathy for the hero, heroine or chief character, because such details enable the reader to perceive aspects of his or her life in the writer's life. However, the reader's focus should not be on only those historical minutiae that shape and define the author's personal life. In the case of Head, although she may have drawn from her personal experience as a colored South African émigré, she does not confine her vision to her personal woes and travails. Rather, adopts positions and viewpoints that transcend her "backwater" experience. This "backwater" experience is spliced with mythical elements and political themes. In any case, Head deliberately recuperates her characters morally and socially. She improves their political consciousness and empowers them economically. Her readers are equally steeped in this lustral rite: their literary sensibilities are enriched by mythic paradigms, while their morality is purged through a process of psychic healing, what Aristotle calls "catharsis" (*Poetics*, Trans. Francis Butcher 1961). The physical frame of Head's

characters may seem frail, insecure and disoriented; yet they always have the ability to overcome quakes, tempests and human oppression. They initially suffer a sort of diminution of self, but they eventually pull through. Elizabeth (A *Question of Power*) and Margaret Cadmore (*Maru*) demonstrate this sort of resilience. In the case of Elizabeth (A *Question of* Power) the initial impression one gets is that she is too fragile of personality to absorb the onslaughts on her by Dan, Sello-in-brown-suit, and Medusa. In fact, she breaks down mentally. However, she recovers with the help of Sello, as well as people like Kenosi and Eugene. Margaret Cadmore, in *Maru*, equally starts as a diffident, timorous fellow, but she soon gains strength of character and becomes the centre of Maru's and Moleka's worlds. Ultimately, Maru uses her to found a new society devoid of social discrimination. All told, it is Head's residual faith in man that enables her to cling to the dream that humanity could still rid itself of acts of cruelty and moral depravity. It is this sort of sanguine faith that motivates her heroes and heroines to attempt to create a better world, at the pains of enormous personal sacrifice. As such, her present-day utopias would yield tomorrow's truths, in the words of Victor Hugo (in Plattel 78). This same faith comprehends the possibility that, sooner than later, the economic, social and political conditions of women will drastically improve and will be bereft of inter-gender rancour.

CHAPTER SIX

MIGRATION AND THE QUEST FOR PROGRESS – THE DYNAMIC ASPECTS OF MYTH IN *WHEN RAIN CLOUDS GATHER*

Humans are bedeviled essentially by the stigma of selfishness. There is a natural inclination for people to cater for only what concerns them. That is the instinct and the motivation for self-survival. Therefore, there is a continual struggle between the private and the public spheres of human consciousness. Evil practices, cheating and the manipulation of the "other" entity occur when hegemony of the private sphere is in ascendancy over the public domain. Such hegemony may engender healthy competition in more clement circumstances. However, hegemonic tendencies may lead to social distortion and systemic schisms, where there is already an entrenchment of moral depravity.

The challenge for humankind, according to Kristeva (205) is always how to envision collective action in the public sphere without submitting to another totalizing order. Revalorizing the public spheres of cognition and praxis ought to be the primary function of a mythic consciousness steeped in political activism, for praxis proceeds first from a personal (individual) acknowledgement of mission, before it can be transmitted along a collective channel of expression. Vice versa, collectively derived precepts and prescriptive tenets would need to be received by individual actors before they could constitute stimuli for pragmatic effort at communal salvation or solidarity. Thus, there is an axis of mutual receptivity and interaction of both realms of cognition.

The human impulse to move to new planes of experience generates what might be termed dynamic migration, whereby individuals continually forge new vistas of experience. Usually for these questers, the status quo is found either unacceptable or obsolete. Head's fictional works evince such migratory tendencies, dynamic heaves that extend both physical and psychic boundaries, often with a view to attaining composite spiritual enlightenment. The Chapter on *The Collector of Treasures* and *A Bewitched Crossroad* has offered the examples of rulers who abandoned their titles and privileges and migrated, in order to found new communities or to provide protection for their subjects (cf. especially to "The Deep River: A Story of Ancient Tribal Migration", *The Collector of Treasures*).

In *When Rain Clouds Gather* (20), the ultimate choice for Head's Makhaya, the protagonist, is "peace of mind." Makhaya, like Maru, abdicates the revered headship of the clan in order to identify with the oppressed people of his village, Golemma-Mmidi. Gilbert, another character preoccupied with the desire for social change, foregoes the privileges associated with his upper middle-class status in order to align with the peaceful hum of life in Golemma-Mmidi. This horizontal association with struggling common folk fosters inter-dependence, sustained sometimes by a unilateral commitment to sacrifice. Head's ideal hero or heroine invariably gives up something of uttermost value. He or she typically holds in disdain any claims to demi-divine status. Consequently, self-sacrifice is the basic ingredient for beatification, and sacrifice is a basic strand of mythic consciousness, upon which Head's writings revolve.

Head locates in the human race the essential capability for ablution through personal sacrifice. For her, communal service entails the forfeiture (even repudiation) of the

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personal sphere in favour of service directed at enlistment for altruistic service. In most settings of Head's fictional writings, communal service helps to mitigate power mania and sexual overdrive because it indicates recognition of the fact that man cannot survive alone on the island of narrowly defined interests. In fact, Head invests her fiction with the sort of humanistic faith that propels humans toward "proletarian egalitarianism".

In Head's world, the characters who do embark on inter-boundary voyages are not mere outcasts or ordinary rebels sulking over vague issues. They are normally people burning with the zeal to serve to change the human condition. So, whether it is the myth of succession or whether it is the myth of male dominance, Head's characters are morally opposed to the restrictive and oppressive fetters of orthodox rules and practices. Therefore, they invent means of circumventing oppressive and reductive structures. In a sense, then, they are non-conformists because they do not completely submit, but they are also culture-heroes or heroines because their actions often transcend personal whims and engender dynamic transitions to more progressive dispensations. As such, society always relies on them for guidance, spiritual strength, paradigmatic shifts moral and ethical rebirth, although these virtues may largely be held in denial.

As Walter L. Reed has noted in *Meditations on the Hero* (1), "heroes are singular and energetic individuals whose character contains their fate, who dominate as well as represent the society around them. Their domination may take a political form. They may be leaders-but it is also an aesthetic phenomenon." In other words, the myth quest ends with the establishment of a community founded on a restored human vision. From mystery, therefore, we arrive at community in which heroes are not only the prime movers but are as well beholden to the community they serve sacrificially.

In Head's fictional works, a dual process might be seen to be concurrently operative: the process of demythologizing, through which calcified myths are discredited and discontinued, and the process of mythification, through which the one who dares and who challenges the prevailing political order is imbued with a mystical or mythical luminance. In other words, the same time as a particular myth is being overthrown, another myth or a new mythical phase is being introduced. Thus, myth making is a dynamic and self-perpetuating process because there are always people ready to cross frontiers in pursuit of mythical goals.

One peculiar feature of Head's fiction is the ability of her characters to traverse interstitial barriers and delimiting frontiers in order to start life anew. As Eugene F. Timple has observed, no literature can exist without any reference to space and location – an observation especially relevant in the study of Head's fiction (171,181). Since space and place are the formal elements that establish absolute and relative location of certain meaningfulness, they entail not only the physical loci and their evaluation in realistic terms but also the implicit location that has a mystical and cosmic significance.

According to Mircea Eliade (16-18), "myths and rites always disclose a boundary situation. A boundary situation is one which man discovers in becoming conscious of his place in the universe". It is precisely this consciousness of an emergent or evolving cosmic role that Reed has called *bildung*, following Goethe's example. Aneas, in a superb example, discovered a boundary situation when he fled the ruins of Troy to found a new empire. Similarly, in Armah's *The Healers* (1968), Densu and Danfo migrate to the seclusion of the forest in pursuit of "the way of life." Therefore, between departure and arrival, the mythic hero voyages and descends, only to emerge with a unified and

wholesome vision of life. In other words, that which interlopes (the mythic quest) also unites. Conscious of dislocated, and as such unacceptable, values, and aware of distorted consciousness, the mythic hero or heroine, as well as the writer who creates such a personality, strives to synthesize the befuddlements of human experience by building an ideal construct. As Eli Mandel has rendered it, "if descending is a type of trespassing, a crossing into unexplored, forbidden territory, and descent is a necessary foreplay for any emergence, then boundaries may be seen as not only areas of rich interaction but also of transformation" (105).

In fact, it might be claimed that most of Head's protagonists bye-pass the first stage of their heroic cast- the Eden stage. When we encounter them, they are already in the fallen stage, fallen socially, politically or spiritually because they have transgressed a taboo or are taboos themselves. As fallen men and women, they now undertake a quest that may entail a descent into Hell or a plunge into the psyche, the dark night of the soul. Head's protagonists experience rebirth, after which they become culture-heroes or heroines. As Rebecca Patterson has surmised in her review of Harry Slochwer's *Mythopoesis: Mythic Patterns in the Literary Classics* (39), the adaptive function of myth is reversed in mythopoesis, since the hero's quest constitutes a critique of the existing order of things. It is in the process of probing and subverting given verities that the hero acquires self-intuition and a quizzical bent of mind. After all, every perception is at once an affirmation and repudiation. The world, in effect, withdraws from us as we approach it. This might be interpreted as the evanescent, perspectivist, but composite, view of myth. Head's heroes and heroines embody in their actions this reversal in mythopoesis. They generally question existing, social orders, and take action to change such flawed systems.

In all her novels, novellas, histories, and autobiographical writings and in her collection of short stories, Head has created characters that defy their human and social limitations in order to deliver people that are oppressed from the tyranny of ethnicity, communal land-ownership, abject widowhood, exploitative bride-price, witchcraft, sexuality/sexual discrimination and pejorative appellations. Her protagonists, in a sense, abolish history by awakening their consciousness, while erasing or rejecting decadent systems and substituting or proposing new ones. As Eliade puts it in *Images and Symbols*, "in so far as man surpasses his historic moment and gives free course to his desire to relive the archetypes, he realizes himself as a whole and universal being" (33). Put differently, the very existence of man may constitute an opposition to the relativity of history because man trespasses the boundaries of history any time he strives to "make history". Head's characters, therefore, express the nostalgia for a mythologized past transformable into present-day archetypes. They express all that might have been, but is not; the paradox of all existence, which *is* only by *ceasing to be* something else.

The novel, *When Rain Clouds Gather*, records not only the abolition of history but also the recourse to antiquity, even if this vestigial form is a modified and positively adapted one. As will be later demonstrated, the mythical life of the hero, Makhaya, consists in a return to "paradise" – a universal human datum of undisputable antiquity. Because the issues she addresses in *When Rain Clouds Gather* are virtually moral and political ones, Head paints a chiaroscuro by way of characterization – a feature equally present in her other fictional writings. This device of chiaroscuric depiction of characterization achieves a unified and well-blended vision that presents life as a moral as well as political contention.

Consequently, characters in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, as in the other novelistic pieces by Head, play symbolic roles as they resolve into bi-polar principles of light and darkness, extension and constriction. They could expand to the heavens in a god-like fashion, or they could converge from there to a point of focus on earth, enmeshed in venal pettiness. Thus, rather than merely "personal" or "aesthetic", the relationships created by Head in *When Rain Clouds Gather* serve as models or prototypes of egalitarian human relations. Kathryn Querts has also noted this fact in her essay, "Personal Politics in the Novels of Bessie Head" (*Presence Africaine* No.140, 49).

The moral contention in *When Rain Cloud Gather* is between two irreconcilable forces – those represented by Gilbert and Makhaya and those represented by Chief Matenge. Whereas Gilbert and Makhaya project the image of an inhabited and ordered space, Chief Matenge inhabits the vacant region of chaos, from where he unleashes pain on his own people. Indeed, it is a universally acknowledged phenomenon – this perpetual collision between order and chaos. In a greater number of texts and historical or mythical renditions, antagonists like Matenge are depicted as ghosts, demons or the purveyors of evil. Such archetypes of nihilism appear in the following texts: *Wuthering Heights* (1847), where Heathcliff exhibits demonic and lycanthropic tendencies); *Moby Dick* (1851), where Ahab's obsessive hatred of the White Whale assumes monomaniac dimensions; *Paradise Lost* (1667), in which the character, Satan, though admirably and histrionically presented, negates the principle of divine salvation for humankind.

Similarly, both Oriental and Occidental myths are replete with detestable personalities whose sole purpose in life is to annihilate the force of moral goodness. Because they assail, disturb or shift the equilibrium of human life, such antagonists are linked to

demonic powers bent on reincorporating the microcosm into the state of chaos, in order to suppress it. As Eliade further observes in *Images and Symbols*, antagonists are perceived as dangerous, not necessarily in their capacity as human beings, but because they are incarnating the hostile and destructive powers in archetypal sensibility (38-9).

Mythical protagonists contend with antagonists to avert the reincorporation of the microcosm, the basic unit of protean sensibility. Protagonists seek to assert and uphold the finest of human sensibilities, leading to the inculcation of positive and stabilizing human values. Makhaya, in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, is one of such protagonists in literature that seek the curtailment, annihilation or avoidance of evil. Protagonists dream dreams that move their actual societies forward, or that actualize their envisioned social ethos.

Dreams serve as the literary telescopes that access or pinpoint an idealistic world. A dream may unfold as a miasma of nightmarish and ghoulish forms that would later recede into the womb of memory, or it may just sear the mind to the point of oblivion. Yet again, a dream may gain solidity and vividness as a mental construct that cathects into a projected order of existence. Dream, for both the artist and the characters whom the literary artists fashion, is a vehicle for theoretical and pragmatic retrospection and reorganization. Thus, dreaming could be a means of self- stabilization, not merely a haunting chimera of shifting forms that disorientate the mind.

Every writer dreams, either to recuperate the status quo or to envision a novel proposition by which human behaviour and human action might be reconstituted. Similarly, the characters created in literary artifacts are permitted to dream. Novels and allied literary

forms acquire profundity and resonance, because of the personas that move the action forward and whose dreams ignite studious interest and deepen insight. Accordingly, where there is no form of dreaming, a fictional piece of writing becomes placid and ordinary. Its message, if any, becomes trite and uninspiring.

As writer, Head is particularly sensitive in her handling of the issue of change that comes about through dreaming. In her view, change can be implosive if it is not introduced properly and sensibly. For Head's characters like Makhaya, Maru, Elizabeth, and Eugene, change of social milieu launches them into different orders of life. The currents of change locate Makhaya, Maru, Elizabeth, and Eugene in farming and self-help activities that lead to social, class and racial integration. For Maru, change dictates the move to found a new community based on fairness and reciprocity. For some characters in Head's fiction, the moral and psychological dilemma posed by change could engender, as well, personality distortion, as will be seen in the case of Elizabeth in *A Question of Power*.

Head's literary writings intimate the fact that mythic figures usually initiate change by undertaking quests with the objective of redefining cultural boundaries and social or political limitations. For most of Head's characters, fording or transcending the physical boundaries of locales approximates to reaching beyond psychological and spiritual limitations. James Joyce's concept of *epiphany* would aptly apply here. As Joyce sees it, a character, in the process of indulging in inter-boundary experience, attains illumination – an especial insight into the somberness of human existence. It is at once an exhilarating (liberating) and enriching experience.

In *When Rain Clouds Gather, Makhaya* acquires this epiphanic reach when he decides to move away from his immediate surrounding. Possessed of an overriding impulse to migrate from the volatile situation in South Africa, Makhaya finds refuge in the village of Golema-Mmidi. He had been imprisoned in South Africa on suspicion of involvement in political activism. However, such iconoclastic reputation is antedated in his earlier career – we learn that, from the start, he had been a non-conformist. Naturally unassuming, he detests ascriptive titles that endow people with undeserved worth. Nowhere else is Makhaya's natural inclination to defy traditions more conclusively presented than in the following passage, which deserves to be quoted at length:

> ... He was the eldest in the family and according to custom he had to be addressed as Buti, 'which means Eldest Brother' and treated with exaggerated respect. As soon as his father died he made many changes in the home, foremost of which was that his sisters should address him by his name and associate with him as equals and friends. When his mother had protested he had merely said: "Why should men be brought up with a false sense of superiority over women? (15-16).

Evidently, Makhaya comes across here as a man who, early in life had gained perception of the inequalities in life and had chosen to contribute toward the eradication of such inequities. "Buti" in Golema-Mmide is akin to "Dede" in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (1993), where Ekwueme, Ihuoma's husband, commonly addressed by that epithet, especially by his wife and his siblings. "Buti" and "Dede" are honorific signifiers of socially prescribed differences between the sexes. Whereas Amadi's Emenike acquiesces in such social valorization, Head's Makhaya roundly rejects it as a superficially conditioned practice, whose sole aim is to put men over women. Ortega y Gasset's

comments on heroes, given below, strictly apply to Makhaya's renunciation of his society's norm of honorific attribution:

> They (heroes) refuse to repeat the gestures that custom, tradition or biological instincts force them to make (in Reed, 29).

It is noteworthy, in another but related respect, to observe that Makhaya achieves independence, or can uninhibitedly assert it, only after his father's death. Here, according to Campbell's thesis, the hero must slay the tenacious and throttling aspect of the father before his *bildung* or emergence can be substantiated (352). The image of the father encapsulates, and evokes, the moribund conditions of the past that must be sloughed off. Thus, the death of Makhaya's father constitutes a release of the vital energies that will feed the South African world in the future—a future that is only a microcosmic representation of the universe.

Makhaya's escape from South Africa is, therefore, a flight from reactionary paternity, if this sort of Freudian analysis is to be further explored. Nevertheless, this flight from paterfamilias and to Golemma-Mmidi is also a gesture of disgust (a social and political reaction) regarding a system that essentially thrives on the principle of inequality. During his departure, he is willing to clutch at "whatever illusions of freedom that lay ahead" (13), as long as these "illusions" could mollify his feeling of inner alienation. His motive for leaving the South African shores is established in the following passage, where he tells the first man he meets over the border:

> I just want to step on free ground. I don't care about anything, not even the white man. I just want to feel what it is like to live in a free country and then maybe some of the wrongs may correct themselves (10).

Upon close analysis, however, Makhaya's motives will be seen for what they are -the spontaneous effusion of a man who, at the putative stage of experience, has not yet understood what it means to be committed to other people. He is still acting out his roles as a heroic gestalt, a character not yet fully formed, and living out an archetypal role, which he little understands. In this light, he is not unlike Femi Osofisan's heroine in *Morountodun* (1984) who initially sets out to emulate the heroics of Tinubi/Moremi (the mythic defender of capitalist establishment), but who later reappraises and reverses her role in the light of the abject condition of the common people within her social milieu.

Not surprisingly, therefore, Makhaya's newly gained freedom yields him neither psychological satisfaction nor spiritual contentment. Because he would not yet confront directly his problems – by way of ascertaining his destiny in life – he remains troubled inside. Nevertheless, Makhaya's troubled state at this moment in no way diminishes his idealistic way of viewing life. As a potential or emergent mythic hero, Makhaya, at this tentative stage, has not yet channeled his dreams to constructive purposes. His dreams exist just as phantasies, recurrent images by which he attempts to order his life, but from which no epiphanies presently ensue. The following is Head's comment on Makhaya's putative assessment of his life at this early stage:

> All his life he had wanted some kind of Utopia and he had rejected in his mind and heart a world full of ailments and faults. He had run away from it all (63).

Makhaya's naïve view of utopianism is very different from what the author envisions in her eschatological use of utopia in her writings. Whereas Makhaya's conception of utopia

is, thus far, escapist and simplistic, Head would characteristically project through utopian constructs a mirror that beams thoughts for a better future for humankind. Makhaya's naivety reflects a wish-fulfilling vision of unsophisticated existence, free from the conflicts and the turmoil of contemporary existence. However, Head's utopian constructs explore mythical elements that help the author to explore political and social themes of dislocation and oppression, with a view to resolving pitted interests, not simply ignoring their existence.

In attempting to locate and delineate in Head's writings the use of utopian details and motifs, Sophia Ogwude (1977) hints at the infusion of the pastoral flair in the writer's fictional and autobiographical works. She calls these traces the touch of "Arcadia", which she locates in Sir Philip Sydney's *Arcadia* (1590). Ruthven has skeptically summed up the import of utopian writing, which he regards as magical "blunderbuss" (48). Nevertheless, his skepticism hardly delves below the surface to unearth the underlying currents of political discontent that inform and characterize utopian writing. In his state as a neophyte, Makhaya, the hero of *When Rain Clouds Gather*, has not yet comprehended the idea that utopian ideals must also have concreteness, in terms of contact with the reality of the human condition. At this stage of practical engagement, utopia ceases to be merely a vent for speculative thinking. Utopia, thus, becomes a way of envisaging social change.

For Makhaya, there does come a time, indeed, when he earnestly confronts, instead of running away from, life's travails and inner frictions. Such an opportunity arises during his encounter with Gilbert, another migrant like himself. After this encounter, Makhaya's stay in Golema-Mmidi begins to gain in significance. To use Simon Simonse's

expression, Gilbert's agricultural programme aims at revolutionizing the stagnated relations of production in the countryside, through encouraging small-scale capitalism (468). Gilbert's role of catalyst of progress is in this regard analogous to that of Farfrae in Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886). Farfrae introduces in Casterbridge changes that make Michael Henshaw redundant. The Mayor's earlier act of 'selling' his wife signals the irreversible dissolution of the decadent order of life in Casterbridge. Similarly, "the Sindebele woman" (who prefigures Gilbert) introduces change in the local judicial system ("kgotla"), through her unique adjudicative approach. These characters represent change agents in mythopoetic experience

Chief Matenge and his surrogates oppose Gilbert's project because the changes he advocates will overturn the old system of communal life in which people were dependent on royal favours- a system in which Matenge and his ilk thrived. Moreover, under the traditional system, farming had been tedious, exploitatively administered, and was considered a non-dignifying venture.

