



Kent Academic Repository

Chetin, Sara (1991) *Rereading and rewriting African women : Ama Ata Aidoo and Bessie Head*. Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) thesis, University of Kent.

Downloaded from

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/86088/> The University of Kent's Academic Repository KAR

The version of record is available from

<https://doi.org/10.22024/UniKent/01.02.86088>

This document version

UNSPECIFIED

DOI for this version

Licence for this version

CC BY-NC-ND (Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives)

Additional information

This thesis has been digitised by EThOS, the British Library digitisation service, for purposes of preservation and dissemination. It was uploaded to KAR on 09 February 2021 in order to hold its content and record within University of Kent systems. It is available Open Access using a Creative Commons Attribution, Non-commercial, No Derivatives (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>) licence so that the thesis and its author, can benefit from opportunities for increased readership and citation. This was done in line with University of Kent policies (<https://www.kent.ac.uk/is/strategy/docs/Kent%20Open%20Access%20policy.pdf>). If y...

Versions of research works

Versions of Record

If this version is the version of record, it is the same as the published version available on the publisher's web site. Cite as the published version.

Author Accepted Manuscripts

If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding. Cite as Surname, Initial. (Year) 'Title of article'. To be published in *Title of Journal*, Volume and issue numbers [peer-reviewed accepted version]. Available at: DOI or URL (Accessed: date).

Enquiries

If you have questions about this document contact ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in KAR. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our [Take Down policy](https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies) (available from <https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies>).

REREADING AND REWRITING AFRICAN WOMEN:
AMA ATA AIDOO AND BESSIE HEAD

SARA CHETIN
Ph.D. THESIS
UNIVERSITY OF KENT
SEPTEMBER, 1991

REREADING AND REWRITING AFRICAN WOMEN: AMA ATA AIDOO AND BESSIE HEAD

Sara Chetin
Ph.D. Thesis
September, 1991

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores female subjectivity in the works of two African women writers, Ama Ata Aidoo and Bessie Head. Reacting against distorted and limited androcentric assumptions about femaleness, these two writers have inscribed an African female-centred consciousness that contests women's marginality in African literature. Their thematic concerns, genre choice, and narrative strategies contribute to an understanding of the ways in which they use language to construct an historically specific female subjectivity. Questions such as audience and narrative distancing are considered in order to establish the problematic nature of interpreting culturally coded texts from a first world feminist perspective.

The contextual framework identifies three areas of "male constructs" used by Achebe, Armah, Soyinka, Ngugi, Sembene and Farah. Specific texts that employ female characters for their mythical, allegorical or metaphorical potential are analysed to establish the ways male writers often deny the diversity and importance of female experience, seeking to reify it within fixed parameters.

By contrast, Aidoo and Head create a variety of characters who voice individual and communal gender-specific conflicts produced by their socio-historical realities. Their perceptions and sensibilities as African women are influenced by their different backgrounds and relationships to their communities; their narrative perspectives, which involve the use of oral storytelling techniques, dramatize the fluid and complex nature of the subjectivity they inscribe. Their use of language to establish a distance between themselves and their non-African readership is examined in order to illuminate the political difficulties inherent in deconstructing feminism within an international framework.

A special acknowledgement to

DR. LYN INNES

for her stimulating insights and continual support during
the writing of this thesis.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
PART ONE: THE SYMBOLIC FUNCTION OF THE FEMALE IN MYTH AND REALITY: MALE CONSTRUCTIONS OF WOMANHOOD.	
I. The Mythic Context: Achebe, Armah, Soyinka	16
"The Feminine Principle"	17
Mame Water: The Temptress and Destroyer	25
II. Allegorical Representations of Women: Ngugi and Sembene	43
Motherland	43
Structures of Oppression	52
III. The Female Subject as Metaphor: Sembene and Farah	60
Women Questioning	60
Women Reconstructing	69
PART TWO: A WOMAN'S PERSPECTIVE: LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY IN THE WORKS OF AMA ATA AIDOO	
I. The Plays	89
II. The Short Stories.	111
III. <u>Our Sister Killjoy</u>	159
IV. Further Contributions: <u>Changes, A Love Story.</u>	178
PART THREE: THE UNPRIVILEGED OUTSIDER: THE IMAGINATIVE VISION OF BESSIE HEAD	
I. <u>Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind</u>	195
II. The Novels	201
III. The Short Stories	239
CONCLUSION	284
NOTES	290
BIBLIOGRAPHY	303

INTRODUCTION

...Brother,
black is the
only colour that
glows against itself

So what shall we do if
we let go of
funerals?

I shall
tell you of
real people who sit to
talk or
write
all day about
real people who stand to
dig and
dig and
dig
all day...

And there are other
tales of
cold hearts,
envying minds
ugly tongues
and cruel hands...

Aching groins.

Aching groins
where they say
lie
all other
million tales
for the telling of
which even
that eternity
shall not give me
time enough.

No,
not time enough.¹

The above lines are from the last part of a poem entitled "Wondering About Him Who Said No to the Glare of the Day" by Ama Ata Aidoo. She

writes the poem "in memory of my twin-brother whom I never knew because he had been still-born" although it appears more of a tribute to "the mother who bore her / ten / children and lost / five." It is a poem about a sister who is "doing the seeing" and recounting "glorious things up here" that disappear like dreams; it is about a woman who is trying to make sense of women's lives - "they still / marry us in our / shrouds, and / bury us in the fineries of / the wedding day." It is about black Africans whose "aching groins" are ready to give birth to a language that doesn't retreat from the "glare of the open day." Ama Ata Aidoo is a storyteller, and in this poem she is calling attention to the lives of her people whose countless stories are waiting to be told. Addressing her own people, Aidoo uses a language that embraces a female-centred consciousness that is open-ended and full of possibilities. "So who am I to scream?" asks Aidoo as her voice attempts to redress the balance in African literature that has privileged male experience and created androcentric assumptions about women which are often distorted and limited. Promising "tales / of friendship that last / forever and / divorces whispering in the wind / before / pretty cakes are cut," Aidoo establishes a relationship with her African sisters as "We cry for joy, / we cry for pain."

One of these African sisters, Bessie Head, is also a storyteller with other "tales for the telling." These tales are different to Aidoo's, although they also reflect a kind of female subjectivity that is trying to rescue itself from the anonymity of otherness. Aidoo's and Head's perceptions and sensibilities as African women are determined by their specific regional and socioeconomic backgrounds, and the richly varied and intricately textured ways in which they tell their stories dramatize the fluid and often problematic nature of the subjectivity they inscribe. As

Walter Benjamin observes, storytelling "does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. The traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel."²

However, this clay vessel, the body of literature Aidoo and Head have created, does not simply reflect a language that expresses their unique individuality; rather, the language they use "constructs the individual's subjectivity in ways which are socially specific."³ This social specificity is concerned with the issues of gender as well as with complex issues of race and colonialism for the African woman writer:

When women began publishing their work in the mid-sixties in Africa, they faced the problem not only of speaking for the experience of women in their own right and in all its depth and variety, but also of combating the orthodoxies of colonial and anti-colonial writing. The coloniser's mythologising of Africa as the Other, as Female, as treacherous and seductive, was all too often transformed into recognizably related forms by African male writers in the name of nationalism.⁴

Aidoo and Head are two African women writers whose works reveal an attempt to "disrupt the dialogue...between Western and African male literary traditions, by creating a multiplicity of voices"⁵ through a discourse that not only embraces their experiences as women but is also determined by them. They have developed narrative strategies that open up and propel a kind of consciousness of African female-centred subjective realities that addresses and contests the marginality of African women's experiences. In the process, they seek to undermine the sexual and racial structural determinants that have kept African women writers as marginal constituents in the hierarchical network of cultural and social power relations, power relations which are legitimized through the specificities of language.

In the context of discussing the production of meaning within post-colonial literatures, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin address the importance of language, relevant to Aidoo's and Head's textual strategies:

Post-colonial texts confirm that writing, by freeing language from the contingent situation, paradoxically gives language its greatest permanence, whilst, at the same time, giving meaning its greatest volatility because it opens up horizons within which many more sets of relations than those pertaining to the contingent situation may be established. Writing does not merely inscribe the spoken message or represent the message event, it becomes a new event.

Post-colonial writing reveals this most clearly when its appropriation of english (sic), far from simply inscribing either vernacular or 'standard' forms, creates a new discourse at their interface. This is a constitutive feature of english in which the notion of a standard 'code' is dismantled by the continuum of practice in which the language is formed. However, what occurs at the moment of such a dismantling is not endless deferral but the possibility of a meaning which functions in and through variance and usage rather than in opposition to it.⁶

One of the specific problems that arises from these new "horizons" that have been created pertains to the feminist reader who is searching for ways to identify with or differentiate herself from her African counterparts. How does a first-world feminist, aware of the "imperialist lens" that sees only "universal, transhistorical and essentialist meanings in the literary text",⁷ enter Aidoo's or Head's African universe and interpret the unfamiliar codes produced by their texts? Can the distance between reader and writer be bridged to avoid "that gulf of silence installed by those strategies of language variance which signify ... difference"?⁸ Jonathan Culler has raised several important issues involved in "reading as a woman"⁹ which have been responded to and enlarged by feminist critics.¹⁰ Black American feminists have established their own distance and criticized Euro-American feminism for its "colour-blindness" and ethnocentrism, searching for links that give some sort of historical continuity to the black female voice.¹¹ A few critics,

cognizant of the political implications of reading African women's texts from a first world perspective, appear to be investigating "the interaction between Africanness encoded in the text and the cultural assumptions which inform their own reading."¹² Often excluded from the writer's targeted audience, the reader becomes conscious of her "unprivileged" status and this allows her access to a kind of subjectivity with which she is unfamiliar, a socially and historically produced subjectivity that forces her to examine the contradictions inherent in the process of defining femaleness in an international context. Gayatri Spivak addresses the issue, although she does not clarify the problematic nature of her prescription: "...in order to learn enough about Third World women and to develop a different readership, the immense heterogeneity of the field must be appreciated, and the First World feminist must learn to stop feeling privileged *as a woman*."¹³

The increasing interest in African women's literature over the past decade has generated numerous discussions about the images, themes and contexts used by both female and male writers, and since Katherine Frank's attempt to explore the relevance of applying western feminist criticism to the African novel,¹⁴ a few other critics have entered the theoretical arena, often responding to the limitations of her critique.¹⁵ Some have posited ways of reading texts that have appropriated specific approaches derived from American and French feminists,¹⁶ while others have attempted to name an African women's literary tradition by uncovering, for example, a dialogic relationship between two Igbo women novelists.¹⁷ And although Lloyd Brown's Women Writers in Black Africa, published in 1981, still remains the most substantial study of the field carried out by a single individual,¹⁸ several critical anthologies have been published within the

last few years whose essays, of varying quality, testify to the fact that more people appear interested in African women's fiction and are attempting to locate meanings within the texts from whatever perspective informs their reading.¹⁹

What is striking, however, is the limited attention that has been paid to the ways African women writers have used language to establish a distance between themselves and their non-African readership. In this study, I will attempt to explore some of the narrative strategies Ama Ata Aidoo and Bessie Head employ that not only call into question socially constructed paradigms, but strategies that seek to subvert the ways texts can be interpreted. Although Aidoo and Head are only two of the African women writers whose texts dramatize the problematic relationship between insiders and outsiders, between those who are trying to create new meanings and those who are trying to locate these meanings within a contextual framework from which they are excluded, I have concentrated solely on their writings primarily because of the different genres they use. Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Mariama BÂ are three important writers who have produced novels that present other kinds of possibilities for exploring culturally specific gendered realities.²⁰ But the substantial body of literature that Aidoo and Head have produced reveals their interests in using different narrative forms to reflect the diverse conflicts and identities of the characters they construct. Aidoo's first published text was a play, and although she moved simultaneously between drama, poetry and short stories, she has always maintained a love of traditional oral literature, a factor that influenced not only her early writings but had an impact upon her later works, two novels. By contrast, Bessie Head produced three novels before she started concentrating seriously on the short story,

influenced by her involvement with the oral history of her adopted village. Coming from different directions - Aidoo, the insider whose communal identity has been fractured by outsiders, and Head, the outsider whose individual voice searches for an imagined community - both women's creative visions provide a challenge to those who want to bridge the distance and listen to the meanings that emerge within that historically specific gulf of silence.

An analysis of female subjectivity must invariably consider male constructions of womanhood. If women writers are attempting to challenge male assumptions and disrupt the western colonial and African anti-colonial dialogue from which they have been excluded, then it is important to understand how they have been excluded by their own people. The first part of this study will establish a contextual framework by examining a variety of male constructs that portray women's otherness to men. Used for her mythical, allegorical or metaphorical potential, woman becomes the terrain upon which male writers project their personal and political visions. By doing this, they fix concepts of femaleness into rigid constructs that deny the importance and diversity of female experience as it is lived.

The discussion is not meant to be a survey of African male writers nor a comprehensive overview of the numerous ways females have been portrayed by men in African literature. Rather, I have selected a limited number of "female constructs" and analysed them in relation to one or two specific texts written by individual writers. I have avoided the more simplistic and stereotypical representations of women that are found in works like Ekwensi's Jaqua Nana, for example, and concentrated on a few of the more sophisticated concepts of femaleness produced by some of the more

"progressive" male writers. They are progressive in the sense that they have attempted to create sympathetic and interesting female characters, and have recognized in their political anti-colonial agendas the important roles women have played in the shaping of African history. But political visions cannot be isolated from the literary framework in which writers work, a framework that determines the way their national identities are conceptualized. Whether situated in myth or reality, "woman" generally has been given a symbolic function in African literature written by men. She is mythologized and put on a pedestal to be idealized or feared; she is allegorized and must be rescued; she becomes her own subject, only to be used as a metaphor or given a language which speaks to her alterity, not to her Self. Just as power relations determine women's position in the patriarchy, gendered relations are reproduced in literature where woman becomes the object, the vessel which carries the writer's meaning. As he produces, she is reproduced within the text, denied the possibility of imagining herself as anything but the Other.

The use of the "feminine principle" seems an appropriate starting point from which to evaluate the way male writers have created distorted images of female strength and power. In Chinua Achebe's classic text, Things Fall Apart, females are glorified in a mythical context but devalued in actuality. Although acknowledging this tension that exists in a society's definition of womanhood, Achebe's novel does not redress the balance. Instead, Things Fall Apart concentrates on the dynamics of social change within a masculine/feminine dialectic, a dialectic which is conceptualized only from a male perspective. Part of the problem stems from the novel's narrative persona, and Achebe appears to approach mythical configurations of femaleness differently in other works. In some of his

short stories, he takes the West African Mame Water myth and not only depicts the powerful ways myths influence people, but he also satirizes the way some men have used myths to account for their own failures and fears.

No such questioning takes place with Ayi Kwei Armah and Wole Soyinka, however. Armah's second novel, Fragments, is constructed around the Mame Water myth where the beautiful sea goddess emerges, in human form, to exert a powerful influence on the main protagonist's destiny. Armah links her to the phases of the moon and the Eve archetype in Christian myth; mysterious and mesmerizing, she offers to heal but can only control, her destructive powers lying in the dependence men develop on her. Unable to live without her, man becomes unable to live within himself, his vision ruptured by an alien force that signals decay and death. Soyinka creates similar images of dangerous temptresses and sirens in his works where women become mere symbols to feed his ideas of the symbiotic relationship between creativity and destruction. In the play Kongi's Harvest, a "Mame Water" figure plays a positive political role which produces a contradictory, ambivalent portrait of female potential that is as convoluted as Armah's. The use of the dramatic form allows for different possibilities to develop female characters and their speech, but Soyinka mystifies their movements and fixes them as a static symbol. In The Lion and the Jewel, women lack mythical status and are portrayed as fluid and flexible characters, whereas the men remain static. But Soyinka's conclusion represents a static picture of women which mirrors the writer's inability to move beyond the restricted boundaries of an (un)imagined female subjectivity.

Whereas some writers have fixed femaleness in an ahistorical, mythic context, others have attempted to give historical depth and shape to their female characters. The Marxists Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Sembene Ousmane have

shown women engaged in political struggles, but often they use their female characters for allegorical purposes. Women's bodies and the issues of prostitution take on other meanings and lose their gender specificity. Ngugi's Petals of Blood is one example where the central female character, a prostitute, serves as an allegorical representation of Kenya and its historical processes. He uses conventional male imagery and symbols, including the ubiquitous symbol of "Mother Africa", and conceives his female character within the confines of her biology.

Another version of the allegorical positioning of women can be found in Sembene's parabolic novel, Xala, where the females are purposely constructed as types to reveal how polygyny functions within a capitalist structure. These types correspond to different stages in Senegal's historical development and it is clear that Sembene is more interested in using characters to develop certain ideas conducive to his parable than he is in giving women a voice for articulating their own feelings about polygyny. By contrast, Sembene's Vehi-Ciosane or White Genesis illuminates a woman's inner anguish and juxtaposes a kind of public morality against a private (female) morality. Her inner consciousness is sensitively portrayed but she is also presented as a symbol of African motherhood which distorts the meaning of her individual experiences. The female as subject does not exist in relation to itself, but carries other meanings that serve the author's national interests.

Nuruddin Farah also employs a female-centred consciousness in From A Crooked Rib where his young protagonist questions a woman's situation and choices. Farah acknowledges that he uses women for their symbolic and metaphorical potential, a concept he fully exploits in Sardines, a novel written from the perspective of an intellectual African woman writer.

