

**CHARACTER AND IDENTITY IN
SELECTED WORKS BY BESSIE HEAD**

BY

NOKUTHULA MONICA THUSI

Submitted to the Faculty of Arts in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of English at the
University of Zululand

**KWA-DLANGEZWA
1998**

Abstract

A central concern in the works of Bessie Head has been the relations between writer and character. One of her novels has indeed been described as an 'autobiography' rather than a novel. Although theoretical interest in the subject of character has 'old fashioned' overtones the existence of character is a textual fact which depends on the constructive role of writers and readers. The connections between Head's characters and aspects of her own biography are obvious. Recurrent themes and situations in her fiction and her other writings can be read as narrative explorations of the nature of the self. It is in the process of discovering the self and carving out an identity that Head creates characters as a means of exploring her own nature and potential. My study focuses on identifying and acknowledging her perceptions on ideal identity and attempts to demonstrate the need for readers of her work to recognise the complementarity of social and subjective existence; to relate Head's subjective trauma to the external reality in which she was located. Head's characters are frequently shown working out ways of setting up balanced human relationships which are characterised by equality, power-sharing, mutual support and human respect. A definite link exists between the inner and outer domains, and so the state of wholeness or completeness is also recognised and monitored in my analysis of character relationships. The interrelatedness of the private and public marks the route her textual quest takes. The implications of complementarity can be measured in the successes and failures of relationships which are examined in my case studies. The novels *When Rain Clouds Gather*, *Maru* and *A Question of Power* reveal the writer's self-examination of an inner world troubled by alienation and mental disturbances. Gradually, though, she comes to terms with these problems and becomes more socially conscious and integrated. Thus social interest characterises her later work: *The Collector of Treasures* and *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*. The journey of self-

discovery reaches its fulfilment in the historical saga *A Bewitched Crossroad*, which serves to acknowledge Head's official settlement in Botswana, and her concomitant commitment to historical and cultural preservation. Emerging from her explorations of character is the fact that though the writer is responsible for the existence of characters, she cannot manipulate them all the time but frequently allows them sufficient detachment to decide their own fates. Thus she is able to both project her aspirations and to find solutions to her own problems through her characters' development. Such a relationship between writer and character exemplifies the notion of complementarity by which, in Head's notion of things, an ideal society must exist. ✓✓

Table of Contents

Preface	i
Primary Texts	ii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: <i>Relations between Writer and Character: When Rain Clouds Gather, Maru, A Question of Power.</i>	30
Chapter 3: <i>Complementarity in the World of Ordinary People: The Collector of Treasures and Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind.</i>	70
Chapter 4: <i>Character and Identity in Historical Perspective: A Bewitched Crossroad.</i>	107
Chapter 5: Conclusion	138
Bibliography	148

Preface

This dissertation, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my original work.

The reference system I have used is a modified version of the Harvard system. A comprehensive list of references is found at the end of this dissertation and includes both works cited and those that represent extended reading undertaken for this study.

I would sincerely like to express appreciation and gratitude to my supervisor Professor M.J. Hooper for immeasurable persistence, limitless patience and expert guidance through a period of intense pressure; to Dr. Catherine Addison whose expertise in grammar, warm guidance and subtle sense of humour sustained me during Professor Hooper's six months' leave in Oxford; to the University of Natal for allowing me access to their resource centre; to the University of Zululand library staff for prompt provision of available research material; to my "little" sister Ntokozo, for encouragement; to my colleagues at Escoled for support; to Jill my computer consultant; to my beloved girls, Siwelile and Nokubonga whose incredible insight into my situation went far beyond their tender years - thanks for the "ever-flowing tea" girls - and lastly but never least, to my steadfastly supportive husband, Welela, whose amazing belief in me made this work a reality.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation and the amount of effort that went into it, to my beloved family who suffered with me for its existence.

TEXTS: Bessie Head

The following editions of primary texts have been used as reference in this dissertation:

- 1968. *When Rain Clouds Gather*. London: Heinemann.
- 1971 *Maru*. London: Gollancz.
- 1974 *A Question of Power*. London: Heinemann.
- 1977 *The Collector of Treasures and Other Botswana Village Tales*.
London: Heinemann.
- 1981 *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*. London: Heinemann.
- 1984 *A Bewitched Crossroad*. An African Saga. Johannesburg: Donker
- 1989 *Tales of Tenderness and Power*. Eilersen, G.(ed). Johannesburg:
Donker.
- 1990 *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings*.
MacKenzie, C. (ed) Oxford: Heinemann.
- 1991 *A Gesture of Belonging: Letters from Bessie Head (1965-79)*
Vigne, R. (ed). Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- 1993 *The Cardinals: With Meditations and Short Stories*.
Daymond, M.J. (ed). Cape Town: David Phillip.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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

The essence of Bessie Head's writing is the unraveling of her sad life story and her expression of a need to belong in an environment of peace and mutual understanding. Her fashioning of an ideal identity for herself has encouraged me to re-examine the interplay of character and identity in her work. The strong affinity that she has with the characters she creates emerges in her efforts to depict an ideal world of existence, a 'universe seen through the eyes of small, individual life dramas'. Though the interest in character has a rather old-fashioned ring, her fiction presents characters who reflect her own 'life dramas'. The existence and relevance of character, therefore, is sought from the texts, in the interaction between writer and reader in their construction of identity.

My point of entry into this dissertation is thus an investigation of the relations between writer and character which recognises the question of identity as crucial to Head's writing. Aspects of her biography are reflected in her characterisation and at least one of her novels has been described as an autobiography. Her urge towards self-discovery is expressed in recurrent themes in her writing which explore the nature of the 'self'.

The 'self' is briefly discussed here in order to establish the difference between Bessie Head's need to overcome the alienation of South African life and the current focus on the decentred 'self' in postmodern writing. In a modern world characterised by fragmentation, the 'self' seeks to make meaning out of the confusion around it. This situation has seen a number of writers concentrating on explorations of the nature of the 'self'. In doing so, South African writers often relate personal experiences of dehumanisation which have eroded the self-image. Such 'fragmented reality' is evident in Head's South African experience of alienation and dehumanisation which was amongst the worst:

As a South African-born 'Coloured', Bessie Head was subjected to all the brutalities meted out to those citizens not born white, and she, as a 'first generation' child of bi-racial origin, bore the full brunt of South Africa's discriminatory legislation. Her place of birth, foster childhood, adolescence as an orphan, her failed marriage and experiences as a 'non-white' in the various ghettos around the cities of South Africa form [her] background (MacKenzie 1990:x).

To restore one's sense of self, therefore, entails the construction of an identity not only for oneself but for countless others. Head's self-discovery then lies in her confrontation with this brutalising past, and it becomes imperative for her to relate her subjective pain to her social reality.

Robert Elliott in *The Literary Persona* recognises the importance of both social and individual aspects of human existence in shaping the identity of the 'self':

Human beings exist as social as well as subjective persons; their wholeness can be expressed only through a complementary mode of description (1982 : 103).

Elliott's formulation seems to me to offer a particularly valid way of approaching Head's work. Aspects such as complementarity are strikingly evident in Head's writing. My thesis has evolved around this notion and explores how and why she attempts to forge an identity which is characterised by complementarity. Key concepts which inform the subject of character and identity will be briefly defined in this introductory chapter. Aspects of Head's life provide the chief source of her writing material and it seems worthwhile to begin here with the distinctions between the concepts of biography and autobiography then move to character and characterisation as they will be used in regard to a selection of her writing.

In simple terms, biography refers to the writing of someone's life history, while autobiography is a self-portrait of a person written by the person herself. In a more elaborate explanation of biography, George Gusdorf insists that:

Biography provides only an exterior presentation of the great persons reviewed and corrected by the demands of propaganda and by the general sense of the age (1980:31).

What Gusdorf claims is that biography cannot break into the centre of the self. In other words, a biographer can only have access to the exterior and second-hand information he or she can lay hands on to tell or write about someone else's life. But the autobiographer goes further and deeper into her inner life which is known only to herself. Of the three main biographers of Head, I have chosen Gillian Stead Eilersen and Craig MacKenzie in order to examine the boundaries of biography. The third,

Susan Gardner, will be referred to in testing the limits that should govern biographic privilege.

In *Thunder Behind her Ears* Eilersen admits that what she has written about Head is based

mainly [on] a well-organised and extremely extensive correspondence, which ... determined the genre of the present work. Bessie Head's lively detailed letters to publishers, agents, critics and other literary friends often provide such penetrating comment on her published writing as well as giving rich insight into her ideas and mental speculation that they afford an obvious basis for an introductory study of this important writer ... (1995:Acknowledgement).

MacKenzie also makes the following qualification in his NELM *Introduction*:

It is not the task of this introductory booklet to offer the reader a definitive version of Bessie Head's origins, or to vouch for the absolute veracity of the version that she herself offers. In the absence of hard documentary evidence, the most that the present work can offer is an outline of her life as she presented it, strengthened and corroborated by generally accepted facts about her life (1989:4).

Both biographers seem to agree with Gusdorf's claim when they use terms like 'outline' or 'introductory study'. No biographer can 'vouch for the veracity' of the story any more than can the subject herself. Even detailed material like letters cannot provide incontrovertible information for a biography. Hawthorn's comment in *Studying the Novel - An Introduction* seems to me to apply equally to biography:

the secrets of the created work may not be accessible to the rational, inquiring mind in the same way that details, other actions and utterances are ... the author wants to conceal something: a real-life model, confessional element in the work, or whatever...How do we know which experiences in a writer's life were reflected (or transformed) in his or her work? Experiences which seem minor to us may have been crucial to the person

who had them - but even so, they may not have the writing of a given work (1992:134).

Teresa Dovey's article 'A Question of Power : Susan Gardner's Biography versus Bessie Head's Autobiography' (1989), serves to highlight this issue. Dovey's argument is centered around the question: To what extent is a biographer privileged to tell somebody's life story? If with Hawthorne we recognise the 'inaccessibility' of certain 'secrets' that may have been deliberately 'concealed' by the writer whose life is under study or being researched, then Dovey's objection to Gardner's presentation of Head in "Don't Ask for the True Story" (1986) is justified. Dovey asserts that Gardner does not have the right to refute Head's autobiographical details or the privilege to claim possession of some secret about Head, because whatever information she has was obtained through the same procedures as other biographers. Like Eilersen and MacKenzie she must have read Head's writing, interviewed her friends, studied her letters and her interviews. But unlike them, she claims to have the "true story". Eilersen suggests, though, that "the true story" must be the one told by the 'self'. It must be found in an autobiography. She concludes her story of Head's life as follows:

The quality of what she would call her soul-power was not to be defined. No more, at least, than she herself could do so in her greatest novel, *A Question of Power*. "It was linked in some way to the creative function, the dreamer of new dreams; and the essential ingredient in creativity is to create and let the dream fly away with a soft hand and heart" (1995:294).

Eilersen's conclusion implies that only Head can define an identity for herself: Dovey too feels that it would be improper to 'violate the writer's desire to be identical to herself'. Head says: 'I have always just been me, with no frame of reference to anything beyond myself' (Dovey 1989:34). Gardner contends that Head has an inescapable 'frame of reference

beyond herself': she has origins and a family name. Dovey reads this as an enforcement of an identity upon Head which violates her desires. If Gardner had been a sensitive reader of Head's writing, she might have recognised Head's wish to be 'unnamable': to be 'not white, not black, not revolutionary not feminist...and like her mother unknown and unpredictable' (1989:35-36). Readers of Head must recognise that what 'seems minor to us may have been crucial to the person who had [the experience]' (Hawthorn 1992:134). If it is important to Head to be described by what she is not, then that must be respected in her biography, for to her this is non-confinement, it is freedom. Dovey's critique of Gardner is thus an insistence on respect and an appeal to the rest of us to be aware of the conditions and limitations of biography.

Gusdorf offers an interesting perspective on what autobiography is and how it limits others' freedom to explore and write about 'another'. He gives the following definition:

[No] one can know better than I what I have thought, what I have wished; I alone have the privilege of discovering myself from the other side of the mirror...nor can I be cut off from the wall of privacy...Others are forever going wrong, they describe the external figure, the appearance they see and not the true person. No one can better do justice to himself than the interested party and it is precisely in order to do away with misunderstanding, to restore an incomplete or deformed truth, that the autobiographer himself takes up the telling of his story (1980:35-36).

The essence of Gusdorf's insight is that the 'I' who tells the story answers a personal question: 'Who am I?' How far and in what sense is the writer's true self implicated in the 'I' of her story? This question can be approached from the point of view of structural theorists like Levi-Strauss, Derrida, Foucault and Lacan who argue that the 'I' is nothing but 'the person who utters the present instance of discourse' (Elliott

1982:33). This seems a warning that selfhood is not an autonomous creation or entity. In these terms the 'I' is an illusion for the self is defined by social roles. The theoretical linguist, Lyons, qualifies this view, claiming in *Language, Meaning and Context*, that the 'self' is 'the product of the social and interpersonal roles that one has played in the past' (1981:241).

If we go back to William James quoted in Elliott we will find another argument against the view that the 'self' is 'an illusion'. He claims that a

certain portion of the stream of consciousness [which] is felt to be an "innermost centre," a "sanctuary within the citadel" [is] constituted by the circle of subjective life as a whole. It is something with which we ... have direct sensible acquaintance and which is as fully present at any moment of consciousness in which it is present as in a whole lifetime of such moments (1982:96).

James's 'innermost centre' is what Gusdorf's autobiographer describes as 'the true person'; the only one privileged to 'discover herself from the other side of the mirror' (1980:32). On the other hand, we cannot entirely discard the structuralists' definition of the 'self' because the social aspect is fundamental to human wholeness.

In creating an ideal world of complementary existence Head can recreate and rediscover herself. In 'The Style of Autobiography' Jean Starobinski suggests that this is

because the past I is different from the present I... the latter may really be confirmed in all his prerogatives. The [writer] describes not only what happened to him at a different time in his life but above all, how he became - out of what he was what he presently is (1980:78).

The view expressed by Starobinski seems to imply that an autobiographer who has taken the trouble to tell her story understands that her past self is different from her present and realises that what has occurred in the past cannot be repeated. Because of uncertainty about people and about things she deems it valuable to fix her identity lest it disappear and become forgotten in time. For Head in particular, the process of self-discovery, or of fixing an identity, requires that autobiographical elements in her writing be understood as narrative explorations of the self - explorations which demonstrate complementarity at work.

Foremost in our understanding of this exploration must be the importance of character as a strategy of reflecting Head's experiences in her writing. In the examination of relations between character and writer which follows, the writer will be seen to present her fictional characters as regaining their sense of humanity. In considering character, various factors will be taken into account, such as the character's sense of individuality or of self; the sense of belonging or of place; the sense of cultural identity or of history, and the sense of motivation.

In *Aspects of the Novel* Forster describes characters as 'word masses which [the novelist] gives names and sex, assigns...plausible gestures and causes...to speak...and perhaps to behave consistently. Their nature is conditioned by what he guesses about other people and about himself' (1927:68). What Forster suggests is that characters have a textual existence. They are 'word masses' with a double function for the writer: to serve as narrator and to serve as protagonist. According to Howarth in Olney, therefore, if the writer occupies the position of narrator, be it in a biography or an autobiography, she must

remain faithful to the protagonist's ignorance in spite of knowing more than the protagonist; for the sake of credible suspense...eventually, as past approaches present the protagonist's deeds should begin to match the narrator's thoughts (1980:87).

If the writer is the creator of text then she is also the creator of character. Head acknowledges this in *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings* when she says of *When Rain Clouds Gather*: 'I created a symbolic type of refugee personality' (1990:68).

Characters are not only created in fiction but also serve to talk for the writer. Robert Elliot quotes Patricia M. Spacks's observation in this regard: 'all fiction...ultimately constitutes autobiography, the artist inventing, whatever the purported aim of his creation, only a series of metaphors for the self' (1982:33). In Head's work the chief character (referred to in further discussions as the protagonist or hero or heroine) becomes a particular point of focus for the writer's purpose. He or she reflects the writer's desires, experiences and aspirations. Head thus tells her life through the 'metaphors' of her protagonists. What Head's characters undergo bears a striking resemblance to her life or to her aspirations. In some cases she deliberately steers their actions along a predetermined course:

I would deliberately create heroes and show their extreme willingness to abdicate from positions of power and absorb themselves in activities which would be of immense benefit to the people (1990:73).

Although one might expect Head to use female characters only to tell her life because she is a woman herself, these human agents can be either male or female. Eilersen points out:

that some of her thinking was so forceful that she couldn't create female characters to carry it. "But that quiet rhythm of deep feeling which so often builds up in me is so powerfully masculine that I was forced to create powerful males to bear the tide of it" (1995:191).

Examples of such 'powerful' male characters are Gilbert, Makhaya and Dinorego in *When Rain Clouds Gather*; Sebembele, Paul Thebolo and Lesego in *The Collector of Treasures*; Khama the Great and Sebina in *A Bewitched Crossroad*; Moleka and Maru in *Maru*; Sello and Dan in *A Question of Power*.

But the writer cannot always determine her characters' actions to reflect those in real life. There are instances when the writer has to stand back and allow a character to appear like steering her own course. In *A Question of Power*, for instance, the heroine Elizabeth detaches herself (even frees herself) from the writer's own real life at the end of the novel. Elizabeth's enactment of Head's mental illness and painful experiences of alienation in Botswana culminates in her recovery from the breakdown and an achievement of self-confidence as she involves herself in community projects. Head at the time of writing *A Question of Power* had not yet come to terms with her own reality of mental disturbance and feelings of isolation, the adjustment was a slow process, and so Elizabeth does not reflect Head's life in this sphere. Head can manipulate characters, yet she can also allow them the freedom of self-development. In 'Notes on Writing A Novel' Elizabeth Bowen remarks that 'the action of the character should be unpredictable before it has been shown, inevitable when it has been shown' (1974:83). The implication of Bowen's point is that characters should evolve out of unforeseen or mysterious interactions. This is what Head allows when she gives them autonomy and avoids manipulating them like puppets. They are then

enabled to realise their own destinies and potentialities from which the writer learns.

In presenting character a writer may employ a range of strategies. In *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, Rimmon-Kenan recognises 'two basic types of textual indicators of character: direct definition and indirect presentation' (1983:43). Indirect presentation occurs when the writer does not describe the real nature of the character in the opening section of the story except perhaps to gloss the character's physical appearance. Then as the story progresses through a series of events the character's nature unfolds and emerges from his or her actions and reactions to others, 'leaving to the reader the task of inferring the qualities they imply' (1983:60). Direct definition entails giving a formal description of characters which might include personality, habits and attitudes. In this case what the character will do in the story becomes common cause; all the actions and reactions of the character are predictable and inevitable. If the interpretive role of the reader is recognised as an asset to the literary scholarship 'the explicitness and guiding capacity of direct definition are often considered drawbacks rather than advantages' (1983:61). Although in modern fiction indirect character presentation tends to predominate, some writers prefer a combination of the two methods. Head is such a writer and her preference, perhaps, is in line with her advocacy of complementarity.

Chapter 2, which examines the subject of character and identity in three novels, will consider Head's preferred mode of character presentation. Makhaya in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, for example, is not formally introduced to the reader - his portrait is gradually drawn around his

thoughts and his shaping of events. His major psychological development takes place when he establishes relationships with other characters like Gilbert, Maria, Dinorego, Mma-Millipede and Paulina who becomes his wife. Maru's character presentation is strikingly different. The story begins with what should be the conclusion and the figure of Maru is presented as if the reader already knows him. Perhaps this is a way in which the writer invites the reader into Maru's psychic world and connects him or her to Margaret's quiet yet communicative world of art. Eventually aspects of the writer's own story of alienation in South Africa and in Botswana emerge in the figure of Margaret. The reader's participation in the interpretation of the relationships between characters is vital, for it is in being read that characters come to life. The interaction between the writer and the reader will be pursued a little later in this introductory chapter.

Character presentation in *A Question of Power* follows a different approach. According to David Daiches, writers of autobiography in the twentieth century

have realised that a psychologically accurate account of what a man is at any given moment can be given neither in terms of a static description of his character nor in terms of a group of chronologically arranged reactions to a series of circumstances. They have become interested in those aspects of consciousness which cannot be viewed as a progression of individual and self-existing moments, but which are essentially dynamic rather than static in nature and are independent of the given moment (1960:15).

This interest gives rise to new techniques. Stream of consciousness, for example, is used by writers when they present the state of mind of their chief character who becomes affected by recollecting and associating past experiences with present ones. Hawthorn seems to believe that a writer

like Head who is concerned with establishing an identity for herself, 'can use the novel form to present her consciousness and to analyse her state of mind because [she] is a real person' (1992:135). The story allows the writer to become the character. Another technique is the use of dream sequences which enable the autobiographical novel to reveal as much about the writer's psychic life as can a dream. In *A Question of Power* events unfold through a dream that dramatises the trauma of alienation and oppression which leads to mental breakdown. Naming is a third technique. The naming of Elizabeth implies a degree of identification between Head and her protagonist. In *Female Novelists of Modern Africa*, Oladele Taiwo says of this identification:

[Head] handles...Elizabeth's life with the knowledge of one who has had similar experiences or can at least put herself mentally in Elizabeth's situation. Physical and mental isolation is used as a principal weapon of making the victim prisoner of her own thoughts. On such occasions she lives in a fantasy world of her own dreams and sees visions which, however frightening, the novelist projects before the reader's eyes in a cinematographic fashion...exposes the community of feeling between the novelist and character, even though Bessie Head takes extreme care to keep the two personalities separate (1984:195).

Whether *A Question of Power* should be construed as pure autobiography or not will be discussed in Chapter 2. Here I will simply say that Head finds it easier to relate her life through an autobiographical novel. This gives her the freedom of incorporating some fictional details which allow her to create opportunities for her characters' self-development.

The writing of an autobiographical novel is an attempt by the writer to shape her life and to give 'full play to all the potential qualities' (Watts 1989:113) of the protagonist even if her own are not fully realised in reality. What Elizabeth achieves for herself is a sense of worth which

encourages her to identify with the village people in their community ventures. She is able to find balance or complementarity between the inner and outer worlds which Head herself battled to reach. Head's ideal climate for identity to emerge is one which recognises and promotes individuality within social structures. The complementary relationship between private and public is thus a vital element in her construction of an ideal world.

Yet identity for Head is a broader concept than can be defined by her immediate environment. Like many African writers she seeks to forge an African identity for herself in writing. Eilersen comments as follows:

in her best moments she was beginning to accept the fact that she had been naive and immature in her early attitude to the country, but that she need not leave it because she now regarded it in a new light. In fact one of her most positive statements about herself and her African identity was made ...in 1975: "Don't worry to define my race", she wrote. "I've defined myself thoroughly in my novels. I am a New African"...Her identity was not dependent on her environment. However, at that stage she had still to make the next admission: her writing was (1995:189).

Head's description of herself as a 'New African' signals a coming to terms with the reality of her situation, which by 1975 had changed drastically. She felt like a new person and began to involve herself in the activities of the community. Perhaps she had learnt from her character Elizabeth how to snap out of the tormented mind, to be less 'naive' about people around her and to join hands with them in reclaiming the human dignity that was lost to colonisation and apartheid. To define her ideal identity Head employs a range of themes in her writing.

Themes can be defined as either implied or expressed general statements around which a story centres. In Head's case no one theme fully serves any given story: one story generally presents several themes. Themes can

also be viewed as ideas and beliefs that give a work its meaning. Howarth claims that a '[theme] may arise from the [writer's] general philosophy, religion or political and cultural studies. Each writer orchestrates his theme as he grapples with issues that appeal to a broad reading public' (1980:87-88). Madden and Scott point out that when a reader explores a theme in fiction he or she is not trying 'to learn about life but to think about it. And a good story is one that prompts the readers to examine critically their world or their ideas about human nature' (1984:13).

My discussion so far has centered on the writer; I will now briefly examine the role of the reader in relation to writer, narrator and the character. Although successful reading takes place when writer and reader are in complete agreement, the reader may not always be willingly persuaded by the writer's production of text. Obviously, the textual communication between writer and reader can only take place if there is active participation in the reading. Wolfgang Iser in *The Implied Reader* points out that 'the simulated relationship between the writer and the reader gives rise to an impression that this partnership is aimed at discovering the reality of human experience' (1974:25). What Iser calls a 'partnership' is referred to by Docherty in *Reading (Absent) Character: Towards a Theory of Characterisation in Fiction*, as 'a collaborative dialogue...[a] common production of meaning by writer and readers working together' (1987:xii). Forster's description of characters as 'word masses' accords with Iser's 'partnership' and Docherty's 'collaboration', since these imply that characters can only exist when there has been an interaction between reader and text. In Iser's terms the meaning of text materialises only when the reader reacts to it during

interpretation. The reader's function, then, is to unlock the text and recognise the writer's intention.

To make sure that the reader does participate in the textual dialogue, the writer often sets up a narrative authority who is referred to as the narrator. The narrator has varied functions: she is a medium through whom the understanding of events is reached, and she can occupy different positions to give the impression that she is a developed character. She can be recognised as an authorial narrator who uses first-person forms or as a character-narrator who speaks in the first person. The effect of the former may be intrusive, while the latter is usually thought of as a distinct narrative mode. Either way, according to Iser the narrator enables the reader to understand the motivations behind viewpoints while leaving 'space for inferences by the reader from the information that is provided' (1974:27). Information will be provided through the narrator in the form of dialogues, symbolic situations, metaphors and allusions to certain thought processes which all serve to manipulate the reader's reactions and judgements. As the narrator mediates in the text, she emphasises themes, contributes to the development of plot and becomes a spokesperson for the 'moral' of the work.

In the presentation of her writing the writer communicates with the reader from different authorial positions. If the writer positions herself in the third person, for instance, the reader is given the impression that he has been allowed access to the inner thoughts of the characters. Third person narratives are often characterised by an omniscient voice or point of view which enables the writer to stay behind the scenes, as it were, to manipulate characters and shape their dialogue to fit her intentions for the

reader's response. First person narrative, by contrast, reflects an authorial intrusion. The details of the writer's relations to the reader, narrator and character will be examined further in forthcoming chapters.

Chapter 3 explores the relations between people as social beings. In the short fiction Head uses themes and narrative methods that elaborate on the relations between herself and her characters whose unfolding helps her define her own identity in an idealised world of human equality and mutual respect. Head's intrusion into the text of her short fiction is designed to influence the reader's attitude and ideology about life in general. The anthology of short stories, *The Collector of Treasures*, will be examined together with the documentary history of the Botswanan people, *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*. The information that Head includes in this documentary is based on a range of interviews with the people of the village. The short stories are born out of these village incidents and interview sessions, and cover all the major themes of village life. Eilersen suggests that the compilation of the short stories might have been the reason Head decided 'to take the final decision about remaining in Serowe' (1995:163).

Both the short story collection and the historical recollections of the villagers have a social bias. This indicates a shift of interest in the writer: from a spiritual exploration of consciousness to a socially directed concern. These stories which are passed on to Head centre around issues of tradition that have been transmitted through generations. Head then plays an important role in preserving Botswana culture in her writing. The role of translators and interpreters in this process will also be considered in this Chapter.