The idea of farm work is as enchanting as it is challenging. Farm work evokes a positive image of humankind. Both femininity and masculinity are enhanced by "the beauty and harmony" invoked in, and induced by, agrarian work. Social cohesion is achieved by the adoption of a positive work ethic, which in turn ennobles the life of an individual and reinforces the "brotherhood of man" (Head, 158). In Head's fiction, the racial and class mix of the personalities involved in cooperative work (and the positive outcome of that sort of cooperation) suggests the idea that inter-racial bigotry, racial segregation and inter-class rivalry rob humankind of the vital forces that make for healthy and balanced living.

When people of differing racial backgrounds collaborate on a common venture of social development, they achieve humongous results. The option that Head proffers in her novelistic writings is communalism shorn of demagoguery. Communalism, for Head, guarantees equitable distribution of the farm proceeds, as well as a fair way of apportioning of the labour yielding such farm proceeds. This same view is expressed through Gilbert and Eugene Graham (*A Question of Power*). The two men create beautiful dreams that are capable of improving the human misery index. The humanism of Head inheres in the fact that she ascribes to fellow feeling and acts of kindness an elixir for social transformation. This transformative spark prefaces and engenders utopian sensibility. It is a better option than sectarian, race-defined and class-centred modes of political organization. Head's abiding faith in humankind enables her to uphold the dream that people could still rid themselves of acts of cruelty and immorality. It is this faith that motivates her heroes and heroines to attempt to change their worlds, at the pain of enormous personal loss. Her protagonists always identify with the powerless and the downtrodden. As far as Head is concerned, therefore, present-day imperfect and oppressive structures should self-destruct, to make way for a new and better world. Her present-day utopias will yield tomorrow's truth, in the words of Victor Hugo (Plattel 78).

People like Matenge, in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, represent those who would naturally want to impugn other people's egos and moral values. Their chief aim in life is to hurt people's feelings, abort dreams and mortify those with whom they interact, especially those that seem to possess morally superior intelligence. In *Maru*, characters like Pete and Morafi typify such satanic agents bent on corrupting the divine essence in man. Head calls such people "political lumberjacks": they always toy with and manipulate people's

destinies. They, in effect, accentuate in people's minds feelings of aloneness, inadequacy, and insecurity.

Head believes that such callously negative people ought to be resisted because they spawn and perpetrate unjust traditions, patterns, values and legacies. They stir the cauldron of hatred. Says Head: "The sane man will resist being swept into this cauldron of hatred. He learns to accept change as one of the inevitable consequences of life and prepares to adjust himself to something new, well knowing that the past was not good for him and looking forward with hope to the future" (*When Rain Clouds Gather*, 12).

Makhaya, sensing the imperative of change in the South African political environment, undertakes just this sort of adjustment to make way for inevitable change. His attitudinal change is, however, devoid of hatred and bitterness. Hatred, in Head's view, stultifies and undermines one's creative potential, even one' spirituality. It is violence feeding violence- the cadaver principle. Hatred is an all-consuming passion that must be sublimated by the mythic protagonist, if positive change is to be achieved.

For Makhaya, Gilbert's example of mechanized, scientific farming (which entails balkanization of the land) imparts dignity to work on the farms and in dairies. It teaches the local people- especially erstwhile idle and socially redundant women – how to be self-sufficient and socially relevant. With Makhaya's help, Gilbert succeeds in liberating and uplifting the women, who had formerly played subservient roles.

Makhaya's association with Gilbert, and with the two women (Paulina and Mma-Millipede, enables him to gain critical insight to human nature. Having obeyed the

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impulse to adventure, he must now fully apply himself to service for humankind through not only the revolutionizing impact of the agricultural work with Gilbert but also through the one-on-one relationships he forges with Paulina, Mma-Millipede and Dimerego. These relationships are based on reciprocity and equality, what Simon Simonse has termed "the symbolic order of production", based neither on capitalism nor on economic marginalization. (*Research in African Literatures*, 468). This social order is sustained by "gift-value," whereby little gestures of friendship and kindness are returned on equal and reciprocal terms.

Makhaya's symbolic order presages and aspires to the Utopian dispensation, which, in mythopoesis, is the unconscious internalization of sagacious values and principles, as well as the envisaging of trouble-shooting in most spheres of human existence. At any rate, the hero of *When Rain Clouds Gather* does not fully get initiated into this idealistic order until he realizes that "the time had come when he could run and hide no longer and would have to turn round and face all that he had run away from" (63). Thus, if in migrating the mythic hero or heroine acquires a new perspective on human existence and on his or her role within that realm, there is implicitly a regression back into the self for a fuller understanding of the self. Put simply, the route to mythical experience is charted forwards and backwards on the temporal planes. The temporal planes are mythical pathways of accessing reality in the past, the present and through eternity. Thus, the mythical self intermittently egresses outwards, ranging through phases of experience, only to come back to itself with richer insight.

To prepare for Makhaya's enlightenment, Head complicates his life with a love affair with Paulina Sebeso:

... the Good God cast one look at Makhaya, whom he intended revenging almightily for his silent threat to knock him down. He would so much entangle this stupid young man with marriage and babies and children that he would have to think not twice but several times before he came to knocking anyone down (187).

Makhaya's case at this point is reminiscent of the recalcitrance of Jonah in the Bible. Jonah had to be swallowed by the whale before he would heed God's order to proceed to Nineveh for his prophetic mission. As part of his or her initiatory experience, the mythic hero or heroine must experience a temporary setback through suffering and shame or through the assumption of a responsibility that has cosmic, rather than merely personal or historical, dimensions. Thus, the relationship between Makhaya and Paulina, far from being oriented socially and reproductively, exists as a symbolic union that, apart from being capable of humbling the hero spiritually, also affords him the opportunity of coming to terms with himself and realizing the nature of his destiny as a mythic hero.

Makhaya's experience, at this moment, proves that, prior to any authentic mystical epiphany, the mythic hero or heroine – the current of whose very life charts a cosmic course – must merge with the whole universe, must dissolve his personal interests and subsume them to those of the larger group. Mythical heroism therefore requires absolute depersonalization: the dissolution of the self-essence. Simone Veil's comment on this matter is very apt:

> We possess nothing in the world – a mere chance can strip us of everything – excepting the power to say "I". That is what we have to give to God – in

other words, to destroy. There is absolutely no free act, which it is given to us to accomplish – only the destruction of the "I" (25).

Indeed, all of Head's heroic figures are engaged in the difficult task of dissolving the ego and becoming a part of the collective consciousness. Equally, such heroic figures tap into the current of the Jungian collective unconscious, from which they are partly constituted

Mythic characters often have to abnegate the self. They end up as "scapegoats" who suffer dearly because of their iconoclastic stances and choices. They are eagle-eyed, being able to see beyond their immediate horizons. The eagle is reputed to have two phobias, which enable it to have an all- rounded perspective: the phobia of predatory attacks and the fear of encircled space. These two aversions drive this gargantuan bird toward resilience and adaptation. Eagles are capable of perceiving about 80 million colours at any time. Mythical figures in literature have this adaptive capacity to enrich their perspectives by seeing beyond the normal field of view. In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, Paulina's marriage to Makhaya helps to enrich and enlarge his perspective. It helps him to expunge his violent hatred for South Africa. He thus achieves a cleansing of the psyche, a transformation that enables him to attune his whole mind to the practical, day-to-day problems of the people around him. His immediate preoccupation becomes the relative or absolute assuagement of such societal problems as abound in the community where he has just settled.

Paulina, Makhaya's consort, had on her part, been long alienated from the village women of Golelma-Mmidi, because the latter disliked her "loose" relationships with men. She had been regarded as "so daring and different" (94). Like Makhaya in his neophyte phase, Paulina also had been rebellious and non-conformist. In accordance with her future role

as mythic heroine, she faces initial illusions in her dealings with people around her, contrary to the docile attitude traditionally prescribed for women. Though Paulina desires equality between the sexes, it must not be supposed that Head portrays her as a "firebrand" feminist.

In fact, the reader gets a contrary impression about Paulina, who would never want to be described as too strong, too independent or too assertive. Head's ideological preoccupation, and which she ably projects through characters like Paulina, is with peace, equality and contentment. Nevertheless, Head hardly equates peace, equality, and contentment with docility and malleability. Contentment, for her, means showing dignity and sobriety in the face of great odds. Beneath this veneer of dignity, there could unfurl the battered flag of hope; there could be the timid petal opening up for unselfconscious inspection.

Fully aware of this unselfconscious display of dignity on Paulina's part, Makhaya decides to marry her. This he would not have done had she pretended to be inferior to him or had she become overly submissive. Rather than display brittle and acerbic feminine pride and feminine insouciance, Paulina exhibits genuine and unembellished feminine dignity that, in no way, eschews respect for male guidance and male companionship.

Predictably, the effect of the symbolic union between Makhaya and Paulina is the restoration of the dignity of womanhood in general. The same result is achieved in Gilbert's relationship with Maria, Dinerego's daughter. The marriage of the two people not only demonstrates the possibility of interracial integration but also inspires respect for the downtrodden women of Golema-Mmidi.

Similarly, cooperation between Makhaya and Gilbert attests to the unacknowledged idea that both the white and the black man could live in harmony and could jointly run programmes capable of enhancing the living conditions of common humanity. Because Gilbert and Makhaya succeed in improving the human condition, they could be perceived as culture heroes and shape-shifters. Therefore, their migration to Golemma-Mmidi serves a redemptive purpose. In this sense, heroism is achieved neither by a militant process nor by bloody duels with gnomic or preternatural forces, but by the re-ordering of the system of subsistence in terms of small-scale capitalism, which encourages self-dependence, mutual respect and androgynous equality.

A character like Mma-Millipede, who also shares the same ideology as Makhaya, Gilbert and Paulina, acquires this paradigmatic orientation in the interpersonal relationships she forges. Naturally virtuous and dedicated to spiritual truths, she combines her natural goodness with the best of Christian ethics:

> 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 her natural
>
> kindness of heart (68).

Through Mma-Millipede's maternal influence, Paulina's good qualities are revealed to Makhaya, who is compulsively attracted to the woman. Mma-Millipede equally supports the agrarian venture being run by Makhaya and Gilbert and she does all she can to see it fructify. She thus performs the role of an accessory or a supportive vessel, through which mythic goals would be achieved.

Chief Dimergo, who adopts Gilbert and Makhaya as his children and renders them help and protection, plays the same complementary role. Indeed, it can be said of Gilbert and Makhaya's careers that they observe what the Jews call the "Akedah merit". Going by this principle, Abraham's sacrificial intent (the outward crystallization of his mythic quest) is complemented by his son Isaac, who totally and humbly trusts in the justness of Abraham's putative action (Reed 47). Just as it is inconceivable to speak of the merit of Abraham the father, apart from the merit of Isaac the willing son, so is it unthinkable to talk of the revolutionary success of Gilbert and Makhaya in isolation of the help given them by Paulina, Mma-Millipede, Maria and Chief Dimerego. There must be mediation, in human terms, between the hero's ideal and the hero's action. There is no absolute and automatic transition from one to the other.

Dimerego, widely respected in Golema-Mmidi, is morally opposed to the evil represented by Chief Matenge. Because Dimerego represents light and opposes primordial evil, the villagers come to admire the way he tackles Matenge. Since the thematic thrust of *When Rain Clouds Gather* is politically and morally oriented, the eventual objectives are the defeat of the forces of darkness and the enthronement of equality and reciprocity.

As Campbel has aptly commented, "The hero, whether god or goddess, man or woman, as the dreamer of a dream, discovers and assimilates his opposite ... either by swallowing it or by being swallowed" (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 108). Indeed, the nihilistic force inherent in Matenge does not swallow Gilbert, Dimerego and Makhaya. Dimerego's support for the two heroic figures constitutes a big boost to the agricultural revolution building up in the land. This revolution signifies the demise of the uroborial phase – the dark period of human existence. Individual ownership of land, for which

Gilbert and Makhaya are contending, will usher in scientific experimentation and entrepreneurship. In using Gilbert and Makhaya as agents of social change, Head hopes that the mode of subsistence these characters espouse will lead to the end of the dangerous rituals of sorcery and witchcraft. In other words, modern man will be uplifted from the stagnant pool of tradition and will emerge in a new era of progress and creative adventurism.

Evidently, then, the protagonists, as opposed to the villains, in *When Rain Clouds Gather* undergo a process of spiritual and psychological rebirth – a theme predominant in the other works by Head. These characters experience relative degrees of enlightenment. They undergo change in psychological make-up. In sum, owing to the exigencies of their mythic roles, they redefine their foci of perception. This is in line with the archetypal role of the mythic hero, who would normally undergo initiation before reification. Initiation entails voyaging out beyond a person's immediate zones of experience and adjusting to the internal and external space in which the individual interacts. The result of such mastery of internal and external loci is the acquisition of psychic or spiritual illumination, by which the mythic hero could improve or modify the general human condition of existence.

As an instance of initiation prior to deification (reification), Paulina Sebeso performs some preparatory tests (rites) before she could marry Makhaya. She prepares, at short notice, Makhaya's wedding feast; she organizes the women to cultivate tobacco, and she bears her son's death with equanimity. These acts veritably endear her to Makhaya.

Since the prerequisite for mythical initiation is a duel with the forces of nihilism, mythic heroes like Makhaya and Gilbert must fight the evil posed by Chief Matenge, an unmitigated nuisance-factor. As villains, Matenge and his unscrupulous aides are unpopular among the natives because of "an overwhelming avariciousness and an unpleasant personality" (*When Rain Clouds Gather*, 23). A terror to his people, Matenge's aim is to scuttle the agricultural project conceived by Gilbert and Makhaya. He resolutely clings to the old system of communal land owning, a ploy he uses to hinder the work being done by these two men. As an archetypical adversary, he easily resorts to blackmail, calumny, sorcery and brute force. Here he recalls a figure encountered in the story, "Jacob: The Story of A Faith-Healing Prophet." Labojang, as was seen in the foregoing chapter, also terrorized people with witchcraft; he equally simulated drought and ritual murder in order to distraught the village people. Indeed, so closely does Matenge's personality resemble that of Satan or Maya (in Buddhist mythology) that he contrives to blight his opponents and his victims with drought. Failing to have Makhaya deported to South Africa, Matenge next employs Mephistophelian powers to bring about the death of Paulina's precocious child, Isaac.

As a potentate (a political figure of rank proportions), Chief Matenge deceives and stupefies the people of Golema-Mmidi with the mystifying prospects of sorcery and the befuddling ideology of African Socialism. This is typical of the behaviour of despots and nihilists, who utilize repression, brutality and propaganda to advance their anti-human and devilish designs. Adolf Hitler of Nazi Germany and Mussolini of Fascist Italy were examples of such evil-minded people. A similar situation will be found in *A Question of Power*, where the characters, Dan, Sello-in-brown-suit, and Medusa utilize the myth of African Nationalism to hide their parochialism, moral decadence and a fiery thirst for

power. Apparently, then, Head's overall intention is to debunk the idea of African nationalism as a 'bogey' concept that mask a deep-seated manifestation of racism, hegemony and factionalism.

Furthermore, Head prefers the democratization of even such a private preoccupation as religion. She disallows any severance of links between action, in terms of meaningful pragmatic work, and belief, as mere affirmation. Rather, she believes in the tenet of progressive science, which is nothing but the liberation, and the harnessing, of the productive forces through scientific methodology. This, to Head, is religion - not the perverted sort that seeks to subjugate and intimidate people. Accordingly, people like Chief Matenge, who oppose this positive thrust of science, must be eliminated or incapacitated, in spite of, and even because of, their sorcery and magic, which in themselves underscore the demonic nature of personages like him.

Along with Matenge, Joas Tsepe is also discredited when the people of Golema-Mmidi discover his selfishness and learn that his brand of nationalism is nothing but a ruse. Divested of supernatural power, Matenge is openly challenged by the ordinary people, and, confessing his evil deeds, he thereafter hangs himself. We find a parallel situation in Ngugi's *Devil on The Cross* (1985), where Wariinga has a vision of the Devil being hung up naked, harassed by the very people he had swindled and deceived. From such graphic portraitures as have been depicted above, it can be deduced that mythical enlightenment will ultimately lead to the unmasking and repudiation of evil.

Isaac's death, caused by Matenge's power of necromancy, constitutes an archetypal sacrifice performed so that others might live and develop a more scientific and a more

catholic orientation. His ashes, his bundle of carvings, galvanize and ignite the formerly placid people of Golema-Mmidi to revolt against the prevailing social system, in the same manner as Ofeyi in Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* (1973) catalyses the people of Aiyetoro to respond dialectically to exploitation by the capitalist cartel. Maria, Dimerego's daughter, thus, explains the people's almost infinite patience:

> You may see no rivers on ground but we keep the rivers inside us.
>
> that is why all good people are called rain. Sometime we see rain clouds gather even though not a cloud appears in the sky (*When Rain Clouds Gather* 168).

The symbolism of rain or water in the above passage deserves amplification. Within the present context, rain or rivers signify the people's dammed up energy, angst or capacity to revolt. The sparks of rebellion may not be observable to the common eye, but they are always there, ready for violent implosion. Only a little gust suffices to convert the sparks to infernos of death and destruction. On the other hand, rain and rivers might refer to the "periodic immersions in the waters of repetitions of the deluge," spoken of by Eliade in *Images and Symbols* (61). Only pathfinders and shape-shifters like Gilbert and Makhaya can invoke such deluges or such effulgence, or can even survive them, as did Noah in the Bible. A post-survival index of such a re-orienting immersion is the founding of a new community of people fired by the same ideal of progress and equality.

Indeed, *When Rain Clouds Gather* constitutes the first act in a three-part drama between mythic heroes and mythic adversaries in Head's writings. Because it was Head's first published novel, *When Rain Clouds Gather* shows how, even at the earliest stage, she appropriates mythic archetypes in her writings to express political views. It further

demonstrates how well she has mastered the art of antithetical patterning in character presentation, as well as in structural and stylistic arrangements within her fictional works.

The following levels of characterization are discernible in Head's writings:

1. The established (ruling) class- represented by Matenge, Bekoto, Morafi, the Motsebeng government, Joas Tsepe, Pete, Seth and Camilla.

2. Men and women with a vision for a better, or a more egalitarian, future: Maru, Moleka, Dikeledi, Eugene, Gilbert, Makhaya, Elizabeth, Sello.

3. The community of people spawned by the fruits of the work carried out by men and women of idealism, in Category 2.

Those people who belong to Categories 2 and 3 represent those who believe in fellowship of humankind. They constitute the protagonists, the catalysts and the beneficiaries of transformative vision.

Characterization in Head is oppositional, in line with the Manichean principle she espouses in her writings. Her mode of characterization is also taut and spare because she wishes to highlight only the qualities that enable her personae to achieve or project their mythic roles. Her protagonists tend to follow "inner perceptions" (*Maru* 21), independent of the praise or censure of man. Eugene in *A Question of Power* represents the character, Reneburg, who played a pivotal role in the social and economic advancement of the people of Botswana. Head's characters, such as Eugene, usually abdicate political responsibility and social privilege in order to make the sort of choice that denies them temporary and vainglory. Abdication (with its attendant effect of mortification on the existing oppressive political order) will earn them eternal glory, in the final analysis.

Head's characters usually demonstrate that protest against politically unjust systems does not have to be cataclysmic in order to be authenticated as a revolutionary effort. Protest can be silent, cerebral, and yet tellingly subversive. This is the philosophical wand that Head appears to wave each time critics attempt to assail her credentials as protest writer or committed artist.

In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, Makhaya and Gilbert are culture-heroes. Their destinies are tied inseparably to that of their society. Their irrepressible wish is to free humankind from the cesspit of moral degeneration and from the tyranny of social, political, and mythic moulds. Consequently, such culture-heroes must cross their known boundaries to adventure in order to help society to attain an idealized goal of social equalization. This goal can be achieved only after the atavistic forces of darkness are defeated and humankind is truly reconciled with the natural and human environment.

Because he is a mythic hero, Head adorns Makhaya with a mystical veil. Mystery in life, as the author believes, is common to both the white man and the black man. As Mma-Millipede interprets it, "...it's not the white man who makes life but a deeper mystery over which he has no control. Whether good or bad, each man is helpless before life" (*When Rain Clouds Gather* 132). Mma-Millipede's view may sound naturalistic, even forlorn. Nonetheless, such a view merely goes to show the co-evality of humans, irrespective of racial colouring. That, too, is reflective of the author's conception of human beings: no one race is superior to the other.

Head's vision in fact opposes, and reaches beyond, the type of fatalistic conclusion that Mma-Millipede draws in the above extract. Man, certainly, could move beyond his

social, biological or natural limits to achieve excellence or perfection. That mystery pervades the novel could be seen in the relationship between Makhaya and the British coloured police officer, George Abbley Smith. The two men cannot comprehend what is pulling them together, in spite of differences of temperament and character. In the case of Paulina and Makhaya, Paulina's daughter constitutes the mystical agency that unites the man and the woman. Through her magical power of artistic creation, she animates the otherwise cold-warm relationship between her mother and Makhaya. Her sculpture, which is a symbolic representation of Golema-Mmidi, inspires Makhaya and Gilbert to forge ahead with their farm project, which aims at reordering the productive pattern and basis of village life. If the girl's art is a symbol of affirmation (in that it signals, and authenticates, progressive linkages), so do the efforts of Makhaya and Paulina yield constructive and dynamic dividends.