Attempting to address the problems of marginality and language, Medina becomes the medium for Farah's exploration of the relationship between women and writing in a colonized country/context. Women are the guests who look to the stories told by their African brothers and western female counterparts to help them forge a tradition which African women could claim as their own. Although the novel raises some interesting questions, its self-consciously constructed metaphorical representations of women's otherness makes visible the need for African women to tell their own stories which reject the distorting and mystifying lens that inscribes femaleness in a symbolic context. As Mariama Bâ acknowledges, it is only women who can fight for a room of their own:

The woman writer in Africa has a special task. She has to present the position of women in Africa in all its aspects. There is still so much injustice...As women we must work for our own future, we must overthrow the status quo which harms us and which we must no longer submit to. Like men, we must use literature as a non-violent but effective weapon. We no longer accept the nostalgic praise to the African Mother who, in his anxiety, man confuses with Mother Africa. Within African literature, room must be made for women...room we will fight for with all our might.²¹

Ama Ata Aidoo has distinguished herself as a fighter, for all of her writings reveal a desire for change not only in women's roles and status, but in the way women are perceived - and perceive themselves - through language. Writing mainly for an audience of western educated Africans, like herself, Aidoo is concerned with depicting how the impact of westernization has created conflicts for both the traditional, non-literate people of a community and the educated "been-tos" who are often trapped between two worlds. Her themes are woven into the structural texture of her writings where language not only becomes a means for expressing ideas, but the type of language used by her characters is determined by the nature

of the conflicts they are experiencing. Drawing on the oral literature provided by her West African cultural heritage, Aidoo is attempting to bridge the gap between traditional and modern ways of perceiving the world, between oral literature and western literary genres.

In her first play, The Dilemma of a Ghost, she uses the framework of the oral dilemma tale to illustrate the problems that arise when a young man brings his black American bride home to his community. The cultural misunderstandings are not bridged by the western-educated male but by the women of the community who testify to the strength of matrilineal voices. Aidoo's second play, Anowa, is structured around a well known legend, but unlike some of her male counterparts who accept traditional meanings, Aidoo looks behind the legend and uses it to make historical parallels between slavery and female experience. Her language becomes a vehicle for imagining possibilities where women can start learning to define themselves in a way that has not been distorted through a male lens.

Aidoo establishes a more formal distance with her audience in her short story anthology, No Sweetness Here, and purposely includes or excludes her readers through the use of her narrative technique. She develops a tension between the vulnerable insiders of the community and those outsiders who may be "listening in", their presence disruptive and threatening. In her first novel, Our Sister Killjoy, Aidoo confronts this issue directly by establishing a dialogue with her African compatriots and keeping her non-African audience at a distance. This text highlights the problematic nature of reading from an outsider's perspective and understanding feminism in an international context. The discussion on Aidoo will close with a short analysis of her latest novel, Changes: A Love Story, viewed in the context of her previous writings, but it will also

establish a new contribution the novel makes to the canon of African women's writing.

I have not included an analysis of Aidoo's various poems, which were written over a long period of time and eventually published in 1985 in an anthology entitled Someone Talking to Sometime, nor have I reviewed her delightful children's stories. Both genres - poetry and children's literature - fall outside the scope of this discussion, although they deserve attention from those exploring the types of poetry and children's literature that are being produced in Africa today.

Like Aidoo, Bessie Head is interested in the relationship between Otherness and Self, and between the writer and the text, but she approaches her audience from a different perspective. Her particular South African background of mixed parentage, her personal hardships and her self-exile to Botswana have shaped her consciousness to such an extent that her writings constantly reflect the awareness of an outsider attempting to reinscribe the process that leads to forming a vision from an insider's specific frame of reference. The complex undertaking of this quest is born out of Head's imaginative desire to transform reality, as well as a practical understanding of the fragmentation and barrenness of that reality that inhibits yet nurtures the process of reconstruction. The last work that was published in Britain before her death in 1986, Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind, is set on a nonfictional terrain that pays tribute to the village where her imaginative vision flourished. It provides a framework within which Head's novels and short stories can be interpreted.

Head's three novels - When Rains Clouds Gather, Maru and A Question of Power - contain many elements of her personal experiences, but she weaves the real with the symbolic to depict the interaction and duality of forces

which give birth to movement and change. Both thematically and structurally, Head's fiction unravels the complex and constantly changing relationship between good and evil, exile and belonging, and the male/female dynamics that exist between people as well as within individuals themselves who are trying to make sense of their wholeness.

In her anthology of short stories, The Collector of Treasures, Head elaborates on some of the themes found in her novels, but she is primarily interested in exploring the neglected realm of female experience and the importance myth plays in shaping human consciousness. Her tales pose specific dilemmas, like Aidoo's, as she hopes her audience will debate the moral questions raised by the storyteller. But she weaves a complex thread between a fictive and a nonfictive audience, deliberately calling the reader's attention to the problematic nature of the outsider's ability to locate meanings within the historical specificity of the text.

Head also wrote an historical novel, A Bewitched Crossroad, published in South Africa in 1984 but not yet available in Britain, as well as several other pieces and short stories written between 1962 and 1980 that recently have been compiled into an anthology entitled Tales of Tenderness and Power. Some of the stories in this anthology are tributes to great leaders or variations on the political and individual conflicts portrayed in The Collector of Treasures. I have not included these in my discussion, preferring to concentrate on the connections between her first three novels and the tightly shaped and ordered stories found in The Collector of Treasures. Head's newly published autobiographical writings, A Woman Alone, contains important insights into her ideas, and it is hoped that the letters Head sent to one of her first publishers, Randolph Vigne, will provide further insights into the writings of this talented woman.²²

This study concludes by showing how Aidoo's and Head's thematic interests and narrative strategies, though different, contribute to an important understanding of the concept of female subjectivity in African literature. Avoiding or subverting the ways male writers have used femaleness in their texts, Aidoo and Head have created new meanings that firmly establish their importance as women writers, writers who have created a variety of African voices that speak to each other, not to the silences that determine their otherness.

PART ONE

THE SYMBOLIC FUNCTION OF THE FEMALE IN MYTH & REALITY:
MALE CONSTRUCTIONS OF WOMANHOOD

I. The Mythic Context: Achebe, Armah, Soyinka

...looking at the past and the present, I think that we have been ambivalent, we have been deceitful even, about the role of the woman. We have sometimes said 'The woman is supreme - mother is supreme', we have said all kinds of grandiloquent things about womanhood, but in our practical life the place of woman has not been adequate...We have created all kinds of myths to suggest the suppression of the woman...

Chinua Achebe, 1987¹

The ambivalence that Achebe acknowledges towards writing about women in a mythic context while ignoring their limited status is found in many African male writers, notably those from West Africa. Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah and Wole Soyinka have used some of the myths from their indigenous cultures, myths which appear to portray women not only as powerful, life-giving forces but as destructive, punishing creatures who must be feared - and subsequently debased in their non-mythic roles. These writers have often used women as symbols to enhance their thematic frameworks and have neglected to address women's real roles, thus keeping "women frozen in time."² This obviously precludes a creative vision of societal transformation, something all three writers contemplate, but because they don't appear to respond to a female audience, their visions seem limited and at times almost conspiratorial. Myths have obviously affected the way people act and Achebe admits that "there are so many folk tales telling you what catastrophe would be unleashed on the world if women

were to get into power that you know that there is some kind of conspiracy going on."³ Achebe now claims, thirty years after the publication of his first novel, Things Fall Apart, that his ideas about the role of women haven't really changed but that his way of grappling with the problems have.⁴ Achebe's early works reveal a certain short sightedness but his openness and increasing ability to respond to a female audience - partially a tribute to the influence of women writers and the acknowledgement of a female readership - makes him one of the most interesting of the African male writers to explore.

"The Feminine Principle"

In Things Fall Apart, Achebe conceptualizes the dialectic of social change through the use of male and female constructs. He recognizes that a balance has to be reached between "male" and "female" values in order for a healthy society to progress, but his use of "the feminine principle" remains confined to a mythic parameter that subsequently undermines the actual social status of women within the traditional Ibo culture. Achebe does distinguish between the idealized image of "femaleness" and the inferior treatment of women in daily life, but his narrative persona, a kind of "village voice" that reflects an older male storyteller, heightens the problem of describing the tension between myth and reality. As a result, Achebe's development of the male/female dialectic remains unbalanced. Although Achebe is well-intentioned, the language he uses to conceptualize femaleness - a language which is not his as much as the society's - perpetuates a mystification of the female subject. Female

subjectivity becomes a male construct, a vehicle for mythic fantasizing. Women are not given a voice "with which to tell of their suffering"; the "silent and dusty chords" in their "parched souls" are never allowed to taste "the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry plate of the panting earth."

Achebe portrays a self-sufficient society which is governed by a fixed value system where men and women are expected to adhere to specifically defined roles. Men are expected to prove their physical strength, acquire as many wives, titles and yams as possible, and display suitably aggressive behaviour. If a man deviates from these norms, he is seen as being "weak" and "effeminate." Women are ascribed the characteristics of gentleness, idleness and protectiveness, and their role within the community reflects the inferior status attached to such behaviour. They are excluded from the judicial and political processes of society, yet their economic contribution is vital, although undervalued. Achebe ignores what connotations are attached to women who deviate from the prescribed norms, preferring instead to create strong and active women who emerge primarily in deified contexts.⁵

Despite the fact that the roles are asymmetrical, the values attached to the roles are not purely exclusive. In fact, the values are seen to complement each other, although we only see how this "complementary interaction" functions from a male perspective. Obierika, who represents the clan's normative values, calls to Okonkwo's attention the importance of recognizing that femaleness is a vital and necessary complement to maleness. Obierika tells the story of how Ndulue and his wife "had one mind" and that he "could not do anything without telling her."⁶ Achebe is laying the foundation for an apparently androgynous-like ideal in which

male and female not only balance each other but merge to form a more coherent unity – a unity that is essential for a fluid and evolving mind/society/universe. The female nature of this dichotomy becomes clear later when Uchendu, the wise man of Mbanta, tells Okonkwo that "Mother is Supreme":

'It's true that a child belongs to its father. But when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother's hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when things in life are good and sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you. She is buried there. And that is why we say mother is supreme. Is it right that you, Okonkwo, should bring to your mother a heavy face and refuse to be comforted? Be careful or you may displease the dead. Your duty is to comfort your wives and children and take them back to your fatherland after seven years. But if you allow sorrow to weigh you down and kill you, they will all die in exile.' (p.94)

Within the context of the clan's values, Mother represents the sympathetic, nurturing, comforting face of the community. But Achebe is also implying that men must be nurturing and sympathetic, which further supports the necessity for the balancing and merging of male and female, of mother and father roles.

But Okonkwo, who resists social change, is not able to heed this advice and as a result, his rejection of anything female and his exaggerated defensiveness of all things "manly" (aggression, action and competition) pave the way for his eventual self-destruction. Achebe uses Okonkwo to illustrate what happens to a man (and implicitly any patriarchal society) who refuses to embrace a balanced male/female world view. Okonkwo failed because he took certain male values in his society to an extreme and was unable to incorporate the female part of his nature into his psyche. Everything that was female to Okonkwo represented failure (i.e. something undesirable) – and failure itself had very female-like implications. His

father, Unoka, in Umuofia's eyes, was a failure: he was effeminate, weak and Okonkwo was ashamed of him. Due to his personal inability to compromise, Okonkwo always over-reacted to what he perceived as weak, female behaviour. His attitude was responsible for driving his son away from the clan, but to Okonkwo, it was Nwoye's "degenerate" and "effeminate" behaviour that led him to desert his ancestors - a failure of the worst kind: "To abandon the gods of one's father and go about with a lot of effeminate men clucking like old hens was the very depth of abomination" (p.108). Okonkwo's banishment to the motherland also reflected his own failure, a failure he could never accept and learn from, but a failure that remained explicitly connected to a "female" crime. He became powerless at the will of the earth goddess and this intensified his fear of powerlessness associated with the paradoxical female control over him. All Okonkwo's actions were motivated by fear - fear of being thought weak, effeminate, "woman-like". Okonkwo feared failure and his whole existence became defined by a disjointed perception of the world where "manliness" connoted success, strength, power, and where femaleness connoted failure, weakness and powerlessness. Perceptions of oneself and others become distorted within a particular linguistic and contextual framework and this gives way to stereotypes. Okonkwo became a victim of his own male/female stereotypes and remained trapped in them due to the implications he attached to these stereotypes. By repressing the female part of himself, Okonkwo was unable to supersede the limitations of his own narrowly defined masculine consciousness.

The psychological depth that Achebe achieves in Things Fall Apart concerning the implications of an unbalanced male psyche and society perhaps contributes to the disappointment one feels when considering the

other half of the dialectic. Although it was not Achebe's intention to give equal weight to the exploration of an unbalanced female psyche, his treatment of femaleness lacks a convincing premise. If the "feminine principle" is so important, if femaleness is supposedly complementary to maleness, why is it that anything which is female in the novel remains in a secondary context? We learn that "talk" is given a female value as opposed to the masculine "action" that Okonkwo is always inciting. Unoka's effeminacy was related to his laziness: he preferred his music and songs to work. Nwoye's "softness" was linked to "the poetry of the new religion." And when Okonkwo participates in the killing of Ikemefuma and justifies it by saying: "The Earth cannot punish me for obeying her messenger...a child's fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts into its palm" (p.47), Obierika's response implies that sometimes silently compromising (a lack of action) is the best action to take. Okonkwo's inarticulateness contrasts with the female face assigned to the art of talk within the society. But within the novel itself, females are seldom seen talking or expressing the wisdom pertaining to their specifically feminine nature. When mothers do tell the un-"masculine stories of violence and bloodshed" (p.37) it is always within the context of their nurturing, domestic duties. And in one of the rare scenes when Achebe explores female consciousness - Ekwefi's reminiscing about her elopement with Okonkwo (p.76) - he evokes a romantic atmosphere where the strong, silent man carries the besotted female, on a moonlit dawn morning, into his dark room and seduces her passionately. This tale appears to endorse "masculinity" from a female perspective but the context and style only seem to reinforce the "unreal" face Achebe attaches to female sexuality, a kind of reification of female desire.

These shortcomings might appear, in the first instance, to contradict the importance Achebe places on all that is supernatural for it is really only in the mythic context that the female takes precedence. But in Things Fall Apart goddesses are empowered with the most fantastic abilities, both good and evil, and this appears to fuel men's justifications for keeping women powerless in their daily lives. The mythical function of the female goddess, Ani, and the priestess of the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves does not mirror the function ascribed to the female in her powerless earthly position. Men must treat Ani well; being the earth and fertility goddess, she will hopefully bear the fruit that lies within her womb. She is also the "ultimate judge of morality and conduct" and is capable of severely punishing those who do not honour her. Her mythical function is similar to the priestess who "protects" the Oracle. The Oracle, called Agbala (a woman or a man without a title), is described in a way in which female sexual imagery is linked to fear:

The way into the shrine was a round hole at the side of a hill, just a little bigger than the round opening in a hen-house. Worshippers and those who came to seek knowledge from the god crawled on their belly through the hole and found themselves in a dark, endless space in the presence of Agbala. No one had ever beheld Agbala, except his priestess. But no one who had ever crawled into his awful shrine had come out without the fear of his power. His priestess stood by the sacred fire which she built in the heart of the cave and proclaimed the will of god. The fire did not burn with a flame. The glowing logs only served to light up vaguely the dark figure of the priestess. (p.12)

The priestess functions to protect, nurture and "give form to" a power that is not her own. Chika, the priestess of Agbala during Unoka's days, was "full of the power of her god."

When a female does deviate from the prescribed norms, it is only in the context of her mythical function. Chielo, the priestess after Chika, is the conserving force behind the clan's values and nurtures "her

daughter" Ezinma when she becomes very ill. In an extraordinary scene, Chielo is seen carrying the girl a great distance, displaying incredible powers of strength and endurance. Okonkwo appears quite intimidated by her: her supernatural qualities reflect the paradoxical control women have over men, a myth that feeds male paranoia, as Okonkwo's behaviour testifies. I would disagree with one critic who says that in Chielo, Achebe "conveys a sense that the tragedy of Okonkwo expresses itself within the structural residues of a society which at one point had certain ideals of equality which exist now only in vestigial form."⁷ There is no evidence to support these ideals of equality in the socioeconomic structure of Umuofia, and it was not Achebe's intention to acknowledge more than "the mythic implications of femininity and its values."⁸

In fact, in a few scenes, Achebe appears to ironically emphasize the token-like function the female supernatural plays. When the men are debating whether to go to war because their honour had been tarnished (a female had been killed), Achebe depicts how their minds were already made up before consulting the Oracle but, "in fairness to Umuofia, it should be recorded that it never went to war unless its case was clear and just and was accepted by the Oracle" (p.9). The voice of the Oracle, the priestess, is given a certain authority, but her authority almost seems to represent a purely symbolic function in the name of the Oracle. The laws are fixed and we never see Chielo making an independent decision; she only appears to be enforcing the existing laws. She operates as a symbol to reinforce a belief in female values, but we don't see how she functions as a guide or model for the other women outside the spiritual space. She nurtures, she speaks for the Oracle (not for herself), she becomes possessed, and she appears to prepare her spiritual daughter, Ezinma, for "her marriage" to

the Oracle. In the novel, female strength is defined in relation to male constructs, and the lack of female characters which would act as a counterpoint to Achebe's critique of maleness is a sad omission. If he had balanced the tension between myth and reality, male and female to a greater degree, Things Fall Apart would have contributed to an even profounder vision of why "the centre cannot hold."

Achebe has, in other writings, created more developed, three dimensional female characters. The short story, "Girls at War", set against the background of the Nigerian Civil War, exposes a victimized, cynical yet fundamentally compassionate young woman whose actions are far more understandable and essentially honourable than the male character whose hypocrisy personifies "a society that has gone completely rotten and maggoty at the centre." Achebe's women become more visible and often take on a new dimension in post-traditional settings, notably in A Man of the People and his recent Anthills of the Savannah. This latest novel develops quite convincingly the relationship between two female characters and shows how their insights and abilities are capable of exposing the personal and political shortcomings of the men whose lives they are involved with. As in his earlier works, he consistently maintains the same faith that females/femaleness can help to restore a decaying society. In Anthills of the Savannah, although females may still be described as goddess-like, they serve as strong, politically active women whose impact is no longer relegated to a purely spiritual dimension.⁹

Mame Water - The Temptress and Destroyer

A popular myth used in West African literature is that of Mame Water, the beautiful water goddess whose seductive powers have been responsible for men's downfall. There are numerous variations on this theme which undoubtedly reflect different writers' attitudes to female sexuality.