Of the thirteen stories in the collection four will be selected as representing Head's major social themes. 'The Deep River: A Story of Ancient Tribal Migration' addresses the opposition between traditional thinking and modern ideology and explores the conflict brought about by the clash of interest in human relationships. The conflict is frequently resolved by characters themselves but authorial comment and intrusion plays a major role in the decisions they make about their personal and social problems. The reader's role then is to react to these authorial coaxings and to judge the moral of the writer's work. The stories also place an emphasis on the status of women in a previously male dominated society and focus on their emergence in this society to take up assertive and self-realising roles. In 'Heaven is Not Closed' the conflict between Christianity and tradition is addressed. Characters are placed on either side. Head's critique of the misuse of power is subtly intertwined around Ralokae, the traditionalist, and Galethebege, the Christian woman. Ralokae will only marry Galethebege by traditional custom whereas Galethebege's Christian beliefs do not permit unions with 'heathens.' Yet they love each other very much. Head thus creates a relationship between the two, which can only thrive if one bows to the other's wishes. Influential comments like these direct the reader to examine both belief systems:

Even Galethebege was astounded by the harshness of the missionary's attitude. The catastrophe she did not anticipate, was that he abruptly excommunicated her from the Church. She could no longer enter the village church if she married under Setswana custom. It was beyond her to reason that the missionary was a representative of God and something evil, the mark of 'civilisation'. It was unthinkable that an illiterate and ignorant man could display such contempt for the missionary's civilisation...The austere rituals of the Church, the mass, the sermons, the intimate communication in prayer with God - all this had thrilled her heart deeply. But Ralokae also was representative of an ancient stream of holiness that people had lived with before any white man had set foot in

the land, and it all needed a small protest to stir up loyalty for the old customs ('Heaven is Not Closed', 11).

This incident connects with the attitude of some of the villagers in *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind* who are very critical of Khama the Great's imposition of Christianity on the Bamangwato tribe which in the past lived under the security of custom. But then Khama had not abolished customs completely: all he had done was 'slice away all the harmful or brutal aspects of each custom' (*Serowe*, 8). Head's comment about the attitude of the villagers shows sympathy even though these people seem to have failed to see the vision of a better future in which individualism, and the importance of the 'self' in making decisions, receives priority. She says:

The traditions and taboos which all the tribal people adhere to, I tend to regard as a kind of external discipline...If [Khama's] acceptance of Christianity was an individual and moral choice, then it meant that he carved out a new road for the tribe - the discipline which people now had to impose on themselves was internal and private (*Serowe*, xiv).

Head positions herself omnisciently and allows the reader to revisit his or her own attitudes towards traditions and Christianity. The purpose of the point of view is manipulative, inducing the reader to weigh the pros and cons of both ideologies, and because the writer's intention is to avert a situation of domination, both hope for a compromise in the characters' lives. In 'Heaven is Not Closed', if Galethebege marries Ralokae by custom then Ralokae should allow her to practice what is noble and just in Christianity. This is the way Head balances forces in human existence so that no one is tempted to misuse power for oppressive purposes. She advocates power sharing.

From her position of omniscient narration Head enjoys the freedom of movement from one character to another and from one situation to another. She communicates directly with the reader, providing objective and subjective views of the characters' actions and thoughts. For example, in 'Deep River' the omniscient voice allows the reader to access to Sebembele's reactions after Rankwana threatens to kill herself if she cannot have him:

Her words had meaning for him because he was trapped in the same kind of anguish. It was a terrible pain which seemed to paralyse his movements and thoughts. It filled his mind so completely that he could think of nothing else, day and night. It was like a sickness, this paralysis, and like all ailments it could not be concealed from sight; Sebembele carried it all around with him ('Deep River', 4).

Madden and Scott read the underlying purpose of the omniscient voice as one of 'striking a balance between interior and exterior views of characters' (1984:66): Rankwana's words express the 'anguish' that both feel inside. These interior emotions match the external threat of suicide. The correlation between interior and exterior is also reflected by authorial comment which passes judgement on characters. Madden and Scott argue that the authorial comment or voice sometimes disrupts the flow of the story or of events as they take place and the writer may show an inclination towards subjectivity. To avoid this, some writers use objective narration in which:

The author is invisible; his voice is silent or neutral. As much as is humanly possible, he does not take sides with one character against another; he is impartial, impersonal, disinterested. He refrains from expressing attitudes about every passing controversy or social issue. The reader feels as if there is no [author], as if he is watching a play or a movie (1984:67).

While there is a fair amount of truth in Madden and Scott's argument about the temptations of subjectivity, it is also true that certain perceptions that take place in the character's mind might be psychologically too overwhelming to allow this character to express him or herself. In this case the writer may need to intervene by way of an authorial narrative voice. Head's need is to interact with the reader in order to work out solutions to problems experienced by characters which to a large extent reflect her own experiences. But instances will be shown where Head prefers to remain aloof and watch her characters sort out their own conflicts and even suggest solutions to her own problems.

Head's evaluation of the past and the present requires the reader's involvement so that she can formulate an ideal identity which incorporates all that is good and humane from our traditional past and our present age. This evaluation is further explored in two other stories, 'Life' and 'The Collector of Treasures', in which she examines the implications of the migrant labour system for family structure. Men and women emerge from these stories as either saints or villains. In the relationships of Life and Lesego, Dikeledi and Garesego, human dichotomies are investigated. On the one hand characters represent goodness; on the other, irresponsibility. Head takes a mercilessly didactic stand as she 'lashes out' at what she calls the 'odious' man who has caused the complete breakdown of family life:

There were really only two kinds of men in the society. The one kind created such misery and chaos that he could be broadly damned as evil... That kind of man lived near the animal level and behaved just the same. Like the dogs and bulls and donkeys, he also accepted no responsibility for the young he procreated... he also made the females abort. Since that kind of man was in the majority in the society he needed a little analysing as he was responsible for the complete breakdown of family life ('Collector of Treasures', 91).

She is outspoken in her criticism of the colonial era through which Africans had to go. She is sensitive to the rural women who have been deserted by promiscuous husbands like Garesego. She does not spare women like Life 'who have broken all social taboos' ('Life', 40). Her presentation of the tragic relationships in the two stories illustrates what happens when people concentrate on the negative aspects of life. Both couples fail to complement each other; they lose sight of the 'treasures' they each possess in their inner worlds. For example, Life's exuberance could have been a strong point in her relationship if Lesego had been appreciative instead of wasting his energies on uncalled-for oppression. And Lesego's bright business ideas and respectability could have been all the more appreciated by Life if they had put their resources together as equals to improve their standard of living and that of their immediate community. This point is handled at length in the next chapter.

Another concern that Head pursues in the short fiction is the role of women. She suggests to the reader the idea that women should not accept roles designed exclusively for them by men in traditional societies. She uses good men like Paul Thebolo in 'The Collector of Treasures' to demonstrate an appreciation of women as equal partners. Women placed in positions of hardship - as orphans like Life or deserted wives like Dikeledi - Head shows to be survivors who are capable of great strength. Life, for instance, arrives in a rural village from a city environment with no hope of making a living, but goes on to establish herself by means of prostitution and liquor-selling. Dikeledi uses her skill at handicraft to support herself and her children after being rejected by her husband. Women empower themselves in subtle ways in the stories. For example, Dikeledi's self-confidence is evident in this statement: 'You know I am

the woman whose thatch does not leak' ('The Collector of Treasures', 90). And Life says: 'Money flows like water in Johannesburg.... You just have to know how to get it ('Life', 38). Given this, the 'bad male' does not go unchallenged by the 'new woman'. The challenge becomes drastic in some cases - Dikeledi murders her husband, Life commits adultery and is murdered by her husband. Contrasting incidents in the lives of Head's characters enhance her notion of complementary existence as an alternative to misuse of power. In the words of Ola she 'celebrates [human] strengths while exposing the weaknesses' (1994:6).

Chapter 4 deals with *A Bewitched Crossroad* whose subject establishes Head as both a historian and a novelist in the literary tradition of Southern Africa. Her concern to create a better environment for ordinary human beings remains an underlying concern in this historical novel. Her impulse to write a historical account also marks a putting down of roots as a Botswanan citizen and a paying of tribute to a country that has finally adopted her. The details of historical data might seem intimidating to a reader whose interest lies more in the fictional aspect of Head's writing than in its factual basis. The discussions in this chapter, however, will concentrate on the fictionalised story line. My interest is in the process of fiction-making and the light it sheds on the ways in which Head positions herself as a writer.

If the main concern in Head's writing is the construction of an identity for herself, it must be significant that at the time of writing *A Bewitched Crossroad* she had developed a strong sense of commitment to Botswana. Yet the quest for a broader definition of her identity still persisted. She remarked at the time:

I am trying to gather several threads together to create a feeling of continuity in my work...to finally record some of the kind of welding I felt on coming to a country like Botswana. It was like finding roots and these roots really go back, for me, to the old tribal way of life and its slow courtesies...So this final work I am on will have the effect of rounding off my Southern African experience. I think I will then let it fall asleep in my mind (Beard 1986:41).

This novel is an attempt at defining African identity in broad terms. In her previous work Head relies on her characters to explore and reveal her ideals and her aspirations to historical continuity. In this work, the fictional character Sebina witnesses the processes of societal transformation that take place within the borders of Botswana. The history of the migratory tribes is woven into the positions the characters occupy in their tribes. Khama, a historical figure, is viewed through the eyes of Sebina who, like Head, admires him for his 'rule of intellect' and his human compassion. After wandering for some time, Sebina has arrived in Khama's territory seeking protection against militant and violent tribes like the Matebele. Once settled Sebina is fascinated by his new environment and appreciates the peace and security he enjoys under Khama's protection. Much of what happens in *A Bewitched Crossroad* is centered in Sebina's thoughts - into which the reader is led by the writer. Sebina is given different positions: as historical witness of an era of tribal transformation under Khama; as advisor to characters that are resistant to change; and as custodian of a cultural and historical heritage. He is thus an important narrative voice in the text.

The themes that Head highlights in *A Bewitched Crossroad* echo those in her other novels, for example, the interplay of individuality and community, and especially the power of the communal spirit; the impact of Christianity on tribal custom; the tension between humane leadership

and dictatorship; the need for the liberation and empowerment of women. In exploring these themes Head demonstrates how a balanced existence must be expressed in terms of complementarity.

In the reading of her works one is led to realise the importance of recognising one's potential by identifying one's shortcomings and being able to make up for these through another's strengths. For example: Makhaya and Gilbert in *When Rain Clouds Gather* come from different backgrounds; one traditional and the other western. Both have run away from stifling societies, but, meeting in a rural village, each recognises the other's valuable background knowledge. In this way, the two men support each other in the village agricultural projects. Gilbert has farming expertise but lacks communication skills to convey this knowledge and this is where Makhaya complements Gilbert.

In conclusion, I wish to examine the significance of some images that Head uses as strategies for characterisation in the works selected for the dissertation, images such as bewitchment, deep river, flowing river, face and light. Head's use of imagery not only highlights her efforts to describe an ideal world of 'ordinary people' characterised by complementarity, but also defines the nature of her characters. In examining the theme of tribalism, for instance, Head refers to the images of the 'deep river' ('Deep River', 1) and of the 'flowing river' ('Bewitched Crossroad', 97) as challenges to the characters of Sebembele and Sebina. Both characters are positioned as rulers of communities described through the image of the 'deep river'; both have the role as leaders of causing the 'river' to flow. Head's purpose in using the water element in 'river' to describe the role of her main characters in these

stories lies, perhaps, in her associating with the characters properties of water such as motion, fluidity, flexibility, the giving of life and endurance. Whereas, the image of the 'deep river' suggests stagnation, motionlessness and lack of change in tribal communities, the 'flowing river' implies progress. If Sebembele and Sebina are forces of transformation and progress, then Head's endeavour is to use such leaders to cause turbulence in the 'deep river' of their communities; to cause their communities to re-think their values and norms, to appreciate individuality and to gather new truths. Head's opening paragraph in the story "The Deep River" points to the need to apply forces of transformation to communities where ignorance predominates:

Long ago when the land was only cattle tracts and footpaths, the people lived together like a deep river. In this deep river, which was unruffled by conflict or a movement forward, the people lived without focus, except for their chief, whose face was the face of all people; that is, if their chief's name was Monemapee, then they were all the people of Monemapee.... ('Deep River', 1).

In this extract the importance of Sebembele's character lies in his initiation of new streams of thought as he modifies customs to change the image of the chief's 'face'. For example, marrying the person he loves rather than one whom the tribe wants.

The interplay of collective identity and individuality is expressed through the use of the image of the 'face'. In the story 'Deep River' it becomes obvious that the chief's 'face' is adopted by the tribe as it assumes his name and identity but, when the chief modifies customs the 'deep river' of the tribe is disturbed and the people begin to show 'faces' of disapproval as a way of expressing their individuality. Head's purpose in raising opposing sides is nevertheless to demonstrate that a balance can

generally be reached by recognising the necessity of the element of individuality in each collectivity. She sees that there is a link between the public and the private or between the inner and the outer worlds; this link can only be secured strongly through complementarity. If the opposing sides fail to establish this link of understanding, Head suggests migration and abdication from a position of power as a means of avoiding a dehumanising confrontation. Such cases are demonstrated in *Maru* and by Sebembele in 'Deep River'.

On the other hand, the new streams of thought expressed in the image of the 'flowing river' are introduced in Sebina's tribal community through his interaction with Khama the Great. Sebina's flexibility in accepting new truths is compared to the movement of the river as it journeys through history.

On the surface it seemed that at a hoary old age Sebina was leading his people once again to a promised land He was the glorious representative of the past and tradition and yet he hungered for the new and unknown ('Bewitched Crossroad', 63).

We shall see Sebina's role in *A Bewitched Crossroad*, for instance, as that of facilitating the 'flow' of the river of the new learning and of mediating a smooth transition from the rigidity of tradition to the flexibility of modernity. The characters' roles in reconciling the forces of traditional rigidity with those of modernity, are viewed as Head's attempt at effecting complementarity in the idealised society of her fiction.

Not only does Head use recurrent images in her writing to chart her ideal world, she also illustrates harmony in diversity through a presentation of

dichotomies within and without the construction of characters. For instance the novel *Maru* opens with a description of clouds:

The rains were so late that year. But throughout that hot, dry summer those black storm clouds clung in thick folds of brooding darkness along the low horizon. There seemed to be a secret in their activity, because each evening they broke the long, sullen silence of the day, and sent soft rumbles of thunder and flickering slicks of lightening across the empty sky. They were not promising rain. They were prisoners, pushed back, in trapped coils of boiling cloud (1).

This image in the opening paragraph lays the ground for associations and distinctions between the characters of Maru and Moleka. From this association it is obvious that the characters' extreme natures are linked to the other by 'clouds' - by their secret hopes to survive the struggle for Margaret's love. And yet Maru is described through the image of 'rainclouds' bearing unthreatening 'soft rumbles of thunder', whereas Moleka is referred to as 'storm clouds' or 'thunderclouds' (27), which is a depiction of a dark violent force implied in 'coils of boiling cloud'.

Opposition is also evident in the presentation of the figures of Dan and Sello in *A Question of Power*: one is a demon, the other a symbol of love; both are struggling for survival within Elizabeth's inner world. The two forces represented by Dan and Sello are dichotomies in Elizabeth's life which she needs to balance and to reconcile so that she herself is able to handle the problems of racial prejudice she has experienced in her past life in South Africa and presently in Botswana. Further elaboration on opposing forces in Dan and Sello will be made in the next chapter.

The following chapter then, examines, Head's three novels in the context of recurrent images and themes that she uses to demonstrate living in a

complementarity. She expresses this existence in the characters' relationships with one another and in the mutual identities they establish for themselves and for herself as well.

CHAPTER 2

RELATIONS BETWEEN WRITER AND CHARACTER:

When Rain Clouds Gather, Maru, A Question of Power

The question of identity forms a recurrent theme in most of the writings of Bessie Head. The links between aspects of her own biography and characters such as Margaret Cadmore in *Maru*, Paulina in *When Rain Clouds Gather* and Elizabeth in *A Question of Power*, are so obvious that the issue of identity must be recognised as crucial to any serious reading of her work.

If, as Teresa Dovey suggests in 'A Question of Power : Susan Gardner's Biography versus Bessie Head's Autobiography', 'a writer's identity must be sought in her writing...' (1989:37), then Head's works can fruitfully be viewed as narrative explorations of the nature of the self. Her novels in particular reflect autobiographical elements which influence the relationship between writer and character. This influence motivates my interest in the issue of character and identity as it occurs in her work.

The question 'Who am I?' is instrumental in Bessie Head's construction of characters in that she frequently manipulates their roles to project aspects of her life and her ideals. Perhaps it is important to recall the distinction between the concepts of 'biography' and 'autobiography' in relation to Head's search for identity. Biography, explains Dovey, is 'the writing of a life [and] should also involve the "reading" of a life...'

(1989:30). Autobiography, on the other hand, narrates the writer's own experiences. It is an exploration of her consciousness, an examination of her self.

Head's autobiographical novels reflect what Craig MacKenzie, in *Bessie Head: An Introduction*, calls a 'quest for identity' (1989:22) : identity that is free of colonial oppression; identity that is achieved by breaking away from the values and norms of a dominant culture. It is development towards self-realisation and self-assertion; towards who one really is. In Ngugi's words, it is a process of decolonising the mind towards a sense of self-worth.

In pursuing this quest a writer may well employ an autobiographical form as a vehicle for exploring the self. Jane Watts, in *Black Writers from South Africa*, points to a

[writer's] means to find a balance between [herself] and the outside world and investigate tensions between subjective and objective that orders our whole life. ...through wrestling with images of [her] past life and resolving [her] relation to the self that exists at the time of writing, [the writer] is able to search out and assess [her] inner standing and thereby come to terms with reality (1989:114).

Watts here makes two important points: that finding a 'balance between one's subjectivity and objectivity' is fundamental to the process of identity; and, as Elliott phrases it, one's identity 'can only be expressed through a complementary mode of description' (1982:103). If Bessie Head is to succeed in carving out an identity for herself then her writing must reflect an understanding of the completeness of human existence, which is both subjective and social. And in recognising the complementarity of existence, Head must 'wrestle with images of her

past' and work out resolutions to discords in her present life. This attainment of inner peace must be balanced by a coming to terms with social reality.

Head's search for identity is particularly compelling for her because she was an exile in Botswana. Aspects of her biography reveal that her traumatic life was exacerbated by the double experience of alienation both in her land of birth, South Africa, and in her adopted country, Botswana. Head was born illegitimately under precarious conditions in South Africa and suffered miserably the consequences of her mother's incarceration in a mental hospital. Without any recollection of her parents, Head was fostered and placed in orphanages and in schools with extremely harsh discipline. Entering the teaching and journalism professions subsequently made her politically aware and socially vulnerable, and made remaining in South Africa in the 1960s unbearable. Her marriage too ended. She exiled herself and her little son to Botswana where the struggle against deprivation and alienation strengthened her quest for self-knowledge and a sense of identity.

Features of this biography are explored in the characters Head creates in her writing. This chapter will focus on three novels which offer a point of entry into Head's journey of self-discovery: *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968), *Maru* (1971), *A Question of Power* (1974). In *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings*, Head observes that her early writing

was filled with personal data and responses to challenges that were on the whole internal and private. Having defined the personal, my work became more social and outward-looking (1990:77-78).

The 'personal data' she refers to emerges in the lives of the characters she creates. Crucial questions that arise, then, are: In what ways should we read her characters as revealing her quest for identity? What treatment is given in her work to the personal and the private?

In my introductory chapter I emphasised that I will be reading character as a creation of the writer's mind which has substance only in the participation of the reader in the textual dialogue. This means that in creating character the writer produces in words a portrait or image which appears to the reader to possess real emotions, to be capable of action and to have relationships with other characters. In the case of Head, characterisation demonstrates a complementarity between masculine and feminine, modern and traditional, Western and African.

Obviously the personal and the private are influenced by factors such as politics, tradition, religion, race, culture, history and language. One must understand that though Head is responsible for the creation of characters, she does not have complete control over her creations. Though Head strives hard to manipulate her characters in fictionalised situations they are still capable of making their own decisions and they are able to impact back on the 'text' of the writer's life.

It seems paradoxical even to think that characters are independent. Jeremy Hawthorn argues, for example, 'there is no way characters can be detached from their creators', because they 'can never be completely independent from writers to whom they owe their existence' (1992:7). Some years earlier, however, John Bayley insisted that, 'characters are expressed as a delight for the writer [who] takes an intense interest in

their personalities which is combined with a sort of detachment, solitude and respect of their freedom' (1960:7).

Hawthorn and Bayley seem to concur that the writer is responsible for the existence of characters in her writing. Yet Bayley reminds us that a writer can allow characters quite a bit of independence in the development of their personalities. I agree that a writer takes 'delight' in the positive unfolding of characters; yet it seems likely that characters who amplify the aspirations of the writer are likely to be allowed more leeway to promote and live out the qualities and attitudes that the writer has failed to realise in her life. This point will be explored in the study of Head's relations with her characters that follows.

Head's first novel in exile was *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968). The novel presents the story of the protagonist Makhaya who arrives in Botswana as a political refugee. Perhaps ironically, his Zulu name means "villages" or "homes"; Makhaya has fled from the political crisis in South Africa in the 1960s to seek asylum and hopefully to begin a new life. He longs for peace and a sense of belonging. Makhaya announces his 'mission' thus:

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

Makhaya's needs seem to reflect those of Head. Like Head Makhaya has sought in Botswana an alternative to war and the corrupting power of the political atmosphere in South Africa from which both have fled. Head's South African experience of alienation is projected onto Makhaya. In retrospect she described him thus:

I created a symbolic type of refugee personality. I implied that he was a man of talent. I made him briefly face the implications of black power and then turned him abruptly away from the madding crowd to spend a lifetime in a small rural village battling with food production problems (1990:68).

Head's comment exemplifies the creation of character as a way of exploring her own consciousness. In his role in the Botswana village, Makhaya seems to be at the mercy of his destiny. Head understands Makhaya's conflict. She herself has been beset by similar problems; for example, the political situation in South Africa so oppressive for a black person and the alienation of foreigners in Botswana which refuses them citizenship. She uses Makhaya to make a scathing attack on prevailing social structures such as tribalism and the status of women in Africa. Makhaya's reaction to the sexual exploitation of a very young girl, for instance, demonstrates the bitterness within Head's mind:

He had known many such evils in his lifetime. He thought they were created by poverty and oppression...It was the mentality of the old hag that ruined the whole continent - some sort of clinging, ancestral, tribal belief that a man was nothing more than a groveling sex organ, that there was not such thing as privacy of soul and body ...(15).

The purpose of this extract is to engage the reader's sympathies for Makhaya. He begins to win reader's hearts. This is what Head intends him to be doing. She treats him as 'an insipid...guileless...simple-hearted simpleton who makes a beautiful choice' (78). Whereas Makhaya's rebelliousness against oppression in South Africa is not by choice but has been forced upon him by his exposure to racial prejudice, the choice that Makhaya makes in Botswana is for the benefit of society. Makhaya's destiny, which Head fixes for him, is to 'spend a lifetime in a small rural village' helping its community.

Head's allusion to Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*, leads me to compare her treatment of Makhaya with Thomas Hardy's control of his characters. It is perhaps a truism that Hardy considers character as 'fate'. Is this how Head understands Makhaya's character? Makhaya flees tragic circumstances in South Africa to step into meaningful and better living in a foreign land. Identifying with his experience and endeavours, Head supplies an alternative 'ordering framework that might make sense of life' (Peck and Coyle 1984:115). Hence Makhaya's 'beautiful choice': his decision to live and be absorbed in Botswana, and to develop relationships with members of the community. Head shapes these personal relationships to foster and promote a spirit of brotherhood in the village of Golema Mmidi which he has chosen as his home.

To understand this notion of brotherhood one must recognise the nature of the village. It is a unique place.

Golema Mmidi consisted of individuals who had fled - to escape the tragedies of life. Its name too marked it out from other villages, which were named after important chiefs or important events...It was one of the very few areas in the country where people were permanently settled on land (22).

Golema Mmidi is an ideal setting for these 'individuals'; they give it a uniqueness unheard of in its surrounding. This is a village that is marked by individuality which accords it a distinct identity. Its inhabitants come from different social experiences and backgrounds - they are fugitives of life who seem to have been brought together by the tragedies they have survived. The newly established village is different from other villages in that though technically under tribal rule, it enjoys self-determination and the inhabitants have come to share many things apart from their previous

tragedies. They have a sense of unity not only in sharing experiences and suffering but also in sharing ideas and visions for a better future.

The villagers of Golema Mmidi have carved an identity for themselves by forming relationships based on a common purpose : that of sharing property and carrying out subsistence duties. Such a relationship is referred to by Head as a 'brotherhood'. Ordinarily the concept of a brotherhood has limitations: for example, in crop growing or money-saving schemes. Once the common purpose has been achieved the brotherhood generally splits. In Head's terms, however, 'brotherhood' must be understood in a wider context as having no limitations or boundaries, such as gender roles. Such a brotherhood becomes a community of people living together in one place and sharing interests. Head's vision of a 'brotherhood' is thus an inclusive one.

Golema Mmidi is thus an ideal place for Makhaya's redemption from embittered frustration. It is as though Head has constructed the community specifically to accommodate him. Golema Mmidi provides for its inhabitants a sense of permanent settlement on the land, shared interests, interdependent equality, self-sufficiency, simplicity and variety. The relationships formed by the villagers are unique and enriching. There is a bond of identity between people who are different in terms of colour, age, gender and political convictions. Makhaya finds this environment very exciting and interesting. Initially, for instance, he cannot understand how a white man could be a part of the community in Golema Mmidi. To his surprise he discovers how a change of attitude and perception makes it easy to relate to Gilbert. Dinorego, an elderly member of the community, lets him into the wisdom of communal living:

"I have no words to describe Gilbert, son," Dinorego said. "Just as I take you as my own son, so do I take Gilbert as my own son, which fact surprises me, since he is a white man and we Botswana do not know any white people, though some have lived here for many years. Many things caused me to have a change of mind. He can eat goat meat and sour milk porridge, which I have not known a white man eat before...If Gilbert [goes] who will pour out knowledge like rain? Everybody is selfish and wants to keep what he has to himself" (27).

Characters like Gilbert and Dinorego are set up by Head as models for Makhaya's growth towards stability and spiritual recuperation. She creates an atmosphere of acceptance for Makhaya. What Dinorego reveals is that matters relating to race, colour and creed have not been much of an issue in the lives of these Batswana - unlike the society from which Makhaya is fleeing. Hence the first step of identification, the sense of belonging that is expressed through Makhaya's announcement, "I might like it here!" (27).