Furthermore, and as Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi has astutely observed (in Asien and Ashaolu Eds., 75), the palm-fronds placed by Makhaya and Gilbert in the mud village built by Paulina's daughter is a symbolic phallic gesture intended to bring new life to Golemma-Mmidi. This phallic gesture is neither unilaterally extended nor is it violent. Rather the, phallic gesture is willingly and mutually acceded to, for the birth and gestation of a new social and economic ethos. The above symbols are only representative of the mystical symbols embedded in *When Rain Clouds Gather*.

In terms of structural dialectics, the novel's incorporation of moral antithesis assures the supersession of good over evil. To bring about the total dissolution of the past – with all its moribund and old-fashioned values, practices and traditions – the vestigial aspects of time must be eclipsed in the unfolding of the future moment. As a chiaroscuro, the novel

(indeed most of Head's fictional writings) reveals an interfacing of shades of light and penumbras of darkness. As proof of Head's moral commitment and visionary fervour, "light," in her writings, defeats darkness and reveals the transition to human greatness, enlightenment and goodwill. Therefore, the literary effort becomes a creatively teleological tool by which a new model of human civilization might be fashioned. The human heart, argues Head, should surge with a "conspiracy against all the insanity and hatred in mankind" (*A Woman Alone*, 60). In the new world envisioned in her novels, novellas, historical autobiographical pieces, Head always roots for human liberation – the enthronement of good and the repudiation of evil. Of her work as an artist, she has this to say:

> I could dream a little ahead of the somewhat vicious clamour of revolution and the horrible stench of evil in social systems. My work was always tentative because it was always so completely new: It created new worlds out of nothing; it battled with problems of food production in a tough semi-desert land; it brought all kinds of people, both literate and semi-literate together, and it did not really qualify who was who – everyone has a place in my world (28).

This all-inclusive perspective frees the author from psychological and cultural complexes of discrimination, suppression, class segregation and economic exploitation. Head further declares, "I look back on myself as a personality plain and ordinary, without any glamour or mystery" (16). This kind of uncomplicated personality is what she strives to make her protagonists adopt. Such simple, ordinary people are shorn of social and cultural masks and they have such attitudes about life as would make them sympathetic to the plight of the underdog and the un-privileged.

Head is decidedly opposed to monomaniacs- those who, like the old man in Ernest Hemmingway's *Old Man and the Sea* (1952), are dominated by just one form of thought. Such people choke the life out of other people because they are so demanding and so domineering. They see things only from a uni-directional point of view. In "Let me tell a story now" (*A Woman Alone*, 5) Head refers to a lawyer, who has so completely identified himself with his work that he lacks responsive individuality. Such a monocled man would easily gall one's ego, humiliate or insult one. He is ostensibly blind to the sensibilities of other people, or to other modes of perception.

What is noteworthy in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, as well as in other literary works by Head, is, as Ogunyemi has commented, the manner in which the author explores the metaphysical dimensions of African life, the way she incorporates into her writings the myths of some African and Asian countries. Familiarity with the mythic quality of the novel would help to underscore its animistic disposition. In the words of Mackenzie, the "distinctive ambience of Head's Cape Town experience helped to temper her perception and relationship with ordinary people" (in Head, xvi). Therefore, fused in *When Rain Clouds Gather* are issues of psychology, politics and ideology, and if psychology yields catharsis and politics engenders egalitarianism, then ideology fosters small-scale capitalism as a vehicle of pragmatic change.

Employing the Indian myth of the Sudras in her novelistic, autobiographic and historiographic writings, Head hopes to reveal characters that are oppressed, but who will one day throw off the chains of oppression. Indeed, Head does not deprecate the then revolutionary effort in South Africa before the total eclipse of apartheid. In any case, rather contends with other issues, values and forces that directly impinge on the lives of

the black people in that country. Whilst revolution rages on, daily life continues, taking its toll, just as its 'natural' courses are mediated and transformed. In Head's view, even quotidian, bare existence deserves to be studied critically, understood and recorded because its very starkness could possess regenerative potency. As far as she is concerned, sloganeering and political posturing may constrict, rather than enrich, the interface between black people and white people in South Africa. Political posturing without a glance into the heart (to search out and expurgate ill motives) would leave the human psyche seared and scarred with self-inflicted and unassuageable pain.

In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, then, myth is made to assume both destructive and regenerative potential – a point well brought out in the discussion in Chapter 2 (on *The Collector of Treasures* and *The Bewitched Crossroad*). In the author's view, the redundant and obstructive communal land tenures, the old notion of female inferiority and the time-honoured practice of black magic should give way to a new order of life. The incessant human quest for adventure ensures the continued retention or repudiation of myths. Such a zest for adventure creates avenues for positive dynamism - such as would yield systemic change. Therefore, migration – the compulsive move to penetrate and explore the interstices of the human psyche and spatial domains – constitutes the only dynamic force that sustains, as well as overthrows, myths.

The Hindu myths in Head's writings are utilized to show the injustice of human systems and to reveal the pettiness of rigid social and class arrangements. Writing on her use of myth, Head says:

> The canvas on which I have worked was influenced by belief in the Hindu view of rebirth and reincarnation. Such belief influences one to think

that each individual, no matter what their present origin or background may be, is really the total embodiment of human history, with a vast accumulation of knowledge and experience stored in the subconscious mind (77).

Therefore, in Head's view, each individual is uniquely endued with a distinct personality and particular sensibilities that ought to be respected and recognized. Class, race, and caste divisions tend to hide or deny people's basic humanity.

In Head's thinking, then, the Hindu myths of reincarnation and rebirth assure the possibilities for new beginnings, not just the perpetuation of extant institutions and practices that dehumanize and marginalize people. Through reincarnation and rebirth, there is room for the emergence of the mythic deliverer, the one that will reshape the archetypal wheel of human existence. Following from the regenerative potential of the motifs of reincarnation and rebirth in Head's art, she creates mythic heroes that are always striving to build a better and a more equitable society. Ultimately, then, instead of nursing a nostalgia for a mythicized past of "oceanic paradise", as Eliade anticipates in *Images and Symbols* (16-17), *When Rain Clouds Gather* projects a reworked future based on scientific innovations. Consequently, from the destruction of one archetypal image of the past – a *gestalt* replete with the horrors of sorcery and witchcraft – emerges new myths concerning frontier-crossers and pathfinders. Instead of regression to chaos or to the undifferentiated state, there is a graduation to a newly ordered and coordinated state. The ash of fossilized myths is also the seed that would give birth to new myths – such as Makhaya and Gilbert have fashioned in their roles as culture-and life-enhancing heroes. Since the contemporary world is illusory and transitory, humankind will be delivered, periodically, from sorrow and ignorance through the process of infinite transmigration – the venturing forth of mythic adventurers for more vital and life-enhancing experience.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE HERO AS REDEEMER: "SCAPE-GOATISM" AND THE RITUAL OF SACRIFICE IN *MARU*

As a humanist in pursuit of ideals, the themes that Head explores in Maru (1971) constitute her ethical blue-print for mankind and lend a certain utopian, but hardly illusory, touch to her work, bringing to mind earlier idealistic writings like Plato's *The Republic* (n.d.) and Thomas More's *Utopia* (1904). To achieve her literary goals of revolutionizing social hierarchies and of re-organizing political systems, Head creates mythic heroes who re-live mythic roles. The existence of these archetypal personas playing archetypal roles, plus the superiority of intelligence displayed by the chief protagonist, Maru, simulates a palpable mythological atmosphere in the novel, *Maru*.

Head wrote *Maru* as an act of evisceration of the colonial notion of ownership of humans as chattel, with their basic humanism gouged out and expurgated by systemic denial and exclusion. She states her reason for writing *Maru* as follows:

> In Botswana they have a conquered tribe, the Marsawa or Bushmen. It is argued that they were the true owners of the land in some distant past, that they had been conquered by the more powerful Botswana tribes and from then onwards assumed the role of slaves....

> The research that I did among the Botswana people for Maru gave me the greatest insights and advantages to work out above all that that type of exploitation and evil is dependent on a lack of communication between

oppressor and the people he oppresses. It would horrify an oppressor to know know that his victim has the same longings, feelings and sensitivities as he has. Nothing prevented a communication between me and Botswana people and nothing prevented me from stepping into the skin of a Marsawa person. And so my novel was built up in blinding flashes of insights into an evil that hung like sickness of death over all black people of South Africa (Abrahams, 1990, 14-15, in Olaogun, 2002).

Many factors qualify *Maru* as a novel constructed within the mythic mould. There is a quest; there is descent from assigned (assumedly superior) roles; there is the formation of a new society, and there is a hero with superior sensibility. As a corollary, there is the incidence of "scape-goatism", ingrained as a core stylistic and thematic motif. "Scape-goatism" derives from a biblical ceremony for the Jewish Yom Kippur in which an assumedly guilty party is sent off into the wilderness. Afterwards, the sins of the people are symbolically laid upon its or his head. This act involves sacrifice, a forfeiture enacted in the tacit understanding that the ritual animal or person would eventually flounder in the wilderness, thus marking the remission of the collective sin, now interred with the decimated beast or person. The experience itself is also scatological in that the victim has its/his head (the embodiment of its very essence) sullied with all kinds of defilement and obscenity. This practice of sacrifice could also be found in several traditional societies, where ritual cleansing is periodically undertaken to renew the cultural and religious currents of society.

The "scape-goat", in human terms, is a mythic figure that voluntarily or perfunctorily bears the sins of their people. There is thus the underlying thinking that the scape-goat's

death will bring about communal healing or group recuperation. Sometimes, it might become evident to society that its action or actions would result in acts of scape-goatism. At other times, however, the full import of such acts may not be immediately discernible and some action performed as otherwise a private measure of sacrifice might, incidentally and gradually, assume globalizing and larger dimensions.

Sacrifice, an essential element of scape-goatism, does not necessarily entail bloodletting. It could sometimes manifest as a relinquishing of a cherished position or status, culminating in social demotion, denigration, seclusion or migration. The sacrifice performed in *Maru* is a personal choice on the part of the protagonist, who shows vigorous imaginative independence, as well as moral courage, in deciding to forgo his royal rights and privileges. Maru, the protagonist, does not defend himself against alien reality, represented by Margaret Cadmore, but rather aligns himself with that external reality that seemingly threatens the very core of his received values, by embarking on a process of separation that would later yield integration through spatial mastery. This corresponds to the mythopoeic periodicity in which the heroes or heroine's experience undulates between ennui and elation. This is the chasm between anonymity/darkness and attainment/prominence.

Richard Chase has called myth "the heaven which heals or makes tolerable those deep neurotic disturbances which ... are occasioned by the clashing attitudes of magic and religion" (in Vickery, 72). Scape-goatism is authentically a religious performance, sometimes suffused with magic and aspects of mysticism. These twin qualities are redolent in *Maru*.

The hero of *Maru* is invested, in the course of the story, with a certain mystical and religions aura. To prove his worthiness and readiness for self- sacrifice and to slough off his mundane nature and tawdry essence, the would-be mythic hero must battle with his personal or local historical limitations and thenceforth attain the generally valid and timeless goals that other members of his immediate community may not immediately identify with. Accordingly, there is bound to be a schism, a collision of interests, either psychically or physically. Maru abdicates the revered headship of his clan in order to identify with the oppressed people of society. Head's ideal heroes or heroines invariably give up something of uttermost value before being reified and changed to demi-divine personages. Sacrifice is thus the basic ingredient for beatification. Thus, in her writings, Head denounces abuse of power, which she perceives as being demoniacal. The mythic heroes or heroines that Head creates are made to give up political responsibility and status in order to achieve inner peace. For these heroes or heroines, fleeting glory gives way to eternal glory.

As has been noted earlier, the characters in Head's writings and the narrative structures within them are arranged in antinomian terms. Each character in this novel appears to have been consciously paired with another character as either complements or foils. Some of the characters help the others to effect positive change, while another set of characters are bent on hindering the process of change in society. In this, the characters in Head's *Maru* conform to the mythic mold of characterization. The mythic hero or heroine has to destroy the forces that hamper his or her questing mind. These negative forces are the enemies that the heroe or heroine must outwit or conquer before he or she could experience a sense of consummation: Medusa, Minotaur, gorgons, Satan, Maya. In destroying their foes, the mythic heroes or heroines usually have companions,

accessories, supernatural aids (the *Deus ex Machinas* that facilitate their operation).These latter groups might consist of the genii, the spider woman, the helpful crone, the fairy grandmother, the talisman or the *chi* (in Igbo cosmology).

The archetypal hero or heroine, setting forth from his or her little hut or grand castle, is lured, swayed or else willingly proceeds to the threshold of adventure. There he or she possibly meets a shadowy person or a phantom guarding the passage. The hero or heroine may defeat or conciliate this formidable power and thus survive the kingdom of the dark, where he or she contends with brother-battle, friend-battles, offering and charm. The mythic persona may be killed by the foe, and may then descend in death, in which state he or she suffers dismemberment or crucifixion. Once over the threshold, the hero or heroine proceeds through a world of strange, yet weirdly- intimate forces, coming out with a great reward. Reward may consist in the hero's or heroine's union with the object of their quest, their own apotheosis or the expansion of consciousness. The boon that the hero/heroine brings back restores or transforms the world because it is capable of recreating or sustaining life. As a modern figure, the mythic persona is dead or is near annihilation, but as an eternal being-perfected, unspecific, and universal – he or she is being reborn daily. The mythic persona's solemn task is to return to society transfigured, ennobled and prepared for service to humanity in general.

Because the novel, *Maru*, has a mythic personality as hero – a persona who wades through barriers of rank and ethnicity to achieve redemption for social underdogs – there is an apparent pattern of structural dialectic as the basis for characterization in the novel. The axis upon which the mythical plot of the story revolves may be typified as a moral

antithesis. Within this antithetical pattern, a Manichean clash exists, giving the novel a didactic colouration.

Consequently, characters in *Maru* set each other off or complement each other, according to how they impede or facilitate the attainment of the mythic hero's object of quest. Such patterning in characterization aligns with the overall moral texture of the novel, within which there is a clash between good and evil or between light and darkness. The mythic hero or heroine usually enacts some sacrificial gesture that tends to resolves this sort of clash, usually resulting in the ascendancy of good over evil.

The above dialectal presentation, and its eventual resolution, could be termed the Zoroastrian principle, by which it is expected that the world would revert to its pristine condition of moral excellence, after the forces of darkness would have been routed. Discussing this Zoroastrian ideology, Joseph Campbell (49) observes that *it is the duty of man (especially heroic man) to contribute to the victory of light over darkness*. In light of the above observation, the following patterning in characterization could be noted in *Maru*: the Maru-Moleka pair, the Margaret-Dikeledi pair, the Ranko–Moseka–Semana group, and the Pete–Seth–Morafi– group.

To fulfill his role of "Hero as World Redeemer", as Campbell calls it in *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (134), Maru must undertake a journey that not only signifies complete severance of ties with his royal heritage and lineage, as well as royal subjects, but also indicates and seals his work of redemption. Depicted and deployed as an agent of light and iconoclasm, Maru is first seen through the consciousness of Moleka, his rival. Because Maru requires little or no sharp, punctilious details of presentation, the reader's

perception of him is that of an immanent force, a metaphysical, rather than corporeal, being. This is a common feature in architectonic novels, where there is not only an interfusion of time and space but where also, in the words of Sharon Spenser, the exploitation of the character as a medium or person results in an intentional blurring of individuality and in a consequent heightening of his typicality (68). Indeed, a single character may be used, such as Maru has been used certainly, as a preceptor, a container of a spectrum of ideas whose opposites or equivalents are represented by the other characters. Spencer calls this technique "literary spatialism".

Evidently, then, Maru as a hero serves as a vector for the enunciation of Head's ideas about how properly humankind ought to handle certain issues of political and social concern . Existing both as a mythic personage and as a social symbol of royal authority, his role and stature acquire a cosmic significance, over and beyond his historic value. As a hero conscious of his redemptive destiny, his main preoccupation is the liberation of the vital energies that will feed the entire universe. In his own case, therefore, character-dimension is made congruent with character-role. He is a god whose action benefits the entire human race.

Furthermore, as a man of heightened spiritual sensibility, Maru is superior to the other characters in the novel, if only in terms of his having the capacity for intuitive perception. Moleka his friend recognizes this extraordinary quality of Maru's:

> Thus it was that thousands of people noted the dramatic impact of Moleka, but he would always cast his eyes across the room to see if all was well with Maru (34).

Clearly, then Maru is endowed with a hypnotic, charismatic and compelling personality that is not necessarily physical.

As an instance of his omniscient or preemptive insight, Maru perceives, and even foretells, the point at which fissures will appear in his relationship with Moleka. After one occasion of Moleka's pledge of unfailing friendship, Maru tells him, "One day we will part, over a woman" (37). Again, Dikeledi, his sister, believes he has an all-seeing eye – being a sort of god in his kindness towards people (28).

So different in temperament are Maru and Moleka that Maru thinks they are both kings of opposing kingdoms. Using this power of foreknowledge of the moral and psychic distances between himself and Moleka, Maru prepares emotionally for the eventual confrontation that ensues in their relationship. Whereas Maru's kingdom is "golden" and bears a mystical aura, Moleka's is of tinsel quality, being thoroughly earthy and manipulatively crude. Moreover, where the former is creative and channels his psychic powers to positive ventures, the latter merely has over-abundance of power that is raw and ruthless. Maru embodies a quality of mind, the sort that a mythic hero like Theseus possesses:

> He dwelt everywhere: he'd mix the prosaic of everyday life with the
>
> sudden beauty of a shooting star (34).

Theseus, in Greek Mythology, was a legendary king of Athens (fathered by King Aegeus and Poseidon, who was the founder-hero). Like Perseus, Cadmus, or Heracles, Theseus battled and overcame foes that were identified with an archaic religious and social order. He institutes an ethos of "dwelling together"—a trope of unity. Theseus possessed both divine and mortal characteristics, enabling him to face tough choices in his mythic quest,

including voyaging by land, where he faced more dire challenges. In this, Theseus resembles Maru, who prefers to confront head-on the discrimination against the Marsawa tribe of his community. His marriage to Margaret leads to the liberation of the Marsawa. Similarly, Theseus, in defeating the evil Minotaur, delivers Athens from tyrannical rule and turns that city into the true home of liberty, the one place in the world where "the people govern themselves" (Hamilton, Part 3, Chap. 2, 216).

As it was with Theseus regarding Athens (and the gift of freedom he bequeathed humankind, by extension), Maru's essential humanity is inextricably tied to the welfare of the whole of humankind (and not just to a select portion of it. Therefore, he detests the greedy and the selfish, even in male-female relationships. He would often complain to Dikeledi: "People who had nothing were savagely greedy... Even if they ate all your food they were still starving" (34). To him, affairs of the heart should happen between partners that understand the language of reciprocity. His disappointment with his women stems from a realization that their materialistic demands threaten to throttle his spiritual powers. The women confuse his inner spiritual potency with his earthly accoutrements and prospects as a future paramount chief. With these women, he says, "a tender smile and a scheming mind went hand in hand" (35).

Maru is further disturbed by the fact that people tend to resign themselves to the phenomenon of evil, as something that cannot be grappled with or withstood. There seems to be no attempt by people to overcome their human limitations and become "gods", thus attaining "eternal, deathless, gentle goodness" (37). In other words, most people are unable, or are reluctant, to explore the possibility of crossing the threshold to spiritual insight. This is the key difference between mere mortals and mythical

personages. Mythical heroes, being shape-shifters, continuously form and dissolve the cosmogonic circle, owing to their indomitable zeal to quest after ideals. Thus, they are able to bye-pass their human, social or spiritual handicaps, thereby gaining the spark of divinity.

Indeed, Maru illustrates in his career Head's conviction that divinity could be made less abstract, becoming concretized and communalized by the evolution of a breed of men of "goodness of heart." Even such a reprobate as Pete, the principal of Leseding Primary School where Margaret also teaches, acknowledges that God the abstract had never lived" (19). In other words, divinity is accessible to anyone who can muster the Promethean temerity. Ostensibly, this very anthropomorphic aspect of divinity appeals particularly to Head. Nevertheless, the status of divinity has its costs, too. Prometheus, and other divine personages of his ilk, had to suffer dismemberment and scarification before attaining the status of godhead. He had to be the "scape-goat" that would introduce enlightenment through suffering.

If Maru is occasionally calculating and seemingly selfish, the reader does not doubt that most of Maru's actions emanate from the orders of the 'gods' who directly speak to him. He obeys what Campbell calls "The call to Adventure" (19). Such a call can only be ignored to one's detriment. Of Maru's imminent betrothal to Margaret, we are informed by Head that:

> It was different if his motivation was entirely selfish
>
> self- centred, but the motivation came from the gods who
>
> spoke to him in his heart (73).

True enough, he may resort to, and often does encourage, half-truths, barefaced lies and fantastic yarns in order to achieve his objectives, geared toward the realization of political, social and spiritual ideals. Mythical heroes or heroines like Maru are often compelled to dissimulate and use seemingly devious ploys in pursing their quests. For example, within the Nordic mythology, as Mircea Eliade reports in *Images and Symbols* (16-18), Odin, the warrior-chief of his people, had a whole series of magical gifts. He had the capacity for ubiquity or of instantaneous transport; the art of disguise and the gift of unlimited metamorphosis, as well as the power to blind, deafen or paralyze his adversaries and deprive them of their sweeping intrigues or of the efficacy of their magical and preternatural powers. Though Maru does not display all the above powers, he is nevertheless adept at the art of dissimulation in order to fool Moleka's protégées. He employs spies to do his groundwork for him, before executing his plans.