Achebe's use of irony throughout his writings reveals his attempt to demystify the goddess, although this appears to have been lost to some critics. In the short story "Uncle Ben's Choice",¹⁰ Achebe uses the popular legend to reveal how a young man, caught between his materialistic desires and his traditional beliefs, is able to resist the seductive power of "Mami Wota", in this context a symbol of greedy, materialistic women who can "kill" men if a man "lets a handshake pass the elbow" (p.76). Achebe humorously uses the mythical, untenable figure from the legend to serve as Uncle Ben's scapegoat and justification for his confused state and lack of material wealth. But G.D. Killam states: "Achebe and Uncle Ben tease the river god here, look at local legend and fall, happily here, victim to its influence. Mami Wota casts her spell over them both (and us)."¹¹ It can only be hoped that this critic's audience - obviously male - isn't as gullible as he is.

The Mame Water spirit also appears in "The Sacrificial Egg" where it is the Mother who tells the myth of "mammy-wota who have their town in the depths of the river...you can always tell them, because they are beautiful with a beauty that is too perfect and too cold. You catch a glimpse of her with the tail of your eye, then you blink and look properly, but she has already vanished in the crowd" (p.43). The women in this story are the sacrificial victims whereas the "men in their greed spill over themselves".

In both this story and "Uncle Ben's Choice", Achebe takes the *femme fatale* out of her watery depths and uses her as an allusive earth spirit, tied to the market place and material wealth. But it is not her powers that terrorize; she remains the object upon which men can project their own failures and fears. She is unfathomable, unpredictable - the Other. Achebe establishes and questions the ways myths have influenced people, something not undertaken by other West African writers.

Ayi Kwei Armah, the Ghanaian writer, constructs a whole novel around the Mame Water myth and reveals his misogynist vision of female strength and power. His second novel, Fragments,¹² raises some interesting issues that few critics have acknowledged. The four main female characters, whose significance cannot be divorced from understanding Armah's central intention, are portrayed as having some kind of influence on the protagonist's destiny. The novel is set in the spiritually and morally barren environment of Bibani (the Akan word for "everywhere") where Baako, the committed and alienated hero, falls victim to the destructive force of his powerlessness and despair. Unable to realize his own life-giving, creative potential, Baako descends into madness, a madness that reflects his dislocation at the hands of a powerful force over which he appears to have no control. Baako emerges a passive hero, and given the pessimistic tone on which the novel ends, it appears unlikely that Baako will ever recover. Baako's grandmother, his mother, his sister and his girlfriend are all attributed with a certain strength and they all appear to want to save Baako from his misery. But towards the end of the novel when Baako

is trying to make some sense of the madness that is imprisoning him, he states: "Women destroying, women saving" (p. 180). Is this Baako in one of his more paranoid moments, or is this Armah's way of shedding light on the implications of the type of strength he has attributed to his female characters? As well as being the healers, the potential savers, are the women also part of the destructive forces that seek to undermine the very essence of Baako's faltering psyche?

Armah's most sympathetic portrayal of a woman in Fragments lies in his characterisation of Naana, the blind, old grandmother whose wisdom is contained in her desire to adhere to the traditional way of life and whose fear of the changing values depicts her supernatural strength to "see things unseen." Naana is not only the moral voice advocating a return to traditional values in the face of the "silent danger" (p.196) which threatens even her existence, but her "opening" and "closing" chapters structurally set the stage for the mythical action that informs the novel. Against the background of decay, disruption and fragmentation, Naana's narrative - linked to the oral tradition - seeks to contain the natural cyclical rhythms of life's essence:

Each thing that goes away returns and nothing in the end is lost. The great friend throws all things apart and brings all things together again. That is the way everything goes and turns around. That is how all living things come back after long absences, and in the whole great world all things are living things. All that goes returns. He will return. (p.1)

On one level, the natural, rhythmic cycle remains intact as the novel closes with Naana's last, resigned words:

I am here against the last of my veils. Take me. I am ready. You are the end. The beginning. You who have no end. I am coming.
(p. 201)

But despite Naana representing the mouthpiece for the soul of her people,

she has become a victim of the madness that threatened to cut "into easy pieces eternity and the circle of the world" (p.200). She sees things denied to others, but is afraid to speak:

The witches saw things denied to others; beyond that they talked of what it was they had seen, and were destroyed. It is a long time since I heard of any witch thrown out of her secrecy, but souls are broken all the same. If I see things unseen by those who have eyes, why should my wisest speech not be silence? (p.2)

Afraid to use her visions, her potential strength to recreate herself, to have her soul "find its home", Naana becomes passive, resigned and her wisdom is essentially useless. Armah uses her to reinforce an image of the suffering, helpless woman who absorbs man's fears and serves as a receptacle in which he posits his hopes:

Afraid to raise more laughter against myself, I shook my head with the perfect understanding that was not in it. I had not understood the words at all, but the sound, above all the cries of the man who sang most of the beginnings, and the women's voices, many, many women's voices always there around him to catch his pain and make it into something almost sweet, that was all familiar to me somewhere. And also beneath it all the thing that went on always and would not let me escape, heavy like a sound of doom, and also I knew. (p.9-10)

It is Naana who Baako searches for in his desperate need for comfort; it is Naana who becomes trapped by Baako's impotent despair. Her "witchlike" power is contained; she poses no threat to the evil changes occurring around her. Baako identifies with Naana because of her suffering and resignation, not because of her potential strength. She dies disillusioned, still trying to contain the madness around her. She achieves nothing; she fulfills the role befitting an helpless old woman. Armah could not have chosen a better character to symbolize the collective unconscious of a destroyed, uprooted people whose fate lay in their blindness, whose inevitable doom is epitomized by their silent wisdom that

remains engulfed by their decaying illusions. Victims of Time, they are betrayed by their own unrealized potential:

What a thing for you to laugh at, when we grow just tall enough and, still clutching the useless shreds of a world worn out, we peep behind the veil just passed and find in wonder a more fantastic world, making us fools in our own eyes to have believed that the old paltriness was all. But again we hold fast to the new shadows we find. We are fooled again, and once more taste the sharp unpleasantness of surprise, though we thought we had grown wise. (p.200-201)

Armah is not merely interested in showing how the political and economic exploitation by the invisible white Christian colonialists affect the lives and consciousness of a people, but he also wanted to depict the existential anguish which threatens to destroy man in his search for basic human values. Armah doesn't appear to condemn Baako for his passivity and "spiritual dislocation" at the hands of a changed society where the old values are dying. Rather, Baako represents an eternal victim, frightened and unhappy, and Armah doesn't indicate that his conflicts will ever be resolved. In fact, Armah depicts Baako as a man trapped and powerless under the influence of greater forces that seek to manipulate his psyche and control his destiny. This becomes apparent from the folktale Baako tells Juana on the beach after hearing Akosua Russell's "poetic" variation of the myth. Baako prefers the traditional, undistorted purity of the Mame Water and the Musician myth:

"The singer goes to the beach, playing his instrument. These days it's become a guitar. He's lonely, the singer, and he sings of that. So well a woman comes out of the sea, a very beautiful goddess, and they make love. She leaves him to go back to the sea, and they meet at long, fixed intervals. It takes courage. The goddess is powerful, and the musician is filled with so much love he can't bear the separation itself which makes him sing as he has never sung before. Now he knows all there is to know about loneliness, about love, and power, and the fear that one night he'll go to the sea and Mame Water, that's the woman's name, will not be coming anymore. The singer is great but he's also afraid, and after those nights on the shore, when the woman goes, there's

no unhappier man on earth." (p.120)

Baako, in an unconscious way, lives out and becomes trapped by the myth. The tale forewarns of the misery of his own dependence at the hands of the sea goddess whose strength - and inevitable destructive power - lay in her ability to control Baako. Juana is linked to the sea goddess and despite her surface characterization as a sympathetic healer, Armah also depicts her as destructive due to the very impotence of her healing powers. The only critic who appears to have seen the significance of the Mame Water myth is Gerald Moore, but he doesn't take its meaning to its logical conclusion. He sees Juana, "a goddess linked to the sea and the phases of the moon" as part of the imagery that represent "the promise of regeneration from madness or death."¹³ But I question the optimistic tone which Moore seems to have attributed to Armah's conclusion, for Juana's symbolic sea and moon goddess significance doesn't evoke the "promise of regeneration" but represents a death-like destructive force from which Baako is unable to escape. The ending of the novel is pessimistic, nihilistic and perhaps sheds light on Armah's distorted concept of female strength.

On one level, Juana is a very sympathetic character. The reader, like Baako, is drawn to her because of her sensitivity, her acute intelligence at understanding the society around her, and her commitment to healing, despite the enormity - and hopelessness - of the task. Armah portrays a woman who is not aware, like Naana, of her potential strength. It is interesting to note that Juana's name echoes Naana's. In some ways, the two women are similar as they are both healers yet they are both helpless and unable to heal. But whereas Naana represents traditional wisdom connected to warmth and light, Juana signifies a harbinger of danger

because she symbolizes another powerful cycle, female in nature, that threatens Naana's traditional "sun" strength:

...I was sure that I was beginning even now to see the sun again. And then they came and broke my peace, saying I had been sitting out there in the cold for hours. Surprised and angry that they were moving me another time, I was sharpening words to tell them I had only come to take in this heat of the sun, till one of them, was it Efua? said in her gentle voice words that touched my soul with fear.

Night fell long ago, Naana. (p.1)

Armah places Juana in a spider-like role whose ability to cast "black shadows and dark, orange light" (p.141) renders Baako powerless due to her strength that follows the cycles of the moon. The mythical significance of the moon reveals itself at the structural level of the novel. The thirteen chapters could represent the lunar year; Baako and Juana make love in the chapter titled "Gyefo" (the Akan world for Full Moon¹⁴). This is when Baako's strength is at its fullest. When Juana leaves, he begins his descent into madness, represented by the Iwu (Death) chapter. Mirroring the Mame Water and the Musician myth, Baako and Juana meet "at long fixed intervals" and her absence not only signifies his despair but also represents the continual dependence Baako has on Juana - a dependence which does not free him, but only imprisons him. Armah doesn't appear to imply that Juana's moon cycle power is complementary to the natural strength of the sun, so it doesn't seem likely that the moon cycles hold the potential for life-giving, regenerative possibilities.

Yet Juana is unaware of her power over Baako, which makes her an even more dangerous symbol. She appears as the caring healer but Armah depicts Baako as becoming self-destructively attracted to the alien, fearful, cold "black shadows" that seek to control and manipulate him. It is ironic that Baako rejects Akosua Russell's version of the Mame Water myth - a version

that celebrates colonialism - while becoming dependent on his own Mame Water, Juana, herself a foreigner. Perhaps Armah consciously intended the double irony here as he creates a very ambivalent picture of Juana. He appears to have distorted the very essence of Juana's mythical power: Juana, the healer, the comforter, is unable to heal, her alien will not realizing the force of its own potential. Armah has turned her powerlessness into a powerful, destructive weapon. When Juana first meets Baako, she feels strange and is immediately drawn to him, although the "uncomfortable pulse" throbbing through her body signifies something ominous: "Indeterminate at first, the hum gradually approached understandable sound: a soft and steady vibration saying you you you you you you." (p.100) Juana is attracted to Baako's "unfixed, free-floating, potential" attitude, but is upset and disturbed by the unpleasant flavour, the "dangerous freedom" involved with becoming close to him. But she acts on Baako's invitation and provides the physical temptation to which Baako succumbs. Juana herself is a victim, like Baako, but despite the fears that draw the two together and despite their inability to recapture their lost Garden of Eden, it is Juana's "fallen state", her own hopelessness that threatens to annihilate Baako:

She searched in herself for something that might make sense, but there was nothing she could herself believe in, nothing that wouldn't just be the high flight of the individual alone, escaping the touch of life around him. That way she knew there was only annihilation. Yet here she knew terrible dangers had been lying in wait the other way - other kinds of annihilation. How could she find the thing to break down his despair when she had never conquered hers? There would be no meaning in offering him a chance to swing from present hopelessness to a different flavour of despair. (p.190-191)

These "terrible dangers" are linked to Juana as the sea goddess. The reader first becomes aware of Juana's identification with the sea (the

moon's cycles control the movements of the water) in the chapter following Naana's warning of the impending doom she felt when she heard "the cries of the man who sang most of the beginnings..." (p.9) Despite Juana's feelings of estrangement, defeat and futility, she recognizes her physical and spiritual "need for flight" in order to escape from "all the reminders of futility" (p.12). She turns away from the closed, decaying symbols of civilization and heads toward the sea, being attracted by the power of her own speed. Not only do cars connote power, status and colonial influence in the novel, but the intensity of speed is a recurring image in Fragments, especially when Juana and Baako are together. Juana is always driving, always in control. Passing the various symbols of society's decadence "Obra Ye Ko" (Life is War), SMOG (Save Me Oh God), etc., she approaches the sea whose sound "came over with a complete quietness that filled the ear like something made entirely for it" (p.15). As the images evoke Eve's lost garden of Eden, Juana "descends" to the sea and reflects on her "restlessness whose pain never ended but got dissolved in the knowledge that the fugitive could never leave the causes of her pain behind" (p.28). Even the name of the second chapter (Edin) where this action takes place sounds like the Biblical Eden where the Original Sin was committed, a sin that resounds in the collective unconscious of a fallen people. Juana's personal inner turbulence is caused by the moral decay around her, "reminders of the impotence of victims and of the blindness of those who had risen to guide them" (p.31). She absorbs the pain and suffering around her, conscious of the fact of peoples' "useless lives...doomed to an extinction started long ago" (p.31).

On one level, Armah evokes the Eve archetype to illustrate Juana's destructive power. Was it not Eve, tempted by the serpent, who ate the

forbidden fruit of the "tree of knowledge" and tempted Adam to follow her example? Armah, like many writers, appears to have used this theme which essentially holds Eve (woman) responsible for Adam's (man's) fall from innocence. The seductive power of the female is a force not to be reckoned with. Juana's role as healer initially brought Baako to her, but he would never be able to escape the consequences of his actions. They make love in Juana's natural setting, the sea, and toward the end of the novel in the Obra (Life) chapter, the "Catholic pagan" Juana is left absorbing Baako's "desperate intensity" against a background of Christian images, symbolising the "impending disappointment" created by an alien religion. I feel that the significance of the Obra chapter is intended to be somewhat ironic given the imagery Armah is using. The promise of life is always there, but "there was a desperation here so deep that it was beginning to be indistinguishable from hope" (p.105). As Juana leaves the hospital, this desperation, "the disturbing things" become transformed into hope: the unused room would bring Baako closer and would hopefully help the healing process. But throughout Fragments Armah uses rooms as a means of escape, not as a means of communication and growth. Characters are constantly disappearing into rooms, unable to confront the malaise which is disturbing them. Similarly, Juana preparing the unused room could signify Baako's escape - into Juana's control. And isn't this man's very dependence on the sea goddess one of the reasons for his misery? Being unable to live without her, Baako is unable to live within himself.

Juana's intention to heal becomes even more ambiguous at the end of the novel when she is encouraging Baako to take his pills - pills designed to narrow consciousness. (He had been given similar pills abroad "to counteract the consciousness expansion effect" p.102.) Juana encourages

the narrowing, the blinding of Baako's consciousness; she does not try to find a solution to reconcile the expanding, visionary insights he has. By losing his vision, he loses himself within Juana, the harbinger of evil, foreign technology.

Armah's concept that Juana, on a mythical level, could represent the destructive, powerful temptress as understood basically through the Eve/Mame Water archetype interestingly manifests itself in various forms throughout the novel. The sea symbolizes woman and man's rites of passage:

... "Here we're supposed to do it all when we're born anyway. The first swim and the first fuck. There's a saying there's no way you can get out of your mother without." (p.125)

Juana and Baako make love in the sea where his movements "often seem to escape his control" (p.122) and Juana is unable to save:

She had to admit she was concerned with salvation still, though she permitted herself the veil of other names. Too much of her lay outside of herself, that was the trouble. Like some forest women whose gods were in the trees and hills and people around her, the meaning of her life remained in her defeated attempts to purify her environment, right down to the final, futile decision to try to salvage discrete individuals in the general carnage. (p.123)

The song the child sings reflects the women's loss, a "long lament for one more drowned fisherman" (p.128). Skido, with whom Baako later identifies, dies in the sea. The fish are trapped in the "bag net, vaginal and black" (p.128). Misguided by her alien illusions, Juana, the foreigner, can not save Baako but can only give to Baako what she herself represents:

He moved deeper, searching for more of her warmth, his head filling with a fear of nameless heavy things descending upon him, pushing him to seek comfort in her. He pulled her completely to himself. She was warm against him, but in a moment he became aware she too was shivering. They lay together, neither moving. (p.143)

And at the end of the novel, Juana prepares the "unused room" for Baako, unaware that she will be trapping him further.

The novel closes with Naana's lament about the fragmented nature of the traditional cyclical order of things, and although her death will join her to her ancestors, Armah appears to hold no hope for Baako's salvation. Baako is under the influence of the deathly moon goddess' cycle, a cycle that does not complement Naana's cycle but symbolizes things "only broken and twisted against themselves" (p.196). Salvation appears to be an illusion, a shadow which people grasp at due to their own fear, but a shadow which they are unable ever to capture due to their innocence at the hands of destiny: "But again we hold fast to the new shadows we find. We are fooled again, and once more taste the sharp unpleasantness of surprise, though we thought we had grown wise" (p.201).