In an article on African women writers, Maggi Phillips remarks that the 'discrete characterisation [in Golema Mmidi] already shows signs of yielding to Head's sense of communal solidarity which links human, natural and cosmic realms' (1994:96). The communal solidarity which Head experienced in the Botswana village in which she herself settled is thus reflected in the characters of Golema Mmidi. Like Head, Makhaya's potential for violence is re-directed in positive ways towards reconstruction and human development. Makhaya's strong personality impresses those he encounters in Golema Mmidi: for instance, Gilbert recognises his leadership potential and organisational skills and uses them on the crop growing project. And yet he also receives strength and inspiration from his relationship with Mma-Millipede, whose wisdom and sympathy reshape him and enkindle in him a spark of life. Among the important lessons Makhaya learns from Mma-Millipede is the concept of

universal 'brotherhood' which requires him to exercise compassion for mankind and patience with it. Mma-Millipede warns him: "You must never, never put anyone away from you as not being your brother" (130). It is a lesson that may well be meant not only for Makhaya but also for Head. Makhaya's hatred for power-mongers is transformed by this new concept of identity. He asks Mma-Millipede: "Who is my brother, Mama?" She replies, "It is each person who is alive on earth" (130). This is Head's idea of universal 'brotherhood' - since it includes everyone discrimination becomes impossible. The dialogue between Makhaya and Mma-Millipede marks a point in their relationship which results in mutual spiritual growth and the generosity of a complementary existence:

The relationship between them from then on was to be of continuous give and take, and who took and who gave and when and how was never counted; he had caught hold of an invisible thread of life and attached it to his own. This togetherness dissolved all the loneliness in the world (132).

Makhaya not only gains wisdom from Mma-Millipede, but also extends his usefulness and inborn humanity to establish meaningful relationships with other fellow inhabitants. For example, Head offers this humorous picture of interaction between the women of the village and Makhaya:

They were unaccustomed to a man speaking to them as an equal. They stood back awhile, with uneasy expressions, but once it struck them that he paid no attention to them as women, they also forgot he was a man and became absorbed in following his explanations. He could change a whole attitude of mind merely in the way he raised his hand or smiled...he never exerted himself, but [left] it to the other party to do all the exerting and changing (106).

Robin Visel describes Makhaya's relationship with his partners in the crop growing projects of the village in terms of 'a utopian vision which disturbs established patterns of thought to change the people's

consciousness' (1990:119). When women are addressed as equals by a man, a sudden surge of self-worth floods their consciousness and they begin to realise they are also human beings and not the down-trodden things that patriarchal societies have made of them. Correspondingly, Makhaya feels comfortable and relaxed in the company of the women workers: 'he had worked side by side with them, like a brother' (112). Like Botswana for Head, Golema Mmidi offers Makhaya a sense of wovenness and completeness of life. He seals his commitment to the adopted village by marrying Paulina whose hard work at the agricultural projects is recognised as an important contribution to the progress of the village.

As I will show, Paulina's desire for a husband like Makhaya is intensely private. Before considering Paulina's point of view, though, it seems important to consider the relationship between private and public, personal and social. Together, public and private constitute who humans are. The private domain includes an individual's emotions; emotions which are often suppressed by a lack of freedom of expression. In positive terms the public domain entails social responsibility and hence commitment to a course of community engagement. But negative forces in the outer or public world can translate into acts of oppression, discrimination, exploitation and racism which often discourage a sense of responsibility in their victims. As Watts points out:

Outside pressures have brought about changes in personality, violent upheavals in the individual psyche which sensitive writers realise they have to reckon with (1989:116).

What they must 'reckon with', in their search for identity, is past experiences which have created a sense of worthlessness and

maladjustment in the public domain. Writers like Head especially, who feel there is more to life than carrying the burden of dehumanisation, do so by projecting their pain onto their characters. Thus Head's characterisation pursues a balance between private and public dimensions for the purposes of self-discovery.

In regard to *A Question of Power* MacKenzie claims a 'tenuous relationship' between private and public: 'There is virtually no causal connection between reality and [her] nightmares...[her] struggle is entirely internal' (1989a:31-32). And yet many people's inner turmoil emanates from external forces such as oppression and dehumanisation. Suppressing these experiences can lead to mental trauma. This is more evident in *When Rain Clouds Gather*. Makhaya feels the need to 'reconcile his material existence with his inner life. His life is conceived to be channeled by his experience in these two dimensions. He acts in the real world and the world in turn provokes an inner reaction' (Mackenzie 1989a:31). Thus Head exploits the connection between private and public as she links social and individual fulfillment in order to develop her characters' relationships with each other more completely.

Most important among these is Makhaya's relationship with Paulina. As I will show, Head uses this relationship especially to illustrate that human relations should transcend factors such as colour, age, gender, status and creed for these only encourage cracks in communities. She criticises racial discrimination and gender roles from both Paulina's and Makhaya's point of view. Both are spokespersons for the countless many who are unable to voice their suffering and who are unable to establish their roots. Using male and female characters, Head thus contrasts the

complementarity that is present in aspects of her own suffering. And through Makhaya and Paulina, Head introduces the idea of gender equality and marriage based on equality. The relationship between the two begins with the private romantic interest that Paulina develops for Makhaya whose own private life has previously been in turmoil. Paulina's private agenda motivates her to work as hard as she can, as leader of the women in the public sphere, so as to be noticed by Makhaya. Makhaya, by contrast, is intent on ridding himself of a painful past so that he can commit himself to meaningful issues in Golema Mmidi village.

Makhaya found his own kind of transformation in this enhancing world. It wasn't a new freedom that he silently worked toward, but a putting together of the scattered fragments of his life into a coherent and disciplined whole (34).

Head's vision is not so much aligned with Paulina's agenda of procuring a husband for herself as with Makhaya's quest for inner peace and 'a quietening down of everything inside him' (24). Makhaya searches for a safe haven in which he can unshackle the chains of alienation and develop a social concern for others. And yet concern for his fellow villagers is complemented by Paulina's concern for him - so that Mma-Millipede's advice helps to 'transform' Makhaya's existence to be meaningful because it is reciprocated in the world around him. Towards the end of the novel, the narrator comments thus:

therefore the Good God cast one last look at Makhaya, whom he intended revenging almighty 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 always have to think, not twice but several hundred times, before he came to knocking anyone down (187).

The fact that Head's central characters are both male and female emphasises the complementary nature of their connection. This enables her to define them through the promotion of individuality within social structure. In *When Rain Clouds Gather* the women characters Paulina and Maria yearn for equality in their marital relationships. These are strong-willed women with minds of their own - women who do not wish to see their individuality destroyed by marriage. The male protagonists, on the other hand, are positioned by Head to understand only too well the evil that comes with oppression and discrimination. In this sense the relationships between Paulina and Makhaya, Maria and Gilbert, Mma-Millipede and Dinorego are ideal because they are intended to demonstrate the recognition of equality and respect for human dignity.

Head is critical of women who allow themselves to be oppressed and dominated by men,

in spite of the advantage they had over men educationally few of the women developed a new personality. They remained their same old tribal selves, docile and inferior (68).

This critique is qualified by the imbalances and inconsistencies that occur even in the most egalitarian of relationships. Although Paulina and Maria are tough, assertive and independent, they are not exempt from what appears to be backsliding into patterns of traditional male dominance. When Gilbert is angered by Maria's refusal to go to England with him, for example, Maria initially resists and then seems to back down before Gilbert's idea of married life which programmes him to think that he 'is the boss and lays down rules' (103).

Maria placed her free hand straight out on her knee, indicating she had made a rule from which she was not going to budge. "You will have to go to England by yourself," she said flatly. "I shall not live in England with you."

"You're not Donorego's daughter any more...You're my wife now and you have to do as I say. If I go back to England, you go there too" (102-103).

This humorous encounter between Maria and Gilbert carries a subtle irony. The tone in which Maria speaks her mind is flatly assertive. She is tough-minded and hard-nosed. But Gilbert who overrules her is even more so. The point is that Gilbert is not just reacting to a threat to his manhood. If he goes to England by himself their relationship will come to an end. And he may indeed have to go, given his precarious status as an expatriate. Furthermore, by virtue of marrying Gilbert, Maria gains a new identity: "You're not Dinorego's daughter any more...You're my wife now." Although Head respects Maria's show of independence, she seems to be pointing out that Maria cannot always have her way. There will be occasions when she will be overruled. As if Maria realises this she seems to succumb to Gilbert's hard-headedness:

"I did not say I won't obey you, Gilbert. I only wanted to find out what was on your mind"...He stood up and pulled Maria by the hand, and together they walked away far into the bush...(103).

What overrides Gilbert's dominance, then, is not Maria's will, but the togetherness which sees them walking hand in hand into the bush. Neither has power over the other, but together they can work things out. Ironically, of course, they do not go to England.

What emerges also in Head's characterisation is that she likes to balance oppositions in her characters to maintain an equilibrium of forces. She

describes characters as 'uncongenial personalities [that] clash and contradict each other all the time' (101). These contradictory impulses are apparent in interaction between characters and also in the expressions and actions of single characters. Maria is an example of contradiction: 'There were two women in her - one was soft and meditative and the other was full of ruthless common sense' (101).

Head's illustration of two sides of human nature which are in conflict evokes the tensions inside every human being. Her writing points to a promotion of human goodness and an affirmation of humanistic habits of mind. The bigger point that Head is making is that there is tension and contradiction in all of us. Even if goodness and humanity are the goals we must pursue, we should do so not by denying and subduing this complementarity but by striving to achieve a balance of dynamic and harmonious forces. Uledi-Kamanga, in outlining Head's 'humanistic vision', seems to recognise Head's endorsement of human development and goodness:

In a superb demonstration of faith in man's value and potential capacity for goodness the author presents her fictional characters as regaining their senses of humanity and that of others through affirmative interaction with people regardless of race and ethnicity (1987:21).

This is pertinent to the relationship between Maria and Gilbert. They are different in terms of race, family values and aspirations, but being human is what renders them equal. Head thus allows us to witness the fact that issues of race, gender and status should not stand in the way of human goodness. Minor disagreements in the Maria-Gilbert relationship must not be viewed as jeopardising Head's scheme of universal love, but rather strengthening it.

An incident in the relationship between Paulina and Makhaya can serve to elucidate the same point:

“I want some tea”, he said by way of explanation. But I will light the fire and make it.”

“Goodness!” she said in alarm,...”Don’t touch the fire. It’s a woman’s work.”

“Goodness!” he said, imitating her speech. “It’s time you learned that men live on this earth too. If I want to make tea, I’ll make it, and if I want to sweep the floor, I’ll sweep it” (139).

Makhaya represents progress. He does not ask Paulina to serve him tea, but decides to do it himself. Makhaya wants the freedom to do things that have traditionally been confined to women. Paulina seems startled by this ‘usurpation’ of her role - ‘it’s a woman’s work.’ Yet the custom that ‘men have always had their way’ must be balanced with what the modern liberated women wants: equal opportunity with their male counterparts. Therefore, Makhaya seeks a similar chance in what is considered *women’s work*.

Valerie Kibera argues that ‘the very real uncertainty and confusion women, including the [women] authors themselves experience, in confronting shifting gender roles in modern...Botswana [results in] a falling back on the old gender roles of female docility and male mastery’ (1991:322-323). My difference of opinion to Kibera’s is that the ‘shifting roles’ she refers to go further than ‘uncertainty and confusion’. A woman writer like Head presents a whole vision of future human interaction and communication. Human relationships should be complementary and not thrive on the disadvantage of either of the partners. Kibera should rather see the ‘shifting gender roles’ of modern societies as an opportunity to redefine human attitudes towards change and equality. Head has taken

this even further by encouraging the reader to revisit conventional gender roles and by exploring the manner in which men and women carry out their duties. She draws the reader in to share Paulina's observation of Makhaya's fire-making:

Paulina watched the fire-making with a critical eye, and it occurred to her for the first time why the ancestors had set certain jobs aside for women and certain jobs for men. Men and women were unlike mentally. Look at how this man built a fire! He treated each stick as a separate living entity and because of his respect for each stick, he moved his hands slowly with many pauses, placing the firewood down at carefully calculated angles. This fire was set for a limited purpose - to boil water for tea and burn beautifully without smoke. A woman worked differently. She grasped a bunch of sticks in her hand, but it wasn't the fire only but a thousand other purposes that fire would serve...But would people ever eat and stay alive if housework was so precise and calculated...[so] bright [and] smokeless (139-140).

Through Paulina and Makhaya, Head suggests different approaches to the fulfilment of similar duties. Makhaya's approach is aesthetic: he is artistic and calculating in his manner of doing things. The fire he makes is perfect, beautiful and devoid of smoke. Makhaya does not merely make a fire, he creates it: the fire represents the ideal fire, 'smokeless and bright'. By contrast, Paulina cannot manage such fastidiousness. She is a pragmatist. She does things for practical reasons rather than for beauty. As a woman, Paulina fills numerous roles; it seems pointless to her to waste her time on aesthetics when people are hungry. For her the fire must fulfill a number of functions and not just neatly boil water for tea. The same fire must enable her to cook, heat water, warm the house and iron clothes. Her view of the fire is utilitarian: it must be useful rather than decorative.

Our choice of whether to sympathise here with pragmatism or aestheticism must recognise Head's purpose in bringing up this issue in

the Makhaya-Paulina relationship. Earlier in this discussion I pointed out that Head reveals a tendency to project aspects of her life into her characters. Like Makhaya she is an artist - although a literary artist. Whereas Paulina knows the number of things the fire can do for her, Makhaya makes the fire for boiling water only. Uledi-Kamanga has interesting views on the functions of the aesthetic as art. She argues:

All Head] has done in her works is to offer "a view of a grander world, of a world that's much grander than the one we've had already." By so doing she has at least fulfilled Aristotle's conception of the function of art and the artist: namely to present a picture of reality not as it is, but as it might be... Maybe to expect art to have an immediate utilitarian function is in itself to be idealistic (1987:32).

This argument suggests that Head is presenting the reader with a picture of reality which involves the ideal: she paints a textual scene which enables readers to see a broader spectrum of life than she has actually presented. This is focused around Makhaya's and Paulina's respective fire-making practices. Paulina has a broader view of the fire than Makhaya, whose fire emphasises the aesthetic. For Paulina, art should not be what one sees but what one can do with what one sees. Head subtly proposes that the ideal will be meaningful only if it is practical. Here again we see the concept of complementarity: aesthetics is meaningful only in providing a broader purpose or utility. To read Head in this way we must recognise the concept of complementarity of identities. Virginia Ola in 'Power and the Question of Good and Evil in Bessie Head's Novels' confirms this:

This complementarity functions either as the necessity for an individual to realise his full potential by recognising his own strength and weaknesses, and thereby seeking to identify with another character who possesses what he himself lacks or it features as two characters functioning as the positive and the negative (1990:63).

The transformation of characters in *When Rain Clouds Gather* is important for Head because it promotes her concept of harmonious living which means living by sharing, compromise, generosity, companionship, equality and positiveness - with no one person dictating to another. Despite her generally positive attitude, Head still had reservations about her status and her image among the Botswanan people at the time of writing this novel. She had not since her arrival been fully absorbed into Botswanan society. She suffered alienation. Yet this ostracism was different from her South African experience. Head had not reached a stage of peace of mind and uninterrupted personal freedom. She first had to continue her quest for self-knowledge.

In letters to friends Head makes frequent reference to her feelings of alienation. She realises that when she experiences the pain of being ostracised she has to deal with it and work towards a commitment to her new country. Botswana, for Head, had prospects for the future and she could not afford to lose the opportunity of being part of such a country. It was imperative, therefore, that this formed part of her new identity.

In the biography entitled *Thunder Behind Her Ears* (1995), Eilersen quotes Head thus:

I like the way I am just a nonentity, a nobody. I like the silence and the hours I turn to study books or study myself. I like the way I have to walk for miles for water and carry it home on my head. And I just like the Batswana, not the big shots, but all the people who walk around with no shoes (1995:102).

In this statement, Head identifies with the downtrodden, with 'nonentities'. What she professes to like is human simplicity and

ordinariness. In other words, Head is explaining her preference for not finding a model of identity in powerful people or in structures of power. She believes in humanity, in humaneness and in humanitarianism. By virtue of her precarious origins she claims the identity of the poor. The Batswana are her models: 'I just like the Batswana,' she says. In her writing one can see the gradual process of Head's association and sharing with the Batswana.

The subject of alienation is the focus of Head's next novel *Maru* (1971). She uses and manipulates characters to trace the experience of alienation and examines ways and means of coming to terms with negative forces. She projects her problems, feelings and fantasies onto Margaret Cadmore. Margaret comes to the village of Dilepe to be a teacher but is confronted with a racial prejudice of the villagers, pupils and parents alike. Like Head Margaret cannot bear to be constantly reminded that she is 'coloured'. Head felt that discrimination belonged to her South African past. She was determined to fight it in Botswana. Therefore, Head uses Margaret to test discrimination. She writes to a friend,

I'm going to bloody well adopt this country as my own, by force. I am going to take it as my family (in Eilersen 1995:102).

This is an assertion of purpose which reflects how ready Head was to take control of her mind and of her inner world. Margaret is portrayed as a victim of discrimination, alienation and oppression. She represents what it means to be discriminated against; she is a medium through whom the writer communicates the ugliness of oppression to the reader. The extent to which Margaret reflects the writer's experience of discrimination is illustrated in the positions into which she is placed by

her writer. For example, when the Dilepe villagers and pupils in the school learn that Margaret is a Masarwa there is a great commotion, and they say: "There is no place for a Masarwa, whom everyone has seen behaving like a low animal...Apparently people don't like the idea of a Masarwa teaching their children" (53-54). Through Margaret, Head amplifies the evil of racial harassment which often impacts negatively on the inner world of human goodness.

And yet the reader understands the figure of Margaret not only literally as suffering oppression and discrimination but also as a symbol of transformation and a spokesperson for ordinary human beings. When she is mistaken for a 'coloured', she is quick to point out that she is Masarwa: a race regarded by the Batswana as an inferior form of human life. Margaret's pronouncement must be regarded as an effort to assert individuality and identity:

Dikeledi drew in her breath with a sharp hissing sound. Dilepe village was the stronghold of some of the most powerful and wealthy chiefs in the country, all of whom owned innumerable Masarwa as slaves. "But I am not ashamed of being a Masarwa," the young girl said seriously (24).

Robin Visel shares the view that Margaret should be regarded as an agent of transformation rather than just the victim of racial oppression. She writes:

In Margaret, then, Head depicts the triumphant emergence of a member of the silent slave class, a woman whose talent and strength of will symbolise the latent power that the oppressed hold over their rulers. Margaret's pictures boldly proclaim: "It is I and my tribe who possess the true vitality of this country. You lost it when you sat down and let us clean your floors and rear your children and cattle. Now we want to be free of you and busy with our own affairs" (1990:120).

Through Margaret Head defines her mission as being, on the one hand, to release the oppressed people from slavery, harassment and discrimination. On the other, it is to define a broader identity which is inclusive of all humans, for example, enabling the Masarwa and the Batswana to live together not only as Africans but also as human beings.

If Margaret is certain, as Geurts claims, that 'her heritage as a Masarwa [does] not make her an inferior human being' (1986:63), then her vision of transforming the hostile environment into which she has come is grounded in a firm base of identity which enables her to proclaim her "Masarwaness" widely and without shame. She has tremendous inner strength and individuality. Head makes Margaret a person who is envied by other characters, especially her colleagues. Dikeledi, her friend, longs to be like her, even though she is a member of the royal family:

"I wish I was like you Margaret," she said, wistfully. "You look as though you could live like this forever. You look as though you don't want anyone or anything..."(114).

Such is Dikeledi's perception of Margaret! Although outwardly she seems to be leading a contented life, in private she faces the upheaval which comes with emotional attachment. This schism between public face and private experience is another manifestation of Head's model of complementary existence and her awareness of conflicting forces within each individual. Thus Head describes Margaret through Maru's eyes:

There was something else funny about her. She was a shadow behind which lived another personality of great vigour and vitality. She raised her hand to hide this second image from sight, but the two constantly tripped up each other (71).

In describing the nature of autobiography, Watts notes that human personalities frequently assume masks. Following Chabani Manganyi she argues that:

each one of us carries a double...a kind of replica of self that is always in conflict with the mask that faces the world. To protect this mask from its double, one cherishes an illusion and nourishes it - the illusion that the future and prosperity of the mask depends upon a negation of the past both individual and collective (1989:117).

What Watts draws from Manganyi is relevant to Head's Margaret whom she describes as having two images or 'masks'. The second image, according to Watts, is a suppressed traumatic experience which one would rather forget. Refusing to face up to one's painful past by 'negating' experiences of oppression and alienation is to live a lie in 'a mask' of seeming contentment. But underneath this sham brews an explosive situation. Maru then becomes aware that Margaret is trying hard to suppress a powerful creative spirit which could enable her to express herself through the barriers of racial marginalisation and thus change attitudes of the oppressors. In this case, I believe, constructing an identity requires a confrontation with the realities of the 'masks' on which a re-ordering of values and attitudes can be made. This seems to be an exercise in complementarity.

Where Head's search for identity leads her to confront the stark reality of her situation by removing her masks, Margaret's assignment is to establish relationships with ordinary people, and by the radiance of her inner strength to permeate the fabric of complex societies. It must be remembered, though, that this process of coming to terms with reality was a slow development for Head which continued for as long as she wrote. I will return to this point later in this chapter.

If Margaret is to reach out and transform the attitudes of the people around her she cannot continue to lie to people like Dikeledi that she 'is peaceful because [she] has nothing and [she] wants nothing' (114). This statement is a typical 'mask' behind which she hides her true feelings. Behind Margaret's mask of passivity is a personality of 'great vigour and vitality', which is expressed both in her art and in her triangular relationship with Maru, the chief-in-waiting, and Moleka, his friend. The effect of Margaret's inner radiance is profound: both men secretly admire and love her.

Through Maru, Head calls for the transformation of oppressive human attitudes such as those that exist in Dilepe village. This transformation can perhaps come about through human goodness and human love. Head admires ordinary people who she defines in terms of their respect for one another's dignity, their kindness and equality, and their willingness to share and to complement each other's qualities. How can Maru, a man of power and distinction, be classified as ordinary? In terms of his status as a future chief he is not an ordinary person. He represents high office. And yet Maru is open-minded enough to recognise other people's humanity. Thus he is presented as a character who is influenced by ordinariness and in turn interacts with it to promote change.

It was here where he could communicate freely with all the magic and beauty inside him. There had never been a time in his life when he had not thought a thought and felt it immediately bound to the deep centre of the earth, then bound back to his heart again - with a reply (7).

Visel sees Maru's environment of inner peace as Head's 'vision of a new world which is both spiritual and physical' (1990:119). As a visionary, Maru is in constant dialogue with his thoughts, which he personifies as

'his gods' or 'his guiding spirit' (8). I believe that these 'voices' are an authorial manipulation which guides Maru like Makhaya into 'choosing beautifully' the path to simplicity. My belief emanates from the fact that Head reflects her ideals and her experiences through her characters. She admits creating her characters and manipulating them into speaking for the writer.

In order to transform and recreate communal values, Maru must renounce power and identify with Margaret's world.

His was not the kind of personality to rule the masses. They knew it and disliked him for never being there on show. And yet, at the same time, he was highly popular among ordinary people. His manner towards everyone was of courteous informal respect...He set the tone, seemingly, for a new world (50).

Maru is a unique character who is able to recognise his community's shortcomings. While he speaks of human love he is quite aware that most people on earth are power-mongers, who are: 'greedy, grasping backstabbing, a betrayal of all the good in mankind'. He states sternly:

I was not born to rule this mess. If I have a place, it is to pull down the old structures and create the new. Not for me any sovereignty over my fellow men...People no longer needed chiefs and kings and figure-heads who wore dazzling garments (68-69).

To make this vision a reality, Maru must connect with Margaret's aesthetic world. Visel describes the complementary elements in Margaret and in Maru as

two halves of one self. She paints his visions, she is his destiny. He safeguards his spiritual and her artistic odyssey by abdicating the kingship (1990:119).

Margaret is of course not only a teacher but also an accomplished artist. She paints images of ordinary people in the village, people without voices or faces. As a painter her task is to infuse these images with life. And through her paintings she affirms and expresses her own vitality. She identifies with the paintings and with life in the 'canvas village'.

[The] picture of Dilepe, at sunset hour, slowly unfolded on the canvas...Margaret grew in strength of purpose and personality. Perhaps constant communication and affection assisted the subconscious change...[A] more powerful woman who dwelt behind the insignificant shadow [was] brought to the forefront. The slowly unfolding landscape was very much part of this emerging personality who had lived with and loved someone in silence for a long while (112).

Art for Margaret is an outlet for her emotions. Her bottled-up experiences of alienation and racial prejudice are released not through violence but through the expression of beauty. In her painting she transforms the pain and suffering of the ordinary people who cannot speak. Margaret's expression of vitality reflects Head's own art, although Head as a writer does with words what Margaret does with paint. Head's 'biography' is reflected in her writing and through her characters. Yet in writing it she becomes the voice of the 'nonentities'. Roy Pascal in *Design and Truth in Autobiography* claims that writers who seek their own identity,

become spokesmen for millions who have no voice...the "I" stands for all the people for whom the authors are the voice. "As I was one of them, I have attempted to be vocal on their behalf, not in the form of propaganda, but simply by giving my own truth" (1960:177).

The manner in which Margaret paints her pictures affects the people who come into contact with her. The pictures are so lovely and real that they cause people like Dikeledi and Maru to take another look at life and at

their attitudes towards their fellow human beings. Dikeledi, for instance, cannot hold back her surprise at how authentic the images in the pictures seem. Maru's image is particularly prominent and this frightens his sister who asks: "Do you always see things like that?" (104). Dikeledi comes to realise that there is a deep psychic connection between Margaret and her brother. She believes that there is an inexplicable force that somehow enables Maru's visions to filter through to Margaret. Yet she cannot quite put a finger on it.

Life appeared to be a mystery, a deep interwoven tangle. How had he done it? How had he projected his dreams on someone so far removed from him? That sort of thing was meat and drink to Maru, but it changed the picture when some other living being was on the receiving end of his dreams, especially such a true and sensitive recorder as Margaret. There were many things she doubted about Maru. He was too rich in speculation and mystery. But Margaret? Everything about her was direct, purposeful and straightforward (104-105).

Dikeledi comes face to face with the 'powerful woman' behind the 'insignificant shadow'. Margaret's strength can be sustained by tapping from a stronger intellectual visionary like Maru. In Visel's words: 'She paints his visions...he safeguards her artistic odyssey' (1990:119).

Maru realises that, to achieve his goals for social good, he has to bond with Margaret and has to remove all stumbling blocks to the ordinary life of his future. This he does by abdicating from his position of power so that people like his sister do not think of Margaret 'as someone so far removed from marrying him'. Together they defy structures of prejudice to establish a 'new world' of social equality and complementarity.

When people of the Masarwa tribe heard about Maru's marriage to one of their own, a door silently opened on the small, dark airless room in which their souls had been shut for a long time. The wind of freedom, which

was blowing throughout the world for all people, turned and flowed into the room. As they breathed in the fresh, clear air their humanity awakened. They examined their condition. There was the fetid air, the excreta and the horror of being an oddity of the human race, with half the head of a man and half the body of a donkey. They laughed in an embarrassed way, scratching their heads. How had they fallen into this condition, when indeed, they were as human as everyone else? They started to run out into the sunlight...they looked at the dark room. They said: "We are not going back there" (126).