Moleka is at once Maru's foil, decoy and alter ego. If Maru is an Olympian, then Moleka is a Titan, a personality of diminished spiritual stature. Presenting his husk as the true seed, he deceives Margaret by his sexual attraction and by his facile change of character, which compares to the molting of the snakeskin that leaves the snake-essence intact. Margaret is so enthralled by Moleka's superficial brilliance that the full imprint of his personality on her psyche is almost inerasable:

> There were tow rooms. In one, his (Maru's) wife totally loved him. In
> another she totally loves Moleka (8).

Admittedly, Moleka has the same calibres of personality and of social standing as Maru, but he is less endowed mystically and spiritually, and is less stable emotionally. Being

over-conscious of his royal antecedents, he can be quite daring sometimes; in fact, his attitude could be described as reckless and overly carefree:

> He was royalty, the son of a chief. He'd grown up making goats and people jump. It was nothing (28).

Moleka could afford to treat his women callously and come off unfazed in the bargain. Thus, life for him is just a mad, blind dash, an exercise devoid of vision, thought, direction or retribution.

Since Moleka's over-abundant energy is not channelled towards positive or creative goals, it is frittered away on women as excess libido. Where Maru destroys his women and then fall sick himself because they assailed his spiritual strength, Moleka, after each sexual escapade of his, feels no psychic drain, nor does he ever daunt his consorts emotionally.

Of note in the *Maru* story is how differently Maru and Moleka react when they first meet Margaret Cadmore, a Marsawa woman teacher sent newly to the town of Dilepe. Moleka's first impulse is to possess the woman and add her to his endless sexual escapades. To achieve his aim, he decides to shed his callous airs and assumes the front of respectability. At any rate, where he is wont to make such a dramatic and flighty change of character, his friend, Maru, is habitually contemplative, secretive and unpredictable because, being the mythic hero that he is, he delights in mystery. Rather than get infatuated with Margaret, he impounds the bed loaned out to her by Moleka, letting it be publicly speculated that he would have nothing to do with the Marsawas.

Nevertheless, as has been noted earlier, Maru's action only masks his grand design to liberate the Marsawas from their state of social and political degradation. A paradigm for this sort of action could be found in the case of Theseus, who enlisted among the youths to be sacrificed to the Minotaur, not revealing (except to his father Aegeus) that he intended to destroy the monster.

Mythic heroes or heroines like Maru are therefore risk-takers. They suffer great personal risks (even possible death) in order to fulfill their mythic mission. Contrary to the impression he creates- that of having great loathing for Margaret- he communicates with her in dreams and via the paintings she makes, thereby implanting his love deeply in her heart. He then engineers events in such a way as to have Moleka entangled with the obligation of marrying Dikeledi (Maru's sister), after having impregnated her. Finally, Maru carries off Margaret to a village several miles away from Dilepe. Indeed, his position, his role, here is analogous to that of Theseus, when that Greek hero carried off Ariadne, King Mino's daughter, after having liquidated the evil Minotaur. Just as Ariadne provided Theseus with a ball of thread by which he found his way out of the Labyrinth, so does Margaret meet Maru half the way, by confirming his hunches and objectifying his dreams through her symbolic oil paintings.

Thus, whereas Maru carries out a well-defined and purposeful action, Moleka merely takes things as given. While the former wears a mystical glamour, a nimbus characteristic of a mythic hero, the latter only aims for mundane goals, acts of tokenism. Indeed, he could be called a Titan, a fallen man sulking for the loss of the divine quarry that has eluded his unhallowed grasp. On the contrary, Maru, envoy of selfless service and apogee

of spiritual humility, triumphs over his rapacious friend. The hero as saviour defeats the pseudo-hero.

In the Margaret-Dikeledi pair, there is little or no opposition in terms of moral disposition, but there is inequality in the assignation of social and political roles and status. On the one hand, Margaret is a veritable mythical heroine. Her career profile mirrors that of a mythic figure. She has an obscure background as a motherless, nameless orphan. In fact, the name she bears is somebody else's, that of Margaret Cadmore, the white missionary woman to whom the young girl is given for up bringing. Though Margaret comes from the outermost fringe of the Botswana society, from the much-maligned Marsawa community, she improves her social standing by cultivating an elastic mind capable of absorbing all things and liable to accommodate everybody in one compendious sweep.

Moreover, Margaret's artistic gift has a touch of mystery because, through her work, she is able to communicate unconsciously with Maru, the protagonist. Therefore, though she starts off as a helpless, underprivileged orphan and as a listless, harassed person, she finally matures into a thoroughly powerful and perspicacious woman who, surprisingly, dwarfs the royal stature of her friend, Dikeledi.

From the onset, the two women have felt alike on most issues, especially issues concerning social and political inequities and the unnecessary affectation of self-importance. On first meeting Margaret, Dikeledi feels an unconscious impulse to protect her, whom she thinks is vulnerable. Margaret had grown up in a hostile environment, with other children always calling her "Bushman" – a highly derogatory and reductionist

term in Botswana society. She, consequently, gradually forms the habit of placing a hand to her breast, both as a gesture of self-defense against actual and imaginary blows and as a sign of self-effacement.

What really fortifies Margaret and prevents her from crumpling up and under the strain of social ridicule is the kind of orientation she gets from her adoptive mother. This orientation consists of an inculcation of moral, humanistic and universal principles of inclusion-principles that make her (both in early life and in a later stage) conscious of the throb of human life daily resonating around her. These same principles also make her conscious of her moral obligation to safeguard and enrich that thread of life.

Brought up to see no limitations in her Marsawa background, Margaret takes pride in her nativity, aided also by the talent, copied from her adoptive mother, for making instant sketches of people and of things. She is thus, by temperament as well as by training, an intellectual-artist who, as one of the author's mouthpieces, possesses a capacious ability for the articulation and etching of complex issues. She is therefore kin to James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1945) and she shares affinity with the galaxy of intellectual personae and spiritually oriented protagonists in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (1928). Indeed, one can find, *ad infinitum*, antecedents for Margaret as intellectual-artist. There is, equally, a palpable quality of *bildung* experience in her career. Woolf's Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse* (1927) is one such other intellectual-as-protagonist. Indeed, literature, both of the past and of contemporary times, abounds with visionaries like Margaret, who use their extraordinary intellectual capabilities to visualize and build a more equitably ordered future.

In terms of personality, then, Margaret is more robustly resourceful than her friend, Dikeledi, although this strength is masked by her habit of self-deprecation. Dikeledi is aware of her friend's latent energy. She notes that Margaret:

> ...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 (71).

Though Dikeledi is not portrayed as mythical heroine, she nevertheless crosses the frontier to adventure and to a new life of social revolution by abandoning her revered position as princess, in preference for work as an ordinary primary school teacher. She thus exhibits self-sacrifice, a necessary ingredient for "scapegoatism". The direct consequences of her action are that it benefits the common people of Dilepe, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, it liberates the Marsawa people from years of social denigration and political exclusion. The import of Dikeledi's act of self-sacrifice is, in fact, globally extendable because it is a gesture of human solidarity and a token of redistribution of opportunities. Education, when administered to the socially underprivileged person, has the effect of empowering the recipient and opening up to them new vistas of experience. At any rate, Dikeledi's stature as a mythic figure is diminished because she allows her feeling for Moleka to restrict her to secular concerns. Nonetheless, Dikeledi also has to pay this price as a way of facilitating the ploys of her brother, Maru, who seeks to consolidate his hold on Margaret, to the detriment of Moleka. Maru, in fact, manipulates Dikeledi in order to achieve his plans. Through her, he sends drawing materials to Margaret, whose oil paintings have a symbolic co-relationship with Maru's dreams and pogrammes.

Maru's cryptic communication with Margaret, via telepathic transmissions and dreams, is projected as utopian constructs that contain mythical elements. These mythical elements explore and resolve political and social issues that center attention on the therapeutic and corrective nature of egalitarian and cooperative existence. Therefore, dreams for mythic personages enact a projected tapestry of beauty, excellence, some enjoyable quality of experience and, sometimes, wry moments of despair. Dreams could also turn out to be nightmarish. Maru successfully woos Margaret through dream projections, in spite of her own deep-seated fears. By marrying Dikeledi, it is virtually impossible for Moleka to marry Margaret ever, thus paving the way for the enactment of Maru's goal of liberating the Marsawas from the bonds of ethnic hatred and ethic discrimination. Just as Dikeledi's action of self-abnegation is symbolic and globally extendable, so does Maru's marriage to Margaret have a symbolic significance. Maru not only liberates the Marsawas from social scorn and political cum economic exclusion, his marriage to a person of low birth is equally a gesture of salvation. He sacrifices his esteemed social and political position in order to win salvation for the less- privileged Marsawas. He is like Christ taking human form in order to save humankind.

Maru's marriage to Margaret demonstrates the fact that the heroine embodies that transformative streak of character for which the archetypal feminine is noted, and which Enrich Newman refers to in *The Great Mother* (*ad passim*). She is the seed, the mystical vessel that will create a new world in which all modes of discrimination are abolished and within which men and women would relate to each other on equal terms. Dikeledi stops short of this transformative potential. She is merely a facilitator to its unfolding, a mere prop on the stage on which Margaret plays a vastly more dominant role.

The next group of characters of interest in *Maru* consists of Ranko, Moseka and Semana. The three men are Maru's shadows or his external sensory organs-his antennas. Unobtrusive and unassuming, they gather, store, analyze and report to Maru gossips, anecdotal stitches and incidents of all sorts. Alternatively, they are employed to actualize Maru's numerous plots and schemes of political and social subversion.

Of the three spies, however, only Ranko receives a human touch from Head. Therefore, Ranko merits some elaborate mention. Presented in soft, delicate light, he is generally regarded as a simpleton by the people of Dilepe, but he possesses a sharp and astute mind, as well as an observant eye that never misses the minutest detail. On first encountering Ranko in the novel, we are alerted immediately to his deceptive looks as a fool:

> Ranko had the most stupid and uncomprehending face on earth. It was like rock in its total lack of expression. When people approached him or talked to him, he said: 'Er? What's that?" as if he could not understand one word. So they said: 'Goodness, what a fool he is', and left him alone. (49)

Thus, left alone, Ranko would roam about prying into people's lives. In fact, he is as ubiquitous and as wily as Prospero's Ariel in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (c.1611). Ariel not only serves as his master's eye, he equally performs practical, odd jobs for Prospero. Like Ariel, Ranko is inventive and resourceful; his mind is also intensely graphic and creative. After Pete, Seth and Morafi have attempted to embarrass Margaret and force her to abandon her teaching work, it is Moseka, Semana and Ranko who punish that villainous troika by terrorizing them, making them abscond from Dilepe. The three spies

are therefore the agents of progress. Together with Maru, they are opposed to the forces of nihilism.

Whereas Ranko, Moseka and Semana work for the enthronement of an ideal of political liberation, Pete, Seth and Morafi are reactionary elements bent on maintaining and reinforcing the dark phase of human civilization. Cast in the mould of mythical gorgons and monsters, they are archetypal antagonists militating against the destinies of mythic heroes or heroines. The three men are drawn together by a sadistic interest in things and situations that bring pain and discomfiture to others. In his descent to the underworld (marked by the conjugal tie with Margaret), Maru must subdue and eliminate these agents of evil, if he is to actualize his plan of redeeming the Marsawa (and by extension, the rest of humanity).

Pete, for one thing, is a fop with mechanical mannerisms, which he employs to ingratiate himself to others, or to harass people who are seemingly inferior to him. On his part, Seth is a caricature figure given to imitating foreign modes of dressing, "down to the Bermuda shorts" (40-1). However, Head pours the thickest scorn on Morafi. He is easily the most odious of the three-some. An inveterate thief and a spoilsport, Morafi's misdemeanors compel Maru and Dikeledi to abandon their natal home, which is redolent of corruption, witchcraft, cruelty and general acts of inhumanity.

Indeed, in presenting Morafi, Head does not hesitate to employ the Dickensian technique of parody and the burlesque. These entail a blend of lampoon and satire, intended to show the author's criticism of the moral values and social attitudes that Morafi's life embodies. This is how she portrays Morafi:

He had big, bulbous protruding eyes which were completely vacant of thought. His face was covered in layers of fat. His stomach hung to his knees because he ate too much.... His eyes never smiled. They were always on the alert for something to steal. (43)

Depicted in this despicable light, Morafi reminds one of the traditional portrayal of Satan as a horned, wily, vile beast, spewing green-frothy vomitas and clutching a lethal fork as a symbol of his destructive nature. Characters like Morafi would do their utmost to occlude or frustrate vision of heroes or heroines like Maru. Morafi and his ilk possess some shadowy, constricting personality. Nevertheless, Maru is very free of such narrowness of mind. Maru is a direct manifestation of the principles of law and morality, whereas characters like Morafi, being sons of darkness and nihilism, observe no moral, legal, or ethical checks.

Head uses types- flat characters who play only ancillary roles in *Maru* and who, more or less, reveal just one aspect of personality. Examples of such flat characters are Pete, Seth and Morafi (and even the trio of Ranko, Moseka and Semana). Perhaps Ranko is the one exception to this stereotyped grouping, owing to his rather complex nature. He is somewhat dynamic, in that his art of dissimulation enables him to adapt to different situations. Head presents these lesser characters as complementary types to the protagonist and antagonist models represented by Maru and Moleka, respectively.

Evidently, judging by the dualistic way Head arranges characters in *Maru*, she wishes them to be perceived as embodiments of antinomian principles or as different shades of colours in a kaleidoscope. One of the points that this thesis has consistently highlighted is

that the characters in Head's fiction perform archetypal roles because they re-enact, through symbolic action, the lives, deeds and patterns of behaviour of bygone and even contemporary mythic heroes and heroines.

Specifically, Maru as a character aims to ford the gulf existing between the divines, the aristocrats, the aborigines, the mortals, the common people, and the outcasts. His marriage to Margaret entails a renunciation of his royal prerogative and pedigree. Theseus did a similar thing when, after his father Aegeus's death, he resigned his royal power, organized a commonwealth and built a council hall where the citizens could gather freely and vote. His dream, like Maru's in the present novel, was to found a people's government where all would be equal (Hamilton, 149-158). Nevertheless, if Maru is the pathfinder in the mould of Theseus, then Margaret is the beacon that guides and focuses his vision. As an Adriane figure, she supplies the simple cues that enable Maru to discern the path to world freedom. After all, the Marsawas are only a microcosm of the entire humanity, a preponderant section of whom the beams of freedom and equality are yet to light upon.

If there are archetypal heroes and heroines, as well as archetypal villains, in *Maru*, there are equally archetypal symbols that apply to specific characters and to specific situations. According to Newman in *The Great Mother* (4), the symbolism of the archetype is its manifestation in specific psychic images which are perceived by consciousness and which are different from each archetype. The first cluster of archetypal symbols in *Maru* is a crop of solar references. Sun, light and moon especially connote degrees of spiritual insight or states of happiness. When, for instance, Maru flatters Dikeledi, by complimenting Moleka, Head writes that "so many suns lit up the face of Dikeledi; and

her eyes melted with tenderness" (56). Similarly, Head writes that Moleka was "a sun around which spun a billion satellites" (58).

Whereas in Dikeledi's case the sun or light symbolizes happiness of mind, it signifies power for Moleka. Maru could thus speak of him: "He is greater than I in power" (58). As a "sun," Moleka cannot temper the brightness and intensity of his unbridled ego, which he brings to bear on people in an intimidating way. On the contrary, Maru (who has the mellow moon as his symbol), channels his energies to creative endeavours, not seeking the kind of vain publicity that Moleka covets and is known for. Maru's solar symbol, the moon, is congruent with his urbane, equanimous disposition, as he is never one for precipitous actions or for anything that smacks of intemperance.

Indeed, the archetypal moral antithesis in light and darkness or in good and evil is dramatically rendered on the last page of the novel. When the Marsawa people awakened to knowledge of their common humanity with the rest of the people of the world, "They started to run out into the sunlight; then they turned and looked at the dark, small room. They said: we are not going back there(127)."

Apart from solar symbolism, the next cluster of archetypal symbols deals with spatial dimensions. This cluster conveys portal imagery that betokens either the imprisonment of the psyche (as the "dark, small room" in the preceding excerpt would imply) or the release of spiritual power. The above states of mind are attained through gaining passage into or through crossing the threshold to adventure. In Margaret's mind, for instance, there are two rooms, in one of which she totally loves Maru while, in the other, she totally loves Moleka.

The existence of these two separate spaces suggests a schism within her mind. This schism is not immediately resolved, but we can infer that the liberation of her people from political serfdom offers Margaret the kind of solace that might assuage whatever sense of loss and nostalgia she might subsequently feel because of Moleka.

Similarly, "kingdoms", when applied to Maru and Moleka, is an epithet that plumbs the relative psychic powers that they each possess. Whereas Moleka's "kingdom" is mystery-laden, because it is not yet fully explored, and remains shuttered and inaccessible, Maru's "kingdom" is a universal concept: "He dwelt everywhere" (34). Unable to read Moleka's mind and thus predict his rival's actions and intentions, Maru becomes apprehensive:

> The king who has insight into everything (Maru) feared the king whose door was still closed. There was no knowing what was behind the closed door of Moleka's kingdom (34).

The closed door here indicates estrangement and eroded friendship. It is a portal gesture of rejection and fractious temperament.

Apart from archetypal characterization and archetypal symbolism, one can also trace a correspondence between the cyclical structure of *Maru* and the career of its mythic hero. The story commences from the terminal point of action: the post-elopement life of Maru and Margaret, together with Ranko, Moseka and Semana. Then a cinematic glance is cast backwards to the incidents leading up to the elopement and apparent ostracism of Maru. Finally, the reader is transported back to the banks of the present moment, the very point at which the story begins.

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Maru's career, as he himself acknowledges, follows the above cyclic flow of creation-dissolution- creation (see diagram below): "Everything I have done has been an experience, an experiment. I just move on to more experiences, more experiments" (54).

CREATION

DISSOLUTION

DISSOLUTION

MARU'S CAREER

CREATION

CREATION

DISSOLUTION

DISSOLUTION

CREATION
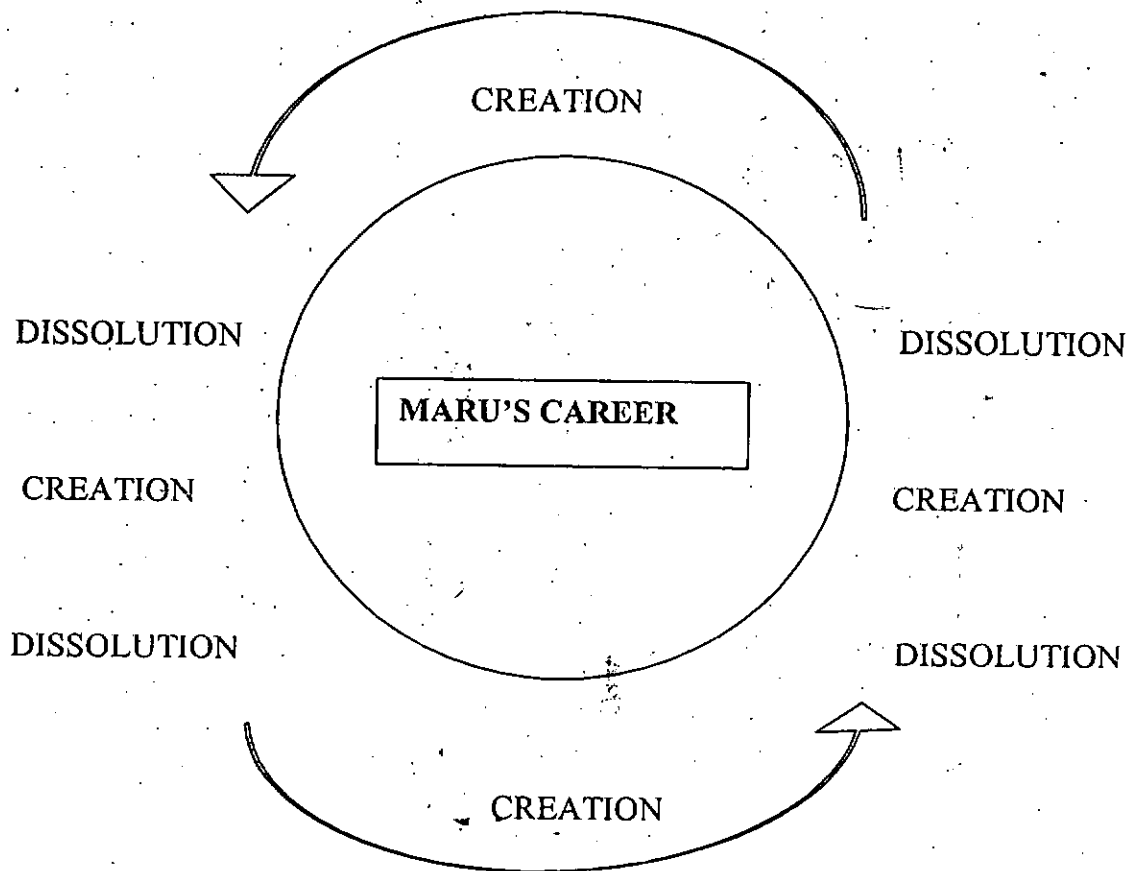
As Maru ekes out life as a farmer, with his wife and his three spies, the reader is convinced that the protagonist will embark on yet more experiments and cross many more thresholds to adventure. Maru's moments of dissolution of experiential matter mark his unending acts of sacrifice as "scape-goats." "Scape-goats" die in order to usher in corporate recuperation. Maru is, after all, a pathfinder who would always indicate the way for humanity to tread. In the words of Campbell, the "enigmatic figure dissolves back into the primal chaos" (354). Accordingly, each act of re-emergence ensures that the journey toward redemption begins anew.