The only character who appears to have grasped the impossibility of salvation is Ocran, Baako's old teacher. Ocran's lament corresponds to Naana's wisdom, but his wisdom has not rendered him powerless like Naana. Ocran survives, cynical and condemned to loneliness. He advises Baako that the only way one can survive in this world is to be alone: "Salvation is such an empty thing when you're alone", Juana remarks, unable to heal. But Ocran gives the clue to what salvation is about - something Baako, and Juana, will never realize due to their dependence on each other: " 'You don't find it in the marketplace, You have to be alone to find out what's in you. Afterwards...' " (p.194) And Ocran also warns Baako that the people "you have to be careful of are the impotent ones" (p.193). Is this Armah's way of warning Baako not only about himself, but about Juana as well?

In one sense, Armah appears unable to see women as anything apart from healers - and destroyers. Despite his ambiguous characterization of Juana, his concept of the female's destructive strength becomes less subtle when viewed in terms of Baako's mother and sister. They are portrayed as manipulating parasites and are held responsible for the various tragedies which occur. Was Efua's symbolic meeting with Juana by the sea perhaps Armah's way of forewarning the audience of the destructive female power which would collectively contribute to Baako's disintegration? Despite Efua's good intentions towards her son, Armah depicts her as the misguided Mother who realized only when it was too late that she had placed "a curse" on her son. She retreats into the self-sacrificial role of Motherhood whose good intentions do nothing but contribute to Baako's despair. Similarly, we are made to blame Efua and Araba for their greedy, materialistic values which provoked Araba's son's death. Like Baako, with whom the baby shared blood, innocent victims become sacrificed on the altar of materialism. And at one point Araba cunningly explains to Baako how she can manipulate her husband with her "secret weapon", her sex: "The male falls in the female trap; the woman is always cleverer..." (p.86) The woman as spider, the "bag, vaginal nets" reappear... The misguided Mother? the scheming Wife? the wicked Temptress? The women, unable to be healers, all end up as destroyers...

Wole Soyinka, like Armah, does not appear to question or satirize the Mame Water myth as Achebe does, but rather he incorporates it into his writings to reflect what he sees as woman's primary function, "that of

symbol and essence."¹⁵ He portrays both Simi in his novel The Interpreters and Segi in the play Kongi's Harvest as beautiful Mammy Watta creatures, "a right cannibal of the female species,"¹⁶ "Queen Bees" who possess a mythological power reflecting man's fears of being "smothered with...beauty" (p.42). Echoing images of Armah's drowned, lost souls, Soyinka's works, which seem fundamentally directed towards a male audience, contain various images of sirens who serve as sexual symbols connoting danger, enslavement and men's demise.¹⁷ Yet some of Soyinka's women also function as political agents and this juxtaposition creates a contradictory, ambivalent representation that appears as convoluted as Armah's portrayal of Juana as both saver and destroyer.

Kongi's Harvest exemplifies this contradiction, not only through its content but by its form. The extended use of dialogue and movement and the limited narrative implicit in drama provide a playwright with a suitable vehicle for creating certain types of characters whose main function is to attract the audience's gaze through a specific kind of stage "presence". Segi is not only the "Queen Bee" who directs the minimal movements of the "Women's Auxiliary Corps", but she is the only woman who speaks in the play, and even then, she is more talked about than given lines of her own to speak. Her actions are instrumental in bringing the play to its climax, but the aura of her dangerous sexuality that dominates the stage seems to diminish her political importance. Although Soyinka draws from both Yoruba myth and Nigerian politics to create his character,¹⁸ his mixture of the two in his conceptualization of Segi has produced a limited, undeveloped female character who appears to reflect Soyinka's own ambivalence towards women. Segi's energetic and committed political heroism cannot be

separated from her dangerous sexuality and this ambiguity contributes to a distorted portrait of women's real potential.

The audience is introduced to Segi in her own nightclub, a space full of colourful lights and lively music meant to contrast with the dull and dimly lit cell of Kongi's retreat. Segi's fluid dance movements and initially unthreatening behaviour to the Secretary mask the image that is shortly exposed: her staring eyes and mysterious disappearance provoke the men's discussion of her, a discussion where Daodu sings her praises while at the same time evoking her powerful and dangerous sexuality. Segi appears to have both soothing and endangering qualities: the conventional male construction of the prostitute, not used in an ironic context in Soyinka's works. In the subsequent scene when the audience gets a further glimpse of Segi, Soyinka fuels the myth of her mysterious, unreal nature by keeping her silent while the men speak of the "coiled snake" and the dangerous "Mammy Watta" who remains "still but at the still heart of a storm" (p.33). Segi becomes a mere essence, an idea that the Secretary reacts against and that Daodu plays up to, mocking the Secretary's fear but at the same time using Segi as idea to perpetuate the myth of destructive female sexuality: "This is Segi. Once she said to herself, this man's lust, I'll smother it with my beauty" (p.42). Soyinka uses a male's voice not only to repeat what a female supposedly said, but what she apparently said to herself! Females become stripped of their own voices as their thoughts are reflected through a male mediator, symbolic of a denial of female value and autonomy. Soyinka was obviously making a political point about Kongi's lust for power, but his continual use of Segi's silences merely perpetuate the aura of a mythical woman who is more essence than real.

When Segi does finally express her own desires and fear, the audience has already been so conditioned to view her in one specific context that it is hard to take her political role seriously. When she is coaxing Daodu to make love to her, the nurturing, earthy, "only life is worth preaching" Segi contrasts with the destructive, snake-like figure whom the men were speaking about two short scenes earlier.¹⁹ Perhaps it was Soyinka's intention to construct a female character who personified "the inevitable contradictions or duality inherent in human experience, embodied most noticeably in the creative-destructive Ogun personality which informs most of his work."²⁰ But the images contradict his intentions: female sexuality is distorted, and as in Achebe's fiction, the dialectic is unbalanced. Although Kongi seeks to make himself a myth and the Obi has ritual status, no men appear in mythical roles as Segi does in Kongi's Harvest. The subtle political meanings in the play are fought on a terrain where history includes women in its battles but at the same time relegates them to a terrain of otherness as Soyinka mystifies their movements and erects them as static symbols for sex, for fuelling men's creativity and for their life-giving potential.

The theme of stasis and fluidity prevails in Soyinka's earlier play, The Lion and the Jewel, a play that clearly touches on "the battle of the sexes" but disappointingly does not develop some of the implications of this tension. The women are seen as constantly dancing and dominating the series of mime sequences, but when they do speak, their language is direct, earthy and full of movement, hope and anger, a contrast to the speechifying and abstract language found in many of the undesirable male characters in Soyinka's plays. In The Lion and the Jewel, Lakunle and Baroka, opposite though they may appear, "are much alike"²¹ for they personify false

progress and traditional conventionality, two sides of the same staid coin. Unlike in Kongi's Harvest, Soyinka gives his female characters loud voices, spaces they physically inhabit (not just in essence) with seeming ease, and roles linking them to the oral tradition which Soyinka firmly believes must not be buried under the rubble of the "bull-roarers'" encroachments. But as the play develops, the females are exposed for their gullible and vain attributes and end up becoming mere tools for the cunning patriarch's game: their fluidity and potential is reduced to a level of ridicule in which their dignity is robbed and their anger is contained. The Bale, although making small concessions to progress, remains firmly entrenched in his view that women with their "ruinous tongues" are mere possessions to be tricked and controlled. The Lion's victory at the end of the play seems to reflect Soyinka's own stagnant view of women, as female potential for movement and change is safely contained within the playwright's humorous parameters.

The Lion and the Jewel is a comic play, its male characters grotesque caricatures of themselves, its female characters essential stereotypes of feminine vanity, gossip and short-sightedness that reflect their powerlessness at the hands of a more intelligent and crafty patriarch. Soyinka appears to have written the play with a male audience in mind: it's easy to laugh at Lakunle's idiocy and to admire the Bale's cunning for getting the better of those scheming women in the end. The women are meant to be laughed at as well: the "Foolish Virgin"²² learns her true value at the hands of the wise older man; the elder wife is the one who really gets "scotched" in the end, her traditional role only really valued for its ritual significance as she has no choice but to perpetuate a system that denies both herself - and the younger wife - any real expression of their true womanhood. Sidi's ability to see through Lakunle's double standards

and Sadiku's anger against "the foolish top (who thinks) the world revolves around (himself)" (p.32) contain important political ideas that Soyinka not only fails to develop, but which are so thoroughly defused through the comic medium that the audience isn't even asked to debate the important women's issues implicit in the play. The women become mere vehicles for Soyinka's central theme about the conflict between tradition and "progress", their fluidity and potential for leading the way to real progress is ignored by Soyinka considering his "happy" ending. A female audience is excluded from participating in the ribaldry of the play lest they want to laugh at their own stereotypes, a kind of frozen mirror that masks the significance of a mime that is searching for a serious voice to express an anger and authenticity that would not reflect "the spotted wolf of sameness..."

Whether by comic design or through political satire, Soyinka's women speak to an audience that must either not take women's desires too seriously or must be fearful of their potential which is fuelled by their awesome sexuality. As in Armah's novel, this potential essentially mystifies historical movement and is constructed around a notion of femaleness that does not demand an audience to conceptualize a new "life-giving" way of perceiving female language and roles, but rather asks individuals complacently to accept the old "death-producing" symbols that Soyinka, throughout his writings, appears to deplore.

II. Allegorical Representations of Women: Ngugi and Sembene

Both Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Sembene Ousmane are interested in exploring the effects of neo-colonialism on men's and women's lives and focus on the role that women play in shaping African history. Writing from Marxist perspectives, these two writers do not hold the same denigrating attitudes to women that Armah and Soyinka express, but their uses of women in an allegorical context pose a different kind of problematic.

Motherland

Ngugi's very popular novel, Petals of Blood, establishes a female principle where a woman is seen as an allegorical representation of Kenya and its historical process. The life story of his central female character, Wanja, becomes a metaphor for a continent which is in the process of demystifying its raped, colonial past and trying to come to terms with its prostituted neo-colonial present in order to find positive expression in its future. Despite his committed political vision that calls for "brothers and sisters in sweat, in toil and in struggle (to) stand by one another and strive for that kingdom"²³ free of oppression and exploitation, Ngugi's imagery and language reflect a conventional male perspective that draws on the traditional symbol of "Mother Africa" and equates the land with female cycles of reproduction. By using female experience to illuminate all human experience in Kenya, Ngugi creates a different kind of mystification of female subjectivity that both denies the specifically culturally determined realm of female experience and places

women in an essentialist category where she is conceptualized within the confines of her biological processes.

Perhaps Ngugi's intentions become more transparent when he states that his works constitute his "creative autobiography" and that his writing "is really an attempt to understand (himself) and (his) situation in society and history."²⁴ From this subjective angle, the women in Petals of Blood could be a recognition of the importance and value Ngugi attaches to his own femaleness, an archetypal concept that aims at redressing the male and female balance within himself. But his novel is much more than a personal statement: it weaves historical and mythical events into a concrete realistic setting that speaks didactically, and at times poetically, to a generation of Africans who must imagine new ways of constructing their future.

Some critics have not recognized the implications of Ngugi's vision and have reduced his perspective to coincide with their own limited definitions of what constitutes male and female behaviour. Eustace Palmer said that the central female character, Wanja, "belongs to that remarkable breed of Ngugi women...all of them brave, resilient, resourceful and determined. There is an element of masculinity in all of Ngugi's major women, just as there is a element of femininity in all of his major men. They probably have to make up for their menfolk's indecision and lack of resolution."²⁵ Palmer appears to be implying that courage, resilience, resourcefulness and determination are all masculine qualities whereas indecisiveness and a lack of resolution are all female qualities. But unlike Soyinka, Ngugi isn't interested in reducing women to distorted images created by their physical appearance or the "mesmerizing hold a woman can exert over a man":²⁶ his writings reveal he is making a

progressive attempt to transcend certain stereotypical behaviour categorizations and create positive images of how African people can come to terms with their lives. His images go beyond merely separating men and women, "the kingdom of man and woman...joying and loving in creative labour"(p.344). Rather, they seek to merge the two, like the androgynous statue in the lawyer's office, "as if it was a man and woman in one" (p.161). Like Achebe, Ngugi recognizes the importance of the male/female dialectic and his construction of womanhood is one of the most important features of Petals of Blood. But the way in which Ngugi creates a female character who functions in a dual context, that of a woman engaged in a specific socio-historical process that is shaping her consciousness and that of a symbol who represents a historical struggle, reveals he is primarily interested in using female experience in an allegorical context that construes woman in a set, problematic way.

The central action in the novel revolves around the four main characters: Wanja, Munira, Karega and Abdulla. Despite the varying degrees of characterization, it is obvious Wanja operates on a different level *from* the three men. She is much more complex, ambiguous and mysterious than Munira, Karega and Abdulla. As the three men unravel their pasts and live their presents, Wanja's presence dominates their lives and actions to such a degree that Abdulla, the wise hero-warrior and future father of the New Africa says:

Under her firm guidance, Ilmorog suddenly seemed to expand: new roads, influx of workers, banks, experts, dances and numerous small trades and crafts. He saw the changes as something being brought about by Wanja's magic. What a woman! One in a thousand! For she seemed, to him anyway, the true centre of all the numerous activities that were working in obedience to an invisible law. (p.310-311)

This invisible law is essentially female in nature as Ngugi tries to make

visible the undervalued, "magical" and powerful aspects of what Wanja represents. She embodies the possibilities open to all those who have been exploited and betrayed by the neo-colonial oppressors: she can either join them and assume a false sense of freedom and independence or she can struggle against them as the only means of realizing her full life-giving potential. Her interactions with the other characters unravel the complex nature of this process and shed light on the workings of Ngugi's concept of a "female principle" that shapes the consciousness of a dispossessed people.

Wanja first appears in the novel after Munira has revealed his stifled imagination and inability to face challenges in life when he takes his students out for a nature lesson and shows them "a flower with petals of blood" (p.21). As he was "out in the field, outside the walls," swearing "he would never take the children to the fields. Enclosed in the four walls he was the master..." (p.22) Wanja mysteriously appears, replacing the image of Nyakinyua that had previously frightened him. Throughout the novel Ngugi continuously associates Wanja with open space - the land - and with the flower and its various uses and abuses. Wanja, like the flower that cannot bear fruit, has become both physically and spiritually alienated from her own life-giving potential because her past has "prevented (her) from reaching the light" (p.22). She comes to Ilmorog to rediscover her lost identity but she must go through many changes in order to gain consciousness that will help her to flower and bear "the fruit and seeds" (p.303) of her essence. Although Ngugi speaks of Wanja's beauty, it is not a beauty that can be associated with the actual physical features of an individual. Rather, the character's beauty evokes a more mysterious, untenable quality that can be associated with the beauty of Africa itself.

Like the continent whose present barrenness is a result of its raped past, Wanja must confront her past - which constantly keeps reappearing in her present (Kimeria in particular) - and not try to escape the consequences implicit for the future. Her development mirrors the development of Ilmorog, of Kenya - and Africa's fate.

Ngugi uses female experiences of sexual abuse and economic exploitation to parallel Africa's present problems. As a young girl, Wanja is betrayed by Kimeria and loses her innocence only to find her present predicament of survival as a barmaid in the city creates more problems and contradictions in a life she is trying to rebuild. By bearing the guilt of having to betray her own flesh, which reflects the deadly self-destructive forces present in all people who under duress often turn against themselves in utter despair, she escapes to the country, a return to the traditional ways in defiance of the breakdown of social morality which her life in the city represented. Wanja's desire to have a child isn't meant to be taken on a literal level to indicate that a woman's only means of self-fulfilment is through reproduction. One critic says: "Her redemption and restoration are at the same time an opting out of what is perhaps her most important role (as the novel sees these things), that of social motivator. Her personal salvation is just as equivocal in its implications as Munira's inner spasms."²⁷ This is a misunderstanding of Ngugi's allegorical treatment of Wanja. Wanja's pregnancy is a tribute to her role as social motivator: she becomes a symbol for the possibilities open to a free and independent Africa which has at last "flowered" and become conscious of its role in combating the destructive forces that have haunted "the travellers of its one road."²⁸ Wanja's rebirth must be seen as a link in the historical chain, not as a break with her past, as Ngugi constantly sets

the individual woman's development within a wider symbolic context which speaks to all exploited men and women engaged in a historical struggle. He does not question the discourse that links the land, flowers and reproduction to femaleness, but rather attempts to make visible the important significance of these undervalued feminine constructions. But in doing so, is not Ngugi really placing woman on a predetermined level that ties her to a fixed identity? Whereas the male characters in the novel are more varied and in essence "freer" to define themselves (and indeed their masculinity is problematized), Wanja's own subjective female responses seem marginalized as Ngugi uses the character to formulate a concept of female oppression that mirrors racial/colonial oppression. In doing so, he seems to be both negating the complexity and plurality of female experience and confining it to a discourse that accepts the limited categorization of woman's biological/natural function.

For example, barrenness, the scourge of African womanhood, is never questioned as a concept but is conventionally used by Ngugi in the allegory. Wanja's barrenness is indicative of the spiritual emptiness that her life in the city represented. Her return to Ilmorog - to her grandmother - symbolizes her attempts to gain control over her body, her human potential and ultimately her history. Her relationship with her grandmother, Nyakinywa, explores this process of repossession and the historical continuity that shapes individuals' fates. But whereas Nyakinywa embodies traditional Africa, whose resilient role in the community and protests against the loss of her land represent the collective voice of the people's past, Wanja embodies the present Africa who links the past with the future, and in doing so, recovers her own sense of self worth. Just as she inherited her grandmother's strength, but must

bring her own resourcefulness to adapt to a changing reality, Africa must build on its traditional roots but not remain a slave to a vision that cannot accommodate inevitable transformations. At the end of the novel when Wanja realizes she is pregnant and contemplates the loss of her father, her mother appears to redress the balance of this loss and complete the chain of females who "shape their hopes and fears" (p.338) and give each other strength to survive the fires of birth and rebirth. The women are all linked to each other and form a kind of linear development which is in itself problematic. When Wanja gives expression to her new self (to the child to be born) by unconsciously drawing the image of a new Africa based on the revolutionary spirit which evokes the androgynous sculpture in the lawyer's office and "the possibility of a new kind of power" (p.338), Ngugi is reasserting the importance of the female principle. But this new kind of power remains firmly entrenched in a male/female oppositional discourse that is unable, in essence, to imagine a new way of articulating itself.