In *Maru*, Head presents a drama that is internal and private but whose consequences are external and public. She places the inner workings of her characters' minds on centre stage so as to reflect her own realities. Thus when Maru commits himself and Margaret to a common course of liberating the oppressed, they communicate their emotions and visions on a spiritual or psychic level. And in doing so, both seem to be enacting Head's own journey.

Craig MacKenzie has described Head's novels as inwardly directed rather than socially oriented. He suggests that Maru and his relationship with Margaret, especially,

is offered on one level as a way to end racial antagonism: there is a real sense that Head is concerned with the real world, to institute change, put an end to racial prejudice and reactionary codes of behaviour (1989a:27).

MacKenzie argues that Head fails to unite the external with the internal confines of the mind. Yet it seems to me that MacKenzie does not sufficiently explore the influence of social forces of oppression on the individual workings of the mind. The forces of oppression, alienation and racial prejudice all too often make a character like Margaret a victim. It is, therefore, futile for a victim of racial prejudice and oppression to come to terms with the external world. Thus Margaret and Maru cannot understand the external world without exploring their internal worlds first.

Watts regards writers who seek their identity through their writing as '[purging] their work of compulsive [angers] evoked by what is happening around them, all the time' (1989:112). This suggests that if a writer like Head presents her life history to the public, then she is presenting her own consciousness and not just a record of external milestones. This argument has a bearing on the definition offered earlier of autobiography as a writer's examination of her self.

Margaret's art enables her both to produce images of reality and to explore her own consciousness. This 'reality' is then imparted to the external world and makes an impact on the artist's audience. The impact establishes a bond between the artist's internal world and that of the society in which she seeks identity. Margaret achieves this identity by marrying Maru, and by making him 'identify with the many wrongs of mankind' (8). Maru identifies with the non-confining dreams which stretched across every 'barrier and taboo and lovingly embraced the impossible' (110).

What Maru and Margaret accomplish in terms of their personal understanding did not happen for Head whose own life was by no means as simple as Margaret's. At the time of writing *Maru* it seemed particularly bleak. She plunged deeper into mental turmoil in Botswana, into psychological bondage from which she battled to free herself. She came to realise that oppression and prejudice came primarily from quarters of power because they are exercised by those who are in positions of power. This realisation is contrary to the hopeful beginnings in *When Rain Clouds Gather* where Makhaya's expectations as a refugee

from South Africa are fulfilled in his establishment of a safe haven for himself in a new country.

Head's search for an answer to the question: "Who am I?", leads her to a painful self-examination. Her search is directed towards the centre of her 'consciousness' which she refers to as the soul. Confronted with the pain of racial prejudice and oppression in Botswana, she comes to realise that these discriminatory attitudes are not confined to her past in South Africa, but exist also in the country she wishes to adopt.

When Head begins *Maru* with its conclusion, she creates in the reader a sense of strong conflict that can be anticipated if power is not balanced by a concern for others. She suggests the potential evil of this power by presenting its consequences in the friendship between Maru and Moleka. Through these characters, Head demonstrates that if power is used for selfish ends it cannot construct a good society: only the power of love can do so. Head also warns us that the wielding of power will always create insecurities which often lead to further atrocities. A typical example is Maru's unease with Moleka's affection for Margaret which sometimes forces him to entertain murderous thoughts towards Moleka.

He was thrown off-balance by the haunting fear that he would one day be forced to kill Moleka, one way or another...Perhaps he had seriously miscalculated Moleka's power, that Moleka possessed some superior quality over which he had little control. Was it a superior kind of love? Or was it a kind of power? He'd trust the love but not the power because power could parade as anything. He's weep too, if he really believed that Moleka had a greater love than his own. What his heart said was that Moleka had a greater power than he had, and he had felt no remorse at what he had done to the only person he loved as he loved his wife (80-10).

In the Maru-Moleka relationship, Head explores the duality of good and evil. The power play is not only present in the romantic struggle between Maru and Moleka, but also manifests itself in the inner conflict of unbalanced power. In my opinion, Head's concern is with the corrosive effect power can have if it is abused. Power *per se* is not evil, but needs to be balanced by a recognition and concern for others. Ola argues that although

Head plays [Maru-Moleka's] essential oneness throughout the book...In character they both possess contradictory traits, positive and negative, each crystallising in description and in action the totality of the personality of the other friend (1990:65).

Head's third novel, *A Question of Power* (1974), offers a dramatisation of internalised human suffering which readers often battle to make sense of because of its complex pattern. According to MacKenzie:

The stress [in the novels] becomes progressively more interior and also more personal. As the focus narrows from a broader, external one to an inner psychic one, so the issues approximate more closely the personal experiences of the author. The problems which are displayed on a flat Botswana landscape in *Rainclouds* are embodied by individual characters in *Maru* and are finally internalised completely in *A Question of Power*. Autobiography is the logical end-point of this sequence (1989a:20).

MacKenzie's claim is based on the fact that the heroine Elizabeth's experiences in the novel are fashioned and remodeled from Head's emotional and mental experiences in real life and from her preoccupation's with identity. MacKenzie considers *A Question of Power* to be the most autobiographical of Head's works, and he bases this conclusion on Head's own words: "Elizabeth and I are one" (1989a:29). If Elizabeth serves for the writer only the purpose of projecting the central concern, which is the excruciating nature of corruptive power in the hands of people, then MacKenzie's 'logical end-point of autobiography' is

justified. Yet in assessing this view we also need to recognise that Elizabeth is a fictional character who has her own fictional existence. It is true that the alienation that Elizabeth suffers through being isolated from other children in school (16), is similar to Head's own school days in the convents. Elizabeth's struggle with the question of identity and the negative implications of power is dramatised through psychological dream sequences of good and bad. The novel falls into two parts which are dominated respectively, by two male characters, Sello and Dan. The two parts dramatise a fierce battle between Sello and Dan who represent the conflict between good and bad. In *A Question of Power* the conflict occurs within the strained mind of Elizabeth who, like Head in the village of Serowe, loses touch with reality in the process of her mental breakdown and her psychological suffering.

In the writer's projection of her excruciating pain onto Elizabeth, we find an echo of her dead mother's appeal 'to share love and to share suffering': "Now you know. Do you think I can bear the stigma of insanity alone? Share it with me" (17). As Elizabeth's dead mother's calls on her to share her insanity, so Head expects Elizabeth to share the stigma of madness. The invitation is further extended to the reader to partake of the writer's and character's worlds - and specifically their harrowing experience of alienation and madness.

If the world of human goodness is characterised by sharing and by complementarity then Elizabeth must recognise the fact that she is both an individual and a social being. It is a fact with which she struggles, through her mental disturbance, to come to terms. Her preference is to remain private and to exclude others from her world. She feels she has

been made an outsider, been ostracised because, as Head was, she is defined as Coloured. As Sarvan points out, she is 'a descendant of African and European parents and finds herself in a racial no-man's land' (1987:84).

Elizabeth reflects an inner turmoil which further alienates her from the community she has come to join. The juxtaposition of good and evil in Sello and Dan is a nightmare experience which is confusing for Elizabeth. Yet the psychological journey she undertakes gradually restores her sense of worth and belonging. This happens when her feelings of isolation from her immediate community and prejudice against it are relieved. Strangely enough, it is this very community that offers her relief from mental illness, by providing projects in which she can take part. She makes attempts to socialise, and is slowly restored to a sense of normality. So she takes control of her private life. She readily connects with social activity and engagement in the agricultural schemes:

It was a point at which there were no private hungers to be kissed, loved, adored. And yet there was a feeling of being kissed by everything; by the air, the soft flow of life, people's smiles and friendships; and propelled forward by the acquisition of the vast and universal love, they had moved among men again and again and told them they loved them. That was the essential nature of their love. It had included all mankind. It equalised all things and all men...She had reeled towards death. She turned and reeled towards life. She reeled blissfully happy up the dusty brown road, down the pathway into the valley area of the local industries projects... "I have been ill", Elizabeth said... "I've come back to work," Elizabeth said. "Let me see the garden." They began to think together again. And so the morning flew. The world had returned to normal again (202-204).

As author Head stands in the same relation to Elizabeth as her mother did to her: she is the creator of Elizabeth and manipulates her to take on her mental illness. Thus the fictionalised Elizabeth shares similar experiences

with the writer, Head. Nevertheless Elizabeth's inner strength enables her to break away from the writer's life to take on a transformed life; away from isolation, towards integration and sharing. Yet what happens to Elizabeth at the end of her ordeal does not follow in the writer's reality, much as she wished it through Elizabeth. Head wrote the following to Randolph Vigne:

There is a big leap forward for me, internally. I don't think my outward life is secure but the inside is free and I thought that if I could build on that, the practical outward problems could resolve themselves...God knows how I wish I could go away somewhere...Just now I'm very afraid (Letters 1991:145-152).

Head's acknowledgement of a rediscovery of a sense of inner strength and a secure private life free from feelings of evil, of alienation and prejudice from the Botswana people, allow her the reintegration Elizabeth achieved. She still cannot socialise freely with the public, however, being afraid of the reactions of the people she hurt during her mental breakdown. She can only afford to express the desire for free social involvement through Elizabeth's fictional victory.

Eilersen finds an imbalance in Head's private and public life, because of Head's admission in a letter attached to the manuscript of *A Question of Power* which evaluated the novel as 'almost autobiographical...[for] Elizabeth lives more in contact with her soul than living reality' (1995:149). The distinction is important, implying that, although Elizabeth undergoes an inner quest for self-discovery, her journey is concluded at a different point of development to Head's. For this reason, one regards Elizabeth as breaking away from the autobiographical pattern in *A Question of Power*. To me Eilersen's evaluation is more accurate

than MacKenzie's who has considered Head's claim of the unfolding of Elizabeth's character as synonymous with Head's too literally. Eilersen argues that

Elizabeth, a reflection of Bessie Head herself, does achieve healing, can banish her sense of isolation and feel that she belongs. Unfortunately, as time was to show, the autobiographical element does not apply in this vital area. Bessie could not eradicate her paranoiac concern with evil by writing about it (1995:150).

Elizabeth's quick regaining of a sense of personhood in *A Question of Power* is not an accurate reflection of Head's real life even though Head is still the one who imagines and writes it in the novel. What Head has done in creating Elizabeth is to shape an identity for Elizabeth which makes her emerge as a strong and peaceful fictional figure. Through Elizabeth's re-instatement into normality, Head experiences therapeutic feelings which make her, 'feel contained in peace by the external life that has run like a thread through the course of her journey into insanity' (Watts 1989:141).

To be part of Botswana Head was in 'most need of feeling success in a community venture' (1995:140). Head's purpose in creating Elizabeth can be understood in the claim by Patricia Ball that:

It is the urge to self-discovery that drives a [writer] into taking on the personalities of the characters [she] creates; it is [her] way of exploring human possibility and [her] own humanity (1968:23).

Head's ideal destination is a world of sharing and complementarity. The earlier novels reveal her preoccupation with racial harmony and the reconciliation of diverse value systems. This preoccupation surfaces in *When Rain Clouds Gather* when Makhaya abandons a militant attitude to

work towards uplifting the standard of his new society into mutual tolerance and understanding. In *Maru*, the epomynous character abdicates his chieftancy in order to marry a lowly Masarwa woman, Margaret. Elizabeth's and Sello's bond concludes in a state of universal love. The final proposition in *A Question of Power* is that human beings are individuals first but also essential components of a just and gentle society promoting equality for all.

The promotion of equality in the relationships Head depicts, is evident especially among women whose historical status in patriarchal societies is one of inferiority. Head's identification with communities that recognise its members as human beings with rights and dignity, indicates a close interest in her women characters, a point with which I wish to conclude this chapter.

By placing women characters in egalitarian relationships Head reveals her ideals for social relationships. She has indicated in the novels her disapproval of patriarchal dominance because it often results in oppression. For Head the female consciousness must be freed from the shackles of oppression and empowered to create and to recreate. The transformation of society should recognise women in new ways. In Head's work this is expressed in the figures of dedicated women of Elizabeth's mettle, expressive artists of Margaret's calibre, community leaders and initiators of community projects of Paulina's determination and traditional leaders of Dikeledi's rank. Head's literary career itself marks a regeneration of the image of women on the African continent.

Head's recognition of the equality of the rights of women and men is shown in several instances of men's abdication from positions of power and patriarchal authority to assume positions of equality and complementarity with their women partners. She encourages in her writing a sharing of responsibilities by men and women. To her it is an ideal situation if a liberated woman can allow her male counterpart to venture into traditionally feminine domains by allowing him to perform tasks such as baby-sitting, cooking and mending of clothes. The Makhaya-Paulina and the Maria-Gilbert relationships demonstrate this complementarity. As an exponent of improved women's status, Head is careful to insist that no man or woman should dominate the other. She says in *A Question of Power*.

Maybe the world would be a little saner after the strains of the past were over and women were both goddesses and housekeepers and there was a time for loving (201).

As Head's writing develops, her ideas and impressions of ideal existence and ideal relationship are expressed through her characterisation which reflects a greater concern for ways of creating a better society. When she proposes better treatment for women to underwrite a dignified identity, she is not conscientising African societies with a totally new concept, but rather re-kindling a traditional attitude of respect for women as persons. Rosamund Metcalf emphasises Head's concern about the liberation of women's consciousness:

[The] traditional African respect for a woman in her symbolic and spiritual dimension must now be supplemented by respect for a woman as a person, deserving of all the dignity and freedom which every human being should enjoy by right of birth (1989:25).

For Head, what a woman symbolises in the African context is not enough: there is a need for a better image, a better personality that will be respected as a rational being, a human being.

What we have found in the three novels is Head's engagement in the study of relationships placing special emphasis on women's roles in their societies. The three major women characters in these novels have been created by Head to mirror aspects of her life. Like her, Paulina, Margaret and Elizabeth experience alienation from people of the villages in which they have settled. Because of the strength of the spirit of independence she gives these characters, they are able to transcend difficulties, consolidate inner power and recognise their partners as equals in the process of transforming rigid societies. Though Head is largely responsible for imagining and writing her characters' fictional world in the novel, she still recognises and credits her characters with strength which she herself did not achieve in her own life. By allowing characters to appear capable of making their own decisions, which are distinct from her life, Head is proving that characters are not simply automatons who re-enact her life. We have seen for example, how Elizabeth is made to take charge of her shattered life after a period of extreme mental anguish by joining in community ventures as a self-actualised person whose interest lies in the development of harmonious co-existence. The freedom of characters that Head allows has also been recognised by Ola:

Head assesses the Botswana woman's worth by the degree of inner strength, individuality and drive with which she is able to rise above the brutalising and restrictive roles assigned her by an unimaginative society (1986:46).

Head's subsequent works indicate an interest in women's social commitment and hence mark a shift from the depressing concerns of her biography to the re-affirmation of social values and a determination to fit herself into the pattern of her adoptive land, Botswana. This is evident in the way she explores what happens to people around her, particularly women in traditional and modern environments. The next chapter will focus on the more socially oriented positions assumed by both characters and writer in seeking identity and in reclaiming human dignity in a fragmented society. The themes of tribalism, modernity, Christianity and gender relationships will provide the basis for an exploration of the importance of complementarity in Head's continuing search for an ideal identity.

CHAPTER 3

COMPLEMENTARITY IN THE WORLD OF ORDINARY PEOPLE:

The Collector of Treasures and Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind

The least I can say for myself is that I forcefully created for myself under extremely hostile conditions, my ideal life. I took an obscure and almost unknown village in the Southern African bush and made it my own hallowed ground. Here, in the steadiness and peace of my own world, I could dream a little ahead of the somewhat vicious clamour of revolution and the horrible stench of social systems. My work was always tentative because it was always so completely new: it created a new world out of nothing; it brought all kinds of people, both literate and semi-literate together, and it did not really qualify who was who - everyone had a place in my world (1990:28)

This statement from *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings* reveals Head's determination to map out an ideal life for herself by adopting a foreign land as her own. The context of the extract suggests that the quest for identity is a driving force in her effort to establish roots in Botswana. She focuses on living above the issues of race, colour and creed. Her aim is to include all kinds of people in her world.

In the previous chapter I considered how Head's creation of character in her trilogy of novels reflected her own life experiences and how she used her characters, particularly in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, to 'create for [themselves] under extremely hostile conditions, an ideal life' (1990:28). Like that of her characters in *Maru* and *A Question of Power*, Head's ideal life is set in a Botswanan village which she regards as 'hallowed ground'

(28). Running away from political oppression and turmoil in South Africa, Head eventually finds steadiness and peace in an adopted land. Yet this new life begins only after a period of intense alienation. Unlike her women figures, Margaret and Elizabeth, Head is slow to come to terms with the experience of racial prejudice and alienation. As her writing begins to show, however, she eventually does emerge from her ordeal of revolutionary clamour and stinking social systems as a victor who creates a 'new world' in which all kinds of people can live together and share an identity.

This ideal world, characterised by equality, 'does not qualify who is who'. The egalitarian relationships she promotes in the novels confirm that Head identifies with assertive African women who, whilst upholding their individuality, retain their community status by communal involvement. This is part of Head's insistence that complementarity is crucial to a meaningful life. Likewise Head's textual explorations of individual characters' consciousness illustrate a need to connect the inner world with the outer world. MacKenzie concurs:

In *Rainclouds*, Makhaya's struggle is to reconcile his material existence with his inner life...He acts in the real world and the world in turn provokes an inner reaction. The two realms are finally brought into accord. With *Maru* the stress is more upon the inner self. Yet Maru succeeds in his ideals only when he has brought the outside world into harmony with his inward desires (1989a:31).

The extract from *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings* (1990) quoted at the beginning of this chapter asserts the relationship between inner and outer worlds. This relationship, between character and identity, will now be further explored in the documentary history, *Serowe: Village*

of *the Rain Wind* (1981), and in selections from the short fiction, specifically *The Collector of Treasures* (1977). My investigation will consider the positions assumed by the writer in relation to her characters and the influence, on the self and on identity, of tradition, history, religion, culture, ethnicity and gender. The relationships that exist between the characters in the short stories will be seen to offer a penetrating insight into both the private and the public life, particularly in the constitution of complementary identities by women and for women.

The subject-matter of the short fiction and the socio-historical novel is related and this makes it difficult to draw a line between the textual content of the two. In this regard MacKenzie argues that *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind* and *The Collector of Treasures*

are wholly complementary if taken as twin portraits of Serowe village. The interest of the stories in providing an accurate description of life in an African village, and that of the history in fashioning the interview material according to the author's artistic aims, bring the two works a lot closer together than would perhaps initially be expected (1989a:43).

Head's short stories are, in her own words, fictionalised versions of village incidents, reconstructed by her creative imagination, which project her attitudes and ideals. And yet the process of story-telling is an intricate one, in which Head creates both character and text. Furthermore, Head could not have coped in collecting interview data for the stories if she had not had the assistance of her enthusiastic interpreter, Bosele Sianana. Judging by the credibility of the stories produced by Head, Sianana's efforts in describing the socio-cultural existence of the Batswana to her are thoroughly competent.

This exercise in cultural translation is not an easy one. In 'The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology' Talal Asad highlights some of the subtleties involved:

The problem of describing to others how members of a remote tribe think then begins to appear largely as one of translation, of making the coherence primitive thought has in the languages it really lives in, as clear as possible in our own (1987:142).

The complexities of translating a culture from the language of one tribe (Batswana in this case) into English are captured in the definitions: 'to carry over meaning' or, according to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 'to express meaning in another language'. Daniel Kunene in his Introduction to *Chaka* points out:

The challenges of translation are many...The translator comes in as a kind of cultural go-between who provides his good services to pass on, as best as he can, the benefits of one culture to the practitioners of the 'other' culture. One of the most difficult things about translation is that you have to determine your loyalties before you embark on it. You have constantly to ask yourself whether your translation does justice to the original, whether in fact it says what the author intended to convey. Then, on the other hand, you have to make sure that by trying to be faithful to the original, you do not then travesty the idiom of the receiving language...so that in the end loyalties are split virtually equally between the donor language and the recipient language (1981:xx).

Both Asad and Kunene emphasise the importance of not adulterating the meaning that the translation is intended to put across. The language of the translator must not overshadow the essence of the original but should make a presentation that clearly benefits the other culture. Kunene, therefore, regards the position of translator as 'go-between' as vital in ensuring that both languages, the 'donor' and the 'recipient', are not travestied or undermined in the translation process. Another perspective is offered by Sol Plaatje who presents translations of an oral culture in *Mhudi*. Unlike

Kunene, Plaatje is not 'outside' the experience he is translating. Plaatje has the advantage of being an integral part of the culture that he is writing about for a specific English-speaking audience. What he wants to put across he thus does without the 'agony' suffered by Kunene in his corresponding task.

My purpose here is not so much to compare the ethnographic positions of these two writers as to emphasise the complexity of 'carrying over' cultural meaning. Head's position differs in regard to the act of translation because she is dependent on the services of a Setswana language speaker who will translate first for her and then through her for an English readership. Sianana and the village interviewees, therefore, have to enter into a collaborative relationship with Head. Asad quotes David Pocock who couches this collaborative relationship in terms of the psychoanalyst and his subject. He explains it as follows:

The analyst enters the private world of his subject in order to learn the grammar of his private language [and in the process] the private language of intimate understanding is translated into a public language (1986:88-89).

Head's friendship with Sianana was crucial in that it enabled her to cross the barrier of language between herself and the villagers. Though Sianana's presence in the stories is not obvious, this does not mean she has been completely effaced. Rather, her presence must be sought in the individuality of the writer's response to the stories about village life. With the advantage of both languages (Setswana and a fair command of English) Sianana becomes a link between the writer and the villagers. In doing so she translates and interprets Head's subjects and in this way leads Head into 'the private language of intimate understanding' (Pocock 1961:88). As a Tswana woman Sianana knows and understands the ways of the

Batswana. Crudely speaking, she becomes Head's "ethnographer" - an expert in describing Batswanan behaviour patterns and communicating them to her. By becoming a link between the writer and the Batswana, Sianana enables Head to set down coherently an adopted heritage. The mutual understanding that exists between the two women parallels textual complementarity that characterises so much of Head's writing. Thus her role as facilitator of the translation process should not be underestimated. Head learns from her and inscribes the oral presentations of Batswana culture into text. Therefore, as Asad suggests,

[If] the anthropological translator...has final authority in determining the subject's meanings - it is then the former who becomes the real author of the latter...(1986:162).

In talking about the subject of autobiography, Lejeune raises a point which I find applicable to short stories and fiction when he describes the author as follows:

He is a person who writes and publishes. Straddling the world-beyond-the-text and the text, he is the connection between the two. The author is defined as simultaneously a socially responsible real person, and the producer of a discourse. For the reader, who does not know the real person, all the while believing in his existence, the author is defined as the person capable of producing this discourse, and so imagines what he is like from what he produces (1989:11).

According to this argument Sianana is important as facilitator of the translation process but the final production of the short stories rests with Head. Though Head's position is that of a learner in a new society, unlike ordinary cultural translators who read, translate, then withdraw from society, Head does not withdraw from society. She becomes part of it. Therefore, she is not only constructing a version of another society for her own readership, but is also writing herself into it and thus finding a new

identity for herself within the Botswanan mode of life. Not only does she live with the Batswana as a Motswana, she also writes about how they live and how they ought to live.

Head's short stories describe a society that expresses its history through traditional oral story-telling. In her stories she reveals her commitment to this society by participating in the public sphere of the Serowe community. She occupies the position of story-teller and literary preserver of the culture of traditional story-telling. By writing stories about Tswana culture and traditions Head is salvaging the little bits of what Plaatje calls 'stray scraps of tribal history' (1987:21). More than this, she has come to settle in Botswana and so cannot remain aloof from the arena of Botswanan identity but must become a part of it.

In this chapter I read the stories as demonstrating the complexity of human nature and human conduct. I select stories which are representative of themes such as tribalism, modernism, religion (particularly Christianity), family structure and social exclusion. In the stories selected the characters engage in relationships which demonstrate the idea of complementarity. The emphasis Head puts on certain behavioural patterns stems from a concern for human goodness. In 'Narrative Strategies in Bessie Head's Stories' Nigel Thomas views her approach as:

[praising] what she deemed praiseworthy, condemn[ing] what she saw as oppressive and highlight[ing] what she saw as social folly...Her approach is not to obscure the subjects she writes about, or to leave interpretation strictly up to the reader, but rather to clarify without being reductive or simplistic (1990:94).

The stories I will use to explore the writer's concerns are 'The Deep River', 'Heaven Is Not Closed', 'The Collector of Treasures' and 'Life'. Themes will be traced across the stories and then linked to the issues raised in the *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind* interviews.

The story 'The Deep River' is set in pre-colonial times when the leader of the tribe is the only one with an identity - or, as the narrator has it, the only one with a face. His subjects are 'faceless': they have no individuality, and they are unable to express their private thoughts. For this reason the tribe is named after their chief. No one contests this traditional set-up; the tribe remains calm and tranquil like a 'deep river'.

All the people lived this way, like one face under their chief. They accepted this regimental levelling down of their individual souls, but on the day of dispute or when strife and conflict and greed blew stormy winds over their deep river, the people awoke and showed their individual faces ('Collector', 2).

This becomes a story of tribal conflict which presents the reader with the figure of Chief Sebembele who, when he initiates a transformation of the ideology of chief as absolute ruler, is considered to be defying the traditional structures. After the death of his father, Sebembele succeeds to the throne. When he declares that Rankwana, his father's junior wife, is now his wife, the calm of the tribe is disturbed: the calm of the 'deep river' is set in turmoil. He also acknowledges Rankwana's child as his. Tribal conflict ensues within the nucleus of the tribe which is made up of old traditional men who are offended at the prospect that Sebembele can be controlled and manipulated by a woman. He refuses the advice of the senior councillors to take somebody else as his wife. Sebembele declares

openly that 'the love between Rankwana and [himself] is great' (3). The narrative voice qualifies his decision as a 'blunder' (3).

Sebembele's actions and decisions give rise to a split in the tribe. On the one hand there is the group of the traditional men who disapprove of his action. These old men remind Sebembele of his tribal position: 'If we were you we would look for a wife somewhere else' (3). Since Sebembele's position is a symbol of tradition and collectivity, this traditionalist group is expressing regret and disappointment that their chief is showing a different 'face', a new face they have never seen before. On the other hand a new splinter group is supportive of the chief's individual initiative and emotional commitment. This group is compassionate and sees Rankwana as a fellow human being with dignity, a woman of substance who is capable of being 'the wife of a chief'. The splinter group represents a shift in the tribe's thinking process. Sebembele's initiative leads people to speak their minds and express their private feelings which approve of the chief's action: 'If he loves her, let him keep her. We all know Rankwana. She is a lovely person deserving to be the wife of a chief' (3). By publicly acknowledging the woman of his choice, Sebembele abandons his position of power with all its rigid tribal traditions and so stimulates the flexibility of individual thinking. The group which is supporting transformation realises that 'they have a ruler who talks with deeds rather than words' (5).