Ultimately, however, the problem in *Maru*, as in all works of art fostering the utopian state, is how best to ascertain the efficacy of the idealistic projections made by Head. Are those projections realistic and inerrant? On the other hand, are they hoaxes and chimeras foisted on the reader by the author? To the extent that a selective portion of humanity values change and vigorously pursues it, Maru as a character is relevant as the bearer of iconoclastic values, a role he plays adroitly enough. However, to the extent that the same human society is hugely and incorrigibly reactionary, assiduously maintaining and defending its time-honoured patterns of social hierarchy and political arrangements (as well as its primordial drives and instincts for power), then Maru's work may be interpreted as quixotic or, at best, only capable of achieving ephemeral success. The latter view, at any rate, contradicts Head's avowed ideological and artistic tenets. She believes that art ought to leverage and convey tangible social change. She is also of the view that social and political inequalities should be done away with- a prospect she believes to be quite realistic. Indeed, mythic heroes and heroines are not usually deterred in their redemptive mission by the skepticism and doubts of a reactionary flank of society. Such heroes and heroines triumph because they ignore, and if need be, endure or contain the opposition.

Nonetheless, Maru, as a soteriological hero, has his Achilles' heels. His unscrupulousness at times assumes devilish intensity, and one is left to wonder how such a man of seemingly devious capacity could be said to possess the type of magnanimity of spirit that, for example, Theseus was famed to have had. Campbell's view on this matter is quite incisive and ought to be borne in mind in any contemplation of the relevance of the

mythic persona: "There is such recklessness in this divine deliverance of the future that it appears to be nihilistic" (353).

Lastly, Arnold J. Toynbee's comment on the inadequacy of the pursuit of ideals underpins the nihilistic purpose of mythic quests, but it also problematizes the moral position of seeking for alternative ways of *doing* and *thinking:*

> .... Schism in the soul, schism in the body social, will not be resolved by any scheme of return to the good old days (archaism), or by programmes guaranteed to render an ideal projected future (futurism), or even by the most realistic, hardheaded work to weld together again the deteriorating elements. Only birth can conquer death, the birth not of the old things again, but of something new (169-175).

The dialectical quandary is how to best inter tl.e moribund arrangements and facilitate the sprouting of new forms of life. The answer appears to be that there would necessarily be some sort of death – death of the self, suffered by "scape-goats" who are prepared to undergo self-immolation – before true change would ensue.

There will surely be births, but the issues sometimes turn into what Anyikwei Armah has dubbed the "Man-Child" – a creature that speedily reverts to its primordial states of agedness and corruption (1963). Head's kinds of birth seem to negate Armah's kind of pejorism, as is projected in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*.

Conceivably, there is just a tenuous line between utopia and Dis-Utopia. The prosaic nature of everyday life ensures the fact that the creator of mythic heroes or heroines strives to fashion stridently characters that seek to escape the doom of heroic incompletion. Perhaps, the pragmatic thrust of the dreams of such heroes or heroines that will keep the readers perpetually enthralled and motivated enough to take pragmatic steps that will eventually bring anticipated change in the social miliuex.

CHAPTER EIGHT

i.   EMPOWERMENT AS A MODE OF POLITICAL AFFIRMATION IN HEAD'S FICTION

ii.   MYTH AND SELF- AWARENESS IN *A QUESTION OF POWER*

EMPOWERMENT AS POLITICAL AFFIRMATION IN HEAD'S FICTION

Empowerment is an act of conscious enunciation and affirmation of people's capacities, skills and endowments. Empowerment entails a willful, systematic promotion of self-actualization among the under-privileged and the deprived members of a community. In a way, this process of self-affirmation involves recognition of the idea that a homologous conception of social order is false. Therefore, the act of empowerment admits the possibility, indeed the cogency, of conceiving reality in heterogeneous terms. As a process, empowerment both rends and renews the social code, as Julia Kristeva affirms (54-5).

Recognition of socio-cultural marginality is the first step toward honest and self-unconscious appraisal, giving one the opportunity to seek ameliorative or restitutive measures. Therefore, empowerment is a framework for laicizing power and any centrally constituted phenomenon that structures human relations and modes of production. This mode of remediative intervention rejects any absolute form of identity. Thus, the underlying ideology behind the concept of empowerment is the notion that a process of

social and political reformation could reconstitute "marginality" and such fringe ideas. This is a relational stance, a positionality that accommodates procedural and structural changes.

Being a sensitive writer that she is, Head is aware of the positional nature of most prejudiced and lop-sided arrangements that encourage maltreatment, discrimination and depravity. Therefore, she has created in her writings characters and situations that project change (indeed, recuperate) the social and material conditions of people whose lives are "filled with calamity and disaster" (Emenyonu, 95). Head herself came from a background of rootlessness, reflective of the social stigmatization that marked her "mulatto" status and made her *persona non grata.*

In fact, Head compels the major characters in her fictional writings to act in reaction to the social circumstances in which they operate, to choose the right options, in the face of systemic injustice. Makhaya says in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, "I shall choose the road of peace of mind. I shall choose a quiet backwater and work together with people." In *The Cardinal*, an incestuous relationship between Mouse and Johnny extends for the writer the outer limits of some of society's dire rules and moral ethos, rules that the protagonists in that story choose consciously to impugn.

Annie Gagiano (123) has noted that Head does not necessarily endorse or advocate incest as a social practice. Rather, Head anticipates sympathy, on the reader's part, for the awkward situation in which Mouse and Johnny find themselves (in *The Cardinals*) as they proceed to consummate their incestuous relationship (of which they are initially

ignorant, but about which the reader is aware). This presentation of dramatic irony problematizes the moral strictures of society that ordinarily exposes Johnny to rank ridicule and possible ostracism. However, Head invites the reader to empathize with the two characters embroiled in an illicit relationship.

Just as Head does not ask the reader to condemn people who unwittingly fall into error, she also projects the Hindu mythology as a reel that plays out incidents of social and political injustice. The Hindu myths in her fiction are ostensibly employed to show, among other purposes, the discriminative nature of the rigid and facile social systems of class and caste, systems that underpin Hindu cosmology. Says Head:

> The canvas on which I have worked was influenced by a belief in the Hindu view of rebirth and reincarnation. Such a belief influences one to think that each individual, no matter what their present origin or background may be, is really the total embodiment of human history, with a vast accumulation of knowledge and experience stored in the subconscious (77).

The human history that Head mentions above is tinged with a lot of bigotry, hatred and manipulation. In Head's view, the human heart should surge with "conspiracy against all the insanity and hatred in mankind" (60).

The solution that Head advocates for the elimination of traces of insanity and hatred is conscious intervention in the affairs of the common people of South Africa:

I think that our only education in South Africa, as black people, is a political one. We learn bitterly, everyday, the exploitation, so that a writer automatically feels pressured into taking a political stand of some kind or identifying with a camp (60).

This sort of pragmatic meditation also entails engagement with modern agrarian and scientific principles as a means of improving the living and economic standards of the South African people. Head reverses in her treatment of the African soil the type of gussied up sentimentalism associated with writers like Christopher Okigbo, Leopold Senghor and Okot P'Bitek. These writers have each a sort of romantic attachment to the soil and to its fertile grounds. Head overturns this dependence on the putatively regenerative power of the soil and the spiritual ambience it purportedly casts. She rather shifts her attention to the practical use that people could make of it (using modern, scientific tools and practices) to eke out a living and to ward off the reincorporation of humanity into the vortex of darkness and primitivism.

In the novel *Maru*, we find Margaret equipped with the skills that enables her to educate people about the dangers of social discrimination. Margaret's state of economic and financial independence makes her the more attractive to the contending duo of Maru and Moleka. Head seems, therefore, to endorse the belief that education opens up the mind and prepares one for clear thinking and pragmatic action. Maru, in marrying Margaret, further provides the latter with the opportunity for self-actualization. Margaret's empowerment is a sort of affirmative action geared toward providing economic

independence to the Marsawas employment; in addition, her example also affords them political and educational opportunities.

In *A Question of Power*, then, Elizabeth equally possesses a palpably liberated outlook on life. She is depicted as a sort of freewheeling artist, in the mold of Virginia Woolf's Lily Briscoe (*To the Lighthouse*), but, unlike Lily, Elizabeth's mind is buffeted by some internal turmoil that deranges her for long stretches of time. What restores her sanity is cooperative farming – work geared towards gaining mastery over the demonic forces that intrude on her consciousness.

Consequently, Head's preoccupation (in both her major and minor fictional works) is the social, economic, spiritual and political emancipation of her characters. One can, thus, safely deduce that Head, through her writings, is very interested in helping is people advance beyond their primary and natural limitations to gain preeminence, acceptability and relevance. She achieves this leveraging through deliberately empowering her characters, which constantly choose affirmative actions. In fact, Head holds such affirmative actions as a model of regenerative and corrective mediation.

MYTH AND SELF-AWARENESS IN *A QUESTION OF POWER*

If a total view of life admits contradictions, as part of the truth, then the man who sees completely must necessarily suffer confusion to the point of madness (Spencer, 124).

If the preceding chapter, which dwells on *Maru*, has highlighted the redemptive role of the mythic hero, vis-à-vis humanity in general, then *A Question of Power*, Head's third novel, records the gruelling process of individuation and personal awareness. R.D. Laing (116) emphasizes the point that madness is a sort of "safety-valve" for those who see life from tangent points, those South Africans (or indeed anybody else) who were neither "white nor black". He particularly links madness with a mythical descent that achieves restoration. This state of restoration may have eluded Armah's listless and generic hero, The Man, who in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*(1963) eventually disconnects with every "valuable" tie or relationship on account of his perceived effeteness and non-relevance in the fulfillment of familial and societal expectations. For Head, however, her heroine Elizabeth, in *A Question of Power*, re-emerges from the labyrinths of dementia and hysteria to begin a new way of life, to forge a unique vision that perceives events and phenomena from positive and therapeutic perspectives.

In *A Question of Power*, Head does not present the reader with a hero who resigns his or her high position in order to serve humankind by liberating a portion of it. Rather, Head introduces a heroine cast in the mythical mode, who personally grapples with the problem of viewing life from its complex and multi-sided forms. In effect, his is examining life in

its absolute and an all-extensive form enables the heroine to re-define her actual and symbolic roles in relation to the rest of her people.

As she does in *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *Maru*, Head also employs mythic features in *A Question of Power*. The heroine, Elizabeth is a monomythical figure whose career follows the formula represented in rites of passage: separation (contemplative life) – initiation – return. Maduagwu (1997) has observed that this sort of heroine is found in all cultures and traditions of the world. The Greeks define a heroic persona as one that is not always a supernatural being, but who, having affinity with the gods, is reified on account of his or her hugely phenomenal exploits. Whatever their background, heroes and heroines are known as people who transform human conditions, whose actions "liberate the people from oppression or problems and challenges that threaten their existence" (425).

Because Elizabeth's quest in *A Question of Power* is one for composite illumination, the vision she seeks is the absolute knowledge of a sage, seer or prophet. Such vision usually culminates in the unification of the dual arms of the Manichean concept – light and darkness, good and evil, pride and humility, God and Satan, ethnicity and absence of inter-ethnic animosity, awareness and ignorance, spiritual wealth and paucity of spiritual gifts. To acquire this unified awareness, Elizabeth must encounter the force of virtue, in Sello, and then have this experience exploded in her interfaces with Dan and Medusa. Finally, Sello rescues her from the wiles of Dan, restoring her sense of morality and

enlarging her scope of perception. Elizabeth, coming face-to-face with evil, survives its rapacious embrace.

In her conversation with Lee Nichole, Head acknowledges the fact that confronting evil was, for her, a moral imperative:

> In my novel, *A Question of Power*, I was extremely bothered to define evil. I was looking for answers all along to questions of exploitation, that is, if we have to fight evil, we ought to present them as they really are... (1981, 54).

In Head's view, the ogre of super-human greatness, and the evil this misconception inherently unleashes, ought to be frontally challenged if humanity is to achieve social justice and economic empowerment. Power-maniacs manifest their antics insidiously. Apparently, people are too easily cowed to acquiesce in, or endorse, derogatory practices. Those who venture to speak out might merely undertake gestures of tokenism that end up massaging the ego of the transgressors. Strident and unwavering temerity is needed to subvert and eventually topple evil systems, as the cases of apartheid in South Africa and the colour bar in America have demonstrated. As Wole Soyinka has forcefully asserted in *The Man Died* (1972), the man dies in him who fails to speak out against oppression and brutality.

In light of the above observations on the invidious nature of evil, Head has notably infused *A Question of Power* with various moral posers that insist on dialectal resolution.

Thus, the main feature of *A Question of Power* is its structural principle of dialectal positionality. This principle entails a bipolarity that sorts ideas, people and phenomenon as positive or negative prepositions. Accordingly, characters are matched against one another in a series of antagonistic dyads and collisions. Within this bipolar framework, ideas acquire the capability of embodying contrastive inflections and the capacity to achieve complexity.

However, ideas do not exist sui generis. They determine the plot-sequence of the story in the novel and they motivate and impel the characters who people the work of fiction. Accordingly, in works of fiction like Head's, in which fictional elements depend on the author's vision for a full realization of their heuristic meanings, there is, as Jose Ortega Y Gasset observes, a tendency to attempt the objectification of the subjective (35). The subjective here refers to the themes and ideas, which constitute and concretize the writer's vision. These themes and ideas are objectified when they are made to crystallize in believable characters whose actions reflect a teleological orientation.

Because the major characters in *A Question of Power* objectify ideas, Head denies them all the facilities and features easily available to characters in the conventional novel: depiction of characters with recognizable details of dress and personage; portrayal of actions logically, in consonance with temperament, character traits and personal whims; functional, realistic settings presented through representative description, and mannerisms. De-emphasizing the above features in *A Question of Power* guarantees the exploration of symbolic, rather than literal, significations, and this stylistic preference of Head's preserves the cosmic and universal quality of the myths that each specific

character in *A Question of Power* embodies, or which all of the characters conjointly embody.

As illustration, the characters in the novel do not have last names; they are simply called Dan, Sello, Tom, Elizabeth, Eugene, Graham, and Kenosi. Alternatively, they appear as symbolic abstractions: Miss Sewing Machine, Miss Wriggly-Bottom, and Miss Squelch-Squelch. On the other hand, still, they directly bear mythic names: Isis, Osiris, Christ, David, Buddha, Shiva, and Al Capone. Rarely does the reader get to know details of where or with whom the characters live, for example. The characters in *A Question of Power* possess, as it were, a fluid, charismatic quality. Such instances, among several others of a similar nature, provide the eschatological atmospheres which imbue the novel with ponderous complexity.

Under the above arrangement, non-representational or abstract ideals (represented in characters, settings or symbols) form the structure of *A Question of Power*, which is juxtapositional. In Elizabeth's case, counter-pointed ideas stand for the different psychic states that she undergoes in the course of her mythic experience. Because Head prefers to emphasize only those details that percolate to the core of a character's personality, *A Question of Power* is at once intensely personal and extremely abstract. As far as it traces the various uses of ethnological differences, the aspects of power relations, and the varied conceptions of sexuality, *A Question of Power* is a theoretical construct. However, as far as it is descriptive and evocative of the personal life of Elizabeth, this autobiographical novel by Head is personal, almost lyrical. Therefore, Head is maintaining a balance in this novel between the general and the specified, with each aspect enhancing, and feeding into the other. Invariably, then, a deep personal relationship reaches outward, to the

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general sphere. Thus, there is a merger of historic time (mythic time) with present time (contemporaneous time), and reality eagerly yields to unreality, in a filmic miasma. Among other things, such fluidity allows for a multiple, comprehensive perspective, which the open-structured novel permits.

Because *A Question of Power* is open-structured, making possible a considerable expansion of the theoretical and technical qualities of the conventional novel, there is a purposive destruction of the "frame" of this novel so that its contents can freely spill outwardly. Einstein's relativist theory has, as Jose y Ortega Gasset argues, advocated juxtaposition as a structural element in fiction (35). Juxtaposition works in two ways: the juxtaposed elements might be so homogeneous as to evoke a monolithic experience or they might be so disparate as to appear fragmented. In *A Question of Power*, juxtaposition is achieved by the Manichean coupling of characters, ideas and situations; by the admixture of the banal and the terrifying (sometimes hallowed), to create a fragmented structure, and by the use of "prose panels" – a literary style in which short, rhapsodic prose passages are strung together by spatial casualness. These prose pieces often embody descriptions, presentations, comments, reveries and dialogic interfaces that have dramatic import, often containing varied thematic and moral values or viewpoints.

According to Gasset, the "prose panels" mentioned above (as a narrative structure in *A Question of Power*) are then left for the reader to synthesize into one whole ensemble. As Spenser observes, "in all works that are constructed upon patterns of juxtaposition, the spectator or reader must provide the harmonizing and unifying overall view" (68). In *A Question of Power*, each "prose panel" implanted by Head usually provides a unique perspective on Elizabeth's mental turmoil, or it casts a penumbra on the activities,

insights, influence or points of view of her fellow characters. This is the principle of linear succession that entails rapid movement, for when spaces are treated dynamically (that is, with an awareness of their counter-pointing effects and the refracted relationships possible to each one) more and more possibilities for new experience exist (Butor 49). The use of "prose panels" permits the simultaneous unfolding of the variegated experiences that Elizabeth undergoes before she acquires self-awareness and a totalizing view of life.

Related to Head's use of spatial elements to create poignant effect is her use of narrative techniques that reinforce the mythic quality of her art. Sophia Ogwude (1977) quarrels with Head's use of the apparently objective (rather than the subjective) point of view in *A Question of Power* to create the sort of emotional distancing that autobiography disallows. Admittedly, the subjective (First-Person Point of View) would hugely curtail and undermine the expansive perspective, which the author projects through the prism of myth. What Head prefers to dwell on, reveal and explicate are the multifarious facets of reality, which the limited (first-person) point of view would obviously elide. The author utilizing the mythic structure needs to employ an omniscient perspective that is capable of delivering an all-rounded survey and interpretation of human experiences.

The techniques of *in medias res*, internal reveries, flashback, flash-forward, etc, provide the novelist writing in the mythic mode with a fluid operational space. Equally, a flexible chronological arrangement is essential for the enunciation of the subject matters to which myths naturally respond. Contrary to Ogwude's imputation of faults in Head's narrative style, the above-mentioned narrative techniques are not "presumptuous" (out of place) in *A Question of Power*. They rather complement and enrich the artistic vision of the author,

whose avowed intention is to 'step out of the box,' breaking all the conventional moulds of artistic creating, in fictional terms.

The biographical details contained in *A Question of Power* are partially those of Head and partially those of her fictional proxy, Elizabeth. Many parallels could be established in the lives of creator and "artifact": the two women were born in the asylum, to which their mothers were consigned for apparently being insane; they are divorcees and they themselves have suffered mental breakdown. In any case, Elizabeth's career does not present a mere biography *per se*. In Elizabeth's story, Head utilizes biographical material in exploring the transcendent issues of personal awareness, the essence and the ramifications of divinity, the enigmatic quality of good and evil, the destructive potential of spiritual and political power, the significance of cooperative living, the virtue in humility, and the pitfalls of parochialism.

Elizabeth is kept ignorant of her own and of her mother's background until she is thirteen, when she is taken away from the woman she had thought was her mother, and sent to a mission school. Without tact or hesitation, the principal of the school – a cruel, unscrupulous, garrulous, white person – blurts out to her:

> You must be very careful. Your mother was insane. If you're not careful, you'll get insane just like your mother. 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 (16).

The principal also starts isolating the young girl any time Elizabeth strikes back at a child who calls her names or who molests her. Thus commences Elizabeth's protracted period

of crippling self-consciousness- an experience that makes her look inward for the meaning of life. Thereafter, her marriage to an inveterate sex-maniac is short-lived, as she cannot endure the man's lechery. In fact, discovery of her husband's promiscuity colours her assessment of Dan, whose libido she associates with moral depravity.

As a schoolteacher at Motabeng, Elizabeth encounters Sello and Dan who each employs psychic powers to influence her thought processes. She is chosen as a vessel for mythical revelation because she is spiritually attuned to such an experience. Sello's intention in allowing Dan to tempt Elizabeth is to open her eyes to the profound truths about human existence.

Whereas Sello aids Elizabeth, in attaining self-awareness, Dan strives strenuously to occlude her vision. Sello has as counterparts the Asian and the Father, and in his former role as Osiris, he had had affairs with Isis - a transformative feminine essence. His foil is Sello-in-the-brown-suit, who weaves distracting illusions in Elizabeth's mind. On the other hand, Dan's partners and accomplices are mainly women, in conformity with his extreme sexuality. His principal partner in this direction is Medusa, a spiritual monster who helps to overturn Elizabeth's psychic balance and undermine the positive thoughts that the heroine already has of Sello. Thus, the issues involved in *A Question of Power* are moral and ethical ones, and the insight gained by the protagonist encompasses the ouster of the evil forces personalized in Dan, Medusa and Sello-in-the-brown-suit.

Dan and Medusa are able to subject Elizabeth to intermittent and intense periods of mental breakdown from which she occasionally escapes by engaging in the farm-work organized by Eugéne, Graham and Tom. – *avant garde* expatriates who settle in Batswana

to help the natives improve their means of subsistence. From her high plane of mystical exploration, Elizabeth occasionally establishes contact with the grain of human life in order to provide for Shorty, her son's needs. This she does by maintaining a working relationship with Kenosi, her friend.