Ngugi alludes to this through his development of Karega, the mouthpiece for Ngugi's own political perspective. In the course of the novel Karega changes from a naive, idealistic young man, searching for answers to his own history, to a strong revolutionary leader who gives guidance and support to those who have shared his suffering. But Wanja's influence on his life cannot be underestimated. Even when she became a prostitute she helped Karega to understand the inevitability of the struggle and provided a kind of emotional impetus to balance his intellectual vision. This vision often runs the risk of destroying itself by its own aridity in the novel, but Ngugi gives it new life when it merges with the female voices that have shaped Karega's past for they provide the continuity with which he can face his future:

He looked hard at her, then past her to Mukami of Manguo Marshes and again back to Nyakinyua, his mother and even beyond Akinyi to the future! And he smiled through his sorrow. (p.345)

The young girl at the end of Petals of Blood represents the hope and faith embodied in the female principle which Wanja personifies. Women represent the feeling forces and men the intellectual forces which are meant to merge in order to complement and nurture each other to produce that "man and woman in one", the basis for which Karega's "human kingdom" can be realized. As Nyakinyua says: "A man cannot have child without a woman. A woman cannot bear a child without a man. And was it not a man and a woman who fought to redeems this country?" (p.161) But Ngugi ends the novel with Karega murmuring "tomorrow...tomorrow..." to himself, a kind of inarticulate response to the knowledge that although he is not alone, the possibilities of new beginnings/of new ways of interpreting - and changing - the world have yet to be realised.

Ngugi's characterization of Munira is not as open-minded and equivocal, however. Munira is doomed to destroy himself precisely because he has repressed the female side of his nature. This takes the most obvious form in his misogyny, directed primarily against Wanja and all that she represents. His complex feelings towards her reveal his obsessive and fanatical personality in which he must rape her of her purity by possessing and controlling her destiny:

...Munira felt her even more remote: as if he had never touched her: her taunt had the same alluring power as the beckoning coquetry of a virgin: he could touch her only by deflowering her by force and so himself flowering in blood. A virgin and a prostitute. Why couldn't she carry an advertising label on her back: Drive a VW: Ride a Virgin Whore. Or VIP: Very Interesting Prostitute. (p.76)

This important man whose pride was to avoid "being drawn in" (p.22) actually chooses to burn Wanja's whorehouse as again the imagery links her

to the petals of blood and he to the closed in darkness he craves: "He stood on the hill and watched the whorehouse burn, the tongues of flame from the four corners forming petals of blood, making a twilight of the dark sky" (p.333). His misogyny translates as a projection of his own self-hatred and his religious zeal is merely an attempt to purge the guilt he feels for his own failures in life. Although the novel is told largely through his recollections, it is ironically Munira who reveals that his "twilight" reality is what is blocking him from journeying through the open spaces (his femaleness) of a future of life-giving possibilities. And it is also ironic that Munira is the one who actually provokes Wanja's rebirth: her redemption by fire, by the "petals of blood", mark the triumph of her new consciousness in which she refuses to continue her exploitative role and accepts the fact that all human relationships become reified within a capitalist commodity economy. But Munira remains unable to confront "how Wanja had shaken his world, the world he had created around himself" in which the female "fruit in the old garden" (p.332) represented growth and self-discovery, not sin and destructiveness as Christianity suggests.

Whereas Munira debases Wanja and her female power, Abdulla idealizes her/it as Ngugi links woman to the traditional elements. When Abdulla saves Wanja, he is also reborn for he is reunited with "Mother Africa" from which he has become alienated, but to which his past - and future - belongs:

Only that for him now, a woman was truly the other world: with its own contours, valleys, rivers, streams hills, ridges, mountains, sharp turns, steep and slow climbs and descents, and above all, movement of secret springs of life... A woman was the world, the world. (p.315)

Abdulla has at last integrated "the other world" of womanhood into his

psyche, a world linked to "secret springs", to mysterious natural movements that evoke the traditional image of the powerful woman in Gikiyu mythology. Nyakinyua's epic role in the novel also testifies to this as her singing, her wisdom and her actions represent attempts to reassert all that the colonial legacy destroyed. The importance of rediscovering one's past, of regaining a lost continuity as a means to constructing a better future are obviously necessary facets in the historical struggle for an independent Africa, but Ngugi's spiritual (over?) valuation of the feminine continues to be problematic. Women as nature, as tradition, as something to be rescued signifies the loss of female specificity as the reader is left contemplating a masculinist discourse that is unable to go beyond the very categories that have mystified woman's consciousness of the world for so long.

Structures of Oppression

When speaking of his novel Xala, Sembene Ousmane acknowledges that it is "a kind of allegory, or more precisely a fable, more accessible to my people, on several levels of understanding."²⁹ But unlike Petals of Blood it draws all of its characters as types where the inner psychological level is both absent and relevant. The women are neither idealized nor mythologized but used to show how capitalism has imposed a structure on polygyny that has objectified them to such an extent that they are literally unable, in fitting with the novel's form, to perceive themselves

as having an individual identity, as being anything more than a dehumanized type - "the other."

The African parable focuses on the businessman El Hadji's private and public difficulties as his three wives and daughter all become affected by the "xala" (impotence) that plagues him. Sembene ironically establishes that no matter how much capitalism separates the public and the private, the two spheres are bound to fuse in an African context. El Hadji's private and public worlds are so intertwined that all private relations are reduced to business-like commodity exchanges and all public relations become affected by his private "problem." As the story unfolds and the political and moral message become clear, the audience understands that the true victims of El Hadji's "impotent" mentality are the beggars who, dispossessed of land and identity, seek revenge by depriving El Hadji of what means most to him: his private property. He is denied possession of his third wife, a "marriage (that) raised him to the rank of the traditional notability; it represented a kind of promotion."³⁰

Throughout the novel, El Hadji's wives are depicted as objects, pawns bought and sold, deprived of any power or identity. Unlike the beggars, they accept their position and fail to realize how this acceptance of themselves as private property only perpetuates their reification. As long as they play the game, no matter how disgruntled they become, they cannot possibly begin to create an authentic life for themselves. Sembene depicts them as more than victims, however; they become perpetrators, not destroyers, of the type of society where money and private property are all that matter. Sembene is obviously making a very important observation about the concept and practice of polygyny in a neo-colonialist context and uses his female characters to illustrate this. Yet unlike the beggars who

question their situation and are able to act, the wives are so totally typified that for the most part, they "can in no way be read as a cry for understanding, even less reforming, women's situation in postcolonial society."³¹ Their caricatures don't evoke sympathy but a slight disdain, almost, and an irritation with their greediness and/or passivity. Sembene offers no real alternatives for women, even through his characterization of the daughter, Rama, whose vision cannot be separated from the position she occupies within her exploitative class. Sembene confirms a conventional Marxist perspective when he states: "In reality, the problems should not be posed in terms of sexes but in terms of classes."³² The parable may be a very effective means of reaching the African people on many levels, but it can also inhibit a creative re-imagining of the roles that men and women could play in society.

However, there is a kind of internal progression in the way the three wives are conceptualized that mark various historical phases.³³ On one level, Adja Awa Astou, El Hadji's first wife, appears to deviate from the materialistic norm that characterizes the nouveau-riche bourgeoisie. She is the traditional first wife, religious and passive, quietly accepting her fate to such a degree that her husband notes that she was "so indifferent to the things of this life that you could bury her alive and she would not complain" (p.84). Adja is unable to act on the persistent feelings of discomfort she feels when El Hadji takes a third wife. She justifies her subservience when her daughter insists she should rebel. Adja responds:

'It's easy to talk about divorce, Rama,' her mother began slowly. What she was about to say was the product of much careful reflection. 'You think I should get a divorce, where would I go at my age? Where would I find another husband? A man of my own age and still a bachelor? If I left your father and with luck and with Yalla's help found a husband, I would be his third or fourth wife. And what would become of you?' (p.12)

Sembene depicts the paradox of the female who in this type of society realizes that she is better off with a husband to protect her status and her children's futures than she would be if she were on her own in the society which would devalue her even more if she were divorced or an inferior wife. Few options remain open to her and the only way she can cope with the situation is through "the daily dose from her religion" (p.25). Adja remains consistently loyal to El Hadji and although Sembene is condemning her passivity, he nevertheless does portray her with a kind of inner integrity that is lacking with his other female types. She has not become totally corrupted by relations within a commodity economy and consciously maintains a traditional stance that appears out of place in the new society. Sembene uses her to counterbalance the second wife who represents how polygyny has been affected by Europeanization. Unlike Mariama Ba who sympathetically describes the inner suffering caused by polygyny in So Long a Letter, Sembene appears more interested in ideas than in people in Xala as his female characters personify stages in Senegal's historical development. Like Naana in Armah's Fragments, this development indicates integrity and a certain kind of wisdom belong to the past.

Oumi N'Doye, the sexy second wife, has no inner life; she is brash, superficial and greedy to the extent that she functions as a mere caricature of the materialistic urban woman in the neo-colonial setting. Sembene offers her as a satirical example of what happens when traditional values lose their significance and the terrain becomes a competitive battleground where all women are seen as threats and all men are creatures to be manipulated. Oumi N'Doye uses sex and money to fill the empty spaces in much the same way that Adja uses her religion, although ironically she

is less dependent in many ways on El Hadji than is Adja. When El Hadji loses his money, he loses Oumi as the "modern" woman sells herself elsewhere - to those who can pay:

Now that she had fallen from her former position of economic superiority, Oumi N'Doye tried to show she was a modern woman by going from office to office, firm to firm, in search of work. Through her change of fortune, too, she came to meet men who liked the easy life, men who could provide pleasure while they had money. So Oumi N'Doye often went out in the evening. (p.103)

Through this caricature, Sembene is depicting polygynous marriages as a type of prostitution where women like Oumi N'Doye have only their commoditized sexuality to trade as they are left in a habitually insecure frenzy, grasping pathetically at whatever "security" comes their way.

An interesting comparison can be made with Adaku, the second wife in Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood. Adaku has been forced to develop her trading skills due to economic necessity, and thus when she leaves her husband, aware she plays no function because she does not have any sons to "immortalize" him, she becomes independent, self-sufficient and prosperous. Oumi N'Doye, on the other hand, precisely because she is rich, has never had to develop skills and is actually in a worse, more isolated position than Adaku. The colonisers have created this new class of Oumi N'Doyes where even motherhood has less importance than money. She suggests to El Hadji, apparently without pain, that Adja should take her children. Without money, she feels she has no value at all, even to her children. But whereas a woman writer seems concerned with describing how polygyny personally affects females, Sembene seems more concerned with creating characters to illustrate how polygyny functions on a structural level.

Woman as commodity - and luxury item - is personified in El Hadji's third wife, N'Gone. She does not even respond like Oumi, let alone have

any thoughts like Adja, for Sembene created her as the epitome of reification in a capitalist society. She is the stereotyped female object who never appears to say anything and is manipulated by her aunt, Ya Bineta, who is the female equivalent of El Hadji. Whereas El Hadji buys and sells goods in the public sector, Ya Bineta acts as a kind of broker in the private world - in this case, El Hadji is the buyer and N'Gone, the goods. Ya Bineta "sells her daughter" in order to stop living "like animals in a yard" (p.7). Her language is replete with commercial vocabulary: "El Hadji, this is my daughter...Could she not be some kind of measure? A measure of length or a measure of capacity?" (p.7), and she even accuses El Hadji of treating N'Gone worse than a gold coin: "You don't keep a girl as if she were a gold coin. Even with a gold coin you do business" (p.104). N'Gone remains El Hadji's private property whose proof of virginity must be obtained before she can keep her car, "the proofs of love" (p.4). Yet El Hadji never can find out whether his goods are "second hand" or not as his xala prevents him from fully possessing her new wife, and N'Gone decides to eventually "take back her freedom" (p.103). Dorothy Blair says "The new bride is the stereotyped vacuous virgin accepting marriage for its material benefits and reneging on the contract when her husband loses his fortune."³⁴ Not only is it debatable whether N'Gone is really a virgin, but it is obvious it is not N'Gone but rather Ya Bineta who decides to renege. N'Gone has no say in what happens to her: behind the scenes, Ya Bineta schemes and is only out for her own self interest. This type of woman functions within the capitalistic, profit-oriented structures of her society; deprived of a respectable life of her own, she lives vicariously through the objects she manipulates, possessing nothing,

producing nothing and grasping at a false sense of power that leaves her as "impotent" as El Hadji himself.

In the film version of Xala, the image of N'Gone as object is clearly emphasized by Sembene as the viewer only sees the bride under the wedding veil or half clothed in the bedroom, the camera focusing on the back of her lower nude half. On the wall is a large portrait/photograph of her that obviously symbolizes N'Gone, the object, as opposed to N'Gone, the person. And the only time she speaks in the film is when she is told by her aunt to tell El Hadji that she cannot sleep with him that night because it is her period. The modern form of African capitalism has imposed a structure on polygyny where all relations become so reified that Sembene has used a woman purely as commodity to represent the disintegration of values that have no human face whatsoever.

In contrast, posed against the third wife, Sembene has used the character of Rama who is not only reacting against the traditionalism of her mother but against what could happen to her given she is the same age as Ngone. Yet Sembene's characterization of Rama's rebellion is ambiguous: her form of nationalism appears naive and even ironic as she defends private property, rejects her half brothers and sisters and believes in segregation of the bus to school. It is not the intellectuals of her generation and class with their grandiose political gestures who will change the structures of oppression. The end of the novel supports Sembene's view that change will come about only by the dispossessed, the workers and the peasants, the mutilated and wretched of the earth:

In despair Adja Awa Astou unrolled her beads and begins praying, supported by Rama. Rama herself was bursting with anger. Against whom? Against her father? Against these wretched people? She who was always ready with the words 'revolution' and 'new social order' felt deep within her breast something like a stone falling heavily into her heart, crushing her. She could

not take her eyes off her father. (p.111-112)

The parable depicts Rama, like all Sembene's women, as being trapped within a structure where they cannot imagine ways of breaking free, and their two dimensional characterization within the structure of the parable itself denies them an authentic voice for articulating the possibilities of such an experience.

III. The Female Subject as Metaphor: Sembene and Farah

Nine years before the publication of Xala, Sembene Ousmane wrote a short novel called Vehi-Ciosane or White Genesis that sensitively explores the consciousness of a traditional African Muslim woman who is reacting against her fate. Similarly, the Somali writer, Nuruddin Farah, has written two novels that construct woman as subject: From A Crooked Rib describes the experiences of an illiterate country girl whereas Sardines exposes the literary and political struggles of an intellectual African woman who is attempting to reconstruct her own story and ultimately her own life. Both writers depict women as outsiders and attempt to show how their characters' experiences are distinctly female. Although interested in the ways in which women are imprisoned by male concepts, they nonetheless manipulate the concept of female subjectivity in order to further their own literary and political agendas. By constructing their subjects as "the other", the writers appear unable - and unwilling - to forget their characters' femaleness and therefore are unable to capture a sense of wholeness of experience. The audience becomes aware that these women are indeed male creations and that they generally serve as metaphors for male writers to project their own visions of change.

Women Questioning

Vehi-Ciosane or White Genesis is another of Sembene's parables concerned with morality, justice and truth, but in this story, unlike in Xala, there is a heroine who can be interpreted as both character and

symbol of African motherhood. This woman, Ngone War Thiandum, self-consciously comes to recognize her subjective female feelings that both liberate and destroy her. Sembene attempts to construct a discourse that shows subjectivity as a self-reflective process that is constantly in a state of fluidity, shaped by historical conditions in which race, class and gender are determining features.

Before the actual story begins, Sembene writes a tribute to a companion of his youth, a co-initiate who died with nothing, like "Poor Mother Africa" who "sterile you might have been a paradise for your sons..."³⁵ He then includes a little epigraph to the story that Ngone War Thiandum later repeats "to herself, but still she hesitated to act" (p.13). It is about honour and nobility, themes which in the story relate not only to class difference but to women as well who must learn to act against those who rob them of their dignity. In the prologue Sembene goes on to tell the readers, his fellow Africans, why he is writing a story many told him to forget because it would dishonour his race. He speaks of the need to confront unheroic acts as a means of descending "inside MAN and his failure, and to assess the extent of his damage" (p.5). He despairs that thousands of young people will never read his lines nor will the African mother who, illiterate, "lives alone; it is a way of clothing herself in her drama" (p.6). But he ends the prologue with a kind of dedication to the symbolic woman of the title, Vehi-Ciosane Ngone War Thiandum, who must "prepare the genesis of our new world. For out of the defects of an old, condemned world will be born the new world that has been so long awaited and for so long part of our dreams" (p.6).

The story begins with a description of a barren landscape that has "pools of stagnant water" and a "torrid atmosphere" that mirrors the

decaying moral world of a people who are "enclosed inside the immense, silent loneliness of the niaye" (p.8). The actual village where the events take place, Santhiu-Niaye, "emptied of its will to act, became depopulated, stagnated" (p. 10) as the inhabitants lost their desire to live and create life anew. The songs of life were only those from long ago as the mothers, "with aching and heavy heart" listened silently to them, remaining "dominated by their men, fearful of today's realities and sick at heart" (p.11). It is against this enclosed silence that one woman does begin to speak, a tiny voice Sembene hopes will shatter the illusion of that retreating African landscape where the stranger/reader feels "he has made no progress" (p.7).