Through Sebembele, Head creates a dichotomy between traditional and modern thinking, a direct confrontation between the 'old and new'. The shift in thinking marks a movement forward from rigid ideologies. Head

cannot allow Rankwana to suffer the consequences of isolation and rejection. As a story-teller she manipulates her characters into experiences that resemble her own. Her experience of alienation as a foreigner in Botswana leads her to identify with Rankwana's plight. Therefore, the relationship between Sebembele and Rankwana must survive so that Rankwana's integrity is not undermined in the patriarchal society. Walter Benjamin in 'The Storyteller' describes the process of story-telling as '[taking] what [one] tells from experience - his own or that reported by others - and [making] it the experience of those reading it' (1979:14). Head's comment about Sebembele's thoughts is designed to enable the reader to construct a better image of Rankwana and to avoid seeing her through the eye of the 'world where women were of no account' (3). This is the world governed by the mentality of the old traditionalists. As Sebembele migrates with his family and a few supporters he moves on to establish a whole new world of human equality where the importance of the family structure is emphasised. By acknowledging the legitimacy of his child, Mokobi, Sebembele sets an example for a new society. But in the story the old men have the last word on women: 'They shake their heads and say that women have always caused a lot of trouble in the world' (6).

The theme of tribalism and its clash with modern thinking is also a central issue in the documentary interview in *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*. The clash between Seretse Khama and his uncle Tshekedi about the chieftaincy echoes Sebembele's decision in 'Deep River'. Seretse 'went off to marry an Englishwoman' (77). The opposition he meets from his uncle is similarly based on the traditional thinking that 'a King or Chief

could not do as he pleased, as he was the servant of the people and an heir to the chieftaincy' (77). Seretse does not subscribe to this rigid traditional thinking: he believes in individualism and thereupon insists on his right to marry whom he pleases.

There is one point of contrast between Seretse's and Sebembele's relationships which in my opinion strengthens the criticism levelled by traditionalists against a chief who 'thought he could do as he pleased'. The contrast is racial. Seretse marries a white Englishwoman and in doing so grossly violates the traditional history of the Bamangwato tribe who consider Seretse's marriage illegal. The regent Tshekedi bases his resistance to recognising this marriage on fear for the tribe's survival. He claims that:

[It] is the heirs and the Bamangwato chieftainship that he wanted to protect, to him the children of such a marriage would marry away from the tribe (*Serowe*, 97).

Nevertheless Tshekedi's publicly expressed concern about a bi-racial marriage would seem to be concealing private agendas. Firstly, Tshekedi's stand against Seretse's English wife can be read as an attempt to secure the chieftancy for himself. The tribe seems to have identified this intention: 'the people became just adamant that Tshekedi was trying to steal the chieftainship from Seretse' (98). Secondly, the offspring of such a union would face identity problems which might be difficult to handle. It is not surprising that Head should raise this issue since she herself was a product of a bi-racial relationship which was kept a secret for fear of prosecution under the South African Immorality Act.

In examining the figures of tribal rule against the backdrop of traditional practice Head insists that the essence of humanity is to be human. To be human transcends borders of concern as seen in her description of tribes like Talaote in 'Deep River' where Chief Sebembele's protection of the dignity of his wife and of his father's tribe makes him renounce his chieftaincy and migrate so that tribal bloodshed can be averted. Similar events occur in *Maru* and in Seretse's marriage to a white woman in *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*. Head's main point in presenting these relationships lies in her collaborative stand with the reader against forces which she sees as 'oppressive'. If freedom of individual expression is suppressed in a tribal situation, then that situation needs to be overhauled to allow individuality to complement collective thinking. This kind of change will create a climate of negotiation and compromise in which no one will have space to abuse power, and no one will see a fellow person as inferior. The scenario of human equality is painted around the characters who form successful egalitarian relationships in Head's writing, in spite of the barriers of colour, race, status, gender or creed that are drawn by tribal conventions. Head's chieftain figures, with the exception of Maru who abdicates and goes into exile, are never isolated or alienated by the entire tribe for thinking differently from it. They gain support for their beliefs from those who identify with change and progress, and who then become their followers when conflict intensifies and are forced to migrate in order to avert bloodshed.

Another serious issue emerging from the Seretse-Sebembele relationship is the influence of Christianity on the tradition of polygamy. On the one hand, Christianity advocates one wife for one husband, on the other hand, tradition promotes polygamy. In Botswana the conflict between the two

dates back to the era of Khama the Great who after accepting Christianity refused to marry a second wife in accordance with the 'custom of polygamy which was the prerogative of the chief' (5). He introduced social reforms which gave traditional practices a 'facelift'.

With Khama, a new order was born which was a blending of all that was compassionate and good in his own culture and in the traditions of Christianity (*Serowe*, 8).

This new order took the form of abolishing customs such as polygamy, traditional initiation ceremonies and witchcraft. The brutal aspects of each custom 'were neatly sliced away' (8).

Khama's imposition of his social reforms on the tribe is compatible with the traditional system in which the chief's subjects live 'without faces'. The chief chooses how his tribe ought to live and they in turn adopt the identity he imposes on them. Khama's innovations, therefore, effectively enforce or carve out an identity for his tribe. Thus whilst Khama softens the rigidity of the traditional 'face' through a process of transformational reforms, he is cautious not to destroy the essence of tribal identity. In its positive aspect tribal identity involves human attributes such as compassion, empathy, dignity, humility, loving-kindness and patriotic pride. Evidently, this is the type of 'face' that Khama seeks to preserve for his tribe. When Khama accepts Christianity he does so for the public good. Head comments in the Introduction to *Serowe* as follows:

If [Khama's] acceptance of Christianity was an individual and moral choice, then it meant that he carved out a new road for the tribe - the discipline which people now had to impose on themselves was internal and private (xiv).

Two points can be drawn from Head's speculation. Whereas traditional culture is inclusive and public, Christian values are exclusive and private. Khama's acceptance of Christianity, then, is bound to lead him to abolish certain ancient customs which are responsible for the external discipline and security of the tribe. As the narrator puts it,

Large social courtesies surrounded each ritual, ceremony and custom practised by his people. All the courtesies were retained while the harmful or brutal aspects of each custom were neatly sliced away...all Khama's reforms [were] touched by personal insight into human suffering as opposed to group acceptance of tradition (*Serowe*, 8).

In contrast to Khama, Head moves not towards Christianity but away from it, for she 'found it stifling'. She prefers Hinduism which is 'rich and deep in concepts' (Eilersen 1995:34). She is not in favour of the entire system of traditional discipline either because it suppresses individuality. Her admiration for Khama lies in the fact that he endeavoured to carve out a new identity for his tribe which is based on compassion. He managed to forge an identity based on a complementary mode of existence. Head appreciates the fact that Khama's reforms did not entirely disrupt traditional tribal values. But Thomas cautions that 'the religious incertitude' among certain members of the tribe towards Khama's policies, which was rooted in

the arrogance of the early missionaries and their *a priori* contempt for everything that was non-European ...[was] juxtaposed with the indigenous pride some Botswana felt for the customs (1990:98).

Elsewhere Thomas claims that Head's fiction aims at overhauling those aspects of the traditional value systems that are oppressive whilst retaining those that are humane and praiseworthy. Perhaps it is for this reason that one finds a constant intrusion of authorial voice in her short fiction and in

the interview commentaries. This authorial intrusion, I will show, enables the reader to gain insight into Head's ideal society. Without Head's intrusion into her stories, Thomas continues, 'we could not appreciate the significance of the drama and irony inherent in the story' (103), nor could we understand the social forces shaping the actions of her characters. Here is an example:

I never seemed to find the time to linger on the past or to sort out what it was that made these old men so infinitely attractive to me. They still imagined themselves as caretakers of their whole environment and during a conversation, they would suddenly break off and take another track, explaining in detail the basic functions of men and women - that they were there to produce children and quite a lot of them - and the simple belief that they had a whole body of holy customs and beliefs locked away in their subconscious minds (*Serowe*, 67).

The fact that this passage begins with the first person pronoun 'I' indicates a direct intrusion which establishes the speaker as authority. The authorial address is directed to the reader, who is asked to admire the enormous amount of patience and determination with which the speaker waited on her sources of information. The shift from the 'I-who-speaks' to the objective 'me' signals a change in the speaker's attitude towards 'these old men' who must demonstrate their status as 'caretakers'. The shift to third person 'they' and 'them' which notes the way the old men 'break off and take another track' has an interpretative purpose which is elaborated in 'explaining in detail the basic functions of men and women'. The authorial voice merely stands back to learn what 'these old men' have to say about the way things are. But by occupying the position of reporter she becomes the agent who relays information to the reader and passes on her insight into the attitudes and beliefs of the old men which might otherwise seem to be impractical and outdated in modern times.

Head recognises the onus on her to 'demonstrate the ability to stand back and wait to learn [because] letting people teach you about themselves can be a wonderful experience' (Eilersen 1995:165). Nevertheless the above example demonstrates how vital is the presence of Head's voice in the text of her narrative fiction.

Two further points can be drawn from Head's comment. Firstly, her detachment enables her to allow characters to reflect her experiences. Secondly, she is also capable of allowing her fictional characters to show how they could resolve their problems - this is the point at which she must learn from them. In *A Question of Power*, for example, the protagonist Elizabeth regains her sense of well-being and develops a new public image through community involvement. Head allows a character like Elizabeth the opportunity of self-development in spite of her enormous problems of alienation. Thus she allows her characters leeway to work out solutions for their personal troubles from which she herself then benefits.

In the story 'Heaven is Not Closed' similar kinds of intrusion occur in the conflict between Christianity and tribal traditions. The reader is shown the social forces that are responsible for the actions of the characters. Head's introductions and commentaries help the reader to recognise the influence of these forces. 'Heaven is Not Closed' is a story of the love of a Christian woman, Galethebege, for a traditionalist man, Ralokae. Her love for him overcomes the prescriptions of Christian teachings such as marrying in the church, which have no force in Ralokae's traditional world. He argues that no one should impose Christian values on African traditions because neither practice is superior to the other and because African traditionalism has always been an embodiment of who Africans are: it is their identity.

Ralokae has recently observed the traditional custom of mourning after his first wife's death. He is determined to marry a second wife by traditional custom too and will not compromise. Ralokae represents Setswana custom. Unlike Sebembele, Seretse and Maru, Ralokae does not relinquish his position and beliefs for the love of a woman. Expressing an attitude of aloofness, he says: 'Girlfriend... you can choose what you like, Setswana custom or Christian custom. I have chosen to live my life by Setswana custom ('Heaven is Not Closed', 11).

It is difficult to blame Ralokae for his stubbornness since his firm convictions against Christianity are based on disillusionment with Christian practice:

The God might be alright,...but there was something wrong with the people who had brought the word of the Gospel to the land. Their love was enslaving black people and he could not stand it. That was why he was without belief. It was the people he did not trust. They were full of tricks. They were a people who, at the sight of a black man, pointed a finger in the air, looked away into the distance...They had brought a new order of things into the land and they made people cry for love. One never had to cry for love in the customary way of life ('Heaven', 90-10).

The conclusions that Ralokae has reached about Christianity condemn the bigotry with which missionaries relate to tribal people. The word of God should, according to Ralokae, spread a message of love and compassion. It should not discriminate and scare people off with the fires of hell if they carry on with their cultural practices. If Christianity is such a noble practice, then the narrator is justified in asking the following questions:

Was heaven really closed to the unbeliever, Ralokae? Or had Christian custom been so intolerant of Setswana custom that it could not hear the holiness of Setswana custom? Wasn't there a place in heaven too for Setswana custom...? ('Heaven', 12).

The questions reflect the uncertainty that seems to direct the reasoning of some members of the tribe against accepting Christianity. If Christianity practises discrimination then these people prefer to stick to their traditional identity. Only if Khama's example of accommodating the 'holiness' of both the traditional and the Christian practice can be followed, can there be a genuinely complementary existence.

Galethebege's decision to be united with Ralokae is read as strength and integrity by the villagers. Those who have been practising Christianity also identify with Galethebege, whose dilemma prompts them to review their loyalties to Christianity. Thus in the public opinion Galethebege's stand against the church is praiseworthy. Privately, though, she suffers the fear of the eternal damnation that the Christian church preaches to those who reject God. She prays daily as an act of atonement for 'in her good heart she had been terrified that the doors of heaven were indeed closed...and she was trying to open them' (12).

The situation in which Galethebege finds herself can be seen as a test case for Head's characterisation. Without recognising her position as a divider Galethebege seems to be caught right between Ralokae's uncompromising stand about his traditional beliefs and the missionary's Christian ways. The controversy that Head creates for these characters is left to her to resolve. Galethebege knows what she wants from Ralokae: 'a husband who knows his mind'. From the missionaries she only needs spiritual guidance and blessing. But like Khama, Galethebege is unable to bring the warring sides of tradition and Christianity together single-handed. In this case, though, Head gives the opportunity of creating a complementary life within the tribal community to a woman. Galethebege is empowered by

the circumstances in which she finds herself to make decisions about what she wants. Even Ralokae encourages her to be independent and this is one of the attractive features about him. Galethebege privately muses:

What could a woman do with a man like that who knew his own mind? She either loved him or she was mad. From that day on, Galethebege knew what she would do. She would do all that Ralokae commanded as a good wife should ('Heaven', 10).

In *Women and Identity* Margaret Hall points out that 'a woman traditionally [has] been taught to put others before herself' (1990:22). Hall's point implies that women are 'taught' and perhaps trained to act stereotypically - that is, like characters without any individuality. On the surface Galethebege might seem to be slipping back into the patterns of male dominance by 'putting others before herself'. Yet at the deeper level she is developing a new position for a woman. In the above quotation Galethebege clearly gives her own feelings priority. She purposely decides to 'do all that Ralokae commands as a good wife should, 'in order to get what she wants - Ralokae. She reflects individualism which recognises the importance of other people's lives as well. Through Galethebege Head challenges traditional expectations by allowing her the freedom to secure her relationship with Ralokae. Hall goes on to discuss women's negotiation for positions of equality in their societies:

By consciously cultivating identity, women neutralise this tendency to deny their selfworth. Assessing skills and talents and placing a value on their own privileges and resources makes women more likely to enter into negotiations as equals. Identity empowerment is a process whereby women define their own privileges and resources, standing by them in all negotiations (1990:10).

Galethebege falls into this category of women. Her alignment with Ralokae is a step towards negotiating a complementary relationship in

which both tradition and Christianity can be accommodated. Towards the end of the story there are subtle signs that Galethebege and Ralokae have considerable understanding and tolerance for each other. Galethebege has never stopped praying to the Christian God in spite of marrying a traditional man. Ralokae always ‘smiles’ when Galethebege practises Christianity and in my opinion this suggests a softening at the edge of a rigid traditionalism and a tolerance of the practice. It would not be surprising if later on Ralokae joined in the prayer sessions because the culture of their relationship looks conducive to complementarity.

Head’s egalitarian relationships do not imply over-stepping the tenuous borders of equality but rather living in harmony both at personal and at social levels. Family structures built on such complementarity make respectful societies.

My next exploration, of ‘Life’ and ‘The Collector of Treasures’, is in sharp contrast, since in these stories the consequences of colonialism bring about a breakdown in the family structure. This theme will be investigated in the context of the decline of traditionalism and the emergence of modernity. The new social construction of identity that occurs in *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind* will be referred to, thus adding another perspective to issues raised in the stories.

During the colonisation of the African continent the Christian religion was introduced and marked a turning point in the traditional lives of village men and women. The emergence of industrialisation, urbanisation and modernity as forces of transformation in neighbouring towns and provinces brought influences that caused conflict in the set-up of the tribal village and

its family structure. In order to understand the process it may help to review briefly some comments Head makes about this issue in *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*. The Serowe villagers seem to claim that Khama the Great's reforms and his modifications of customs such as polygamy, are not responsible *per se* for the breakdown of the family unit. Yet the old men of the village think that these changes have burnt 'a gaping hole in the fabric of society' (*Serowe*, 59). To them, for instance, polygamy is considered to be advantageous in the sense that:

It assured every woman in the society of a husband, and that she was performing her reproductive functions under fairly secure circumstances. This way no child was born illegitimately (*Serowe*, 59).

And yet Head intrudes to comment:

[These new changes] seem unfortunately to have struck a death-blow to the male. He ceased to be the head of the family, and his place has been taken by a gay, dizzy character on a permanent round of drink and women, full of shoddy values and without any sense of responsibility for the children he so haphazardly procreates (*Serowe*, 60).

The figure observed by Head is the new male of the colonial era. The patriarch of tribalism has given way to an irresponsible male with weak morals. On the other hand women also undergo a major transformation: from being subdued to being assertive. With the influence of urbanisation comes the need for employment as a means of making a living. Many young men and women from traditional environments go to the city in search of employment and are consequently exposed to a modern culture over lengthy periods. It is during this process that people slowly assume a city identity which makes 'shoddy' characters of them. If, for instance, a woman is unable to get a decent job she devises quick and risky ways of

making money, such as prostitution or liquor vending. These women would be drunk everyday, and

could be seen staggering around the village, usually with a wide-eyed, illegitimate baby hitched on to their hopes. they also talked and laughed loudly slapp[ing] each other on the back and [they] had developed a language all their own (39).

The modern way of life that comes with industrialisation and colonialism creates new persons who relate differently to their traditional societies. Both men and women experience a range of influences in modern communities which make forming identities difficult.

John P. Hewitt, a social psychologist, argues in *Self and Society* that it is very difficult for the traditional community to retain the loyalties of its members once they have been tempted by the glamour of the modern world. This he describes as:

a tempting field of opportunities, for it offers other communities with which the person might choose to identify and...is a constant reminder that the community in which one currently resides is not the only option (1988:134).

There is an element of truth in Hewitt's argument. In her story, 'Life', Head takes this one step further, to show the difficulties of adjusting back into a traditional setting when one has had a modern upbringing. The diverse and complex nature of modern society presents individuals with difficulties in choosing a community with which to identify. Ultimately the collective identity may disintegrate and give rise to more self-conscious individuals who must organise and perform a variety of roles every day and develop alien identities.

The traditional community is based on the association of individuals who know one another very well and who are 'bound by a sense of obligation to one another as well as by their sense of similarity' (Hewitt 1988:134). It is thus relatively easy for members to form an identity because the community cares for itself and the importance of the family unit. Behaviour patterns are shaped by what the traditional moral code dictates and the value system is intentionally grounded in the community itself. This strict adherence of the community to the traditional setting is what the story 'Deep River' was about - 'the tribe assumed the face of the chief and all flowed like a river' ('Deep River', 2). Hall points out that 'traditional values are difficult to change, because they are focal references for established social meanings and explanations' (1990:23).

The story 'Life' explores the clash between the traditional Tswana life and modernity. This is important because the progress and development brought about by modernity cannot be sustained without the foundations of cultural grounding. Traditions, on the other hand, cannot remain stagnant forever in a dynamic world. Therefore, Head's vision points towards a recognition of human compassion and mutual respect as grounded and inscribed in a culturally coherent. This recognition of one's cultural background can prevent a total absorption into foreign cultural traditions. Head demonstrates the consequences of forcing one influence upon the other instead of promoting a complementary existence. The character, Life, is a typical woman who has 'broken all social taboos and has nothing inside herself to cope with village life' (40). In 'Of Human Trials and Triumphs' Femi Ojo-Ade describes her as

a stunning, young black beauty just back to her Botswana village after a stint in South Africa as a singer, beauty queen, advertisement model and prostitute. She symbolises the fast growing foreign culture largely conveyed by returning migrant workers (1990:85).

Life had been raised in a village setting for ten years and then moved into the modern environment of the city. After the loss of her parents in her teens, she grows up without supervision and finds ways of surviving in the city of Johannesburg for a period of seventeen years. Thus, she has missed out on the foundations of identity which would 'shape patterns of her behaviour' (134) in later life. She has not achieved a mature personal identity and this is evident in her lack of focus in life as she takes up a variety of roles to make a living: singer, beauty queen, advertising model and prostitute. Life's values are basically materialistic and these enable her to succeed in the modern world. Financial power is one of the things she thinks will give her freedom. But she soon discovers that complete freedom cannot be achieved through the world of materialism. It needs enrichment of the inner world also. With Independence, all Botswanan citizens residing in other countries were forced back to their motherland and this is where Life's conflict begins because she is not used to the traditional community.

The village women who meet her are driven by the spirit of tradition which makes them into 'individuals bound by a sense of obligation to one another' (1988:134). They receive Life warmly into the village and offer her a home. In them Head shows the values of simplicity, compassion, human kindness, togetherness and good neighbourliness. Life is accepted into the community as a child of the community: 'a group of women continued to stand near her and they said kindly, "We are very happy that a child of ours has returned home" ' (38). But Life is not used to this

concern for others; she does not understand how people can render services to one another free. The coldness of her modern lifestyle has always shown her that everything must be paid for; thus to have money or wealth is to have power and freedom. Life's appearance is indicative of what she values: money, style, glamour, humour and exuberance,

[She] wore an expensive cream costume of linen material, tailored to fit her full figure. She had a bright vivacious friendly manner and laughed freely and loudly. Her speech was rapid and a little hysterical but that was in keeping with her whole personality ('Life', 38).

The village people receive her openly and seem to acknowledge the fact that Life is from a different era. She is regarded as a blessing ('a little light') who will help improve their rather 'backward' conditions. These villagers have the wisdom to accept what may be of benefit to them in the form of 'new ideas.' They perceive Life as a new kind of woman - one who can encourage resourcefulness and individuality. At the same time these qualities are viewed with scepticism because of the traditional belief in 'a sense of community and togetherness'. Individuality upsets the collective identity of the tribal community: as we have seen in the stories of Sebembele, Maru, Seretse and Galethebege exercising one's individuality is a cause of strife and conflict.

The village people reacted in their own way; what they liked, and was beneficial to them - they absorbed,...what was harmful to them, they rejected ('Life', 37).

Head indirectly suggests how complementarity might be practised and allows this lesson to be learnt from ordinary people of the village. Life could have improved her relations with these people if she had been selective in her behaviour but modernity has alienated her from the basic human virtues of compassion, respect and honesty, and her sense of

superiority over the villagers has blinded her towards the good things she can learn from the villagers.

Life had had the sort of varied career that a city like Johannesburg offered a lot of black women. She had been a singer, beauty queen, advertising model, and prostitute. None of these careers were available in the village - for the illiterate women there was farming and housework; for the literate, teaching, nursing, and clerical work. The first wave of modern women Life attracted to herself were the farmers and housewives. It did not take them long to shun her completely because men started turning up in a unending stream. What had caused a stir of amazement was that Life was the first and the only woman in the village to make a business out of selling herself ('Life', 39).

The goodness of Life could have enhanced her relationship with the farmers and housewives who had seen in her an opportunity of becoming better women, had she really regarded herself as a 'light'. But instead of developing her fellow women by sharing her skills with them, and developing herself by learning about traditions from them in order to strengthen her roots, she loses direction. The sordid business of 'selling herself' overshadows what could have been complementary upliftment. She is the one who blows out her 'light': the women who intended to make her their role model 'shun her completely' (39).

The story 'Life' raises issues similar to those that emerge in 'The Collector of Treasures' and further exploration of the characters and their marital and social relationships will be made comparatively. Life's character is questionable and so she alienates herself from the conservative quarters of the village. By contrast, the central character in 'The Collector of Treasures' is a basically good woman who struggles to remain good until the pressures in her marriage make her snap. Both these characters are capable of good and bad. Head's point is that human nature consists of two aspects that are kept tenuously balanced. For instance, it is hard to

credit that Dikeledi's kindness and skillfulness with her hands can be overcome by the negative power that enables her to rip off her husband's genitals with a sharp knife.

Dikeledi knows her strengths and uses them to help others who are not as skilful as she is. She complements her community with skills they do not possess and her resourcefulness enables her to deal with the rejection she has suffered at the hands of her husband and also her relatives who see her as a burden.

You know, I am the woman whose thatch does not leak. Whenever my friends wanted to thatch their huts, I was there. They would never do without me. I was always busy and employed because it was with these hands that I fed and reared my children ('Collector', 90).

Like Life, Dikeledi has lost her parents at a young age. Unlike Life she has been raised by a foster uncle who refuses to educate her and forces her into an arranged marriage with his friend Garesego. A contrast is thus drawn between their respective upbringings. Dikeledi is supposed to be taken care of by her immediate family and the traditional community at large. And yet Dikeledi's uncle forces her into an unhappy marriage to get rid of her as 'she [was] just hanging around...like a chain on [his] neck' (95). What Head indicates through the uncle's attitude is that his 'sense of obligation' has been adulterated by the selfishness of the modern era; he has been caught up by the notion of every man for himself. The ill-treatment Dikeledi suffers in her uncle's care makes her accept the wrong decisions that are made for her. Her point of view is stifled and she submits to Garesego's male dominance. Both Garesego and Dikeledi marry for the wrong reasons. Dikeledi marries Garesego to get away from the strain caused by her uncle; Garesego says 'he'd rather be married to

[her] sort than the educated kind because those women were stubborn and wanted to lay down the rules for men' (95). Public opinion believes that people who enter into marriage do so out of love but both Dikeledi and Garesego have hidden agendas.

Life, on the other hand, grows up in a modern environment virtually on her own. She has developed a sense of independence. Unlike Dikeledi, Life makes her own decisions and devises ways of surviving in a materialistic world. Forced by circumstances to go back to the rural community, she receives overwhelming care which because of her financial status she misreads as patronising. Whereas Dikeledi suffers because of a breakdown of communal responsibility, it is Life's strange behaviour that alienates her from the village people. Life's relationship with Lesego has similarities to that of Dikeledi and Garesego. Life and Lesego are attracted to each other for the wrong reasons too. In 'Change on the Margins', Ursula Edmands explains:

[She] sees in him the high-life excitement of a Johannesburg gangster and he sees in her the freshness of the new spirit. They clash and destroy each other because of a misreading; each attacks the other's weakness; he attempts to end her freedom and thus her "life", she refuses him, a wealthy and generous cattle-man, his right to possessiveness (1984:202).

Apart from their mutually attractive outward appearances, Life and Lesego have inner virtues which should be appreciated and developed in each other but go unnoticed. For instance, both are very generous,

the newcomer seemed to have an endless stream of money which she flung around generously... "When Lesego has got the money and you need it, he would give you what he has got and he won't trouble you about the date of payment..." ('Life', 38, 41).

Both are business oriented though Lesego does not engage in the urban business ventures Life has undertaken which are undreamt of in the village. Lesego's outspokenness is balanced by Life's boldness and free-spiritedness that 'broke all social taboos' (40). Life founds a 'sisterhood' of 'emancipated women' committed to a life outside marriage. When she marries Lesego she betrays her commitment to the 'sisterhood.' ' "All my old ways are over," she said. I have now become a woman" '(42). Each is unaware of the other's private agenda and unwittingly plays into the hands of negative forces. Lesego's seeming kindness harbours a cruel male dominance which is immediately evident after he has married Life:

He took control of all the money. She had to ask for it and state what it was to be used for. Then he did not like the transistor blaring the whole day long. "Women who keep that thing going the whole day have nothing in their heads", he said. Then he looked down at her from a great height and commented finally and quietly: "If you go with those men again, I'll kill you" ('Life', 43).