What Elizabeth goes through is no ordinary dementia. Sello and Dan are used to teach her several lessons about life. In Sello, she learns that the concepts of good and evil exist at a confluence and are not merely in mutually exclusive tension. Sello also teaches her spiritual humility. However, she learns in Dan and Medusa the destructiveness of untamed power and unbridled passion. At the end of her psychic experience, she acquires the will to live and appreciates the true essence of divinity.

Since *A Question of Power* constitutes a mythic experience of self-awareness, Elizabeth's encounter with Sello and Dan is dialectically oriented. After first meeting Sello, her knowledge of him is subsequently exploded by what Dan reveals to her. Therefore, in terms of spatial arrangement *A Question of Power* presents, as if consecutively and juxtopositionally, the heroine's encounter with the psychic forces represented by Sello and Dan. Thus, the book consists of two broad sections – "Sello" and "Dan." However, this arrangement does not imply a strictly logical narrative sequence. Rather, the novel being open structured and mythopoeic, such an arrangement reflects a vast, diffuse, confusing and complex world, quite independent of conventional ideas of characterization, time and space, giving the impression of asymmetry (Spencer). In historical periods, when man feels uneasy, oppressed, confused, overwhelmed and terrified of his natural and human environment, artists tend to abandon realism for a style that seeks exaggeration distortion and abstraction. During such historical epochs of tragic

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experiences, images of the world that are simplified and reduced to bare essences provide, accordingly, a comforting sense of a basic stability of life. As further analyses would demonstrate, Head's *A Question of Power* reflects this attempt to grapple with, and comprehend, the horrid, dissolute aspects of human life.

The first section of the novel, "Sello," contains details, incidents and portraits that are seemingly unrelated. Randomly spliced together are loose threads of Elizabeth's childhood, "prose panels" commenting on political ideologies and on other philosophical issues, snatches of the local environment of Motabeng, and accounts of the heroine's first and subsequent encounters with Sello. Evaluating and arranging all these details is one sensitive mind (Elizabeth's) trying to lodge a foothold on the quicksand called life.

In other words, only one center of consciousness reconciles the internal and the external landscapes within the novel, but this consciousness is not unique basically on account of intellectual and philosophical, or of even spiritual, sophistication. Rather, such a consciousness is sharpened by recognition of the protagonist's stereological role in the narrative. In conceiving the story in *A Question of Power*, Head appears to be troubled by the immensity and the varieties of evil that hinders humankind from experiencing spiritual unification and economic, as well as political empowerment. Thus, behind the facade of personal consciousness lurks the spectre of heroic existence, whether as fact or as possibility. Therefore, Elizabeth's eventual victory over Dan and Medusa is a mythical triumph in which the heroine purges the psyche (whether personal or collective) of the enigmas of evil and oppression.

Elizabeth's spiritual mentor, Sello, who lacks a last name and who possesses no sociological antecedents like the other characters in *A Question of Power*, is a mythic figure depicted in a symbolic manner. Because his role and actions have a cosmic value, he prefers to identify with no particular geographical patch of the earth: "He loved each particle of earth around him, the everyday sunrise, the people and animals of the village of Motabeng; perhaps his love included the universe" (11). Neither a divine personage nor an immortal, Sello has a privileged relation with the supernatural (like Achilles or Odysseus in Greek mythology), whether it is the supernatural of the gods or whether it is the natural supernaturalism of the created world. He thus illustrates, as did Maru in the preceding chapter, the fact that heroism (especially in the mythic mode) must have a specified and a special relation to a metaphysical or ontological source.

Consequently, if Sello's physical presence is underplayed, his spirituality is greatly underscored. For instance, Sello has undergone a series of inner development that also parallels the inner metamorphosis in Elizabeth, his spiritual partner. Obviously, the two personas experience "parallel illumination" because "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 pre-occupations in a pursuit after the things of the soul" (11-2).

Though their primary concern is with spiritual phenomena, Sello and Elizabeth are opposed to the misuse of spiritual and political power. They are baffled at the ease with which "powerful persons can prey upon loosely knit personalities" (12). On this matter they feel alike with their creator, Head, who employs the myths about Hitler, Napoleon and Caligula to illustrate the evil intrinsic in an abusive use of power (14). Such a

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negative display of power usually has destructive consequences. Adolph Hitler, Napoleon Bonaparte and Caius Caesar Augustus Germanicus (Caligula) were men notorious not only because of their zest for world hegemony but also because of their unchecked greed, cruelty, amorality and sex-mania. These men represent the Euhemeristic portrayal of historical figures whose actions so grip a people that the historical personas end up being mythologized in people's imaginations. The above vices committed by Hitler and his ilk are only a few guises under which human evil manifests. Bessie Head condemns such displays of evil in all of her writings.

One of the ploys used by the afore-mentioned autocrats was the bogey of racism, which enabled them to pillage, plunder and decimate whole towns, cities, kingdoms and peoples. Racism, rooted in irrationality, is an expression of egoism and is non-creative (19). In Head's opinion, racism is an aspect of the dark period of human existence and should no longer be practised. It is from this dark period that Sello wants to liberate Elizabeth, seeking to take her to a new phase characterized by moral goodness and universal unity. Therefore, awareness of human imperfection, plus a willingness to contribute towards its correction, constitutes the basic step to self-redemption. As Walter L. Reed has noted in *Meditations on the Hero*, the hero, in so far as his conflicts always involve some germ or vestige of social and moral concern, may be depicted as an eventual redeemer (5).

In redeeming others, the hero also liberates and regenerates himself or herself. The heroic figure is not heroic just because of moral excellence but because he or she has scaled the common pales of morality: good and evil. Such a figure is the solution, or is contributory to the solution, of the problems of society. The heroine in *A Question of Power* becomes aware of this special role after a period of soul-searching. The course of action she takes

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thereafter underscores the notion that the character, as a fictional element, can be used as a vehicle of social transformation. With this end in view, novelists create the figure and ideal of the hero or heroine, a person who possesses wholeness, self-unconscious passion and the ability to act in a decisive manner.

When Sello first inhabits Elizabeth's psyche and then physically occupies her room, she loses consciousness of day-today existence and begins an exercise, although unconsciously, in introspection. In the course of time, we are told that:

> She was not sure if she were awake or asleep, and often afterwards... dream perceptions and waking reality were to become confused (22).

Elizabeth's status conforms to the career history of mythical figures in which normally an assertion of the powers of physical perception is preceded by loss of the self, a total blanking of the mind. What Elizabeth perceives appear like dreams and nightmares.

> The dream, as a mythopoeic element, provides Elizabeth not only the facilities of free association and access to spiritual power; it also lends an aura of ritual and supernaturalism to her experiences. Joseph Campbell has defined dream as "the personalized myth", for in the dream the forms perceived are twisted by the peculiar troubles of the dreamer (15). Elizabeth's mind is peculiarly suited to the dramatization of the archetypal conflict between good and evil.

In trying to come to terms with the phenomena of good and evil, Elizabeth's mind is splintered by spliced and elusive concepts about human existence. Madness for becomes

a sort of "safety-valve" (Laing, 19), prefacing the restoration of her schizophrenic sensibilities. As a mythical heroine, Elizabeth possesses a superior sensibility, able to withstand the rigours of psychic disorientation.

Furthermore, in *A Question of Power*, Sello-in-brown-suit uses language (dialogue), in frequent reference to Elizabeth's assumed frigid sexuality, as a tool for ridicule. Women (in this case, Elizabeth) are used to show off male bravado and vapid sexuality. There exists, it appears, an unequal, precipitous relationship between Elizabeth and Sello-in-brown-suit. Head later balances the scale with the introduction of the other Sello, who projects a less sallow view of the male essence. He is humane, understanding and hardly condescending. Sello, in effect, disables the "erotic of domination" embodied by Sello-in-brown-suit. In the words of Gerald M. Maclean, "Erotics of domination attempts to extract surplus value that rewards some people, while dumping others" (in Kauffman 148). Sello's personality is the stabilizing force that Elizabeth needs to transform into a new phase of existence, springing from the grave of rank sexuality, as we find in her encounter with Sello-in-the- brown-suit.

Sello's possession of the heroine's mind through astral travel is so palpable that, on one occasion, when Tom the American agronomist expresses surprise at the deep level at which she discusses metaphysical issues, the latter distinctly hears a strange voice say, "Yes, that's right." Immediately, the chair on which Sello permanently sits in Elizabeth's room falls down with a clattering noise (24). Sello, being a mystical figure, reveals himself as an ageless personality who, through repeated reincarnation, has gone through cycles of permutation. As Elizabeth says of him, "his past life had pervaded the whole world" and he had chosen religion as a vocation. In the past aeons of human civilization,

he had evolved from Caligula to Osiris and now to his present form of a god. He tells Elizabeth, "I'm very old, you know, in my soul. I have completed billion cycles in my destiny. You are only two." (34). Like Elizabeth, therefore, Sello is a cosmic force following the cosmogonic fate of perpetuated essence.

Owing to his mythic orientation, Sello never gets born without the "prophecies.' The 'prophecies' would presage a new mode of accessing and measuring experience. The object of his mythic quest is the formation of an ideal society in which spiritual power, and indeed all other forms of temporal power, is stripped of destructive and dehumanizing potential. Therefore, *A Question of Power*, like *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *Maru*, is a novel of utopia in which Head projects an ideal future charted by "beautiful people." Elizabeth shares this dream with Sello and, because of her transformative role, is appointed the "prophet" of the new dispensation. She is the person who will envision, articulate and realize this new world. She gains awareness of her spirituality, and of Sello's positive influence on her spiritual life, through a rigorous exercise of mystical meditation, because of which she discovers the various phases of spiritual development she has undergone.

Just as Sello has metamorphosed through several stages and through numerous forms, so have Elizabeth, Dan and Medusa gone through phases of psychic development. Where Elizabeth had in the past worked with Sello, Dan had gained Directorship of the world (temporal hegemony) "since 1910." His avowed aim is to scuttle Sello's prophecies. Elizabeth is the mythic vessel who, in teleological myth, shall manifest the divine purpose. Dan, the force of nihilism, is bent on destroying this human vessel of divine

revelation. However, Sello is aware of Dan's dubious intentions and employs his superior spiritual powers to contain and undermine his mythic adversary.

Being omniscient and omnipresent, Sello is able to unify the widely disparate experiences reflected in *A Question of Power*. His vision, his direction and his inspiration are therefore strictly teleological, in consonance with his mythic role. A parallel could be drawn in God's relationship with Job within the Christian myth. Just as God permitted Satan to tempt Job or just as God allowed Christ to be tested at Gethsemane, so does Sello allow Dan to confound Elizabeth's vision, distorting her notions of morality. This notion of manipulative ability in *A Question of Power* is conveyed in the cluster of images suggestive of gadgets, toys, switchboards, consoles and buttons used by Head. In order to create his beautiful world of the future, for instance, Sello sits "at a switchboard plugging in the lines to all the beautiful people he had on call" (29).

Sellos's vision of an ideal world eschews racial intolerance. He warns Elizabeth that, in spite of her suffering back in South Africa, she must not hate white people because most of the mythic heroes or heroines descend from them. For instance, Eugene, a white expatriate in Motabeng, is a "white God" whose precursor we have seen in Gilbert of *When Rain Clouds Gather*. Through Sello's lines of communication, Elizabeth is privileged to have a mythical revelation of Eugene. While she is in a trance, Eugene appears to her as "the father". In this same trance, Sello is seen to merge with Eugene's soul because the two men share spiritual affinity. They are equally possessed of the same type of political consciousness: the empowerment of the downtrodden, the establishment of the right balance of power relations. So alike in disposition are Eugene and Sello that they "seemed to be easily interchangeable souls, because Sello stood up, walked

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straight into his person (Eugene's) and totally disappeared" (30).

Interchangeability of physical (or even psychic) forms is a dominant feature of *A Question of Power*. Change of forms is a supernatural facility that enables the mythic figure to dissimulate, elude his or her foes, subtly manifest his or her presence, or steal (acquire) the divine boon. This transformative capacity creates such diffusions as allow for the widest propagation of prescriptive values. A writer like Head knows how to deploy astutely this facility in the characters she has created, because she has as her chief focus the reordering of the world. In a highly mystical experience, this transformative ability leads to unification, a sort of total at-oneness. Elizabeth, for example, is capable of experiencing at-oneness with Sello: "She had no distinct personality from Sello" (52). What appears initially as a psychic invasion on Sello's part is actually a mode of mutually adjustive internalization. It is a mechanism for social, as well as political, conditioning that impels the protagonist toward *praxis*. Enlightenment (perception of the mythic persona's political destiny) determines and characterizes the persona's actions, *vis-à-vis* society and other individuals.

The above kind of enlightenment about a mythic persona's destiny redeems humankind and elevates the actualizer of destiny to the status of apotheosis. As a god-type, Eugene, for instance, is committed to alleviating the harsh conditions under which the poor of Africa live. "The poor of Africa" (or the geographical space of Africa) becomes the metaphoric object of Eugene's quest. Therefore, his agricultural project is tailored towards the attainment of the mythic goal of transforming the present state of human consciousness, as well as alleviating the human misery-index. Accordingly, Eugene's

fight is against "poverty" and against evil is universally extendable. To symbolize his readiness to serve, Eugene divests himself before Elizabeth and dons the tattered, dirty rags worn by the poor and the beggars. Divestiture here is expressive of extreme humility, and the desire to serve. Equally, identification with the poor is an antecedent stage to deification. The symbolic equation can be thus rendered: humility = apotheosis (see diagram below).

Christ

Buddha

HUMILITY ⟶ **APOTHEOSIS**

Rama

Eugene
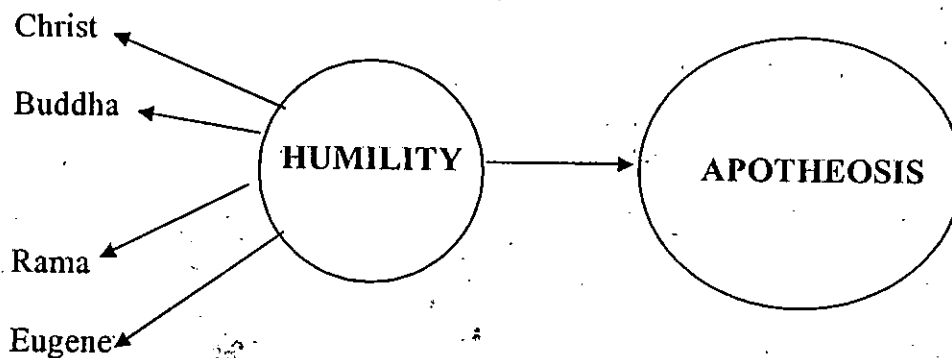
As Northrop Frye observes of resonance in mythopoesis, "Through resonance a particular statement in a particular context acquires a universal significance" (in Neil Postman, 1985, 19). Frye calls metaphor the "generative force," the force that unifies and invests phenomena with meaning, contextual inflections, and extendibility. Indisputably, these features can be applied to Eugene's personality.

Clearly, the above equation could be traced in all myths. Christ, within the Christian lore, assumed mortality in order to assert his immortality and vindicate his divinity. In Oriental mythology, Buddha preferred mendicant rigour to the comfort within palatial bounds that should have been his natural haunt. In order to be able to repudiate his heritage, he had to seek for illumination through arduous trials, gaining apotheosis in the end.

Because Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* is an active partner in the above-stated objective of rescuing and rehabilitating the poor, she receives a glittering crown as a reward. While presenting her with this crown, Eugene tells her:

> We have worked together for a long time. This is my earnings with you. We'll work together again, but you prepare the way (30).

Another woman, anonymous, awards Elizabeth a crown of "earning." The crown is the prize awaiting the mythic hero or heroine who, however, must "prepare the way" by embarking on a mythical adventure and accomplishing the task that would be assigned to him or her. In Elizabeth's case, this consists in her coming to an understanding of the true essence of good and evil; it equally involves her engaging in positive work.

Work geared toward improving the human condition often entails self-sacrifice and absolute dedication to the objective of human development. This objective becomes an ideological cause, a sort of moral credo, to which the mythical persona is irrevocably committed. Such a cause is necessarily expressed through concerted action, a practical platform for the articulation and demonstration of ideals, tenets and coda of a reciprocal order. In Elizabeth's case, Sello makes her watch a procession of matured "servants to the cause."

The ambulant species that Elizabeth observes all have the "expression of people who had killed and killed and killed again in one cause after another for the liberation of mankind" (35). Participation in such humanitarian ventures entitles the mythic persona to the supreme title of 'God.' As Elizabeth sees it,

The type of people Sello referred to as God seem to be ordinary, practical, sane people, seemingly their only distinction being that they had consciously concentrated on spiritual "earnings" (31).

Accordingly, these "Gods" in Head's fictional world work for the realization of "equality of man in his soul". A *sine qua non* for attaining this hallowed status of godhead would, it seems, be the capacity to identify directly with the poor and the humble. Apparently, as far as Head is concerned, the qualification for identifying with the poor and the humble is the willingness to participate in the process of wealth redistribution and the diffusion of proprietorship rights. In fact, an Asian man - one of those spiritual personages operating within Elizabeth's metaphysical space – remonstrates with her for not being fully engaged yet in service to the poor.

Another requirement for attaining the divine essence is the propensity to be inured to physical death. Rather than surcease the power of mystical perception, death actually heightens it. Death, in fact, is an extension of metaphysical access. Not merely a physical event, death (within the mythopoeic context) is a psychic process that could transform a person's soul to extra-ordinary phantoms, shapes and specters. Says Elizabeth regarding this interchangeability of forms in mythopoetic experience, "I killed, yes, but from that day she became a follower of the lord" (33).

In other words, death loses its pangs in mythopoeic experience and assumes positive, enriching, life enhancing, potential. As such, death becomes the gateway to a more sophisticated and spiritual perception that ultimately gives rise to new vistas of human experience. Sello speaks in the following terms of his transformation during the Osiris-Isis

phase of existence: "My death at that time broke the hold she had over me." In short, death is made to perform a liberating, not a damning, role in mythic consciousness. Dying is but a mere turn of the cosmogonic wheel that ushers in another phase or dimension of mythic consciousness. Thus, in death may be found the dialectal logic of *thesis-antithesis-synthesis*. In this cosmogonic experience, there is no cataclysmic revolution engendered, but positive change could ensue all the same. Because of the cosmic roles they play, mythic heroes live beyond death because, at the terminal point of their career, they attain divinity and immorality. Their entire lives and actions thus yield universal and timeless resonance, thus echoing Frye's remarks on the global applicability of mythic (metaphoric) experience.

Aside from learning something about her innate divinity – because of her mythic role – Elizabeth also becomes aware of the invidious nature of evil, a theme that runs through *A Question of Power* and other works by Head. In Head's view, evil is as natural to humanity as air is indispensable to human existence: "It did not matter who planned evil, it was always there, the plan" (34). As a corollary, even the best of humans, however nobly principled, are corruptible. Head alludes to the David-Uriah story in the Bible to illustrate her thesis:

> David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die (34).

David himself had been adjudged God's chosen one, the more reason why his foible here is thrown in ironic relief.

Head, through this David-Uriah paradigm of power relationship, strives to show how easy it is for people in positions of authority to abuse power, at the expense of "pawn-like" victims. The Machiavellian dictum, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely," aptly applies in the above scenario. The impulsively lecherous king expends a hapless victim whom he has cuckolded. The inordinate use of power surely leads to debasement of morals and to bestial descent to murder, conspiracy and deception. Obviously, Head wants to extrapolate from this example of abuse of political power a warning to readers regarding the ill consequences of all forms of misuse of power. Oppression and repression stem from abnegation of someone else's innate and express rights: right to life, right to own property (even proprietary rights), right to self-expression, sexual rights, as well as intellectual rights. In Head's view, denial of the above array of rights (plus others that are inferable from them) amounts to a denial of human life.

As the story in *A Question of Power* reveals, Elizabeth, at some point in her mythic experience, is incapable of distinguishing good from evil. Sello had forewarned her: "There are so many lessons you have to learn... that the title God, in its absolute all-powerful form, is a disaster to its holder; the all-seeing eye is the greatest temptation" (37). Since she pays little heed to this warning, Dan is able to induce her to perceive Sello as an incorrigible pervert, an example of the admixture of the loftiness of the human soul with the murkiness and pettiness of human nature. Nevertheless, this incapacity on her part to make moral choices comes as no surprise, for Sello had also told her, "I am the root cause of human suffering" (36). Even more confusing for Elizabeth is the character, Dan, who as the devil appears to her in the guise of a god. Predictably, she is unable to separate Dan's rank exhibitionism from Sello's humility of spirit, perhaps because the two characteristics expressed by Dan and Sello are spliced as a continuum.

However, Head projects Sello and Elizabeth as personas who exemplify the idea that evil in human life could be rooted out through the ritual of "crying", which elicits a cathartic effect. "Crying" means not only self-flagellation, but also a re-orientation of the mind to the pursuit of spiritual and ethical ideals. In effect, the huge effort in *A Question of Power* culminates in the obliteration of the "dark phase" of human civilization by a patently ameliorative mechanism. Everything in this novel, every element or incident (in fact, all of Sello's prophecies) is directed toward the establishment of the ideal or futuristic form of human existence. Sello tells Elizabeth:

> There are sets 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. And the people that dreamt belong to your age group. Everything was evil until we broke down and cried. It is when you cry, in the bleak hour of despair that you stumble on a source of goodness. There were a few of us who cried like that. They said "send us perfection." They sent you. Then we asked: "what is perfection." And they said: "Love". (34).

Love, ushering in fellowship of humanity and replacing the greed for power and its abuse, appears to be the antidote for the darkness of the human heart. Political integration and multilateral cooperation, as well as tolerance and selfless service, are Head's answer to the nagging problems of abuse of the power process and the moral decadence that issues from such abuse. The envisaged oneness of humankind, according to Head, will materialize through the purgation of guilt- by crying and demonstrating spiritual humility, a thoroughly cathartic exertion.