The story then penetrates into the "waterless depth" as the audience is exposed to the inner world of Ngone War Thiandum who awakens from an unconscious dream state to confront her obsessive feelings about her husband who, we soon learn, has committed incest with their daughter, now pregnant with his child. Sembene describes the dawning realisation of a woman, no longer able to repress her feelings, who begins to articulate that "she had been the prisoner of a morally false order" (p.12). She feels disgust for her body, is trapped in a kind of inertia and desires to rebel but only feels "deep contempt for life" (p.13). She begins to ask questions to Yallah, not only for forgiveness but for answers:

When I became a woman, I ceased to be a woman: my heart smiled no more at other men, my mind was given no more to carnal thoughts. I was humble, my Yallah, as you wish it, as you desire it for your subjects. I remained a wife and a mother without complaining, without blaming the infidelities of my husband...Yallah! Forgive me! But why this act? Why? (p.14)

Ngone understands the actual lived experience of womanhood entails the denial of desire, of a voice, of the self... Ngone feels self-doubt, fear,

anger and "a burning desire to be free." Sembene poetically describes how difficult it is for woman to grasp the significance of her subjective feelings that begin slowly to trickle out in a fluid movement, gaining momentum from the impact with consciousness:

In the end, this self-doubt gained a hold on her, finding that healthy life a fertile soil in which to take root. Her life which, until now, had been sustained by the laws of the Koran and the adda, surrendered. Tormented, her will broken, she was an easy prey to predispositions deriving in part from the passions, and today's act forced her to question the precepts which, until yesterday, had been the obvious basis of her life. Like a tear, a tiny hole which she unconsciously enlarged, she fell in with her realization - a new step for her - that she could judge events from her own, woman's point of view. This new responsibility was a shattering experience for a woman like herself, whose opinions had always been decided for her by someone else. (p.15)

She is up against the forces of a very traditional society which has lost its own roots and against a future that denies her a fertile soil. Even her closest woman friend, her griot Gnanga Guisse, is unable to comfort her as "a sea of anger welled up and roared within her, waking and sharpening her awareness of her frustration and placing the accepted moral values in question by baring them to the light of the day" (p.29).

The female griot plays a very subtle but important role in the story as does her husband who is the one who forces the men in the village to recognize "the blood of truth is always noble, whatever its origin" (p.66). But whereas Dethye Law's role mirrors the public world, Gnanga Guisse inhabits the inner, private world of Ngone War Thiandum: "Once again they faced one another. Each looked into the pool of the other's eyes, and saw herself reflected there" (p.22). The griot remains silent throughout Ngone's anguish, aware her guelewar knows "'Rather die a thousand deaths in a thousand ways each more terrible than the other than endure an insult for a single day'" (p.23). Gnanga Guisse later remembers more wisdom but again

does not need to speak it directly to Ngone who eventually acts on the knowledge: "'Any truth that divides and brings discord among the members of the same family is false. The falsehood that weaves, unites and cements people together is truth'" (p.49). Ngone's suicide is a tragedy but also an assertion of her own dignity as it is Gnanga Guisse who passes the mother's name and symbolic jewellery onto the new born female Vehi-Ciosane N'Gone War Thiandum. Gnanga Guisse leads the outcast pair of females into the new world and when they are out of sight, she reflects on N'Gone's tragic fate but gives voice to the legacy of her guelewar's actions that symbolize a shared vision of females who have not lost hope, at least in the chain of life: "'May Yallah ensure that, although that child is not of noble birth, it may acquire nobility and nobility of conduct. Out of them, the future will be born.'" (p.69)

It is doubtful whether Sembene is simplistically implying that "the future is female", but he nonetheless does recognize the importance of the female voice that can be heard making "an eloquent plea for the necessary transfer of power and leadership and the renunciation of the traditional hierarchical structure of society in the face of abuse and corruption."³⁶ Dethye Law conveys this message publicly to the community as the women communicate the meaning of the parable's moral truths through their intensely private world of shared understanding. There is a certain abstract, dream-like quality to Sembene's prose that reinforces his use of N'Gone as a symbol for African motherhood or even "Mother Africa", a symbolising which carries the same problematic implications as Ngugi's writings. Yet Sembene, unlike many of his contemporaries, has begun a process of consciously recognizing that the world can be interpreted from a woman's point of view, a responsibility that Vehi-Ciosane or White Genesis

carries into the future.

The immediate future - what tomorrow will bring - is a constant concern for the female protagonist in the Somali writer's, Nuruddin Farah's, first novel, From A Crooked Rib. It exposes the same kind of tyrannical patriarchy and oppression from the perspective of a rural Muslim women as Sembene's story, but its stark realism contrasts markedly to the parabolic nature and poetic imagery of Vehi-Ciosane or White Genesis. The young female protagonist in Farah's novel asks many of the same questions about a woman's plight as Ngone, but she is given a language that is unable to convey a sense of depth or wholeness. Perhaps some of the novel's weaknesses, particularly the narrative inconsistencies, can be attributed to the author's age and inexperience - he was only twenty-three when he wrote From A Crooked Rib which was published in 1970. The verbal sparsity and emphasis on the protagonist's oral background that correspond to the novel's setting are appropriate, but Ebla's incessant self-consciousness about her own femaleness does more to remind the reader that she is a male creation than convey a sense of woman's otherness.

Farah's character conceptualization is well-intentioned and empathetic, however. A very tall, almost majestic young woman who "would have been beautiful had it not been for the disproportion of her body"³⁷ escapes the harsh laws of tribal patriarchy and the poverty of nomadic pastoralism and ends up, after a series of difficult experiences, in Mogadiscio where she becomes disillusioned and confused. Farah paints a bleak picture of an oppressive and poor society in which Ebla's constant references to "tomorrow" reveal both her inability to make sense of the

present and her unease that "tomorrow" will not have anything positive to offer her. By creating a self-questioning, intelligent woman who knows what she does not want but cannot find a satisfactory means of self-fulfilment and thus uses her indecisiveness as her only refuge, Farah is commenting on the nature of women as outsiders - women deprived of their own language, not in possession of their own histories.

Farah opens the novel with a prologue in which Ebla's grandfather, a symbol of patriarchal power, is cursing her for running away from him. A self-assured, vehement language flows from this fragile figure as he curses the very thing which would ensure his passage to Spring, the "semi-god" that "meant everything." The hardships of life have deprived him of his pride and left him silent, except when his main duty, to give advice, was required. When he did speak, "the only thing which could revive his enthusiasm of his past life" (p.4) was to recount the history of the Somali Warrior, the Sayyed. He clung to the past victories of his people, embodied in this warrior, in order to give his empty present and dying future some meaning. Slowly he has become an anachronism; times have changed, "nobody cared what he thought", particularly the youngsters. Farah has used him to show how a whole way of life is dying, and the old man is powerless to do anything but curse. Farah's prologue forewarns of death, upheaval and decay in a rapidly changing world. It frames the action of the novel and sets the tone for what is to happen. But it also depicts the contrast between men, who have a sense of their own histories and who possess a language to curse their futures, however bleak, and women, who possess neither a sense of belonging nor a language in which to articulate what tomorrow may bring.

The rest of the novel centres around Ebla's experiences and more importantly, her perceptions of her what is happening to her. Most of the narrative exposes Ebla's thoughts, private fears and confusions, although, as one critic succinctly has stated, "the vagaries of viewpoint and the author's uneven approximation of his ingenuous heroine's mental vocabulary"³⁸ diminish the novel's overall impact. At times Farah allows his heroine a certain language and formulation of ideas that seems inappropriate for an illiterate nomadic girl . Farah does, however, construct her as a unique young woman whose search for the answers to her life's questions mark her individuality:

To her, a refusal did not matter. Neither would a positive answer make her pleased. But acceptance of her opinions, both by her relations and her would-be husbands, did make her pleased. She thought of many things a woman of her background would never think of. Translated, Ebla roughly means 'Graceful' and she always wanted her actions to correspond with her name. (p.8)

Unfortunately, the more she ventures out into the world in search of an identity, the less graceful and self-assured she becomes as she realizes that neither her thoughts nor her opinions matter precisely because she is a woman. Her initial hopes for freedom and desire to escape change by the end of the novel as Ebla seeks refuge in marriage, despite witnessing what an oppressive institution this represents in her society. She identifies with nature, with the trees and later with the caged animals in the town as "Silence was the only refuge they all knew. That was the only language they could comprehend" (p.15). The veiled figure in black that frightens Ebla when she first arrives in Belet Wene represents not only the imprisoned world women find themselves in, but also the imprisoning effects this has on their consciousness. As "innumerable ghost-like sights seemed to hover around her" (p.65), Ebla loses her confidence; the questions she asks

"touched the sores" and created wounds that are never allowed to heal. Lacking a mother's guidance and trust, Ebla befriends women who use her, manipulate her and speak for her, and in Mogadiscio she naively challenges her husband's disloyalty with her own marriage experiments, claiming "an eye for any eye..." When she worries about "the enigmatic situation that had developed because of her acceptance of other people's advice", Farah notes that "never for one single instant did she believe that she was responsible for what she was doing" (p.131). Recognizing she was only "an intruder" in the world, she puts her faith in "the morrow" (p.71). The umbilical cord broken, Ebla finds herself in a hostile world, her illusions shattered as she searches for a means to justify her existence:

Ebla repeats to herself that she loved life. However, she did not really understand what life was: she had a wrong interpretation of life. If her interpretation was right, then everybody's would be right. To her, life meant freedom, freedom of every sort. 'One should do whatever one wants to - that is life. That is what I love.' Freedom: that was what she worshipped. Not the freedom to sleep with any man, for every man was not worth sleeping with, neither could every man be a good husband. She was unique in forming ideas about things. Marriage was a sound refuge...what could she do then? Run away. But where to? No. No more escapades - not in search for another man anyway. If another man was in any way interested in her, he could present himself. 'But that would be prostitution. No, it would not be. I love life, and life lies in marriage, and marriage is born out of a couple from opposite sexes.' (p.126)

Ebla appears to accept that marriage is her only means of survival and her only marketable quality is her sexuality as she welcomes her husband's "hot and warm world into her cool and calm kingdom." (p.179) The ending is ambiguous: is the crooked rib now straight and independent, Ebla finding some means to affirm her own selfhood, or does it remain crooked, a symbol of women's subservience and traditional inferiority? Ebla is able to assert that "A white man's language is no knowledge" (p.178), but does her indecisiveness indicate she is on the threshold of articulating a new

identity and way of being in the world? These questions are perhaps answered when Ebla reappears as a wise, divorced, middle-aged woman in Sardines, Farah perhaps making amends for the unsatisfactory conclusion to his first novel.

On some levels, From A Crooked Rib might be read as an allegory of Somalia's history where Ebla, the symbol of a prostituted country on the eve of its independence, resembles Ngugi's Wanja. But whereas Wanja's pregnancy signifies rebirth, Ebla's pregnancy appears more ominous. Will Somalia become a fatherless nation, its uncertain identity making it vulnerable to the same fate as the mother who bore it? Farah's use of the female to embody his own political vision becomes clearer when one considers Sardines and the statements Farah makes about women in some of his interviews.

Women Reconstructing

In an interview in 1981, the same year as the publication of Sardines, Farah said that he has "used women as a symbol for Somalia because, when the women are free, then and only then can we talk about a free Somalia."³⁹ If Ebla's journey to the city in From A Crooked Rib could represent the various stages of Somalia's movement to independence, then the women in Sardines could perhaps symbolize the different types of resistance that have evolved against the totalitarian regime of General Barre. Sardines is the second novel in the trilogy, Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship, and it focuses on the private world of women and their various interrelationships that are undoubtedly influenced by political

structures. Farah's concept of using women as symbol poses the same problematic as previously discussed with other male writers, but what is unique about this particular novel is Farah's creation of an intellectual African female character who, like a modern Scheherazade, self-consciously narrates her own story for survival. Yet when we consider his statement, "I see women as the subjugated self in everyone in us"⁴⁰, we are unequivocally presented with a male creation of a kind of femaleness that often appears contrived and inauthentic. Femaleness becomes magnified and distorted under the gaze of a male writer trying to come to terms with his own wholeness.

Nevertheless, Farah does raise some interesting issues concerning women writing in a (neo) colonial country and he attempts to explore the interrelationship between the writer and text within an imaginative context. As the writer projects his own otherness onto his text, his female construct, Medina, becomes the medium through which male-centered perceptions of reality are challenged and subverted. One critic has criticized Farah for his ambivalent political messages for, to her, the intellectual in a modern African state, part of the "privilegentzia", appears to be "playing at revolution."⁴¹ Another critic, addressing Farah's contention that Sardines is about those who compromise, says that "As women take over the struggle against tyranny, active resistance gives way to a beleaguered impotence, protest becomes more gestural than practical...and the punishments...are now milder than death, imprisonment, torture, or exile." He goes on to assert that "through the figure of Medina, Farah unerringly pinpoints all the hypocrisies of compromise within the most embattled section of Somali womanhood."⁴² Despite the validity of these statements, the novel does offer some valuable insights into the

struggle writers are engaged in. To Farah, the exiled writer whose multilingualism and intellectual background resemble Medina's, writing is like a woman, something subjugated that must define itself against censoring and dominant forms of oppression. Medina can be criticized for her rigid ideological egotism, being "as confident as a patriarch in the rightness of all her decisions",⁴³ but her matriarchal tendencies interact with complementing patriarchal structures as well as with fluid, undetermined female forces to offer a complex view of the possibilities for movement and change.

Sardines begins with Medina "reconstructing" her own story "from the beginning." The word reconstruct is important as it connotes a going back over something, redefining what in the first instance she had no part in creating. As Medina enters "a secret back door in another wing of the building" (p.2), the reader is introduced into "the architecture of her thoughts", thoughts which stray from the norm to explore what was previously secret and silent but which now has been appropriated for her own use. Medina has to "repaint", "redecorate" and "replaster" her thoughts in order to give her journey "a colourful purpose as meaningful as the vision she had seen"(p.2). But in the process of reconstructing her story, and thus her life, she has become acutely aware that she is defining herself against something which constantly threatens her sense of self, something that must now be relegated to otherness: "He is not all of us!" Medina affirms, alluding to Achebe's tale and his influence as the "father" of African writing. The constant need to negate what is already a negation of oneself as a woman is a recurrent theme in the novel that underlies the whole concept of feminist writing. Sardines is a tightly packed novel within a novel: as Farah constructs the character of Medina, Medina

reconstructs the lives of many people, mostly women, whose stories unfold like "a tapestry of patterns." The experiences described in the stories are shared by many women, although paradoxically the stories Medina "had developed, none of which, to the best of her knowledge, had known precedents." (p. 2) It is the telling of the stories which are unique. Medina, the critic and translator, seeks not only to translate personal female experience into a political critique of the structures of oppression, but effectively to create new ways of seeing the world through the process of writing itself. It is here that Medina has no "known precedents", no traditions to follow. Despite having money, an education and literally a room (a house) of her own, Medina still must struggle to create - and articulate - her life in a country where she remains a guest, a silenced outsider who, like Ebla in From A Crooked Rib, is not in possession of her own history.

Women writing in a politically and socially colonized context are faced with two major obstacles that inhibit their growth as writers: the obstacle of their gender and the obstacle of their historical situation where foreign powers rule the indigenous population. Medina means "city" in Arabic, but a medina has also come to be defined by the colonisers as the native quarter where trouble remains a potential threat. Throughout the novel Medina articulates numerous examples of female subordination where women are not in control of their sexuality and are constantly manipulated to participate in the reproduction of their own exploitation. Images of women being imprisoned by their bodies abound in Sardines as numerous references to abortion, pregnancy, circumcision and rape serve as powerful metaphors for the fragmented female psyche whose public and private identities symbolize the tension between how society defines women

and how women are struggling to define themselves. In addition, women must also contend with the coloniser who aims to speak for them. The coloniser's powerful control has doubly mystified woman as to what her real identity is. Imprisoned by a foreign ideology, she remains a "guest" in her own country, relegated to silence in an often slum-like, impoverished corner of her being. Farah introduces first-world female characters to emphasize this "double oppression": by depicting not only the confusions of western women but by having them actually contribute to the colonized peoples' exploitation, Farah is challenging the validity of western women's experience as a means by which African women can define their own lives.

This challenge to western tradition becomes apparent when one examines the relationship between women and writing that is articulated by Medina. Medina uses the western feminist literary tradition to guide her, to help her establish the universality of women as "Other." Her references to feminist writers from Virginia Woolf to Susan Brownmiller and Anne Sexton, as well as to politically committed male writers, like Brecht and Gunter Grass, reveal Medina's acknowledgement and awareness of the western influences in her life. But the references also serve to emphasize the virtual absence of African women writers with whom Medina can share a common voice to speak their own truth - for "Truth must be owned" (p.71). This truth would reflect women's historical shadow where they would no longer be relegated to the ghost-like state of Otherness:

And Medina reminded herself that she was a *guest*, that she should behave herself. In the background of the silence there was a reminiscence. Faint voices of a part: Europe, in this hall of mirrors, was talking narcissistically on and on and on and on, whereas Africa was the ghost which never cast back an image, Africa was the spectre without a shadow to reflect, without substance. (p. 207-208)

Yet Medina is very aware of the important African influences in her

life as she uses an example from African literature although creatively reinterpreting it to correspond to a female perspective. Medina takes a folktale found in Achebe's Things Fall Apart and invents her own title to give meaning to the relationship between gender and language. In the Ibo tale, a tortoise is claiming a false identity; it is speaking for others and Medina has entitled it "He" to symbolize how language is dominated by "others", specifically the male voice that assumes to speak for everyone. By imaginatively reconstructing the form, Medina is able to give articulate expression to a new way of viewing the world and in the process attempts to negate the language which has imprisoned women in a false identity. By introducing the Achebe tale as well as referring to numerous western writers, Farah assumes a specific African readership and in the process, is perhaps questioning what African writers should be doing. Farah uses the Achebe tale to signify how important it is not to let others speak for you, others who claim to share your interests but are only out to exploit you. The tortoise, who is "everyone", resembles the General: "Our dear General: thou art blessed: blessed be thy script: blessed by the Peoples' name, Amen!" (p.125) But Medina continues to mark her own walls with the warning "He is not all of us". Although Farah may be implying the need to write in one's own national language (Medina as translator) as a means of reclaiming a lost identity, he could also be alluding to the patterns of male/female language which are symbolic and metaphorical rather than verbal and linguistic. "He" has enforced on women a type of language that is not their own, and they must learn to speak other languages (Medina as multi-lingual) in a patriarchal society to free the appropriated soul from its otherness. Medina reconstructs imaginative ways of seeing - and saying - things as her function mirrors that of the writer whose purpose is to

imaginatively project a vision, with a carefully chosen language, onto the audience. Achebe's Ibo tale lays the foundation but Medina has "superimposed a tapestry of patterns" (p.2) that does not exclude the specific experiences of the African woman. And although many of the women's experiences described in Sardines are tragic, the writer herself creates a positive vision for potential change.