A relationship based on such threats necessarily lacks the essential Headian components of integrity and trust. Edmand's view that Life and Lesego could have established an exciting relationship by complementing each other and cherishing each other's strengths is in line with Head's attempt to delineate a new world, characterised by tolerance, acceptance and nurturance. Their relationship fails because each 'attacks the other's weakness'. Lesego suppresses what has initially attracted him to Life: her independence and her exuberance. He is not convinced of Life's preparedness to settle down into marriage and does not trust her assertion of a positive attitude towards the building of a meaningful relationship. If he likes this 'new kind of woman' then he could at least adjust his traditional attitude by expressing a similar commitment to the success of their marriage, and by being less domineering. He does not join hands with

Life in the process of self-transformation, but instead 'look[s] down at her from a great height'. In his comment: "if you go with those men again, I'll kill you! (43)", one can see that Lesego is privately a ruthless and oppressive man who wields power. He takes control of all the money. Life feels intimidated and excluded from both the public and the private spheres of Lesego's life. The security and excitement she expected from the 'gangster-look' does not materialise and her marriage becomes oppressive. She feels isolated and lonely,

She looked from the beer-brewers to her husband to all the people who called, she found no one with whom she could communicate ('Life', 44).

It is this loneliness and exclusion which drives Life back to her 'old ways'. Her marriage turns, ironically, lifeless. Throughout her life she has taken risks and has gambled to survive; she has climbed to 'dizzy heights' (40). Nothing stops her taking one more risk; not even Lesego's threats. Life realises that she has over-estimated Lesego's seeming integrity and, therefore, rebels against his small-minded dominance. She tries to escape society's confinement and marginalisation but loses sight of the repercussions of promiscuity in a marriage. She crosses the severe boundary that Lesego has drawn for her and commits adultery. In Lesego's eyes this is punishable by death, and so he murders her. Both Life and Lesego are thus victims of power which has gained control of their lives. They have become oblivious to kindness, which

demanded that people care about each other...[which] created people whose sympathetic and emotional responses were fully awakened, and [which] rewarded them by richly filling a void that was once big gaping yawn ('Life', 43).

In contrast to Life, it is Dikeledi who commits an act of violence against her husband. Yet she is given another chance. Like Life, Dikeledi develops a similar kind of 'sisterhood' among her prison inmates after she has been found guilty of murdering Garesego. The women with whom she is imprisoned share similar experiences and commit themselves to a new venture of mutual support. Even behind bars the 'sisterhood' extends to supporting their children through hand-work.

We get a little money saved for us out of the sale of our work, and if you work like that you can still produce money for your children...('Collector', 91).

Head seems especially interested in relationships that are grounded in similar experience or trauma. She particularly admires Dikeledi's act of rising from an oppressive relationship to enter into the holiness of humanity. The 'spirit of togetherness' which is evident in the positive relationships her characters form, is based neither on tradition nor on modernity but is rather a complementarity which respects human dignity. Her ideal world is characterised by compassion and humanity; such a world cannot accommodate 'power over the other'. In *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings* she says:

[Mankind] will one day be ruled by men who are God and not greedy, power-hungry politicians. I see this achievement as not the effort of a single man but a collaboration of many great minds in order that an integrity be established in the affairs of men. I clearly foresee a new race of people, not nations or national identity as such but rather people who are a blending of all the nations of the earth (1990:99-100).

Such integrity is a vital aspect of the world characterised by equality and equality. If a relationship lacks such integrity it ends tragically. We see this in the relationships between Life and Lesego and Dikeledi and Garesego.

The two stories just discussed involve severe cases of domestic violence, which in my opinion suggests the extent of the damage that has been caused by the clash between tradition and modernity. Men like Lesego and Garesego still cling to the conditions of the patriarchal relationship which sees women as subordinate. It seems as though these men were left behind when changes were made to restrictive practices within traditional societies by innovative chiefs like Khama the Great. With this transformation the status of women in society was recognised as important to the survival of the nation. Some men nonetheless failed to come to terms with these changes. They felt threatened by the expression of individuality by their female counterparts and in order to subdue them inflicted an oppressive form of discipline or acted irresponsibly by abandoning their families. Even so, while some men characters behave irresponsibly, others do not. Thus it is useful to examine the respective roles in which Head has placed her characters.

Head perceives two basic kinds of men in society: the good and the bad. She provides several examples of 'good men' in the figures of Sebembele, Maru, Gilbert, Makhaya, Paul, Seretse, and Khama the Great. Head admires the power that these men characters possess: the power to create themselves anew. She describes the ability of this kind of man this way:

He turned all his resources, both emotional and material, towards his family life and went on and on with his quiet rhythm like a river ('Collector', 93).

Paul Thebolo in the 'Collector of Treasures' is such a man, a good man who will take care of all around him. Head also sketches a mixed case of 'good' and 'bad' within Lesego's character. Lesego's goodness lies in his public status as a useful member of his community, in being there when the

public is in need, but his private world is characterised by dominance and oppression of women. His seeming attraction to the 'new kind of woman' turns out to be a private strategy to marginalise her and to rob her of her strength to survive. By contrast Garesego is a straight example of a 'bad man'. Head lashes out at the bad man. She holds this man 'responsible for the complete breakdown of family life, accept[ing] no responsibility for the young he procreates' (91).

To do justice to Garesego in this story and men like him in reality, one has to view them in the light of Botswanan history. Head, in a narrative intrusion, draws the following conclusions regarding the development of the bad man:

In the old days before the colonial invasion of Africa, he was a man who lived by the traditions and taboos outlined for all the people by the forefathers of the tribe. He had little individual freedom to assess whether these traditions were compassionate or not; they demanded that he comply and obey the rules, without thought: they appear on the whole to have been vast, external disciplines for the good of the society...with little attention given to individual preferences and needs; they relegated to men superior positions in the tribe while women were regarded as an inferior form of life. To this day, women still suffered from all the calamities that befall an inferior form of human life ('Collector', 92-93).

Head sees this traditional identity of the man as the head of his family vanishing with the onset of colonial subservience in which 'he became "the boy" of the white man and a machine-tool of the South African mines' (92). This dehumanisation particularly affects the migrant workers and leaves them, once proud occupants of superior tribal and traditional positions, devastated and frustrated. Back in their villages, chiefs like Khama the Great have introduced reforms in the traditional laws and customs. Many people have converted to Christianity and traditions that have kept the tribe securely together have been removed. Women who

have been left behind by their migrant-labourer husbands have taken up initiatives to involve themselves in community projects introduced by white traders, and as a consequence their identities have changed. These women have become self-reliant and independent. As the man comes home degraded by the city he is faced with a new family environment.

It was the man who arrived at this turning point, a broken wreck with no inner resources at all. It was as though he was hideous to himself in a dizzy kind of death dance of wild destruction and dissipation ('Collector', 92).

According to Ola (1994) the 'degraded' man loses his sense of direction and is confused about his identity. 'In an effort to flee his own inner emptiness he would take his cruelty and oppression out on his wife' (42). The Dikeledi-Garesego relationship illustrates such a situation. Head paints Garesego as odious, vicious and irresponsible. He is devoid of human love and compassion. She compares him to 'a dog' who will go all out to dehumanise others. Often the 'male dog' will work in concert with the 'female dog' to destroy whatever goodness still remains. By using such animal imagery Head is registering her outrage at the stage of the bad men's shameless behaviour and that of the bad women who encourage them. Yet in the process of their promiscuity the colluding women soon fall victim to the 'bad' men as they are left with illegitimate children. This situation is explained by an interviewee in *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*:

A woman might have three or four boyfriends - always in the hope of marriage, but very rarely do they offer marriage. Many, many women are now rearing children on their own...it is not a good life ('Serowe', 65).

Head's authorial intrusion as she attacks the 'bad' man is a confrontation with the negative aspects of socio-economic factors and their impact on the

cultural ethos. She steers readers to see the extent of the damage that dehumanisation has caused to people's self-esteem and self-control. When Dikeledi murders Garesego, she seems to have been pushed too far, not so much by his gross irresponsibility as by his dehumanising sexual advances which make her feel like one of his cheap loose women. Her act of castrating Garesego is a way of putting an end to the power of the 'phallus' without which men like him become incapacitated. And yet Head subtly suggests to the reader options that Dikeledi might have followed to avoid the drastic step of attacking Garesego.

Her life had become holy to her during all those years she had struggled to maintain herself and the children. She had filled her life with treasures of kindness and love she had gathered from others and it was all this she wanted to protect from defilement by an evil man. Her first panic-stricken thought was to gather up the children and flee the village. But where to go? Garesego did not want a divorce, she had left him to approach her about the matter, she had desisted from taking any other man. She turned her thoughts this way and that and could find no way out except to face him. If she wrote back, don't you dare put foot in the yard I don't want to see you, he would ignore it. Black women didn't have that kind of power ('Collector', 101).

The dilemma in which Dikeledi finds herself cannot be solved by anyone except herself. Even the writer cannot intrude into her final decision. This is the point at which the writer detaches herself from Dikeledi and allows events to take their course: in this case an attack on Garesego.

Dikeledi's goodness and caring turn her into a murderer who is incarcerated for life in prison. Like her Lesego murders his spouse. But the justice system does not treat them equally. Lesego ends up getting five years imprisonment. The injustice of this situation is reflected in Dikeledi's words: 'Black women didn't have that kind of power' (101). Whereas Life's immorality is treated as an extenuating circumstance which

motivates Lesego's reaction, Dikeledi does not receive the same consideration. In a male-oriented society, Garesego's immorality is ignored, even condoned. These are imbalances that Head seeks to highlight in these characters because to her no crime against humanity can be accepted.

I have read these short stories as presenting characters who give insight into both the private and the public sphere especially in their constructions of complementary identities. In 'Heaven is not Closed' Head demonstrates the need to live above individual differences of race, colour and creed; to create a humane society that distinguishes itself by acts of compassion, sharing and respect for individuals. The concepts of equality and equality are predominant in her ideal world of ordinary people and the story 'The Deep River' shows the need to regard women as equal partners in decision making. The abdications of characters like Sebembe mark the importance of pulling down structures of discrimination and oppression against women. And this message is reinforced in the respective fates of her characters in 'Life' and in 'The Collector of Treasures'.

Head's idealism provides her with the authority to exploit life's incidents for solutions that create better relationships and better communities. Sometimes she allows her characters to explore and find solutions to their problems and to her own, for that matter. In spite of the presentation of atrocious behaviour by her bad characters, she is by no means propagating negativity. In the examination of issues that affect humankind, such negative power is often counterbalanced by the goodness with which mankind is endowed. Quite often Head intrudes into the narrative to stress the need for human beings to connect inner and outer worlds, to keep these

worlds connected. The subtle implications of complementarity as a solution to conflicting views on tradition and modernity, tribalism and Christianity, community and individualism, have been raised in the stories discussed in this chapter. Head's concern with the status of women in society is evident in the fact that these stories centre on the problems of women and the ways in which they undergo changes and empower themselves to stand up to male dominance. If the image of the women characters is improved, this has positive connotations for Head herself, since she is also a woman. To her, transformation of societal attitudes towards women improves her own acceptance in Botswana and her incorporation into the affairs of a country she can call 'home', a country to which she can pay tribute through a literary preservation of its history and its ordinary people. In her article, 'The Reconceptualisation of Power and the Recovery of the Ordinary' Linda Susan Beard quotes Head thus:

I foresee a day when I will steal a little of God, the unseen Being in the sky and offer it to mankind. From then onwards people as they pass each other in the street each day will turn to each other and say "Good morning, God." War will end. Human suffering will end. I am building a stairway to the stars. I have the authority to take the whole of mankind up there with me. That is why I write (1991:58).

It is a vision with which this chapter can effectively close.

CHAPTER 4

CHARACTER AND IDENTITY IN THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE :

A BEWITCHED CROSSROAD

In the works that I have considered thus far, Head's search for her own identity has suggested an inclination towards 'ordinary decencies' in ordinary life. Her personal need for 'a quiet backwater and a sense of living' becomes a textual aspiration in *A Question of Power* when the figure of Elizabeth is inscribed as having

fallen from the very beginning into the warm embrace of the brotherhood of man, because when a people wanted everyone to be ordinary it was just another way of saying man loved man: she placed one soft hand over her land. It was a gesture of belonging (206).

The individual fulfilment expressed in this description has not presented Head with wholeness or contentment in her search for identity. Her internal and private challenge stretches outward to encompass a 'total' embodiment of human history as she examines the lives of ordinary people in the context of a condemnation of corrupting power. Finding roots in a small Botswanan village does not quench her thirst for a broader definition of her identity. *A Bewitched Crossroad* offers the spectrum she needs to explore her relationship to the rest of Botswana and to Africa.

A Bewitched Crossroad is basically a historical novel, which re-interprets Southern African history from a Southern African woman writer's point of view. The novel is a result of Head's detailed research into Botswanan

history and an examination of its inhabitants. She outlines her intention in writing *A Bewitched Crossroad* as follows:

I am trying to gather several threads together to create a feeling of continuity in my work...to finally record some of the kind of welding I felt on coming to a country like Botswana. It was like finding roots and these roots really go back, for me, to the old tribal way of life and its slow courtesies. So this final work I am on will have the effect of rounding off my Southern African experience (MacKenzie 1989:9).

'Finding roots' in Botswana enables Head to make the 'gesture of belonging' of producing and recording a history of her adoptive land, and in doing so to teach South Africa and Africa at large about human kindness, which can only thrive in the absence of exploitation, slavery and oppression. Locating her writing in Botswana is an attempt to shape the future for the broader Africa and to offer through her spokespersons, the characters, a model of ideal co-existence and compassion. In recording Bamangwato history and tracing its origins, Head is demonstrating her gratitude for having been granted national status in Botswana. In *A Woman Alone* she expresses how imperative she found it to present a historical perspective on Botswana cultural heritage.

If one wishes to reach back into ancient Africa the quality of its life has been preserved almost intact in Botswana. It is a world that moves so slowly that it seems to be asleep within itself. It is like a broad deep unruffled river and as accommodating. Anything that falls into its depth is absorbed. No new idea stands sharply aloof from the social body, declaiming its superiority. It is absorbed and transformed until it emerges somewhere along the line as 'our traditional custom'. Everything is touched by 'our traditional custom'. - British imperialism, English, Independence, new educational methods, progress and foreigners. It all belongs (1990:69-70).

Implicit in this description is the strong bond that Head has developed with Botswana. For her Botswana is a gateway to Mother Africa; Botswana is

a solution to her problem of identity. The admiration she has for Botswana's culture is apparent in her willingness to be herself 'absorbed and transformed' into it. She identifies with what she calls 'our traditional custom 'which has "touched" all the historical and colonial forces in Botswana while it has still 'uniquely remained a blackman's country' (71). Head's transformation and her identification with the 'social body' of Botswana are also evident in '*A Bewitched Crossroad*'; in her recurrent concerns with human compassion and the ordinariness of life. She admits that:

It was this peaceful world of black people simply dreaming in their own skins that I began to slowly absorb in my life. It was like finding black power and black personality in a simple and natural way (1990:72).

This unique Botswanan society is an ideal that realises Head's conception of complementary existence. This society is quite different to her previous South African environment. In "A World Elsewhere" Cherry Clayton identifies some of the contrasts:

[Where] African leaders in South Africa had been ruthlessly suppressed or driven underground, in Botswana African leaders of stature, diplomacy and power had emerged...where African traditions had been downgraded, ignored and crushed in South Africa...in Botswana African customs had been able to drop elements of darkness and cruelty associated with human sacrifice. Where black people in South Africa had been humiliated, ousted from their own land, deprived of citizenship, turned into a landless proletariat and deprived of human dignity...[In Botswana Head's] own feeling for humour, individuality, unpredictability and story-telling could operate (1988:57).

Obviously, these positive aspects of Botswana lend support to Head's dream of a humane society which she feels could never be realised in the land of her birth. Head feels rooted in Botswana. In writing *A Bewitched Crossroad* she pays a historical tribute to her 'adopting country' and

'rounds off' her Southern African experience. A clear-cut storyline is, therefore, overshadowed by the detail which presents history both as fact and as fiction. This means that Head's thorough research into Botswanan history for factual information is intertwined with fictionalised material created by the writer's imagination. My main focus in this chapter will be on the role of the fictional characters in the construction of identity and on how such characters can assist the writer to condemn dehumanisation and to promote co-existence. It is on the basis of this focus that Sebina and Khama III will be explored as fictional and historical figures respectively, who initiate and support social change in their community.

Sebina is an old and dignified leader who, after intense humiliation at the hands of dominant tribes like the Matebele, seeks help from Khama III and is eventually absorbed into the Bamangwato nation. Though Eilersen (1995) refers to Sebina's status as that of 'an insignificant chieftain...whose thoughts and ideas might be too difficult to interpret' (262), Head presents him as an experienced sage, who bears the oral memory of his clan; a preserver of history who takes his tribe through a journey of transformation and absorption. My interest in Sebina as a character stems from the fact that his perceptions and insight reveal a private domain which seems only to be accessed by the writer herself when interpreting events and different perspectives on Botswanan history. A strong affinity between Head and Sebina is marked by their shared admiration for Khama III. One might expect Khama III to be the main protagonist in *A Bewitched Crossroad* because of his enlightenment and his historical status, but Head elevates Sebina to this position.

The choice of fictional main character should not puzzle a Head scholar, however, for Head has obvious sympathy for ordinary people, for the 'insignificant'. Like Head, Sebina comes from humble beginnings. Like her Sebina fled the turmoil of political violence in his land of birth to seek refuge in a foreign land. In the past Sebina and his clan have enjoyed the tranquillity of a 'deep river'. As we have seen the image of the 'deep river' is linked to an ancient stream of tribal existence which is undisturbed by outside threats and conflict. It is an expression of peace and harmony where people live 'without faces' under the absolute power of the chief. Yet Head does not identify with an environment where individuality is repressed and subjugated. In her ideal world no new idea can dominate; rather, all must be assimilated into the tribe or community as 'ours'. If there is complementarity of existence, the 'deep river' of the tribe will not be ruffled and turbulent like the one that Sebina endures, when 'the winds of change sent ripples through the tribe':

An era of violent change and upheaval lay ahead for all the tribes. The Sebina were to change their name and place of abode many times. Their lives and destinies were to mirror the anguish and wonder of a new era (9).

The concept of 'turbulence' contrasts with that of the 'deep river'. It entails a disturbance of the tribe's internal stability because of the effect of conflict on the collective existence of the tribe. Such turbulence takes place within various clans as they clash and fight over land and property. Head takes the reader on the historical journey that Sebina and his tribe follow. Sebina seeks to preserve his tribe's identity by settling at a place where he will be offered peace and prosperity. He is in search of a place where he can be accepted as a symbol of tradition that nevertheless welcomes transformation and mental growth. Head's journey of self-discovery in *A Bewitched Crossroad* begins with a presentation of the

theme of tribal migrations which seem to a South African historian to be running parallel to colonial migrations like the Great Trek. To help us understand Sebina's plight in his search for peace and freedom from other tribe's dominance, I will now sketch a brief historical background to what history has referred to as the 'African Trek'.

A Bewitched Crossroad emphasises the fact that during the tribal migrations a number of stronger tribes like the Zulu, Ndebele and Basotho forced smaller clans into quick submission and 'facelessness'. The stronger tribes exerted the force that often resulted in the subdued tribes assuming a new identity or fleeing into a rival camp for protection. The historical account of tribal migrations from an African point of view reveals a people with a strong sense of history which challenges and 'decentres' the one-sided historical story of the Great Trek and of the Trek Boers; refutes the notion that the white colonists arrived on vast empty stretches of African land. Head exploits the clashes that ensued when the Trek Boers crossed paths with the migrating tribes to contrast them with her ideal of co-existence and sharing. She shows how the Trek Boers movement brought its fair share of human destruction. It took advantage of tribal conflict: 'the Boers became skilled at exploiting these rivalries, siding with one party against the other, under cover of which, once war broke out, they would seize the land' (37).

Head's belief that 'refugees' should be 'absorbed and transformed' into adoptive societies is contested by the situation of the Trek Boers, in that their designs are 'total subjugation and exploitation of their hosts' (37). The following example demonstrates the overpowering of a host tribe by the Trek Boers:

Chief Moroka, of the Barolong, driven from his territory by Mzilikazi, and his Ndebele army, arrived in Sotho territory to live under the shadow and protection of Moshoeshoe. He and his people were received according to custom and allocated lands at Thaba Nchu, within Moshoeshoe's territory. When the Trek Boers arrived...they were befriended by Chief Moroka. He warned them not to trek further into Mzilikazi's territory. The Trek Boers ignored this advice and were attacked...Chief Moroka joined forces with the Boers and succeeded in disrupting the Ndebele and forcing them to flee northwards to Bakalanga territory. This friendly alliance between the Boers and Chief Moroka was almost immediately exploited by the Boers for invasion and inroads in Moshoeshoe's territory. They coveted Moshoeshoe's green fertile and well-watered valleys. Pretexts for raids and wars of aggression were easily found (34).

The Trek Boers' private agenda is to acquire Moshoeshoe's fertile lands - not to protect fleeing minor tribes. The 'ripples of a deep river' that the Boers' arrival causes these tribes are so extensive that only a wisely led tribe can stop the widening circle of the Trek Boers' influence. This is how Head's 'vision of African leadership' surfaces in the figure of Khama III. It is under his leadership that small vulnerable clans like Sebina's find solace and are reactivated into significance. At the same time, the domineering attitude with which the Trekkers regard tribal presence in Botswana is met with an 'image of the perfect black man found at last...[who will] create a pause in the activities of Europeans' (56). Khama's leadership (I will now refer to him as simply Khama) is regarded by Head as a magic 'bewitchment' for he stands his ground to prevent a take-over of his lands and, by implication, of the rest of Africa.

The image of 'bewitching' that Head invokes in the title of her book thus has two-fold significance. Bewitching implies putting a magic spell on something or somebody. With regard to Botswana, the bewitchment takes place both internally and externally. The fact that Botswana's geographical conditions (wind, long periods of drought) are unenticing to outsiders, might have been perceived by Head as a natural bewitchment of

this country. Botswana did not offer green pastures to the land-grabbers - she had put a magic spell on herself to look unattractive.

It was grim and unproductive, subject to seven-year cycles of severe drought. It was called the 'thirstland' by the early explorers as surface water was almost non-existent (*A Woman Alone* 1990:71).

On the contrary, what Khama does for Botswana within her borders is magical. Though the country itself is geographically unattractive, Khama creates an internal atmosphere of delight and prosperity by providing his people with opportunities for self-improvement. His visions of a prosperous nation enable him to maintain security and peace within the borders of Botswana. Khama becomes 'a bulwark against Colonial invasion and the expropriation of land' (Clayton 1988:60). Head expresses Khama's determination to protect his country as follows:

A war would rage for his land, but a subtle war, not the war of spear and shield against canon and gun, already fought and lost by most of the Southern African tribes. Khama was to provide a resistance of image and prestige (57).

Khama's 'deep river' is re-directed. When he assumes chieftaincy he has already converted to Christianity, and so his private self has undergone a transformation and a redefinition. It is this very enlightenment that Khama seeks to extend to his tribe. Because of the redefinition of his identity, Khama does not fear opposition from his tribe for having introduced reforms that might clash with traditional practices. Khama's personal transformation becomes for him a social concern, a carving out of a new road for his tribe. Unlike other tribal leaders, Khama realises that he cannot let his people down by opting out of his tribe and establishing a new community. Rather, the tribe is transformed internally. Khama exploits his position as chief to impose new ideas on his tribe, by 'a

regimental levelling down of its individuality' ('Deep River' 2), and this he achieves through intellect and not force. In her article 'A Novelist at the Crossroads', Joyce Johnson points out that 'where many African writers have celebrated Shaka, Head projects Khama III, as a leader who inclined toward non-violence' (1990:127).

No wonder Head admires Khama. Like her, Khama dreamt all his life of a world 'created anew'. For Khama the dream becomes reality, in the reforms that he implements in his tribe:

Large social courtesies surrounded each ritual, ceremony and custom practised by his people. All the courtesies were retained, while brutal aspects of each custom were neatly sliced away...Khama's reforms are touched by personal insight into human suffering as opposed to group acceptance of tradition. One of his first actions on assuming power was to abolish the initiation ceremonies, *bogwera* for men and *bojale* for women...With Khama a new order was born which was a blending of all that was compassionate and good in his own culture and in the traditions of Christianity (*Serowe*, 8).

What Khama does to his tribe reflects Head's concept of 'a reverence for the people' (1990:99) which she projects in Sebina as well. Head considers the element of 'reverence' for others as vital for co-existence. In an earlier encounter with authority Sebina's invitation to the Bakalanga chief to witness the practice of circumcision shows the chief that there is something valuable in it and he consents to its practice. Sebina's request to follow traditional practices could be construed as a challenge to authority. Sebina had felt then, under the Bakalanga, that his smaller clan needed to maintain its identity by keeping some basic customs:

We have taken your language and customs...your god is our god, but we cannot altogether give up the customs of our forefathers (12).

Yet Sebina does not disclaim the authority of the Bakalanga - rather he creates a climate of mutuality. The Bakalanga chief is so impressed that he asks for young people of his own tribe to be included on future occasions. Head recognises the complementarity that allows Sebina custom to become Bakalanga custom.

With Khama Sebina sees no chance for similar requests. Nevertheless on the occasion of Sebina's reception, the Khama-Sebina relationship demonstrates the policy of mutuality quite explicitly. Khama pronounces:

This is a happy day for my people...Bakalanga people, of which Sebina are part, are famous for their ploughing and trading skills. It can only be a benefit to us to have such clever people come and dwell among us (65).

In recognising the skills of others Khama seeks to enrich his people's well-being, to respect the dignity of humanity and to promote a complementary existence. Head sees Khama's success as 'an achievement not of the effort of a single man but a collaboration of many great minds in order that an integrity be established in the affairs of men' (*A Woman Alone* 1990:99). Sebina's quiet acceptance of Khama's new laws shows a receptive individual bent on keeping open the doors of learning for his people. Sebina and his clan have joined a transformation. They adopt the Bamangwato identity as the clan gets absorbed into the new learning and new practices. All dehumanising customs are abolished, circumcision among them. Sebina has become an instrument of change himself by facilitating his community's need to learn new things. He comes to realise that he favours change and believes in a progressive society. In Khama, he sees a mirror of himself: a stern but peaceful leader:

He liked that austere face, cold and bleak in its goodness. It matched an austerity and goodness within his own nature. He liked that cool, intellectual world...(65).

Head's perception that true leadership is not effected through dictatorship but through compassion and negotiation is reflected in Sebina's thoughts about co-existence in the Bamangwato tribe. In retrospect Sebina concludes that:

Life had always been a broad, peaceful river for him where all thought and human experience floated with graceful ease. He disliked aggressive attitudes of mind and bitterly and deeply hated the violent regime of the Matebele. He had always been a leader of his people even though in the humble role of a petty chieftain or headman. He came from a rich tradition where people were governed with affection and justice and where the rules and courtesies of life were always known; a world where men distinguished sharply between what was just and unjust, good and evil, and were skilled in sorting out disputes and the management of their affairs (74).