Elizabeth is convinced that once people perceive that they are, within their souls, "forces, energies, stars, planets, universes and all kinds of swirling magic and mystery, they are puffed up by such insight and tend to lose their natural goodness" (35). That she is capable of making such a profound statement is proof of the sort of spiritual lesson she has learnt in her journey to the interior of the mind, where the deep truths of life could be evaluated thoroughly and conclusively. Her mythical journey, inwardly directed, enables her to understand the fact that none possesses the prerogative would hold of egoistic assertion and dominance to the exclusion of others. Head adopts this mature perspective in the face of, for instance, trenchant feminism that roots for a devaluation of maleness. In her balancing act, she presents the two forces of maleness and femaleness as complementary energies, rather than antagonistic propositions. This same mode of balancing is reflected in Head's advocacy of a moderate, reasonable use of political power. Elizabeth's experience is, therefore, one of ingression to the mind in order to gain enlightenment. However, this experience is also an egression back to normal life to assert and apply, in real terms, the truths about human relations that the protagonist has learnt in the underworld.

In support of her belief in the interfusion of life, and to affirm the tendency of human nature to aspire to perfection, Head introduces Darwin's evolutionary theory which, among other things, holds that "from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and wonderful have been, and are being, evolved" (35). According to Darwin's thesis, the protean state of perfection and innocence will be attained once people become mindful of the rights of other people with whom they interact.

Elizabeth, as has been noted earlier, acquires this awareness of the sanctity of *otherness*, or rather comprehends it in the most lucid t rms, when she undertakes an archetypal journey to hell. Indeed, *A Question of Power* is redolent of archetypal patterns motifs and themes. To recapitulate, the archetypal experience of mythical heroism pursues the following course: a descent into hell (the nirvana); a contention with evil forms and illusion; spiritual dismemberment; the ascent to, or emergence in, a new world powered by a new vision; the appropriation or bestowal of divine boon, leading to spiritual unification. Since such a pattern is evident in *A Question of Power*, one could apply Goethe's term, *bildung*, to qualify a situation in which the story in the novel reveals a "hero-in-process", a hero whose experience is incrementally primed, up to the climactic moment of illumination (Reed, 5). This contrasts with what, as opposed to Goethe's term (*gestalt*), is applied to that which is finished and fixed in character.

Elizabeth's experience in *A Question of Power* fulfils Thomas Hardy's prophetic assertion about the transformative import of suffering in human experience: "If way to the better there be, it exacts a full look at the worst" (in Fagles 6). Consequently, pain, for Head, could become both a stimulus (a prompter) and a reward, in terms of the generic and intrinsic benefits it could produce. In the Aeschylean tragedy, Zeus thus enjoins the Old Men of Argos: "If we must suffer, suffer into truth." This is the paradoxical bond between *pathos* and *mathos* (suffering and its significance). The mythical figure needs to suffer in order to redress some cultural or collective malady. The mythic hero or heroine dies into life. Like Dionysus, the phlegmatic son of Zeus, the hero in a mythical construct must be dismembered before he or she could experience spiritual regeneration and cultural recuperation.

As part of her unfolding or emergent experience, the mythic heroine Elizabeth, in *A Question of Power*, descends into the unconscious realm of dementia, a kind of ingression to Dante's Inferno. This proves to be an excruciating and near-lethal experience that tests her sanity and integrity. Her psychological pain is intensified by the antics of an agent provocateur that casts spells of illusion on her. The aim of this entrancement is to lure her from the path of virtue. In the entire gamut myths the world over, there are always such *agent provocateurs*. In the case of Christ, Satan tempted him and sought to mislead him. In the case of Buddha, Maya first tempted and later tried to destroy him.

As regards Elizabeth, Dan, Medusa and Sello- in- the –brown- suit attempt to distort and falsify her perceptions both of her personality and of Sello's veracity. Through the following comments of Head's, it becomes clear that Elizabeth undertakes an illuminating journey: "None of mankind's God-like figure-heads recorded seeing what she saw on this nightmare soul journey (35). In this archetypal journey, the heroine appreciates the true quality and dimensions of her spiritual power and its transformative potential. Similarly, she acquires the idealism of the typical mythical figure: "Oh, what a world of love could be created," she exclaims (35)!

.As an archetypal or mythical construct, *A Question of Power* is replete with numerous archetypal symbols. For example, a symbol like "river of light" (35-6) refers to the medium, as well as the impact, of soul revelation. It has the capacity to flush the mind and flood it with surges of illumination and self-enlightenment. Further, there is a reference to a deep cesspit filled with excreta. This symbolizes a plunge to the nirvana, which must take place in mythical experience of heroism. At any rate, excreta could be

associated with the mythic hero or heroine in his or her attempt to cleanse the "Aegean Stable" and restore the wholesomeness of man. If within the cesspit the soul gains self-awareness, then it is flagellated equally in the process. In the cauldron of traumatic experience, within the crucible of pain, the hero or heroine confronts death, self-sacrifice and a battle with gorgons.

In addition to the symbols of "light" and "cesspit," there is also the incidence of alienation in *A Question of Power* (Strelka 68). Cacophony manifests in the guise of the discordant record-pieces with which Dan intermittently afflicts Elizabeth. While his record-pieces are extremely distracting and prejudicial, his thunderbolts are punitive, unnerving in effect. Thunderbolts here represent abusive use of power—something that Head stridently deprecates in all her writings and philosophical musings.

Most power-drunk personages combine an abrasive power display an uncanny exhibition of noise, in the forms of propaganda and sheer vocal or graphic modes of intimidation. The tools of cacophony and thunderbolts are employed by Dan to cow Elizabeth into submission. They transmit male-centered prejudice and ideological pedagogy. Here, Head proves the point that mythic personas employ diverse epistemological devices to communicate their messages or to exert control in dyadic relationships.

As evidence of this epistemological leverage on the part of the mythic personas in Head, the pale blue rosette, which Elizabeth is seen clutching, symbolizes the envisaged brotherhood of humankind. In *A Question of Power*, the rosette represents unattractive, fragile forms. In using the symbolism of the rosette, Head's message is that people should conduct their affairs with humaneness and gentility of spirit. The rosette is pale because

it signals Head's predilection to center power in underprivileged people. In her view, people that are socially maligned and discriminated against are apt to use power wisely, and to the ultimate benefit of humanity. Head's view here agrees with the claims of Standpoint Theory, which holds that people at the lowest end of the social ladder are more apt to empathize, because they have a composite view of life(see reference to Hartstock, in West and Turner).

In many instances of manipulated activity in *A Question of Power*, Head strings together Elizabeth's excruciating experiences in order to project an idealistic and teleological objective. Just as Sello controls and determines what Elizabeth should perceive, he also allows Dan to implant a negative image of himself in the heroine's mind. This anti-image of Sello is personalized in Sello-in-brown-suit, who has the vicious Medusa as a partner. The pseudo-Sello is bent on corrupting Elizabeth's sense of moral probity.

Remarkably, Sello and Medusa had lived past lives as Osiris and Isis, respectively, the same way as Sello and Elizabeth had worked together before. As Isis, Medusa was a transformative agent because, after Osiris' moment of bodily disintegration, it was Isis that healed him again. However, she exists now as Medusa, a power-hungry tyrant. Accordingly, Sello, Dan, Medusa and Elizabeth demonstrate in their mythic careers an architectonic feature that Spencer attributes to the open-structured novel. The open-structured novel is an architectonic construct that permits interfusion of experience. In their ever-changing forms, Dan, Sello and Medusa illustrate the dynamic and inter-fused potential of time and space within the novel. Each of these four characters has lived through all time and can move through every single space. Spatial and chronological fluidity are thus major planks in an architectonic construct, such as *A Question of Power*.

Evidently, then, the Greek, the Roman, the Indian, the Christian and the Egyptian myths that pervade *A Question of Power* provide structural paradigms and thematic prototypes that supervene and amplify the deeper meanings underlining the work. In fact, D.P Mathurs's comment on the value of myth in Indian literature could superbly apply to Head's handling of myth in *A Question of Power* and, indeed, in her other fictional, historical, and autobiographical works:

> When an Indian writer takes up myths even as the underlying structure of his work, the whole living complex of Indian mythology has also evoked. Other branches of knowledge impinge upon his consciousness and the myths sometimes tend to intermingle, giving the work a richness and suggestiveness that the structural pattern of one myth alone cannot provide (17).

Evidently, then, myth furnishes both the writer and the reader the facility of multiple perspectives, just as it enlarges or dilates the scope of treatment of the subject matter in hand. This is the resonating function of myth that makes it amenable to fashioning or envisioning new cultural and political realities. From the sinews and ligatures of past myths, the writer could extract life-forming and life-changing tissues of experience. Out of the ashes of a fading myth, new myths spring out, perpetuating the cycle of death and rebirth.

Though the experiences of Elizabeth, her heroine in *A Question of Power*, Head underpins a salient feature of mythology, a feature that has universal application:

Nearly every nation had that background of mythology- looming, monstrous personalities they called "the Gods," personalities who formed the base of their attitudes to royalty and class; personalities whose deeds were hideous and yet who assumed powerful positions, presumably because they were in possession of thunderbolts... (40).

Indeed, Head delights in undermining and negating in her writings this type of 'bogus' mythologizing of personalities. Such pseudo heroic figures are wont to cause a lot of havoc to the social fabric and to the collective psyche.

Going by Head's artistic inclination, therefore, myth may arise from an attempt to mystify through intimidation, extortion and cultivation of sham grandeur. The larger myths of society(those concerning national or ethnic heroes or heroines)would, then, gradually shade into and enlarge the personal myths as people and nations begin to appropriate for themselves the greed, the self-importance and the lust for power associated with "the monstrous personalities of society" (p.40).

In Head's opinion, myths associated with, or accruing from, the internal darkness of the human soul result in the demise of the soul. Herein lies the pitfall in mystification of the Absolute – the presumption of absolute spiritual power. Rather than project or promote such egocentric myths, Head projects archetypal characters that build up societies through their humanizing powers and attributes.

Head's conception of the ideal nature of spiritual and temporal powers is that they should be de-cabalized and de-mystified. For this purpose, she makes Elizabeth perform the role

of "blabbermouth" (40). Elizabeth, therefore, resembles Prometheus, who stole the divine fire from the celestial hearth. She opens the door to the arcane chambers of mysticism, so that anybody may partake of its ensuing benefits. As Sello acknowledges, "Religion ought to be a function in which all mankind may participate" (41). In the epoch of open, free worship envisaged by Sello and Elizabeth, "the wayside inn, the wayside well...the courtyards of the rich and the poor" are all encompassed in one wide-ranging sweep. As Head notes of the new epoch,

> It (religion) was so much free that the wayside beggar
>
> could peer in with an enquiring face and join in the dialogue (41).

In other words, religious mysticism ceases to be the sole preserve of power freaks like Medusa, Dan and Sello-in-the-brown-suit. The net effect of this leveling act is that humanity would begin to acquire compassion, tenderness of heart that eschews self-assertion and dominance. In this regard, Head's definition of "God" assumes an anthropomorphic aspect. To her 'God' is the totality of all great souls and their achievements. The achievements are not those of a single soul; rather, they are notched by the collective effort of many souls, who all have worked to make up "the soul of God" (54).

To Head, therefore, liberalization (democratization) of spiritual power is akin, and surely conduces to, democratization of the political process, within which people would be free to stake their moral choices without let or hindrance. We find that Head's protagonists usually take actions that tend to disperse political and spiritual powers centrifugally.

Indeed, one of the social ills that Head fights vehemently is moral depravity, which, in her view, evolves from an intemperate display of power. Depravity, as she sees it, is a gradual, but inexorable, manifestation by which the mind, the psyche and the collective consciousness become tainted by the smear of greed and selfishness. In Sello's case, Head informs the reader that "some dark, evil thing set down roots deep into his soul and ate and ate" (41). This invidious mode of corruption needs to be arrested and uprooted, if genuine change in the scheme of things is to take place. For Sello, humility would help him to shed the slough of degeneration, a state to which he had begun to sink. Moral degeneration in potentates is usually associated with the taste for propagandist displays that seek principally to stupefy the mind and condition behaviour in pre-determined patterns. Head particularly believes that an unbridled use of power is abetted by pernicious propaganda:

> Someone just asserted something and directed it as a victim, regardless of whether it made sense or not: "You are inferior; you are filth (47).

According to Head's reasoning, then, stereotyping and all such pejorative classifications happen just in this haphazard manner, resulting in economic, social and racial stratifications. In her view, unconscionable vituperations beget stereotypes, while docile acceptance of such stereotypical views (on the part of the victims) entrenches them.

As an instance of the obnoxious use of propaganda employed for propagandist purposes, Medusa and Dan batter Elizabeth's mind with the theme of the homosexuality of the "coloureds." In a word, then, the myths of racism, inferiority or superiority are employed to sustain power manipulation. Such myths bloat and magnify the stature and image of one

man or one nation, while contracting, or even effacing, the significance and identify of another man or another nation.

At any rate, the new world envisioned by Sello in *A Question of Power* negates such parochial uses of myth, and all its power codes. Sello's projected new world differs markedly from the old world that was "so narrow, so exclusive, so shut in" (47). The envisioned new world, spawned by Head herself, will usher in a great symphony, a complete statement of the future, about the dignity of man, in which none is high and none is low, but all are equal"(63).

On the contrary, Medusa is bent on subverting this kind of idealistic worldview. In her kind of world, "Satanic powers had been vividly a part of social orders" (99). She prefers to harp on the colour of man's skin, for instance, arousing feelings of ethnic hatred. Alternatively, she would emphasize sexuality as a false virtue, and then berate Elizabeth for lacking sexual virility. What matters to Elizabeth, however, are "long years of imprisonment," "death," "loss," "suffering," and "sacrifice" (66). These are issues and causes canvassed by people with heightened political and moral commitments. Elizabeth's interests lie outside of the confines of racial hate and sexual excesses. What counts to her is a person's ability to make sacrifices for the sake of communal good. As an authentic mythic heroine, Elizabeth must 'stoop' in order to overcome adversarial contentions and then attain illumination, together with possible deification.

To ensure the commencement of the new age of goodness, humility and mutual support, Sello must destroy Medusa, and all that she stands for. Sello burns her to a heap of charcoal dust (93). Here, the element of the mystical, the Gothic, is felt patently, because

even Shorty curiously asks her mother: "What was you burning last night? The floor is full of burnt things" (93). As has been hinted before, any novel cast in the mythical mould normally embodies the interfusion of reality with unreality, as we observe in Shorty's experience above.

This correspondence between internal consciousness and external reality is a prominent feature of Head's fiction, made especially manifest in *A Question of Power*. This fluidity in psychic and corporeal perceptions conforms to what Jean O. Love terms subject-object interfusion in mythopoeic consciousness (47). Apart from the destruction of the figure and phantom of Medusa in the psychic realm, the erstwhile rotten and smelly cesspit is purged of filth and is flooded with an ethereal light. For Elizabeth, he ethereal light cleanses and exposes moral decay for what is, thereby purifying her mind.

Prior to this, however, evil men like Caligula (representing demons and gorgons) are pitched into the pit in order to be destroyed. This is a preliminary step toward the exorcism that Elizabeth's mind must undergo. Medusa's end must be executed by a Perseus figure, in the person of Sello. Christ had to overcome the power of Hades in a similar manner. Writes Head:

> A warrior like Perseus had appeared to cuff the head of the terrible gorgon; there had been so much slaughter to bring destructive power under control (99).

Thus, if the first part of *A Question of Power* ends at the point of Medusa's destruction, the second part (named "Dan") commences with the presentation of the man Dan as an Al Capone figure, kingpin of the underworld community. If Sello's humility and purity of

soul is worthy of emulation, Dan's sexual excesses repulse the reader easily. Apart from his sexual prowess, the regaling of which he uses to torment Elizabeth, he employs his spiritual power toward diabolic ends, to confuse Elizabeth and corrupt her spiritually.

Endued with the gift of oratory, Dan easily influences the heroine to believe his numerous spools of falsehood. One of his strategies is to employ histrionic effects, which enable him to assume many roles. As the obverse side to Campbell's prototype, he could be called "The Villain with a Thousand Faces". Elizabeth herself discovers "that Dan was a great one for the right atmosphere and lightning effects" (103).

The essential difference between Sello and Dan lies in the fact that whereas Sello hopes to achieve the democratization of political power and divinity (to keep them within common reach), Dan wants to mystify and stupefy the mind through a monopoly of political and spiritual powers. He organizes an all-female choir that chants in Elizabeth's hearing, "Glory be to God on high; on earth peace, goodwill towards men" (106). His aim is to make the heroine feel utterly excluded and dejected, incapable of even acknowledging an exogenous use of power.

Dan's reckless and insentient behaviour contrasts with Sello's cautious and considerate disposition towards other people's sensibilities. Indeed, it is typical of Dan to assert proudly, "I don't care what I do." He is at the forefront of Headean characters who conjure up hell in the mind and who actually make life hell for their fellow characters. Moleka, as has been noted earlier on in *Maru*, habitually makes people and animals scamper out of his way. His behaviour smacks of deliberate oppression and intimidation. They are habits that Head detests and criticizes in her writings.

In order to overwhelm Elizabeth completely and psychologically, Dan introduces to her a long line of concubines – seventy-one in all – who wantonly display their peculiar endowments. Each of the women answers a name that matches the degree of her sexual debauchery: Miss Body-Beautiful, the Womb, etc. They all symbolize boogie-figures that Dan injects into Elizabeth's psyche to stupefy her. Often, the illusions cast by such phantoms appear quite credible, through the sheer force of coincidence. For instance, Dan contrives that Elizabeth should visualize Sello as he is about to sexually assault a herd boy. The next day, the news spreads that a boy has been found dead in the bush, ostensibly "raped". The effect of such a correspondence between internal state of mind and outer reality is that the heroine begins to believe her own nightmares (140). Head draws attention to the pernicious influence of Dan on Elizabeth. In this context, Dan serves as the symbolic representation of Mahamaya, a personage that trapped men in their own passions" (98).

Given the above context, therefore, the moral choices for Elizabeth become confusing because "A belief in Sello's evil was to amount to a belief in the evil of a thousand people" (141). Sello remains inscrutable to her because of the contending moral absolutes he seems to embody: "He had introduced absolute perfection and flung muck in her face" (137). However, Sello appears ambivalent to Elizabeth only because he wants to test her power of judgment. Actually, Sello represents the agency of change, the catalyst of new political and moral epochs.

As an anti-hero (the "big-time guy from hell") sent to destroy Sello, Dan's plan is to corrupt the principles for which Sello stands. In fact, Dan is so certain of Sello's spiritual

perfection that he calls him "da Buddha" (126). Buddha, in Oriental myth, was purportedly the epitome of spiritual perfection and spiritual development. Head, therefore, fields him as a mythical archetype of the type of spiritual sensibility she desires to evolve among humankind. The sort of heightened spiritual state that Sello possesses is the political consciousness that preaches fairness and equity – the consciousness that is inclusive, rather than exclusive and discriminating. First, however, the Buddha (Sello) must be tested by Mahamaya to ascertain his suitability for the mythic role he is designed to play.

Aside from his overtly morbid sex shows, Dan uses sloganeering to attempt to bias Elizabeth's mind against Sello. However, Elizabeth believes that slogans of exclusive unity like "Black Power!" could easily instill racial hatred and cause the kind of holocaust associated with Hitler's Nazism. On this issue, Elizabeth appears to be the author's mouthpiece when she tells Tom, "I don't like exclusive brotherhoods for black people only" (132). Her concern is with humanity in general. As far as Head is concerned, black people should be regarded as part of the general stratum of humankind. In her view, "Any heaven, like a Black Power heaven, that existed for a few individuals alone was pointless and useless. It was an urge to throttle everyone else" (133).

What seems to confirm Elizabeth's conviction regarding the obnoxiousness of exclusive groupings is the spiritual insight she gains in the Sello-Dan duel. She witnesses the destruction occasioned by Dan's deleterious quest for power –power that is rooted in sectionalism, partisanship and political oppression. Acquisition of this type of power has earned Dan Directorship of the universe since 1916. "Directorship" here becomes a

metaphor for expressing unlimited lust and greed, impulses that feed on selfish considerations.

For Elizabeth, however, the guiding principles of life are those emblazoned in the teachings of the great teachers and the great philosophers through all the ages (Christ, Buddha, Mohammed, etc) who said: "Never think along lines of I and mine. It is death" (134). The harsh conditions under which black people have lived have made them appreciate the negative effects of greed and egoistic values. Head believes that evil stems from "the arrogance of the soul, its wild flaming power, its overwhelming lust for dominance and prestige" (135). Lust for power and the drive for dominance constitute, symbolically, the spring, the river, and then the ocean of evil, in that ascending order. In Head's opinion, the rightness – that is, the moral soundness – of the soul is the only constituent, and the ultimate description, of power. This sort of power that is exercised equitably is accessible to all, as she sees it.

As is evident in *A Question of Power*, the positive aspect of power relationships is at odds with the notion of excessive sexual behaviour that Europeans normally associate with Africans. Equally, Europeans, and other racially biased people of Caucasian origin, assume that Africans have a predilection for witchcraft and sorcery. An excessive display of sexuality, according to Head, represents obsessive power; similarly, witchcraft constitutes a means of systemizing mental torture and other manipulative practices. Significantly, Dan displays a superb mastery of the two vices: "To sex he added homosexuality and perversions of all kinds. To witchcraft terror he added the super staying power of his elemental soul" (137).