Farah sets his novel in a specific political and social context to portray realistically the multicultural elements of Somalia whose Arabic, Italian, and American influences are represented by the various characters who interact with Medina and who serve as metaphorical representations of the different types of power that have sought to impose their will and their ideological vision on the Somali psyche. Medina, in an attempt to negate these influences on her own life, tries to reconstruct the "architecture of her thoughts" in order to control her own destiny:

She would allot a room to each of the names which had presented themselves to her. She would do that before the *idee-construct* fell on her like a house of cards. But did she have enough rooms, did she have the space? Would she allow anybody to shift the furniture about, change, say, the position of a chair or a table? Would she let anyone make alterations in her plans or for that matter suggest she changed the menu for the day or the week? Would she consult anyone while ordering anything? And who would have access to all of this? Who would the *guests* be?

A room of one's own. A country of one's own. A century in which one was *not* a guest. A room in which one was *not* a guest... (p.2-3)

The allusion to Virginia Woolf's A Room Of One's Own evokes the situation of Medina as writer who must not only possess the physical preconditions for creating (time and space: a room of one's own), but must possess the mental condition in which she steers her own passage through history.

Virginia Woolf's text, like Achebe's, provides guidelines for Medina, but as a woman writer in a colonized country, she must "superimpose a tapestry

of patterns" to put forward not only the female perspective, as she has done with the Achebe tale, but an African-centred female perspective that does not reflect western women's experience or situation. In A Room Of One's Own, Woolf discusses the preconditions that are necessary for women to write and she cites how women must subvert the content and the form (the language) they use by rejecting both "Milton's bogey" and "the angel in the house". Medina uses the image of the patriarchal General/government as "Milton's bogey" which has literally censored her by firing her from her job as a journalist and forbidden her to publish her writings inside the country. Her voice has been silenced. But in true patriarchal fashion, "He" has not taken her that seriously for she was not imprisoned as a man in her situation would have been. She is relegated to live out a marginalized existence in the private, censored, purdah-like world of women, denied access and power to the coloniser/patriarch's realm. This world resembles a sardine tin of claustrophobia and anonymity. Like Shakespeare's sister who "died young - alas, she never wrote a word. She lies buried where the omnibuses now stop, opposite the Elephant and Castle",⁴⁴ Medina remarks on the lives of many women, like the poor, who are buried in unmarked graves outside the Muslim cemeteries. With her words, Medina is trying to make visible the silent and censored women who are potentially able to "write (their) name into history", not "out of it heavy-handedly" (p.52). The censored Medina, deprived of ^a job and living temporarily in a room not her own, proceeds to translate for her daughter, translations which signify female experience that require "slight alterations as to where the chair should be positioned, where the curtains should be drawn" (p.250) in order to correspond to a specific African female-centred reality.

Medina is engaged in a power struggle against both patriarchal and matriarchal figureheads who are depriving her a room of her own. She strategically moves out of the house she owns because her husband has taken a government job as Minister of Constructions (where the furniture would not change) and she knows this will incur the wrath of her mother-in-law:

Was she afraid of the scandal? It wasn't her own mother and, in any case, she had parted with this woman's son, her husband. "The General's power and I are like two lizards engaged in a varian dance of death" - the emphasis on power and not on the General: power as a system, power as a function. Was Idil part and parcel of that power? The sky would fall in on anyone who upset a pillar of society - in this case, Idil. So Medina would go about with care; they were like monitor lizards in combat, each dancing the tango of its strategy, chest to chest, face to face... (p.52)

Just as Medina rejects "Milton's bogey", she also rejects "the angel in the house". Idil could represent an African version of Woolf's devastating image of femininity that perpetuates women's own powerlessness. Just as the angel in the house can only exist in relation to Milton's bogey, Idil's matriarchy can only function within the patriarchal structures of the State. Idil's matriarchy is a falsification of true female power and like patriarchy, it contributes to the oppression of all individuals. As Idil plans to circumcise her granddaughter and manipulate her son's life, Medina realizes that this angel, so revered by society, must be destroyed. Medina becomes the structure upon which "each had a story to tell. *Idil and the General were the absent conveners*"(p.248) who would attempt to weaken and marginalize her in her "journey to the acceptance of roles..." (p.250)

But the journey to define these roles is by no means devoid of complications and pitfalls, especially when there are no paths to follow. Farah creates opposing pairs of characters within the intellectual debates and poetic patterning of his novel to call attention to the fluid nature of

change which cannot be structured into fixed, rigid categories. He uses the relationship between Medina and her daughter, Ubax, as a means of raising certain questions regarding the limits of imposing one's own structured guidelines on others - guidelines that risk being turned into ideological dogma as constrictive as the General's and Idil's vision of reality. Ubax is Medina's creation, her "delight", "obsession", "joy", "pain", "life", "death" (p.11). Medina tries to protect Ubax from an unhappy childhood, from the pain of being circumcised and subjected to the tyranny of "unwritten laws":

Ubax's concert of moods, her symphony of needs and desires, the variations she could play at only eight years of age were worthy of a maestro. Her own father had once said; "A flower chokes on the bountiful waters which surround it. Too much of anything in the end smothers, too much of anything kills. Don't you know when love ceases to be love? You must leave breathing space in the architecture of your love; you must leave enough room for little Ubax to exercise her growing mind. You mustn't indoctrinate, mustn't brainwash her. Otherwise you become another *dictator*, trying to shape your child in your own image..." (p.14)

Medina gives her daughter a certain freedom to say "no", to define herself as she wants: "So she took a perverse pleasure in hearing her daughter's refusals, her well-articulated challenges stated in the frankest language and without fear, her defiances uttered plain as truth and her angry "No" (p.15). But paradoxically Medina uses language as a means of excluding Ubax, of "protecting" her from ideas she thinks she is not old enough to handle. Medina constantly talks in foreign languages which angers Ubax, and Medina prohibits her daughter from playing with the children on the streets because of their "filthy language". By using language to control Ubax, Medina is denying Ubax an important kind of independence. She is imposing her will on another individual and limiting her experiences in the real world. Although Ubax is a child and needs guidelines, Farah sees the

risk of Medina destroying what she is attempting to form. Ubx is an embryo, as fluid as a water lily who must be left to breathe in the water of her environment if she is to survive. Just as Medina, the mother, cannot overly determine her daughter's life, Medina, the writer, cannot let her ideas about the nature of language freeze into an ideological dogma that would be divorced from an ever-changing, fluid reality. Farah constantly juxtaposes Medina's interactions with Ubx with the "room" metaphor which situates Medina in the process of creativity, an open and spontaneous process:

The world was a room. And it was the state of the room, whatever its shape, in which one drew breath and had one's most private or creative thoughts, it was the state of the room that determined the mental state of the person in it. She looked up at the ceiling, contemplated the open window and the blue sky, and reminded herself that this wasn't actually her place, that she was here *temporarily*. But why didn't she like it? Didn't she have the bare minimum? A few books she hadn't had time to read, a few toys thrown here and there. No, it was very orderly; this house was too bare. It wouldn't give anyone the change to lose anything in it so that looking for what was misplaced one might accidentally discover something very precious which one was not searching for. One couldn't arrange one's thoughts, shuffle them like a deck of tarot cards and deal out precisely the hand one had in mind... (p.17-18)

Out of the bareness, the silences, the imagination must grow wings and fly (p.15) in new directions. The woman writer must not remain a guest in a foreign ideology - in any ideology - for she must defy the temporality of a tradition not her own and create her own "nest":

Employing her language of symbols and metaphors: *She left to dwell peacefully in a notion, find a home in it, a home to which she could bring life's treasures like a bower bird other birds' feathers, a room that she could call her own and in which she was not a guest; a home in which her thoughts might freely wander without inhibition, without fear; a home in which patriarchs like Gad Thabit and matriarchs like Idil (whom she saw as representing the authoritarian state) were not allowed to set foot.* (p.242)

In addition to numerous bird metaphors, Farah uses water as a symbol

to emphasize the fluid process of movement and change as well to underscore Medina's rigid structure, often very "masculine" in its imposing and confident self-righteousness. Sagal, by opposition, is a swimmer who is likened to an indeterminate form, lost and without direction:

...Sagal, blind like a cave-fish, would swim in the pools of an unplanned future. Her moods, her thoughts, her likes and dislikes would unpredictably give way to furies, rages, changes of direction. (p.57)

Farah constructs her as representing the "feminine" counterpart to Medina; she is the "river (that is) synonymous with its water. I am a woman synonymous with subjugation and oppression" (p.58). She is critical of Medina's "timbered construction (that) has been invaded by white ants and so the structure of her dream has weakened..." (p.57-58). But she is also admiring of Medina's firmness and strength of resolve, something she lacks herself. The two represent the need to bring opposing forces together, to merge male and female qualities without enclosing and confining roles.

Whereas Medina's vision often seems fixed and rigid which could perhaps signify Farah's criticism of certain strands of feminism, Sagal travels "in a different direction" and has "a traumatic journey full of thorny byways and traps and betrayals"(p.249). She is "a half-child, half-adult" on the threshold of discovering she has her own story to construct. Towards the beginning of the novel, Sagal differentiates herself from a woman who dies in childbirth:

The focal point of my dream is always myself. I'm not Beydan. And I don't dream my own death, neither do I bewitch my rivals. The dialectics of my dream are such that I see the contradiction in the future I invent and what life's reality has in store for me. Besides, there is another door I haven't entered... (p.40)

But Sagal, who "never woke to reality when she dreamed", becomes confused and is forced to confront how the alien power, in the form of Wentworth

George, could imprison rather than liberate her. She has become pregnant and must make some crucial life choices, which are invariably political. When the opposition to the swimming competition is destroyed, the game isn't the same: Sagal's rivals become her allies as she realizes that the choice of winning through her body would be a false challenge, an "easy" win. Sagal felt "as if she were swallowed up by something bigger than herself, something 'enclosed', a room without a door, a road with a certain dead-end, 'a whale which never came ashore'" (p.234). Farah does not "close" Sagal's story but leaves it purposely unresolved, although there is a sense that she is waking slowly and entering that other door to discover the power of her own story, not narrated by Medina, which would give birth to a new vision and hope:

Now her future, it seemed, chose to separate itself from the rest; it stood out, giant as ambition, large as a dreamt wish, but like promised goods not yet delivered. She was telling herself the story - *her story!* A woman, without taking the necessary precautions, one night made love to a man she had not met before that evening. And then? A hesitant pause came after this. Had the well of her imagination run dry? Why didn't she continue? Her double told her other double that she shouldn't *judge* but that she should narrate; certainly, she shouldn't blame *the reason or the act* itself, for both were noble in themselves. Whom should she blame then? She intended to serve a cause...(p.116)

By narrating their own lives, their own individual experiences, women are creating a bond that will help them create a tradition of their own that forms a bridge with their pasts, a tradition in which they no longer have to be the guests.

Sagal's mother, Ebla, emerges in this novel as the reader is reminded of her story, narrated when she was a young woman and "inarticulate with self-questioning". Now her intelligence and independence testify to the fact that women are capable of overcoming the obstacles that have shaped

their lives and her relationship with Sagal is contrasted to Medina's relationship with her own daughter. Whereas Medina's creation seeks to be structured, Ebla recognises that her creation cannot be protected from the pain and humiliations of history. She does not seek to impose her will on her daughter but wants to give her support to Sagal:

"...I want you to be wiser than the history you read in books. Because I want you to see well in an ill-lit place. Because I want you to rise when meteors fall. Because I want you to take your humiliations like bitter medicine. I stand by you now. I will collaborate as much as I can... Your life, however, is your responsibility. So do with it what you please. Just tell me what your wishes are so I know. Teach me. Prepare me. Please. But do not torment me." (p.41)

Despite Farah's concentration on the "threatening and threatened" aspects of written resistance,⁴⁵ he constructs the character of Dulman, the illiterate radical Somali woman, the former "Lady of the Revolution", who now uses her underground songs to combat the General's regime and reclaim the importance of the oral tradition: "one can communicate with the hearts of the Somalis only through their hearing faculties" (p.170). There are many similarities to Ngugi's Wanja, for Dulman's collaboration with the government has made her sterile. She is a compromised victim, but not blind to her situation: " '... I suspect 'Dulman' as an adverbial noun meaning the victim'" (p.169). She is an actress who is surviving by pretending; her private world doesn't correspond to her public image: "Actors perform, they act: they pretend to be what they are not in real life" (p.166). Just as the actors must give back the gifts the audience has given them, Dulman has given a part of herself that cannot be fulfilled. But her fate does not seem as optimistic as Wanja's, and Farah portrays her as an ambiguous character whose obsession with procreating, with fulfilling the traditional expectations of womanhood, have closed the door on the other possibilities

open to her; "Medina had numerous open doors to enter, whereas Dulman waited for only one door, a door into and out of which a pram could be wheeled" (p.107). Perhaps Farah is asserting that written and oral forms of resistance must be combined, like the writing of Dulman's name on the wall. Just as women must learn to speak another language, they must not adhere to traditional forms of expression: women must subvert both male and foreign influences in their lives in order to superimpose that tapestry of patterns over Chinua Achebe and Virginia Woolf.

In addition to Idil representing a symbol of tyrannical matriarchal morality that complements the General's patriarchal stronghold, some of the other women whose stories Medina narrates expose the various negative possibilities open to women who seek access to power and speech. Sandra, the Italian, and Atta, the Afro-American, become metaphors for the foreign powers that collaborate with the regime to rob the Somali of his/her own voice. Sandra, a journalist, takes a job writing for the General in order to "write the truth", a truth she is oblivious to as her arrogance and ethnocentrism prevent her from questioning her attitudes. Her dishonesty and narrow-mindedness reveal how she can do nothing but "misname" history (she calls Uba, Ubah), but Medina finds it difficult to warn Sandra "of the ideological trap into which she had fallen" (p.207). It is through Sandra's actions that Medina confronts the otherness of her African identity:

Medina fell silent. She feared her voice would betray the resentment and jealousy she felt, a resentment and jealousy not so much addressed to Sandra but at the Africanness in herself, at her guesthood; if she could she would have annulled her with her fixed stare of hate. (p.207)

Sandra proceeds to conspire to have Atta expelled from Somalia. Atta, the naive Afro-American, is so mystified and trapped in her political ideology

that she fails to see how she is being used to perpetuate her own subordination. The promiscuous Atta is in a sense prostituting herself to a fate she cannot control. Both Sandra and Atta are trapped in a world of false assumptions and dogmatic ideologies and have no authentic voices of their own. It is up to Medina to expose "the farce" and articulate the stories of the African women who will forge a tradition of their own.

Farah has written a highly ordered, complex novel where he raises important questions about the contextual nature of African women's writing and posits some abstract and self-consciously theoretical considerations that no other male writer has undertaken. Yet his female constructions, always metaphorical representations of different types of women's otherness, are so exclusively "female", so painstakingly structured to correspond to a specific gendered reality, that they often become contrived and stylized to the point that the reader is aware of a certain mystification of female subjectivity. Farah, like Sembene and Ngugi, may show an interest in and sympathy towards women's lives, but perhaps women writers have a different kind of appreciation and understanding of female experience, and a different way of telling their stories, that makes their voices so important to be heard.

PART TWO

A WOMAN'S PERSPECTIVE:
LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY IN THE WORKS OF AMA ATA AIDOO

...a few people are waking up to the multi-faceted nature of human experience and even female experience...As an African woman, my responsibility, if any, to world consciousness, is that I bring my problems along to a discussion of world problems... Once you articulate the concerns from your environment meaningfully, someone is bound to hear you. If not a foreigner, then your own people are going to hear you. That is what is important.