Sebina's thoughts are reported to the reader by the narrator so that the reader can have access into Sebina's inner world, constituted by his attitudes, virtues, life experiences, cultural identity, aspirations and leadership style. The objective use of third person - 'he', 'him' - indicates Sebina's shift from a position of active clan leadership to that of facilitator of progress, mediator, negotiator and observer of peaceful co-existence within the Bamangwato tribe. Sebina is presented as a unique old person who is always committed to negotiation with his fellow humans. Nevertheless strongly emotional phrases indicate that he dissociates himself from inhumane acts: he dislikes aggression, he bitterly and deeply hates violence. Sebina's emotions echo Head's own attitude towards aggressive behaviour and violence in the exercise of power and authority. Though Sebina has the role of 'petty chieftain' Head projects through him an ideal leadership. It is his benevolence that marks Sebina as a true

leader. Clayton interprets this ideal leadership as a focal concern of Head's.

A key emphasis which appears in *A Bewitched Crossroad* is the idea of leaders, those who made great gestures, and "great gestures have an oceanic effect on society - they flood a whole town" (*Serowe*:xv)...[Head's] emphasis on great leaders or chiefs has a double root: an African tradition of praise and worship for the austere, quietly effective chief of the tribe, and the reverence given by a South African to leaders who are powerful without being oppressive, who use their power for the benefit of the community at large (60).

If we agree with Clayton's perceptions of Head's concern with true leadership then we should justify Head's recognition of both Sebina and Khama as 'great leaders'. On the one hand, Sebina comes from a 'rich tradition' of affectionate governance and justice which allows the practice of 'new learning'. On the other hand, Khama is admired by Sebina for his innovations. Nonetheless, there are elements of imposition in Khama's leadership style. To me, Khama's reforms seem to threaten the survival of what is left of the tradition. Even without aggression or violence, his edict is oppressive: 'It is no longer permitted for all people to observe certain customs. I wish my laws obeyed' (65). This order is unconditional and, evidently, has not been negotiated. The narrator observes: 'Khama became an obsessed reformer - African custom and tradition had to conform to Christianity' (54). I believe this is one reason Head cannot use Khama as the main protagonist - because she cannot allow authoritarianism to tarnish intellect. To prevent the possibility of such 'tarnishing', Head uses Sebina to diffuse the impact of the new laws on the people.

Stephanie Newell concurs that Sebina's main purpose in *A Bewitched Crossroad* is not only to be a historical witness and custodian of African tradition but also to mediate and channel the harsh impact of Khama's reforms and the possibility of a rebellious reaction by the Bamangwato tribe.

Through the old man Head can soften the potentially authoritarian contours of Khama's obsessive reforming zeal and guide readers towards the adoration she expresses for Khama as the ideal leader of a culturally boundless nation (Newell 1995:80).

The issue of rebellion will receive further consideration later. Sebina's position as mediator is the means by which the writer can tone down Khama's authority and keep admirable power from being abused. Sebina sees to it that the boundary between good and bad is observed - Khama has to stay on the good side.

Sebina is thus actively involved in softening the impact of Khama's authoritarianism. As a mediator, Sebina cannot afford to be confused by emerging change in spite of feeling that 'change has come upon us with the sudden violence of a storm' (95). His task is to objectively assess the new activities and practices in order to advise the Bamangwato people in his ward to be supportive of transformation and of the man behind the innovations. This is the spirit which Sebina wishes to prevail within the tribe; then he can feel at peace with himself, since 'life was reborn in him again like a full, flowing river...' (97).

If the image of the 'deep river' emphasises a state of passivity, lack of innovation, and unutilised potential, the 'full flowing river' is suggestive of

Sebina's willingness to learn, to absorb, to transform, to be flexible and to share useful information with the world at large. Johnson observes,

Sebina who accepts change as natural and inevitable appreciates the way in which the community is being transformed...Sebina accepts the new influences as ones which allow what is best in the culture to flower and new "truths" to emerge for scrutiny (1990:130).

Sebina's 'flowing river' is symbolic of his insight into what happens around him and he welcomes the changes in his community. His traditional wisdom and his understanding of the transformation process 'flows' into Head's idealism and intellectuality which defines the existence of African communities living on the other side of what Newell calls 'the colonial researchers' literacy line' (1995:80). Head understands Sebina's role in the history of an African community as follows:

For so long old men like him had been the libraries of the tribe, the experts in all knowledge and custom. That day he knew that a new era had begun; the document he had touched had preserved the deliberations of the day forever, never to be lost or changed in the faulty memories of men. It would travel with the foreigners from an obscure and humble towns like Shoshong to the greatest cities of the world and be pondered over from age to age by all the generations that would follow him (120).

In this light I wish to examine further the significance of the shift from the 'deep river' to the 'flowing river' which is seen as a force of knowledge and traditional wisdom within Sebina. As a custodian of tradition, Sebina's role is to safeguard the cultural identity of the African people but at the same time to be as flexible as a 'flowing river' in allowing progress and development to penetrate communities. The significance of the 'flowing river' lies in the success with which complementarity is achieved by an assimilation of old and new. Sebina realises the importance of the 'new book learning' in recording and preserving the community's oral tradition. It has become outdated to rely on old men like him to relay

cultural information orally from one generation to the next. Sebina's 'deep river' of tradition must begin to 'flow' into written communication even though the capturing of the oral into the written radically alters the flow. For instance, the voice and the gestures of oral presentation cannot be captured precisely in the written text. All that can be captured is the memory.

Old men such as him had been the only repositories of tribal history. It lived in their memories and so was preserved and passed on from generation to generation. Often, only a tree, a river bank, a hill or a mountain lingered in the memory as a scene where great deliberations had taken place or gigantic battles had been fought...That day he knew a new era had begun; [in] the document he had preserved the deliberations of the day forever, never to be lost or changed in the faulty memories of men (120).

As a representative of tradition Sebina's memory deserves to be recorded in the 'document' so that it is not 'lost or changed in the faulty memories of men'. Head sees herself as owing Botswana this duty of preserving her historical heritage for having adopted her; she honours this responsibility by preserving Sebina's oral history in formal text. She recreates Botswanan history from an African writer's perspective and immortalises it within the written text. The preserved history can then become a source of identity for African posterity and for international audiences. In this way she sustains the flow of the river.

For Sebina, I believe, the new era is indicative of the power of intellect that Khama displays in examining past traditions. Yet it requires his objectivity to assess this intellect. The fact that Khama's compassionate side is not overshadowed by sentimentality earns him Head's admiration which is reflected in Sebina's calm observation. He observes Khama's leadership style as strengthened by balancing compassion for the poor and the

helpless with strict discipline and 'uncompromising control over this territory, dispensing his own justice and asserting sovereignty. He does not reject power, but seeks to exercise it effectively' (Johnson 1990:313).

Nevertheless, this 'uncompromising' power and control that Khama seems to wield does not go unchallenged by pessimists and thwarters of progress like Maruapula, Sebina's nephew and protégé. Head again draws a contrast between the positive and the negative. Whilst the general impression created by Khama in the community is one of progress and development, Maruapula represents the dissenting voices who are opposed to Khama's reforms. In expressing his scepticism Maruapula stresses that he 'does not like it that one man should wield so much power' (120). At this point I wish to develop Newell's suggestion that a rebellion against Khama is a real possibility. Maruapula's opposition should not go unheeded because sooner or later the "little" cracks and tears that it opens in the fabric of the community might widen and lengthen. Dissenting voices come from Khama's half-brothers who test his resilience when they seek to topple him for prohibiting beer-brewing and drinking. This prohibition raises a storm which leads to rebellious campaigning to oust Khama. Khama's flexibility proves helpful here. Rather than force a confrontation in which his people may get hurt, he applies his 'intellect' and 'repeals a ban on producing beer'. On the other hand, Sebina responds to Maruapula's protests; he softens the impact of Khama's authority by letting his 'flowing river' of enlightenment and insight lead Maruapula towards the 'new light' of learning. He explains that

[the] times have changed...Nothing is like it was before. Our ideas of leadership must change to suit the times. Besides, I have lived under the Matebele and...they created a state where one man and one man alone

wields power...dealing death and destruction every turn, to friend and foe alike. It could never happen here. This is the calm rule of mind (121).

Sebina does not agree with any of Maruapula's protests against Khama. Rather he explicitly identifies with Khama's world of vision and realises that though he is old and handicapped by age he has a longing to experience the process of education. He sees the importance of letting the youth, women and able-bodied men take part in the learning process. By implication, Maruapula must be a part of this learning process instead of protesting against change. Sebina believes that the younger generation 'will be alight to the [people]' (133). Sebina's grandson, Mazebe, represents this generation of modern wisdom. Mazebe is the 'eyes and the ears' of the village. By allowing Mazebe to read to him, Sebina is reaching out and participating in the 'new learning' experience. This is Sebina's demonstration that knowledge must be available to all, even to the old, and to disadvantaged young people like Tumedisso, who happens to be Maruapula's son.

The image of 'light' as Head uses it suggests both knowledge and the learning process. The task of the younger generation is to use this 'light' to interpret the tribe's history, its Africanicity and its identity. National history is transformed and relayed as literal truth, from the traditionalists to the modern generation. Then the "Sebinas" will depend on the "Mazebes" 'to decipher and convey the new, written truths' (Newell 1995:79). The pressure to learn new truths becomes so great among the young generation that even Maruapula's son defies his father who rejects the 'new learning' thus denying his family intellectual freedom. The disgruntled Maruapula has completely hardened his inner world against anything he regards as a threat to his traditionalist attitude. He reflects a traditional society's

opposition to transformation and cannot even begin to understand Sebina's motivation in liberating his household to the new world of intellect.

Initially, Maruapula's self-centredness 'intently [seeks] something deeper than his casual wars from the face of the old man' (173). Head presents Sebina as a symbol of 'infinite wisdom' to Maruapula and not as 'a betrayer of trust'. And yet Maruapula's egocentricism blinds him to the light of old Sebina's wisdom. He 'fails to examine his friendship with Sebina in its true light' (173). He fails to gain insight into this wisdom and fails to accept the process of his community's transformation as vital and positive. Maruapula's criticism of the transformation brought about by Khama makes him oblivious even to stark suffering 'under the brutality of African power struggles and violent forms of jealousy and greed' (Newell 1988:74), of which the Matebele are an example and from which Sebina fled. Sebina is critical of African traditional leadership whose oppressive power has had only one objective: to destroy and annihilate the weaker African tribes or clans:

The leaders of the destructive wars were desperate heroes intent only on the preservation of their own clans (77).

In sketching the history of the Bamangwato, Head reiterates her condemnation of oppressive power in the hostilities Sebina experiences during the Wars of the Calamities. In the light of past experience as a victim of the 'destructive wars' by powerful clans like Matebele, Sebina regards Khama as a good leader in spite of opposition that finds his authority oppressive. Sebina's insight and experience shows that Khama is not harsh. He understands Khama's leadership style as 'the calm thoughtful rule of mind', whose fundamental principle of leadership is 'always negotiate' (153). According to this principle Maruapula's

opposition group is wrong. Khama creates a new image of national consciousness. His tribe is considered a safe haven for the unfortunate victims of brutality: 'it absorbs diverse populations displaced by the wars' and through 'negotiations' he unites diverse people into a strong Bamangwato tribe. Newell points out that Khama is 'the bipolar opposite of "military predatory and aggressive" Matebele and Boer nationalism' which is 'culturally insulated...intent only on self-preservation (1995:77). The ideal image of a nation that Khama seeks to advance is grounded in the unification of diversity and the intermingling of heterogenous Afro-European ideas. This image that Khama is carving out for his tribe indicates that he embraces complementarity. The concomitant blending of ideas is observed in day-to-day activities. For example, respectable traditions are not totally done away with by Khama but are preserved and transformed to 'suit the time'. Sebina observes this flexibility at work in the dress code:

[H]eadmen still felt fully clothed in their traditional garments of karosses and loincloths of animal skins, but each headman had added one small item according to his fancy, of European dress: a waistcoat, a hat, a pair of shoes, or a shirt. Only Khama was totally modern (64).

Head's interest in and approval of Khama stems from his 'assimilative leadership'. Through Khama's construction of a culturally flexible nation Head emphasises complementarity and egalitarianism. On the one hand, the observer-status that Head bestows upon Sebina has the purpose of detaching Sebina from certain activities which he feels he cannot practise because he belongs to a different era. As far as the dress code is concerned, for instance, unlike Khama he remains totally traditional. Sebina's detachment does not mean that he is critical of Khama, however. On the contrary, Sebina approves and defends Khama's changes. Both their images are reflected in their dress code. As an elder in whose

memory is captured the past of the African nations, Sebina is to be regarded as a treasured member of the society - he is their traditional identity reference while Khama is a symbol of progress and modern development.

On the other hand, the crux of the relationships between Sebina and Head lies in their functions as preservers of Botswanan history. Head's position in this relationship is that of learner. Though Sebina is a character created by her, Head cannot manipulate Sebina in the task of preserving Botswana history. Sebina, like a teacher, has an advantage over Head of historical and traditional knowledge. It seems as if it is Head who is subjected to Sebina's power in this exercise: she taps historical information from the store of oral tradition at Sebina's command and converts this into the written word which will remain preserved through generations, as a textual monument. Textual monuments like historical monuments will forever communicate silently what the concept of African leadership means: the employment of power that will benefit the tribe or the nation and not oppress it. What Head has preserved in her text will also provide for Botswana, particularly, and for Africa at large, a forum for learning through the mistakes of the past. Future communities will then be able to make a fresh start typified by complementary existence. Head's recording of the history of Botswana is above all intended to enable the whole world to learn of its benevolent leadership and the ideal reconstruction into a modern society whose lack of barriers can cater for diversity. From Sebina she learns about true leadership which she sees as worthy of being recorded so that the rest of Africa can find a model of co-existence with Botswana. Her own problems of identity seem to have been solved at this stage. In fact Head had already acquired Botswanan citizenship at the time

of writing this novel. Thus I see Head's contribution to Botswanan heritage as an act of gratitude for belonging.

Having examined how Khama and Sebina seem to succeed in constructing a complementary co-existence for the Bamangwato, I now wish to look at how gender issues are handled amongst the Bamangwato to create a state of equality. In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, the male protagonist Makhaya questions Paulina about the rationale behind the designation of roles according to gender. As we have seen Makhaya transgresses the traditional gender barriers which stipulate that household work must be done by women; he makes the fire and the tea himself. And in challenging gender barriers, he reminds women of the community that men live on this world too, and that therefore they must be allowed to perform any task they feel capable of performing. In *A Bewitched Crossroad* it is noteworthy that women seem to be effaced from the making of history; in fact, very little mention is made of women. The barriers of tradition 'obliterated a woman as a thinking, a feeling human being and defined her position in the society as: "A woman is sacred only if she knows her place which is in her yard, as a mother of children and a housewife.' (165). It is also true that Bakhwi, Sebina's senior wife, is presented in terms of a male prototype and is focalised through Sebina's masculine eyes. Nevertheless his view of her is remarkably enlightened:

Bakhwi was very tall, a thick-set, strongly built, vigorous woman, who towered head and shoulders above all the assembled women. She had a deep, penetrating, masculine voice. She held her head upright on a strong, curved neck and the expression of her face was proud and serious (66-67).

A Bewitched Crossroad, too questions the traditional mindset on the exclusivity of gender roles, and recognises women's capacity to perform

tasks as competently as men. Sebina sees that Bakhwi is a woman whose physique intimidates, and who commands authority that could be redirected effectively in a modern society in a leadership position. This portrait of Bakhwi overturns the stereotypic image of women as the weaker sex. Sebina is enabled by Head to project a new image of women: as competent to venture into male dominated positions. Sebina's description of Bakhwi is a reinstatement of dignity and respect of women not only as partners in procreation but also as intellectual counterparts.

The new woman is projected by Head as engaged in a process of public self-definition and of working out her own identity. The new identity for Botswana women parallels Head's own establishment of new roots in Botswana. She came 'to find new correlatives for [her]self, to penetrate with thought, and thus recreate in fiction, the adopted environment' (Clayton 1988:59). Head's role as writer is to promote this new image of women by demonstrating herself that, for a change, Southern African history must be seen from women's perspective. Women should take it upon themselves to address issues that affect their daily lives. According to Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, in 'The Female Writer and Her Commitment', a woman should express her desire for:

[wanting] change and innovation. She wants power, wealth and status like the men. She wants to ride a car rather than walk; use a gas or electric stove instead of fire-wood (1987:7).

In Khama's world the traditional ideology that women should be physically endowed with strength only to carry out the routine tasks of their household world is transformed. Khama announces the liberation of women from the shackles of traditional perceptions. He acknowledges the importance of the roles that women play in socio-economic structures. Khama gives women the voice and the space to negotiate with their male

counterparts. Head uses these emancipated women to tell their story of silent suffering under patriarchy. The liberated women begin to assert themselves straight away:

What great light has been given to us to day. Has it not always been that all in life on us depends? We are the backbone of society. We are the mothers who have reared the generations, but it has been our bad luck that our views have never been heard...(172).

By removing women's marginalisation Khama strengthens his position at the helm of a new and boundless society. For the first time women can enjoy the right to inherit wealth without patriarchal dominance. The abolition of *bogadi*, the bride-price, not only empowers women but also helps dislodge a difficult cornerstone of the traditional society of the Bamangwato tribe. Khama allows women to address their own problems by using platforms for dialogue such as the *kgotla*.

kgotla is a place where only a man's voice is heard. A woman's voice is never heard here unless she asks a man to appeal on her behalf...I now say to you: "Let this *kgotla* be a place where a woman's voice is heard...where a woman may initiate a case on her own..." (170).

It seems to me commendable that Khama's initiatives includes negotiations in the *kgotla*, because an issue like the liberation of women should be publicly declared and debated specifically in a traditional institution of justice where everyone's voice is given a chance. The *kgotla* ensures that people are well informed about all the events that are taking place in the whole country. Bringing women to the *kgotla* is in itself a large step towards granting them equal status with their male counterparts.

Sebina's approval of the emancipation of women by Khama is apparent in the way he expresses and accepts new things: 'Today we older people can

only anticipate novelty while we see our traditions blown away. This is how we prepare the way for the young today' (173). Sebina 'stands for a core of tribal memory' (Clayton 1988:59) and has a duty to pass on an old era of rigid traditionalism to the modern era of transformation. Thus it seems contradictory that he should accept change this easily. Yet Clayton argues that 'Sebina represents a flexibility of spirit as against a rejected ideological rigidity' (1988:60). As a flexible historical custodian Sebina welcomes the liberation of women. The concept of flexibility is, in my opinion, Head's major concern in *A Bewitched Crossroad*, for it is rooted in her idea of complementary existence. Flexibility surfaces in Khama's accommodation of diversity in his rebuilding of a boundless nation. Head projects her admiration for Khama's flexibility through Sebina's witnessing of the process of transformation. The relaxation of gender laws, in particular, marks this flexibility.

While the majority of people in the Bamangwato tribe welcome the emancipation of women from the oppressive laws of tradition, a small sector of the community which I have identified earlier in this discussion as the 'opposition', feel threatened by the release of women's energies. Maruapula is representative of this negativity. He cannot imagine women as better than 'cowardly, meek creatures who will never be the equals of men'. He compares them to 'little dogs to be fondled and kicked' (17). Maruapula believes in and lives by the harsh decrees of the ancestors who paid very little attention to individuality. Yet if ancestors expect a woman to be 'industrious, chaste, modest and obedient' (169), then surely men ought to acknowledge the meekness in women by loving treatment, caring and respect. Maruapula's corrupted patriarchal views are the very reason which propel Khama to re-examine women's status in society. One might

also think that all women would welcome the review of their positions in society. On the contrary, there is a minority of women who seem to be comfortable with violent and dehumanising acts against them in male-dominated communities. These women are horrified by change which makes them equal partners with their men. Such women, have been so victimised under the patriarchy that they find it difficult to imagine themselves treated differently. Bakhwi, for instance, speaking on behalf of such women says that she does not find anything wrong 'when a wife gets a little beating from her husband [because] a beating ensured that a woman remained on the right road' (173). The 'right road' for women like Bakhwi is the belief that a woman's place is in the kitchen. These women support the Maruapula ideology which would rather see women remain powerless and tolerant of being kicked around like dogs.

When Khama opposes the abuse of women by men he is reflecting a deep understanding of the experiences and fates of women. On the other hand Sebina's support for the freedom of the women in egalitarian societies stems from a realisation that in the past traditions have not proved able to guarantee the safety and protection of the integrity of the society. Where traditions have failed, the society's belief has become destabilised and shattered. Sebina argues the futility of traditional rigidity to Maruapula as follows:

You should have seen what life was like in my youth when we worshipped the ancestral spirits. We feared and resisted any new idea lest we give offence to the spirits who protected us; it was only when unreasonable danger overwhelmed us that our belief in ancestor worship was shattered (171).

With these words Sebina refutes the theory that Khama's introduction of reforms is an insult to the ancestors who created traditional laws. He points out that traditional societies themselves have in desperation displaced and abolished the ancestors, doubting their protective powers. As far as Sebina is concerned, Khama's reforms should have taken place long ago. Because Khama is concerned with the well-being of all members of his tribe, he does not replace all traditions with totally new practices - he retains some of the more humane ones. And the fears of the opposition that the liberated women will develop loose morals are allayed when unexpectedly,

the women did not immediately react in an overt way to their newly earned freedoms. In fact, they kept their shawls around their shoulders and looked as conservative as everyone else (173).

The conservatism reflected in their gesture is indicative of what Newell calls a 'historical continuity and timelessness' (1995:81). In other words, the women are observed by Sebina to preserve and protect their traditional image as 'industrious, chaste, modest and obedient' (169) backbones of society. I believe Khama would approve of the positive implications of this image, for it demonstrates the dignity with which women demand to be treated by men. It is the dehumanising ill-treatment of women that Khama is set to obliterate.

In order to safeguard the interests of the 'ordinary' people in his tribe Khama is wary of dissenting voices within and without Bamangwato. He easily defuses a potential rebellion involving his half-brothers, but the greatest threat to his tribe is the aggressive neighbouring chiefs who have been acting in cahoots with the Trek-Boers. To prevent the possibility of

usurpation of land Khama applies his 'rule of intellect' by requesting external assistance from the British Crown:

The people could still have been destroyed by so many hostile forces - the northward thrust of the Afrikaner Boer, the Germans and the Portuguese. It was not the British who sought out the Botswana but the people of Botswana who sought out the British. A vague feeling floated in the air at that time that it was only the British who could be trusted to have honest dealings with black people. Yes, where financial greed was not a major British concern, the British took time off to hold exquisite dialogues of integrity (*A Woman Alone*, 71).

Not only were hostile forces coming from the Afrikaner Boer, Germans or Portuguese, but also the depredations of some resident British figures like Cecil John Rhodes, were potentially just as threatening in financial double dealing and betrayal.

Khama knows too well what is good for his people, therefore, seeking assistance from quarters that would not harm his tribe unnecessarily, is paramount. To preserve its integrity, land-grabbers have to be kept at bay:

We think that the Chartered Company will take our lands, that they might enslave us to work on their mines. We black people live on land, we live on the farms. We get our food from the land, and we are afraid that if the British South African Company begins in our country, we will not get these things and that it will be a great loss to us (189).

Khama here defines the identity of black people as one that must be free from slavery and oppression. Ordinarity is thus identified as the enjoyment of basic human decencies such as the possession of land for subsistence purposes. Khama's reforms are aimed to secure the best interest of the tribe which is the preservation of not only African but also human identity. It is for this reason that he perceives colonisation as a threat. Khama's quest has fictional as well as historical significance. If

Khama achieves this objective for his tribe Head likewise will have realised her dreams of belonging to a humane society of ordinariness.

Lewis Nkosi (1983) in *Home and Exile* argues that 'the loss of the broader definition of African identity has been due to its destruction of links with its past and as a consequence [Africans] have been unable to determine who they are today' (123). Perhaps the situation described by Nkosi is what Khama seeks to prevent for the Bamangwato, for Botswana, for Southern Africa and by extension, for the African continent. (Incidentally, of course, nothing at present occupies Africans more than the matter of their identity. There has recently been a call for an African Renaissance which in my mind is an indication that Africans are very aware of their identity and are clamouring to let all nations know who they are).

Head, too, employs her creative genius to define and preserve African identity in literary art. Her purpose is not just to relate or retell how things were or how events happened or did not happen, but 'to project an ideal platform for a Southern African future' (Clayton 1988:55). Head expresses her literary purpose herself in 'Some Notes on Novel Writing', a chapter in *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings*:

I have recorded whatever hopeful trend was presented to me in an attempt to shape the future, which I hope will be one of dignity and compassion (1990:64).

By using Khama as a character to portray benevolence, the rule of intellect, true African leadership and egalitarianism, Head is attempting to realise her dreams of a better world in which man loves man and respects basic human experience. In producing this novel, Head shows that Botswana differentiates itself from other Southern African countries as a place where

magic can be produced. It is particularly welcome that Head, an African woman, takes the initiative to present a different historical viewpoint of Africa rather than leaving us to hear it from strangers. In doing so, she secures her 'home' in Botswana.

Sebina's quest for roots is also realised in Botswana: he finds peace of mind under Khama. Although he 'represents a dying era which is symbolic of his own [age]' (Johnson 1990:130), his loyalty to tradition does not deter him from accepting novelty. In my opinion Sebina is a better leader than Khama, whose impositions sometimes nearly get him into trouble with his critics. Unlike Khama, Sebina is not overbearing to his clan nor is he confused about the mediative role he has to play in the Bamangwato tribe to prevent rifts. Sebina's calmness and flexibility enable those in his care to benefit from opportunities for progress and self-development. For him, for instance, Christianity does entail a replacement of customs, hence his decision to keep to a polygamous marriage and to protect his traditional family unit means he cannot practise Christianity. Sebina aspires to compassion and humanness among his people. He certainly 'allows what is best in the culture to flower and new truths to emerge' (Johnson 1990:130).

In Sebina Head creates a historical witness who becomes part of Botswanan transformation while contributing towards the preservation of the country's heritage. Head thus represents both historical continuity and historical change. In particular she inscribes a new image of women. When Khama transforms gender laws, the traditional image of women as a tool for procreation and a keeper of the house ceases to dominate in the traditional ideology. Khama elevates women onto a platform of social and

economic dialogue to share in the exercise of national problem-solving and the strengthening of the spirit of nationalism.

Clayton reiterates the significance of the realities of one country's transformation for the rest of its continent. She says Head

witnesses to an absence by celebrating an African presence in the history of Botswana. She modifies this dictum by making her history of one country a moral, human judgement on another. Her unique position as a black woman historian in Southern Africa leads her to overturn a dominant settler mythology and to correct the harshness of the frontier spirit in favour of a "compromise of tenderness" between African tradition and Western influence (1988:65).

All that this implies about Head emanates from the fact that she both celebrates Botswanan transformation and benevolent leadership, and achieves for herself freedom. To her Botswana is a country where she can express her feelings, uniqueness, imagination and fears. Unlike in South Africa, her land of birth, where writers of the time ran the risk of prosecution if they spoke out against the injustice of the apartheid government's policies, in Botswana there is freedom to think broadly and to cherish human dignity. In *A Bewitched Crossroad* Head subtly wishes that South Africa should emulate a country of ordinary people, Botswana. In 'Some Notes on Novel Writing', she says, 'I spent a whole portion of my life in a country where it was impossible for black people to dream, so I know what that's like. I spent another portion in a country where it is possible to dream and I have combined these two different experiences in my writing' (*A Woman Alone* 1990:63-64).