Instead of such mean preoccupations as promiscuity and witchcraft, Head wants people to practise cooperative communalism. The character, Eugene, is reminiscent of Gilbert and Makhaya in *When Rain Clouds Gather*. He is a sort of "God", a prime mover. He initiates and inspires the local industries and the farm projects, ventures through which Elizabeth achieves personal salvation and by which she channels her desire to serve humanity. Head believes that people should adapt themselves to new social environments by pursuing purposeful work. Adaptation entails, as Kolawole Ogungbesan has noted, a movement from alienation to commitment. Such potential for acclimatization is conspicuously symbolized by the Cape Gooseberry: "A complete stranger like the Cape Gooseberry settled down and became a part of the village life of Motabeng" (153).

Similarly, immigrants like Elizabeth, Tom, Eugene and Turner (people who continuously explore new boundaries of experience, as chapter two has shown) show a commitment to the interests the Botswana people. These expatriates are heroic figures for whom work in the local industries and on the farms is an opportunity for making a positive contribution to human civilization. Such characters illustrate Head's belief that God is not an abstract construct: "There is only one God and his name is man. And Elizabeth is his prophet" (206). That Elizabeth is able to stake this claim is proof of her ultimate enlightenment and of her victory over Dan's diabolic machinations.

In short, going by Head's avowed ideology, anybody could be a hero by crossing the frontiers to adventure. The implicit objective of, and the qualification for, this crossing of spatial and psychic frontiers is the improvement of the human condition. In any case, this improvement in social terms can only be achieved when the forces of darkness are defeated thoroughly.

It is noteworthy that, at the end of Elizabeth's tortuous experiences after (her mythic return from the nirvana), she is seen reading "a literature of magic, of ghosts, of the adventures of high-born heroes and heroines." She now knows what it takes to be a true heroine. Apparently, the vision she has gained in her mythic quest into the unconscious state (the vision of an epoch of equality and democratized godhead) has predictive validity. In her thinking, everybody else could access this vision, as well as the ability to become a god. Humility of spirit, the daring to step over the threshold to adventure, the willingness to serve: those are qualities needed if a person were to acquire the spark of divinity.

As a novel, however, *A Question of Power* poses two problems for the literary student. First, Elizabeth, the heroine, acknowledges, the dilemma faced by a female mythic persona like her, encumbered by the obligation of keeping a home with a child and tottering on the verge of dementia. She wonders if such an afflicted persona could have the training and the capacity to unveil the kinds of profound truths that *A Question of Power* contains (50). The problem is how to reconcile dementia (even a faint show of it), quotidian existence and mystical revelation. Perhaps this apparent illogicality of mental and material states is what lends complexity to Head's literary work.

The second problem, which the reader might grapple with in contemplating Head's *A Question of Power*, is the plausibility of recreating the world through spiritual regeneration and through the introduction of mythic personas that embody social change. In view of the proneness of man to corruption and evil, any attempt to project and predict

an ideal future in which all human imperfections will be eliminated might be construed as quixotic.

However, the above two puzzles are resolvable in the overall artistic schema of Head's writing. However, as has been demonstrated in the course of our textual analysis in this thesis, Head has employed myth as a mural for depicting a new way of envisioning change in the conduct of human affairs.

A Question of Power, undoubtedly, teases one with its technical virtuosity, its religious and mythical resonance, and the political message that it transmits, just the same way as other prose writings by the author grips the literary imagination. *A Question of Power*, therefore, is a novel that presents humanity in the process of apprehending its identity and its destiny. In *A Question of Power*, then, Head employs myth as a vehicle for social reengineering.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION:

This thesis has shown that Head's fiction makes valid and telling statements of political significance. Essentially, Head uses characters whose careers evoke the careers of mythic heroes and heroines in extant mythologies. These characters created by Head subvert, rather than sustain, existing social and political systems that marginalize segments of people. This thesis has demonstrated clearly how Malinowski's theory of pragmatic function of myth enables one to understand the eclectic and development-oriented nature of the Head's art. In other words, Head's writings anticipate, and indeed, argue for, social change. This advocacy for systemic change, spiked with political consciousness, has been robustly articulated in all of Head's writings, using the vehicle of myth. Indeed, Head is an author whose works merit deep and sustained consideration, because of the hope for a better future that they consistently convey.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

In line with the outlined Research Objectives in Chapter 1 and based on the theoretical approach and the methodology adopted in this research inquiry, the following findings regarding Head's fictional writings have been made.

Firstly, salient aspects of Head's mythic vision are embedded in *The Collector of Treasures* and *A Bewitched Crossroad*. The two books paint scenarios of social and political transformation through a process of myth making. The myths of ritual sacrifice, female subjugation and racial segregation are exposed as being unsupportive of healthy

living. In *A Bewitched Crossroad*, the author paints a picture of a past in which both the whites and the Africans perpetrated evil practices. Using the character of Sebina (Motshipeng), however, she shows how good leadership could transform a very bad situation. Sebina, as a mythic hero, takes the practical decision to ally with Khama the Great and other powerful rulers, in order to protect his people from predatory attacks.

The Matebele, Sebina's most potent foes, represent archetypal evil. Their repressive rule supports Head's belief that wickedness is not the sole preserve of the whites. Black people equally commit vicious acts against their fellows. Sebina prefigures the pacifist Maru in the eponymous novel, *Maru*. He represents the good shepherd, the embodiment of the true African essence of humaneness and fairness.

In *The Collector of Treasures*, "Jacob: The Story of a Faith Healing Priest" reveals a character who also lives a life of sacrifice and devotion to principles. His ministry brings about improvement in the material condition of his people. In her writings, Head visualizes not just a utopian hereafter, but also a future in which African grandeur is not undercut by bloodletting, cruelty and exploitation. The above agrees with both items (a) and (b) of the Objectives of Study. Head's characters seek for social change; and, through them, she is able to make political statements, using mythic archetypes and paradigms.

As it happens, Head's characters chiefly appear grand, noble, timeless and, at times, larger-than-life, in keeping with their roles as agents of change. Characterization in her writing is taut and sparse because she wishes to highlight only the qualities that enable her personas to fulfill their mythic destinies. Her protagonists usually follow "inner perceptions", *Maru* (22), independent of the praise or censure of man. Eugene in *A*

Question of Power represents the historical figure of Patrick Van Rengburg, who played a major role in the social and economic advancement of the people of Serowe. Head's characters usually abdicate political positions as they make the kinds of choices that deny them temporary praise and 'tinsel glamour.' When they forego their political privileges, however, they gain eternal glory. This finding tallies with item (d) of the set Objectivés of Study.

Additionally, Head's characters usually demonstrate that protest against politically unjust systems does not have to be violent before it can be validated. Khama the great is described as "a gift of God to the People" because he taught them to use self-help projects as a means of political and economic advantage (*Serowe* 9).

Related to the above modes of characterization in Head's fiction is her presentation of her personas as either round or flat, depending on the role she has envisioned for them. The round characters like Maru and Moleka (*Maru*); Elizabeth (*A Question of Power*) and Makhaya (*When Rain Clouds Gather*) are capable of deep, emotional experience. Such complex emotional experience helps them to achieve moral growth. They discover, in the process, higher values in life and they then realize their callings as agents of political and social transformation. This conforms to the career that mythic heroes or heroines must pursue.

On the contrary, the flat characters (like Seth, Morafi and Pete- *Maru*; or Sello-in-brown-suit and Medusa- *A Question of Power*) largely embody the Dickensian streaks of caricature, pathos and bathos in their stock display of evil, greed and depravity. They are

incapable of moral change and they stand for those values that the author deprecates in all her writings. This finding is in consonance with item (a) in the Study Objectives.

Consequently, a majority of Head's characters lack second (family) names because they are presented as mythic types. Character delineation in Head is therefore fuzzy-not the typically realistic etchings in some fictional works by other authors. This fuzziness allows for possible shifting of roles and states of existence. The following levels of characterization may be discerned in Head's writings:

(a)   The established (ruling) class: Matenge, Bekoto, Morafi, the Motabeng government, Joas Tsepe, Pet, Seth, and Camilla.

(b)   Men and women with vision for a better or more equitable future: Maru, Eugene, Gilbert, Elizabeth, Makhaya.

(c)   There is then the group of people sustained by the political idealism expressed and exemplified by those characters in Category B.

The characters in Categories B and C represent those that believe in fellowship of man.

Contrary to popular opinion, feminist issues are inscribed in Head's writings as a way of exposing the inequities and the political imbalances in society. This contemplation of feminism is possible because the mythic prism through which it is executed is capable of presenting a panoramic view. This view captures the spliced issues of race, class, gender and ethnicity and it then shows them to be exclusivist categories. Head berates such myths as oversexed feminism, femme fatales and myths about religiously ordained roles for women. She believes that such thinking is used to discriminate and oppress women.

Head also rejects the idea of "the female sublime", a monolithic construction that tends to expend the male essence, as much as it attempts to subsume all the differentiated female categories into one rubric. In her view, the differences of social status, class, race and affectional issues should be examined and understood individually. Using the vehicle of myth, she is able to bring these disparate (and yet interwoven) modes of experience into purview, with a view to artistically resolving their different pulls. Head advocates an androgynous relationship between the males and the females, with both sexes existing in a reciprocal embrace. She is of the view that political power- indeed any sort of power – should be wielded delicately so as not to hurt, oppress or undermine the weaker elements of society. Head encourages women to rise above their limitations and embark on self-help labour (*When Rain Clouds Gather* 104-5). Both items (a) and (b) of the Study Objectives have been well addressed here.

Moreover, Head employs African, Egyptian and Judae-Christian myths in her writings to show the pathway that the mythic hero or heroine must follow if they would fulfill their destinies. These mythic pathways for Head's protagonists tally with Joseph Campbell's formulation of the plot of the "Monomyth": "a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return" (10, 35). In the above - mentioned myths, the personas would usually renounce the *I* in them before they will become aware of their mythical destinies before they will accomplish their mythic missions. Christ and Buddha are seen to make such a sacrifice. This sort of personal sacrifice is done with the intention of fostering the common weal. Its incorporation by Head as an artistic plinth helps to add depth, artistic richness and complexity to her writings. This fulfils the expectation set forth in item (C) of the Objectives of Study.

The Hindi myths in Head's novels (especially *A Question of Power*) are employed to, among other things, show the injustice of the rigid and artificial social structures of class and caste that underpin Hindi cosmology and all other myths patterned after the Hindi myth. In "Notes from a quiet backwater II", Head says:

> The canvas on which I have worked was influenced by a belief in the Hindu view of rebirth and reincarnation. Such a belief influences one to think that each individual, no matter what their present origin or background may be, is really the total embodiment of human history, with a vast accumulation of knowledge and experience stored in the subconscious mind (77).

Head's protagonists usually identity with common humanity and they champion the cause of the downtrodden. Maru, in *Maru*, typifies this welfarist orientation. The myth of the Sudras (of Indian origin) is used to characterize the oppressed and the socially and politically disadvantaged. Head predicts that, sooner than later, the Sudras and their ilk will be free of their oppressors (*A Woman Alone*: 58). This fortuitous prediction authenticates Malinowki's notion of the pragmatic relevance of myth, as a tool of social reengineering, as indexed in item (d) of the Study Objectives.

As a corollary, Head demystifies certain obnoxious myths in order to point the way to better modes of human conduct. In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, we have a nuisance factor in the person of Chief Matenge, who is encouraged in his evil deeds by his minion, Joas Tsepe. Matenge relies on the reactionary aspects of the Tswana tradition to sustain his emasculating hold on the people of Golema-Mmidi. He and his unscrupulous aids are unpopular among the people because of "an overwhelming avariciousness and unpleasant

personality" (23). Matenge is an archetypical adversary, opposed dialectically to the progressive forces represented by Gilbert and Makhaya. He employs sorcery and witchcraft to deceive and exploit the natives, brandishing his doctrine of African socialism, which is a 'bogey' concept that is anti-life and repressive. Matenge and his ilk are discredited subsequently when the people of Golema-Mmidi discover that they are selfish and demonic and that their brand of nationalism is only a cover for wickedness. Challenged by the ordinary people of the town, Matenge confesses his evil deeds and thereafter hangs himself. His necromantic acts lead to the death of Isaac, whose ashes and bundle of carvings galvanize the people of Golema-Mandi to revolt against the prevailing political and religious order. Item (b) of the Objectives of Study is hereby vindicated.

Incidentally, human kindness and acts of tenderness are to Head the real "gems" of life. Her protagonists are usually possessed of, and are motivated by, the impelling urge to show acts of love and fellow feeling. The solution she proffers to problems of political subjugation, exclusion and deprivation is collective, agrarian work, done in a selfless manner. In the case of Elizabeth in *A Question of Power*, such work is ennobling and demonstrates love for other people. In Head's words, love is nothing but "two people mutually feeding each other (13). Acts of human kindness would also mean for Head sensitivity to the material and emotional needs of other people. This humane mode of positive interaction will lead to social and political transformation, Head insists. This political dream tallies with item (d) of the given Objectives of Study.

In addition to such thematic pursuits as were set forth above, setting in Head's writing is presented scantily, yet characters like Maru and Elizabeth possess some engaging personalities that belie the unsophisticated externalities of their material existence.

Though we might occasionally catch the acrid whiff of burning flesh (in *A Question of Power*, for instance) and though we might glean some aspects of rusticity in Tswana landscapes, we are not granted the sensual delectation of scenery, cultural colouration and physical sites. Head uses the glissading technique in her presentation of setting. This helps to universalize the mythic background to her stories, thus forming an archetypal template that helps to synthesize experience and then diffuse its essence, ensuring orientation, perpetuity and a continuous modification of shared precepts. The stories being narrated could flit through time in fluid, sometimes achronlogical, sequences. We see this well illustrated in *A Question of Power* and *Maru* This adroit use of the novelistic element of setting, and the incorporation of other ancillary stylistic elements, ensures the enrichment and intensification of the author's art. It is in agreement with the index envisaged in item (d) of the Objectives of Study.

In terms of narrative techniques, Head employs "prose panels," "parallel illumination" (telepathic linkages), stream of consciousness, introspection and the god-like stance of the third-person omniscient narrator, to show the mental and psychic states of the characters as they discover, assume or perceive their mythic roles. Head employs the objective (rather than subjective) point of view in *A Question of Power*, for example, to establish emotional distancing. A subjective point of view would hugely curtail and undermine the expansive perspective that the author projects through myth. A limited point of view (first-person) would tend to elide the varied and complex aspects of experience that Head has encapsulated and encompassed in her writings. Myth enables the writer, therefore, to reflect the manifold and shifting nature of human experience, which could be intense and which could embody dialectical strands. This intense and dialectal strain (within the purview of the dislocating nature of present-day social,

economic and political realities) tends to propose a pathway to a future that is more equitably disposed, conforming roundly with items (a) and (b) of the Study Objectives.

Finally, language in Head's fiction is symbolic. Words acquire resonance beyond their natural hues and assume global dimensions. The author wishes to convey values and messages that are universal, relevant, contemporary, pragmatic and immemorial. Words, therefore, become potent tools for passing across political ideals and projections for social transformation. Such projections and ideals are expressed through mythic modules. Characters (especially the main ones) also play symbolic roles because they tend to speak for the author and for humankind in general. The symbolic roles played by these mythic figures in Head's fiction have significance of universal import. They, in effect, constitute the paradigm for conveying revolutionary ideologies that retain contemporary relevance, thus underscoring the claims of item (d) of the Study Objectives.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

In view of the far-reaching and novel findings made in the course of studying Head's fictional, historical and autobiographical writings, such research findings, as have been stated above, constitute the Contribution to Knowledge made by this PhD research. The contribution resides in the idea that this thesis has shown that Head uses myth, and mythic personas, as a way of advocating social and political changes in human society.

THE RELEVANCE OF MYTH IN MODERN SOCIETY

Every author initiates in narratives a linear or cyclical movement whose meanings are circumscribed by the express or implicit message and integrity of the completed forms. The narratives could be laden with temporal rhythms or with spectral realities. Myth is the central moulding power that confers social relevance and some spiritual resonance to ritualistic and archetypal patterns that replicate such cyclical or spatial dimensions of human experience. As such, myth is an immemorial feature of human consciousness, as Northrop Frye observes in Vickery (76).

The mythic phases of dawn (spring), triumph (apotheosis) or paradisiacal consummation (autumn or death phase) will always revolve and recur in human nature. Nevertheless, the quest in myth apparently holds the key to moral, ethical and political renaissance. The questing dynamic is primed to break boundaries and conventions, for inherent in the mythic quest is the desire to break the mould in order to free the aching human spirit. In effect, and as Head's writings have shown, humanity perpetually yearns for freedom, both physical and psychic. This yearning is doubly underscored in situations where there

is a deliberate attempt to denigrate, exclude, oppress, or else, decimate other people who are perceived to be politically weaker, racially inferior or spiritually debased.

Sensitive and censorious writers, such as Head, are always critical of social and political structures that tend to put down segments of people, while privileging others in choice positions. Consequently, the social strictures and the imbalances inherent in society form the social and cultural dynamics that feed the production of iconoclastic works of art, no matter what the exponents of New Criticism might say. There will be always writers like Head who will choose to examine consciously and critically the antithesis of existence, with a view to finding its resolution dialectically by reconciling the opposing sides of human nature and projecting more humane and more equitable orders of existence. Through the efforts of such perspicacious writers as Head, the dark, terrific night will, ultimately, yield to the currents of light and piety, offering a putative window of reconciliation.

Behind the motivation for symbolic action by mythic figures is the necessity for making tough moral and ethical choices in life itself, choices that are sometimes dramatically opposed in relation to spiritual values. Within this complex conception of life, the future projection of ideals eclipses a certain painting of the sordid past, or even a grim depiction of the inchoate present. In all cases, the anticipated future is grander usually than the dreaded present and the monstrous past. Mythic heroes and heroines, therefore, dream of a better world, disregarding the pangs of the moment or the angst of the past. Thus, myth offers man psychological reprieve, a sort of spiritual re-validation. Something about the soul of man is expurgated in the process, making way for something new, tender and

fond. Myth, then, presents human existence as a collectively perceived reality, and not some phenomenon that is individually experienced.

Therefore, myths, as essential strands of human experience, enable humans to exert control over external and internal forces that tend to threaten their very existence. Humans, by their very nature, strive to gain competent control over most of the hostile forces they encounter psychically or through physical contact. In the words of Watt, myth offers man cyclic or recurrent salvation (Vickery 79). Richard Chase has called myth "a sort a leaven" that heals or makes tolerable the disturbances occasioned by clashing values and torpid cultural norms. In light of the foregoing, therefore, Head, in the entire spectrum of her writings, has created a wand by which humans may intuit, and then practicalize, possibility of reliving the lives of heroic archetypes. This mode of intuitive participation in richness of mythic experience leads to political, social, economic, and spatial change. As this study has shown, myth has served Head as a philosophical and thematic resource, and as an aesthetic component that enables her to order her soteriological vision. Myth has equally helped Head to define her narrative structures and determine the pivots to her fiction, in terms of the conflict of good with evil. Thus, Head has ensured that, in all cases, good triumphs over evil, and light supersedes the darkness of human nature. In other words, the aesthetics of myths enable both Head and her mythic personas to plumb, and the more exhaustively comprehend their political temper, traceable in their mythic destines.

In conclusion, going by the studies carried out in this research, myth will, evidently, continue to grip the artistic imagination of present and future writers because it contains not only the template for aesthetic development, it also bears the seed of social

regeneration. In spite of the progressive de-socialization of modern humans (owing to new, and ever-evolving, scientific discoveries and achievements), the soul of humanity would always yearn for, and respond to, the chords of mythic consciousness. Though memory, habits, manners and mores are slow to die, in the words of Andrew Little (57), Head has copiously shown in her writings that the vehicle of myth will always constitute the driving force for a mediated future that reflects more humanistic and egalitarian values. Writers might express dreams in their work, but dreams are evanescent. Vision alone remains an eternal verity, and literary works that embody vision will always outlive the protean generation to spawn votives and ideological adherents that will not only sustain the vision but will also attempt to actualize vision in humanistic terms. Assuredly, that has been the fate of the political vision embodied in Head's fiction. Her political and artistic visions , as expressed in her writings, have borne practical fruit by way of political and economic transformations that have taken place in the Southern part of Africa, where Head 'strutted her stuff' as a writer and thinker,

For Head, then, myth is readily serviceable to the evolution, as well as devolution, of a re-humanizing epistemology, such as fiction is capable of evincing. In a nutshell, the political messages in Head's writings appear to be the advocacy of positive empowerment and the unfettered articulation of personal choices and proclivities.

SUGGESTED AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Most probably, Head's fictional, epistemological, and historical writings could be approached from a socialist/Marxist perspective, even though her works in themselves do not propose to undertake a seismic overthrow of extant political structures. Arguably, socialist/Marxist ideologies have been discredited in the present dispensation, and are now placed under the narrow rubric of capitalism. Market forces presently hold sway, with the values of the West triumphing in almost every patch of the globe.

Nonetheless, a closer look at Head's literary works certainly reveals that the author has consistently advocated systemic change, realizing that the political, cultural and economic structures during her time of writing were hugely imperfect, exclusive, unjust and oppressive. Pursuing a socialist/Marxist examination of Head's writings would be, therefore, quite appropriate and will offer the audacity of hope for expressing truths that years of capitalist and political exploitation have suppressed. .

Equally, Head's fiction may be studied plausibly from a Symbolist perspective, for she could speak of her characters authorially through the medium of symbols. Similarly, her characters could express themselves in symbolic modes that have remarkable and unyielding resonance, as well as universal application.

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