The 'dream' that is realised in *A Bewitched Crossroad* is that of complementarity: of balanced existence and human harmony. It is the

dream of a 'deep unruffled river' flowing gently down generations, transporting noble ways and new concepts of modernity, in perfect synchronisation.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

I have found the tensions and balances of the rural parts of Botswana, of a fine order. Enough of the ancient way of African life has survived to enable the younger generations to maintain their balance with comfort and ease, while almost daily with independence, new innovations, new concepts of government and critical, complex situations invade the life of the country. It is in such a world that one puts down some roots in the African soil and one finds a sense of peace about the future (*A Woman Alone* 1990:88).

This statement marks Head's establishing a home base and finally reaching her destination in the journey of self-discovery. In Botswana she has found her roots, her identity. Perhaps my own dissertation's 'journey' of exploration has reached the point of assessing whether it has achieved what it set out to obtain. In this close reading of Head I have realised the importance of mutuality in maintaining peaceful and stable human relations. Yet vital moments of togetherness are often wasted in fighting and warding one another off. Head's writing must be looked at as a lesson in human existence and this could well benefit those who are in authority of whatever kind, who need to be aware that humanity has 'diverse threads which could be woven into a fine cloth of [society]' (Ezenwa-Ohaeto in *Tragic Life* 1990:130).

In her search for the identity which she could not achieve in the land of her birth, Head's arrival in Botswana meant the beginning of a reconstruction of the self. Her writing, therefore, is filled with 'life dramas' (*A Woman Alone* 1990:77), which she presents to the world 'through the eyes of small individuals'. My introductory chapter identified these as Head's characters and the 'life dramas' as the ways in which characters relate to

one another or to her as a writer. These are the relations I set out to explore at the beginning of my dissertation, recognising the question of identity as a crucial one in any serious reading of her work.

In my examination of the relationships among characters I have seen Head creating situations which suggest that human existence can, following Elliott's claim 'only be expressed through a complementarity' (1982:103). To me the concept of complementarity has become synonymous with terms like 'compatibility', 'balance', 'supplementarity' and 'mutuality'. I have come to understand that these words share the common element of making whole, of completing, of co-existing, of combining and of balancing. An answer to the question how complementarity can work for Head, or for anyone else, lies in the way she presents her work, in various situations which she creates in her writing. My conclusion will show that ideal human existence can only make sense if human beings relate to each other in a complementary manner.

The relationships between characters and Head's life experiences have been her testing ground. The fact that her novel writing has occasioned debate as to whether it is biographical or autobiographical, fact or fiction, suggests to me that Head employs complementarity in her writing by combining elements that are both fact and fiction. For example, aspects of Head's life experiences are combined with the fictional characters' romantic love affairs, in the stories of Maru and Margaret, Makhaya and Paulina, Gilbert and Maria. Her other writing is also complementary: the short fiction, for instance, which is developed from the 'Serowe' interviews is recognised by MacKenzie as complemented by the documentary. *A Bewitched Crossroad* is a combination of historical fact

and fiction. Head's idea that life must be viewed in totality and that the identity she seeks is one whose nature encompasses this wholeness, is recapitulated in the instances that follow.

The characters that Head has selected to demonstrate her ideal existence and to shape her identity come from all walks of life. They range from powerful figures of chiefs (Sebembele, Maru, Khama, Sebina) to ordinary traditional men and Christian women like Ralokae and Galethebege; from educated but victimised women like Margaret and Elizabeth, to promiscuous men and women like Garesego and Life. These characters shed light on situations in which power is misused in social and personal relations and so threatens the balance of human existence. Head is very outspoken in her condemnation of the misuse of power by any person. To express this she puts certain characters in powerful positions, like that of chief, and creates conflict which tempts them to wield power and thus overrule their opposition. But because of her attitude she often manipulates them into realising that the negative implication of the misuse of power is oppression, alienation and dehumanisation. To illustrate an alternative to bloodshed and suffering these characters choose abdication and migration. Stepping down from power is considered by Head as a way of joining the ranks of ordinary people and identifying with structures that promote and respect individuality in the collectivity. We have seen examples of powerful characters in the figures of Makhaya, Maru, Moleka, Sebina, Sebembele and Seretse Khama avoiding the destruction of innocent people and opting for transformation of communities so that power can be harnessed and directed in positive ways.

The importance of mutual existence has been witnessed, for example, in the relationship between Makhaya and Gilbert in their management of the

Golema Mmidi microcosm. Gilbert has the agricultural know-how whereas Makhaya has the communicative skills to create a climate of learning; Head has shown how their community venture becomes a success. Through Makhaya also, Head enacts meaningful existence in a universal brotherhood which requires its members to exercise compassion and patience for mankind. This brotherhood is described by Mma-Millipede for Makhaya as including 'each person who is alive on earth' (*Rainclouds*, 130). The partnership between Sebina and Khama in *A Bewitched Crossroad* is recognisably complementary: although Sebina seeks protection for his clan, his presence in the Bamangwato tribe facilitates Khama's transformation process. Thus we have seen how Sebina mediates in cases that could fan a rebellion in the tribe, by making Khama aware of issues that are likely to tarnish his leadership, and by encouraging negotiation with the tribe.

In the individual chapters I have demonstrated that Head has been systematic in shaping her identity. I found that it is virtually impossible to relate and respond to one's fellow human beings unless one has sorted out one's inner life first. Thus, Head's alienation and experiences of dehumanisation in South Africa and during the earlier period in Botswana, are examined through the characters who reflect these difficulties in their own fictional lives. In such situations, the victim of abuse, oppression and ostracisation will not be able to reach out to others before she has looked into the horrors of her past and has come to terms with the pain of degradation. This is what Head does in her novels, especially *A Question of Power* where the figure of Elizabeth enacts her own trauma and a mental breakdown. Head's claim that Elizabeth and herself 'are one' has given rise to the reading of *A Question of Power* as pure autobiography but the fact that Elizabeth ultimately detaches herself from Head to steer her own

course makes pure autobiography a doubtful claim. What I read in this detachment is that the writer cannot always determine her characters' actions. She has to let things happen and let characters decide their fate. I think this is one way Head is able to project her desire for a quiet life in the village, spent in the services of the community. For Elizabeth this actually happens but for Head it remains a dream. Coming to terms with oneself means having to balance the inner dichotomies. Head insists that we recognise the mutual existence of positive and negative forces in ourselves. She says the following about these eroding forces:

...people and nations do not realise the point at which they become evil; but once trapped in its net, evil has a powerful propelling motion into a terrible abyss of destruction (*A Woman Alone* 1990:69).

It is in the way we guard against eroding forces that we get a sense of balance in life; in how we relate our private lives to the public that we get a sense of wholeness. In the short fiction Head offers illustrations of these eroding forces. The illustrations are expressed in relation to a number of factors, including religion, tribalism, modernity, gender and the family unit. In exploring these recurrent themes in the stories it is important to recognise how Head positions herself in her texts. Though authorial comment and intrusion are often regarded as meddling, my observation is that such comments or intrusions are helpful in establishing links between writer and reader. The reader is enabled to recognise the identity of the writer which lies in the world of complementarity. The didactic stand that Head takes in the stories describes a society divided against itself; a society requiring conformity with traditional ideas; a society which confuses assertiveness with defiance. For example, when Life marries Lesego she prepares herself to be a good wife but without support she is subjected to male dominance that she never anticipated and when she

defines the boundaries set for her, tragedy results. Again Head advocates complementarity which does not thrive on another's weaknesses.

It has been notable that in the short fiction Head places women characters in situations of conflict where their decisions can be a matter of life and death. Dikeledi, in 'The Collector of Treasures', decides to stop her husband's abuse by killing him. In this and the story 'Life' we are made to realise that the relationships of the protagonists fail because they cannot give each other mutual support; they cannot complement each other. The male protagonists in these stories are seen as overstepping the boundaries of equality and sliding back into patriarchal dominance which does not appreciate a women's assertiveness or empowerment. However, through Head's presentation of male figures such as Dinorego, Paul Thebolo, Makhaya, Gilbert, Maru, Sebembele and Khama, we see qualities of integrity, consideration for others, and an ability to create oneself anew.

In spite of the fact that Head is against violence she does on occasion present gory details of violence in her stories. By narrating all the facets of reality she makes a real misuse of power and shows us how deplorable dehumanisation can be. Again I believe that she allows things to deliberately happen realising that she cannot always manipulate characters to avoid violence as she does with Maru and Sebembele. The presentation of the tragedies is Head's way of emphasising that human relations flourish when all that is humane and kind is retained and that which is dehumanising is sliced away.

Of the 'good men' Khama is singled out as a chief who does not abdicate. The fact is that as a historical figure his presence is factual though his

presentation is woven into a fictional story-line whose protagonist is Sebina. For Head Khama is regarded as an embodiment of true leadership. *A Bewitched Crossroad* has shown that the writer's concerns have a social bias and reveal her positive attitude towards life as a whole. In the fictional terms her perceptions about African leadership emerge through the figure of Sebina. Sebina shows Head that true leadership can only be effected through compassion and negotiation. Khama's example of offering a safe haven for displaced clans is proof that co-existing in diversity is possible. In him we should recognise the importance of negotiation between the leader and the led. Another commendable quality of leadership has been identified in the instance when Sebina's mediation prevents a full scale rebellion against some of Khama's reforms. He communicates discontent to the leader who is always prepared to listen and to negotiate a peaceful settlement through a rule of intellect. Since Sebina stands for the survival of the traditional identity of the tribe we learn from him that one's cultural identity should never be obliterated in the progress of transformation brought about by modernity. It is for this reason that Khama liberates women from patriarchal bondage which represses their individuality. He allows their voices to be registered in the *kgotla*, a place originally designated only for men. Khama's flexibility is reflected by Sebina who readily allows members of his clan, including his wives, to participate in all the development programmes introduced by Khama.

By using Khama to enact flexible and benevolent rule Head makes him a model ruler for those countries that are still practising discrimination, oppression and dehumanisation (South Africa at that time). The implicit reference to Head's land of birth is indicative of her bitterness with the political situation that drove her away. In her work she is calling out for

the respect of basic human rights and the practice of ordinary human decencies. She is advocating a balanced existence which must be expressed in terms of complementarity. This is the ultimate note which her last writing espouses.

Working on this dissertation has been a 'journey of discovery' for me too. I have appreciated the deeper levels that opened up to reveal underlying truths in the writer's visionary work. The moralistic aspects in her writing should serve to remind us, and especially the governments in Southern Africa, of the ideals of complementarity and the need to exercise caution so as not to overstep the boundaries of equality.

There are challenging issues that have emerged from my investigations which I hope might, in time, help break new ground in further studies of Bessie Head. I have found, for instance, that Head's writing abounds in humour and it appears to me to be a technique that she employs to register certain issues about herself. It could, according to Watts, be a means of concealing her emotional upheaval; it could be a defense mechanism. Since,

confrontation with the issue of identity would be totally self-destructive, it provides, at least, a way of coping with the business of living: the pain can be so wrapped in humour that it cannot pierce the covers and penetrate the heart beneath (1989:121).

In concluding *When Rain Clouds Gather*, for example, Head offers humorous comments by the Good God on most of the characters in this novel.

The way this God with no shoes carried on might easily delude you into thinking he was a charming halfwit like Paramount Chief Sekoto or hesitant about truth like Mma-Millipede or tortured and tormented like Makhaya. He changed from day to day contradicting and confusing himself by all he

had to learn, never certain of anything the way the fortune-tellers were. he had upset Makhaya this day by stacking his cards one way and then toppling them another. He had packed all these cards up in a precarious pyramid and stood by while Matenge picked off the topmost card. It would have been different had Matenge really victimised Paulina for whatever he wanted to victimise her for. Maybe her association with Makhaya. But then a man like Makhaya would not have stood by with tied hands. He would have had blood on his hands by now and been in a cell, with George Appleby-Smith lecturing him on how he had let him down. But the God with no shoes, with his queer, inverted reasoning, had brought Makhaya, a real and potential murderer, face to face with the body of Matenge just hanging there and hanging there. "Don't you see?" he said softly. "Murder is a small-minded business" (*Rainclouds*, 185-186).

Another area that teases one's imagination is Head's translation and interpretation skills. This is particularly evident in the short fiction based on the Serowe interviews, which produce a historical documentary of the village. It should be borne in mind that Head did not speak Setswana, and how she managed to be so convincing in the stories could be addressed in greater detail than has been possible in this dissertation.

Head's positive attitude to, and interest in her elderly characters is clear. The way she presents them reveals the tremendous respect she has for old people. She has expressed how drawn she often was towards these old men of the village: 'I never seemed to find the time to linger on the past or to sort out what it was that made these old men so infinitely attractive to me' (*Serowe* 1981:67). Examples of old people in her writing include Dinorego, Mma-Millipede, Sebina and the old men of Talaote. To her, old people are an embodiment of sagacity and sanity, hence the recognition she gives to their advisory and counselling capacities in her writing.

The subject of the interrelatedness of private and public domains could open up enormous literary forums of debate. It is an intricate subject which deserves specific attention.

On the whole, Bessie Head's work stands as a beacon of hope for the construction of better societies. She has provided future generations with skills to establish 'their balance with comfort and ease'. In an environment such as the one she describes in the opening quotation of this section that one may well find 'a sense of peace about the future' (1990:88).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abrahams, C. (ed) 1978. 'The Tyranny of Place: The Context of Bessie Head's Fiction.' *World Literature Written in English* 17(1), 22.

_____(ed) 1990. *The Tragic Life: Bessie Head and Literature in Southern Africa*. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press.

Achufusi, I. G. 1987. *Female African and Social Criticism: A Study of Works of Bessie Head and Grace Ogot*. Madison: University of Wisconsin.

Asad, T. 1986. 'The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology', in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by J. Clifford & G. E. Marcus. Berkeley: University of Chicago Press.

Ball, P. 1968. *The Central Self*. London: Athlone Press.

Barnet, U. A. 1983. *A Vision of Order: A Study of Black South African Literature in English 1914-1980*. London: Sinclair Browne.

Bayley, J. 1960. *The Characters of Love*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Bazin, N. T. 1985. 'Venturing into Feminist Consciousness: Two Protagonists from the Fiction of Buchi Emecheta and Bessie Head.' *SAGE: A Scholarly Journal on Black Women* 2(1), 32-36.

Beard, L. S. 1986a. 'Bessie Head: Cape Gooseberry and *The Question of Power*.' *ALA Bulletin* 12(2), 41.

_____. 1986b. 'Bessie Head in Gaborone, Botswana.' *SAGE: A Scholarly Journal on Black Women*, 3(2), 44-47.

_____. 1991. 'Bessie Head's Syncretic Fictions: The Reconceptualization of Power and The Recovery of the Ordinary.' *Modern Fiction Studies* 37(3).

- Benjamin, W. 1979. 'The Storyteller', in *Illuminations*. Glasgow: Fontana.
- Bowen, E. 1974. 'Notes on Writing a Novel', in *The Writer's Craft*, edited by J. Hersey. New York: Alfred Knopf.
- Bromberg, P. S. 1993. 'The Development of Narrative Technique in Margaret Drabble's Novels.' *Journal of Narrative Technique* 15, 179-191.
- Brown, L. W. 1981. 'Bessie Head.' *Women Writers in Black Africa*. pp. 158-181. (Anthologised Article).
- Chatman, S. 1975. 'The Structure of Narrative Transmission', in *Style and Structure in Literature*, edited by R. Fowler. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Chetin, S. 1989. *Women and Writing in South Africa: A Critical Anthology*. Johannesburg: Heinemann.
- Clayton, C. 1988. "'A World Elsewhere": Bessie Head as Historian.' *English in Africa* 15(1), 55-69.
- Colson, E. 1970. 'Family Changes in Contemporary Africa', in *Black Africa: Its peoples and Their Cultures Today*, edited by J. Middleton. London: Macmillan.
- Daiches, D. 1960. *The Novel and the Modern World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Daymond, M. 1989. 'Bessie Head, Maru and a Problem in her Visionary Fable.' *Short Fiction in the New Literatures in English*, 247-252..
- Docherty, T. 1983. *Reading (Absent) Character: Towards a Theory of Characterization in Fiction*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Dovey, T. 1989. 'A Question of Power: Susan Gardner's Biography versus Bessie Head's Autobiography.' *English in Africa* 16(1), 29-38.
- Eakin, P. J. 1989. 'Foreword', to *On Autobiography*, by P. Lejeune. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Edmands, U. 1984. 'Towards Liberation: Black Women Writing.' *African Research and Documentation* 36, 18-21.

- Eilerson, G. S. 1995. *Bessie Head: Thunder Behind Her Ears*. Cape Town: David Phillip.
- Elliott, R. C. 1982. *The Literary Persona*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Emecheta, B. 1988. 'Feminism with a Small "f"', in *Criticism and Ideology*, edited by K. H. Petersen. Second African Writers' Conference. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies.
- Ezenwa – Ohaeto, 1990. 'Windows of Womanhood', in *The Tragic Life*, edited by C. Abrahams. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press.
- Forster, E.M. 1927. *Aspects of the Novel*. London: Arnold.
- Fowler, R. 1975. *Style and Structure in Literature: Essays in the New Stylistics*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Frank, K. 1987. 'Women Without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa', in *Women in African Literature Today: A Review*, edited by E. D. Jones. London: James Currey.
- Gadomski, K.E. 1985. 'Narrative Style.' *Journal of Narrative Technique* 15, 133.
- Gardner, S. 1989. "'Don't Ask for the True Story": A Memoir of Bessie Head.' *Hecate* 12(1&2). 110-129.
- Gardner, S. 1989. 'Production Under Drought Conditions', in *Women and Writing in South Africa: A Critical Anthology*, edited by C. Clayton. Johannesburg: Heinemann.
- Geurts, K. 1986. 'Personal Politics in the Novels of Bessie Head'. *Presence Africaine: Cultural Review of the Negro World* 150, 47-74.
- Giddens, A. 1987. 'Action, Subjectivity and the Constitution of Meaning', in *The Aims of Representation: Subject/Text/History*, edited by M. S. Krieger. New York: Columbia.
- Giles, S. (ed) 1993. *Theorizing Modernism: Essays in Critical Theory*. London: Routledge.

Genette, G. 1980. *Narrative Discourse*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Gordon, D. J. 1988. 'Character and Self in Autobiography.' *Journal of Narrative Technique* 18(2), 105-119.

Gusdorf, G. 1980. 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography', in *Autobiography: Essays, Theoretical and Critical*, edited by J. Olney. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hall, M. C. 1990. *Women's Identity: Value Choices in a Changing World*. Washington. Hemisphere Publishers.

Hawthorn, J. 1992. *Studying The Novel: An Introduction*. London: Edward Arnold.

_____. 1994. *A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*. London: Edward Arnold.

Head, B. 1962. 'Things I don't like.' *The New African* 1(7), 10.

_____. 1968. *When Rain Clouds Gather*. London: Heinemann.

_____. 1971. *Maru*. London: Heinemann.

_____. 1974. *A Question of Power*. London: Heinemann.

_____. 1977. *The Collector of Treasures*. London: Heinemann.

_____. 1981. *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*. London: Heinemann.

_____. 1984a. *A Bewitched Crossroad*. London: Heinemann.

_____. 1984b. 'A Search for Historical Continuity and Roots', in *Momentum: On Recent South African Writing*, edited by M. J. Daymond, J. U. Jacobs & M. Lenta. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.

_____. 1990. *A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings*, edited by C. MacKenzie. Oxford: Heinemann.

_____. 1991. *A Gesture of Belonging: Letters from Bessie Head (1965-1979)*, edited by R. Vigne. Johannesburg: Heinemann.

- Hersey, J. (ed.) 1974. *The Writer's Craft: An Introduction*. New York: Alfred A Knopf.
- Hewitt, J. P. (ed) 1974. *Self and Society: A Symbolic Interactionist Social Psychology*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Heywood, C. 1984. 'Literary Perceptions of the Aborigine after 1883.' *Social Dynamics* 10(1), 57-61.
- Hirsch, M, & Keller, E. F. (eds.) 1990. *Conflicts in Feminism*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Hofmeyer, I. 1994. *"We Spend Our Years as a Tale that is Told": Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chiefdom*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Howarth, W. I. 1980. 'Some Principles of Autobiography', in *Autobiography: Essays, Theoretical and Critical*, edited by J. Olney. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Iser, W. 1974. *The Implied Reader*. London: John Hopkins University Press.
- James, W. 1907. *The Principles of Psychology*. London: Macmillan.
- Johnson, J. 1985a. 'Myth and Meaning in Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*.' *World Literature Written in English* 25(3), 198-211.
- _____ 1985b. 'Bessie Head and the Oral Tradition.' *Wasafiri* 3. 5-8.
- _____ 1990. 'A Novelist at the Crossroads: Bessie Head's *A Bewitched Crossroad*.' *Kunapipi* 3, 126-132.
- Jones, E. D. 1987. 'Editorial', in *Women in African Literature Today: A Review*. London: James Currey.
- Jones, N. C. 1983. 'Acculturation and Character Portrayal in Southern African Novels.' *African Literature Today: Recent Trends in the Novel* 13, 180.
- Katrak, K. H. 1985. 'From Pauline to Dikeledi.' *Ba Shiru: A Journal of African Languages and Literature*, 12(2), 26-35.

- Kemp, Y. 1988. 'Romantic Love and the Individual: Novels by Bessie Head, Mariama Ba and Buchi Emecheta.' *Obsidian II: Black Literature in Review* 3(3), 1-16.
- Kibera, V. 1991. 'Adopted Motherlands: The Novels of Marjorie McGoye and Bessie Head', in *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Africa*. London: Women's Press.
- Kunene, D. P. 1981. 'Introduction', to *Chaka*. London: Heinemann.
- Lejeune, P. 1989. *On Autobiography*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Lewis, D. 1992. 'The Politics of Feminism in South Africa.' *Staffrider* 10, 15-21.
- Lionett, F. 1989. *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Lubbock, P. 1957. *The Craft of Fiction*. New York: Viking.
- Lyons, J. 1981. *Language, Meaning and Context*. Bungay: Fontana.
- MacKenzie, C. 1989a. *Bessie Head: An Introduction*. Grahamstown: NELM.
- _____. 1989b. 'Short Fiction in the Making: The Case of Bessie Head.' *English in Africa* 16(1), 17-28.
- _____. 1991. Alienation, Breakdown and Renewal. *International Literature in English*, 557-569. (Anthologised Article).
- MacKenzie, C. & Clayton C. (eds) 1989. *Between the Lines: Interviews with Bessie Head, Sheila Roberts, Ellen Khuzwayo, Miriam Tlali*. Grahamstown: NELM.
- Madden, D. & Scott, V. 1984. *Studies in the Short Story*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Manganyi, C. 1977. *Mashangu's Reverie and Other Essays*. Johannesburg: Ravan.

- Marquard, J. 1978-79. 'Bessie Head: Exile and Community in Southern Africa.' *London Magazine* 18(3&4), 48-61.
- Matsikidze, I. P. 1990. 'Towards a Redemptive Political Philosophy: Bessie Head's *Maru*.' *World Literature Written in English*, 302, 105-109.
- Menager-Everson, V.S. 1992. '*Maru* by Bessie Head: The Dilepe Quartet or From Drought to Beer.' *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 14(2), 44-48.
- Metcalf, R. 1989. 'The Liberation of Female Consciousness', in *African Literature: Literature, Language and the Nation*, edited by E. Ngara & A. Morrison. Harare: ATOLL/Baobab, 15-26.
- Mutiso, G-C. M. 1974. *Socio-Political Thought in African Literature*. London: Macmillan.
- Nasta, S. (ed.) 1991. *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Africa*. London: Women's Press.
- Ndebele, N. 1991. *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture*. Johannesburg: COSAW.
- Newell, S. 1995. 'Conflict and Transformation in Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*, Serowe: *Village of the Rain Wind*, and *A Bewitched Crossroad*.' *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 30(2), 65-83.
- Ngcobo, L. 1986. 'The African Woman Writer', in *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing*, edited by K. H. Petersen. Denmark. Dangaroo Press.
- Nkosi, L. 1965. *Home and Exile*. London: Longman.
- _____. 1981. *Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature*. London: Longman.
- Nuttall S. 1994. 'Reading the Lives and Writing of Black South African Women.' *Journal of Southern African Studies* 20(1), 85-98.
- Ogundipe-Leslie, M. 1987. 'The Female Writer and Her Commitment.' *African Literature Today*, edited by E. D. Jones. London: James Curry. Vol 15, 5-12.

- Ojo-Ade, F. 1977. 'Bessie Head's Alienated Heroine: Victim or Villain?' *Ba-Shiru* 8(2), 13-21.
- _____. 1990. 'Of Human Trials and Triumphs', in *The Tragic Life*, edited by C. Abrahams. Trenton, N. J.: Africa World Press.
- Ola, V. 1986. 'Women's Role in Bessie Head's Ideal World.' *Ariel* 17(4), 39-47.
- _____. 1990. 'Power and the Question of Good and Evil in Bessie Head's Novels', in *The Tragic Life*, edited by C. Abrahams. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press.
- _____. 1994. *The Life and Works of Bessie Head*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Palmer, E. 1979. *The Growth of the African Novel*. London: Heinemann.
- Pascal, R. 1960. *Design and Truth in Autobiography*. London: Routledge.
- Peck, J. & Coyle, M. 1984. *Literary Terms and Criticism*. London: Macmillan.
- Peck, A. 1985. 'Bessie Head and the African Novel.' *SPAN: Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies* 21, 121-136.
- Petersen, K. H. (ed) 1980. *Criticism and Ideology: Second African Writers Conference Stockholm 1986*. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies. Denmark, Dangaroo.
- Phillips, M. 1994. 'Engaging Dreams: Alternative Perspectives on Flora Nwapo, Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo, Bessie Head and Tsitsi Dangarembga's Writings.' *Research in African Literature* 25. (1), 95-103.
- Plaatje, S. T. 1987. *Native Life in South Africa*. Harlow: Longman.
- Prince, G. 1973. *A Grammar of Stories: An Introduction*. The Hague: Mouton.

- Tucker, M. E. 1988. "A Nice-Time Girl Strikes Back": An Essay on Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*.' *Research in African Literature* 19. 170-180.
- Uledi-Kamanga, B. 1987. 'Alienation and Affirmation: The Humanistic Vision of Bessie Head.' *Malawi Journal of Humanities* 1, 21-25.
- Visel, R. 1990. "'We Bear the World and We Make It': Bessie Head and Olive Schreiner." *Research in African Literatures* 21(3), 115-124.
- Watts, J. 1989. *Black Writers from South Africa*. London: Macmillan.
- Welz, D. 1987. *Writing Against Apartheid: South African Authors Interviewed by Dieter Welz*. Grahamstown: NELM.
- Wilhelm, C. 1983. 'Bessie Head: The Face of Africa.' *English in Africa* 10(1), 1-13.
- Wolf, J. 1991. *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture*. Oxford: Polity Press.