Ama Ata Aidoo, 1986¹

The importance that Ama Ata Aidoo attaches to being heard by her own people not only reflects her interest in writing for a specific audience which does not exclude women, but it also affects her conceptualization of the language used to construct the experiences of her characters. Whereas Nuruddin Farah creates a metaphorical female to articulate the concerns of African women narrating for a room of their own, Ama Ata Aidoo does not have to project an imagined alterity: she embodies the female writing in a colonized context. A product of a West African education, which "was well-pruned to suit the colonial or neo-colonial environment",² Aidoo focuses on a realistic terrain that reveals a very deep sense of personal commitment and belonging to an environment that has shaped her consciousness. She comes from a family of highly politicized individuals, "a long line of fighters",³ and the tragic disruptions caused by colonialism and westernization which have alienated her from her community determine the social and political context in which she writes:

...there is no denying the pathos and the wonder of being an African (and a woman) with sensibilities that are struggling ceaselessly to give expression to themselves in a language that

was not just alien but was part of the colonisers' weaponry... There is pathos in writing about people, the majority of whom will never be in a position to enjoy you or judge you. And there is some wonder in not letting that or anything else stop you from writing. Indeed, it is almost a miracle, in trying and succeeding somewhat to create in an aesthetic vacuum.⁴

This "aesthetic vacuum" is the absent, negative space which Africans (and women) occupy, a mute space where they are unable to use a language that perpetuates their marginalization and otherness. Through her writing Aidoo, like Farah's Medina, attempts to question certain assumptions created not only by the colonisers but by her African male counterparts as well. The African female writer's dual task of subverting the forms and language through which these assumptions are symbolised reflects a process that is self-consciously resisting any kind of closure and which seeks to reflect a changing reality. The social and historical determinants of Aidoo's West African heritage have given her a specific linguistic tradition, similar to her West African male counterparts, but her consciousness of being a woman has produced a more gender balanced audience with whom she chooses to communicate. Aidoo resists all attempts to universalize her themes and audience and claims her greatest mentors have been "Chinua Achebe in that very obvious sense" and her mother who "'talks' stories and sings songs." She acknowledges the importance of African male writers, especially Ngugi, Soyinka, Achebe, Armah, but objects strongly to some of their portrayals of women.⁵ As Aidoo attempts to give voice to the various factors and sensibilities that have determined the (non) position she occupies in the "aesthetic vacuum", her discourse becomes the site of a political struggle that is in the process of inscribing an African female subject which challenges the existing African (male) and western notions of African womanhood.

Aidoo's writings are primarily directed at an audience of western-educated Africans like herself who speak and perceive themselves differently than the non-literate people of the community. In her two plays and anthology of short stories, which are set within a framework that resembles the traditional oral storyteller's structure, Aidoo captures the language of both groups in an attempt not merely to articulate the differences between traditional and modern ways of viewing the world, but to integrate oral literature and western literary genres. By doing this, Aidoo seeks to re-establish a sense of continuity in peoples' lives, intrinsic to the oral storyteller's role, that has been disrupted due to the rapid changes caused by westernization. And despite her consistent commitment to this goal of integrating form and content, of bridging gaps within a fragmented community, Aidoo varies the way she approaches her themes and audience. Her first novel, written and published after her plays and short stories, sees her implicitly questioning the importance of communal storytelling and indirectly challenging the ways in which both an African and a non-African audience can read and interpret her texts.

The different genres Aidoo has chosen in which to communicate with her audience cannot be confined to specific chronological periods for she began by simultaneously writing drama, poetry and short stories as a student in Ghana and claims she moves from one genre to another according to "the nut, the nugget of the idea".⁶ But the fact that she only wrote two plays in the early part of her career then abandoned the genre because she didn't like "bringing out a play in a book form before...(seeing) a production of it"⁷ reveals the preoccupations of a writer who has consistently grappled with the problematic relationship between written and oral literature, between writing for an audience that reads and writing for an audience that

listens. In 1986 Aidoo was able to say "If one considers drama as theatre, then it is very necessary that a play be given the benefit of the doubt as a production. You might as well write a novel or a short story if you are going to write something that will come out initially as reading material."⁸ But Aidoo admits she is "happiest of all with drama"⁹ and despite the specific economic and social reasons that have caused Aidoo to work within the more literary mediums, she has never lost sight of her oral traditions. And although Aidoo both loses and gains in changes of form, her choice of genre corresponds well to the specific themes and dilemmas she is bringing to her audience.

I. The Plays

In the mid 1960's, Aidoo's interests as an artist centred around the world of theatrical/communal production. In an interview in 1967 she said, "Give me a theatre...On a very small scale, I even thought of - of all things, setting up an African sort of kitchen with a restaurant for African food, and a kind of back yard - a kind of patio, where people in the evening would come and sit and tell stories, do plays, read poetry..."¹⁰ It is within this conceptual framework that Aidoo's two plays must be situated, plays that reflect the concerns of an audience who are asked to participate communally in the making of their own social history.

Aidoo was only 22 years old when her first play, The Dilemma of a Ghost, was first performed by the Students' Theatre, Legon, on the 12th March, 1964, at the University of Ghana, Legon.¹¹ It was published a year later by the Longman Group and since has been performed in Nigeria and other schools in Ghana. Aidoo's interest in oral literature, whether it be poetry, drama or short stories, has always corresponded with her call for a redefinition of these genres that would not "conform to certain accepted Western standards"; to Aidoo, oral literature should serve as "an end in itself" and the "speaking voice" should be the central vehicle for communicating with an audience, the written work a kind of back-up for those who could not participate in the communal entertainment.¹² The Dilemma of a Ghost sees this ideal in practice not only because it was produced before it was published, but also because it is situated within the particular framework of the dilemma tale, an oral art form of traditional African cultures. In defining the dilemma tale, Lloyd Brown states that it "usually poses difficult questions of moral or legal

significance ...(which) are debated by both the narrator and the audience - and on this basis the dilemma is a good example of the highly functional nature of oral art in traditional Africa."¹³ He cites William R. Bascom who explains the "adjudicative" function of dilemma tales:

They are prose narratives that leave the listeners with a choice among alternatives, such as which of the several characters has done the best, deserves a reward, or should win an argument or a case in court. The choices are difficult ones and usually involve discrimination on ethical, moral, or legal grounds. Other dilemma tales, which border on tall tales, ask the listeners to judge the relative skills of characters who have performed incredible feats.

...Like many other African folktales, their content is often didactic, but their special quality is that they train those who engage in these discussions in the skills of argumentation and debate and thus prepare them for participating effectively in the adjudication of disputes, both within the family or lineage and in formal courts of law.¹⁴

Aidoo seeks to involve her audience and she weaves their participation into the fabric of the play itself. Singing, dancing, arguing - all part of everyday life - are not isolated, passive spectator functions in oral literature as Aidoo challenges her audience to question the issues she raises and to participate in the naming of their histories. And her choice of the dramatic form rather than the tale here to express specific dilemmas stems from her desire to reproduce the linguistic diversity and spatial environment of a community so that the members of that community, Aidoo's "own people", may see their individual lives "acted out" and their social values mirrored in a way that the tale, told through one narrator, cannot capture to the same "lifelike" extent.¹⁵ The Dilemma of a Ghost reflects not one but several different dilemmas facing the members of the community and its success lies in its ability to be heard by that community. The authorial/storyteller's voice speaks to a familiar audience as the remote reading audience is denied the functional context of the play. It is not

difficult to see why Aidoo could not continue to use the dramatic form when the essence of this genre, more than the short story form, could not serve as "an end in itself".

The Dilemma of a Ghost opens with a prelude in which the narrator warns that "the Day of Planning is different from the Day of Battle."¹⁶ Disruptions are inevitable when a family sends their son abroad to study, and although on the surface this play is about one "been-to's" alienation from his family and himself, Aidoo is also making a profound comment on how the lives of women are affected by the changes occurring in their community. Their fears, hopes and desires are carefully woven into the structure of the play so that the day of battle within one domestic household cannot be separated from the future planning of the community as a whole.

The play begins with the homeless, unprotected Bird of the Wayside symbolically linking itself to the various characters who function as part of a chorus. There is the ghost of the main protagonist's, Ato's, former self (the Boy) who is never able to find its way, a ghost that links the past to the present and consequently replaces the lost and spiritually dislocated Ato at the end of the play to become "the trunkless head of the shadow in the corner." The Bird of the Wayside is linked to Nana, the grandmother, "the asthmatic old hag", whose endeavours to connect the ancestors to the living and the unborn are threatened by the "whitened bones" of the disrupter's world. The Bird of the Wayside also focuses on the pair of chattering neighbours who feel vulnerable and not quite "at home" with the roles assigned to them as women with - or without - children. The three generations of characters who establish both the strength of the community and its vulnerability to strangers, as the Bird

of the Wayside portrays, have no direct influence on the main action of the story and serve as a framing device which helps to establish the full meaning of The Dilemma of a Ghost. Yet they don't act as a chorus merely in a western literary context - as various parts of the collective personality that comment, warn and interpret the moral wisdom of the society. The ghosts of the boy and girl, the middle-aged women and the elder grandmother each have a further function within the community itself that operates within the framework of the traditional dilemma tale. The children, Nana and the two women pose questions that are intended to stimulate the audience's desires to apply the dilemma to their own personal experiences. And although the communal context within which Aidoo has set her play functions to reinforce the audience's values, Aidoo is also inviting the audience to gain a clearer insight into the dilemmas affecting women's lives, both within the traditional society and the West. By consistently upholding the function of the dilemma tale and its framework of non-closure, Aidoo neither gives answers nor attempts to solve the problems facing each of the characters. Her focus on issues concerning women's identities that have been glossed over or completely ignored by many African male writers indicates her resistance to the workings of ideology that imprison women in a particular set of meanings.

The central conflict in the play revolves around the meaning of child-bearing and Aidoo uses the two traditional gossiping women as a stark contrast to the black American wife of Ato, Eulalie, whose individualism scandalizes the community. But Aidoo doesn't simply use the women, who function as a chorus, to illustrate the differences between African and American women's values and life-styles. The two women themselves debate the merits of child-bearing and are in fact representatives of the

community's own evaluation of - and ambivalence towards - motherhood. Although the importance of children to the survival of the clan remains undisputed, and becomes even more significant when one sees what suffering the history of diaspora, symbolized through Eulalie, has produced, the two women present a different view of African motherhood than is portrayed in the allegorical and often idealized representations created by some male writers. The first woman bemoans the fate of her barrenness and explains in the colloquial rhythms of her language why being barren means not only loneliness in life but also loneliness in death:

My people have a lusty desire
To see the tender skin
On top of a child's scalp
Rise and fall with human life.
Your machines, my stranger-girl,
Cannot go on errand
They have no hands to dress you when you are dead... (p.36)

Despite the first woman's sense of deprivation, Aidoo has not denied her a strong voice within the community. It is the barren woman who is able to identify with Eulalie's position as outsider when she discovers the American is "barren". In one of the most compassionate speeches in the play, she finds the language to understand another woman's sorrow, a language revealing a life-giving strength that contrasts with Eulalie's speechless and sterile world of machines and alcohol:

For my world
Which you have run to enter
Is most unkind to the barren.
And for you -
Who shall talk for the stranger?
My daughter or my sister,
Whom I have never set eyes upon,
You will cry until your throat is dry
And your eyes are blind with tears.
Yes, my young woman, I shall remember you.
I shall remember you in the hours of the night -
In my sleep
In my sleepless sleep. (p.36)

Yet this identification is misplaced, a symbol of cultural misunderstanding, for it is not Eulalie's physical barrenness that leaves the American without a language by the end of the play but a spiritual barrenness, something outside the African woman's experience. As she sensitively asks "who shall talk for the stranger", the audience, drawn into the dramatic irony, is made aware of the culturally encoded significance of barrenness but also of one woman's attempts to define her subjective world that does not exclude, devalue or forget female suffering. She cannot talk for the stranger she has never seen, but she is able to speak for herself, her world visible to those who have chosen to enter.

The second woman who has children and recognizes their social and economic significance presents a completely unromanticized version of motherhood when she acknowledges she is overburdened with responsibilities and chores that enslave rather than enliven her: "But this is my curse." (p.5) The debate continues as Aidoo attempts to portray the ambivalence women feel towards motherhood, an ambivalence that reflects Aidoo's concerns with women's actual lives rather than male constructed myths of motherhood.

Nana, the old grandmother, emerges as an extension of the two women in her chorus-like function to warn of the changes that are disrupting the community. In the middle and the end of Act One, she is left alone on stage (the others departing after a discussion of her imminent death) to present her insights which reflect the traditional wisdom of the community. Although Nana takes part in the family's discussions, Aidoo develops her as a symbol of the community itself. She senses that the community is being threatened by wayfarers, by people who have no tribe: "Since I was born, I

have not heard of a human being born out from the womb of a women who has no tribe. Are there trees which never have any roots?" (p.11)

Aidoo's Nana has some similarities to the Naana in Armah's Fragments. Given the dates of publication (Dilemma in 1965 and Fragments in 1969) and Armah's dedication to Ama Ata, it would appear Armah's Fragments was written as a type of response to Aidoo's play although Aidoo claims she has no knowledge of this.¹⁷ Both stories have a grandmother, an alienated "been to" (referred to as "the traveller") who has a foreign girlfriend/wife, in each case, an African from the Americas seeking a "homeland", as well as an "involved" mother and sister and no visible male figurehead. Both Ghanaians have chosen a dying old woman as the moral voice advocating a return to traditional values in the face of the "silent danger" (Armah) or "wayfarers" (Aidoo) which threaten to disrupt the natural cyclical rhythms of the life-death-rebirth process. Aidoo's Nana forewarns of the darkness that seems inevitable since Ato has returned from the white man's land:

Yes, someone has tripped in the doorway, eh. One day the people in this house will commit murder. Do they not know that if the heavens withdraw their light, man must light his own way? But no, they will let us all lie in darkness. How will he find his way around this dark place should the ghost of one of our forebearers pay us a visit? (p.7)

And just as Armah's Naana is afraid to use her vision to have her soul "find its home", Aidoo's Nana, whose "tongue is as sharp if not sharper for her eighty plus", cannot find the language to communicate with her ancestors whose nest does not hang by the wayside:

Shall I tell them or shall I not?
Someone should lend me a tongue
Light enough with which to tell
My Royal Dead
That one of their stock
Has gone away and brought to their sacred precincts

The wayfarer! (p.14)

But Aidoo's Nana doesn't embody the same existential anguish as Armah's old woman. The play's dilemma tale structure leaves the moral issues open and invites the audience to participate in the construction of its meaning whereas Armah's closed narrative offers no such alternative. Armah's Naana asks "why should my wisest speech not be my silence?" whereas Aidoo's Nana refuses to be a passive victim defeated by Time. She rebukes her neighbours and Ato for expecting to find her dead (p.13 and p.7) and continues to play an active role in the perpetuation of her lineage.

It is the strength of the matrilineal voices that also distinguishes The Dilemma of a Ghost from Fragments. The women of Aidoo's play are not threatening, ambiguous characters but powerful, sensitive women intent on maintaining the family's unity and coherence. It is Esi Kom, Nana's daughter, who finds the means to communicate with Eulalie although they do not share the same language. At the beginning of the play the women reject Eulalie and appear very conservative. But by the end of the play when Nana's fears are confirmed as Ato's dilemma has reduced him to a wayfarer stumbling over his own shadow of indecisiveness, Esi Kom recognizes the inevitable changes in her community but does not blame those caught up in the rhythms of their daily lives. Signifying the community's vulnerability, Nana also represents a part of the process whose strength lies in its ability to give way to the accommodating wisdom of future generations - as illustrated by her daughter's final gesture.

Yet Esi Kom has not been able to help Ato who is left a "bewildered and lost" shadow in the corner. Amidst the more comic moments of The Dilemma of a Ghost, a tragic element in the form of Ato lingers. It is not the community's weakness that has produced Ato's dilemma but rather it is

the limitations of his own personality that force him to exchange roles with Eulalie as the outsider. Studying abroad has eroded his respect for his family and their values and ultimately deprived him of his own sense of self worth. Aidoo illustrates these cross-cultural conflicts by contrasting Ato's affected, ineffectual speech to his family's rich, meaningful poetic prose. He addresses his people with a pretentious lecturing air and gets irritable when they don't have the literate knowledge to know that there are black people in America. He often uses words like "heavens" and shirks responsibility by muttering "I don't know" and "nothing" often. He patronizes his wife and uses empty clichés that only perpetuate the misunderstandings between Eulalie and his family. He displays indifference to the financial hardships that have resulted from sending him abroad to study: "Moses" is unable to find that promised land... Considering that his wife could not speak the language of his people, his silence only reinforces his weakness, as his ineffectual expression depicts. Contrasted to the lyricism of his family's speech, his personal dilemmas appear secondary to theirs: they have, in effect, lost a son.

But Aidoo is not placing Ato's personal problems in a purely individualized context. By having lost the language to express himself, Ato has lost an important part of himself which Aidoo perceives as a crucial problem confronting young Africans today. The oral structure of the play forces the audience to consider the effects of acquiring "superior" attitudes and denying their historical determinants. The ghost symbolizes the young generation of a lost Africa, torn between past and present, its indecisiveness reinforcing its vulnerability. In Act Three, as the boy-girl chorus sing their song, the "wretched ghost" traps itself in its own

vicious circle not knowing what path to take. The boy represents Ato's former self, a part of his unconscious mind that needs to be integrated into his consciousness. But he could also represent a generation of Atos and the girl could signify a generation of females who potentially face the same kinds of dilemmas, as Monka's sauciness and reluctance to marry young exemplify. Through traditional songs and dances, Aidoo projects a vision in which the future is able to illuminate the present just as the females' dilemmas balance the males', and children awaken the old.

Throughout the play, Aidoo has manipulated the audience's sympathies into rejecting Eulalie for her selfishness and superficiality so the fact that Eulalie has been accepted at "the very source" (p.19) poses a surprise ending, all the more forceful because it raises important questions about the notion of sisterhood and one woman's attempts to embrace another, although they do not share a common language. Why was Eulalie brought into the community? Did Aidoo purposely employ "the archetypal New World black in search of West African roots"¹⁸ to pose, to a West African audience, that women's differences are culturally specific but racial affinities supersede these differences? In one of her recent interviews, Aidoo states that she has always been interested in the African diaspora and accepts Toni Cade Bambara's assertion that "'...bridges need to be built among sisters of the African diaspora and among sisters of colour'."¹⁹ If "that issue is something that cannot be considered dead. It has hardly been touched",²⁰ perhaps Aidoo would be the first to criticize her stereotyped characterization of Eulalie and the unconvincing Black American "dialect". Although western readers may understand Eulalie's refusal to have children (yet was it more Ato's decision?), the West African audience may see her selfishness and arrogance as a fixed cultural symptom rather than a

reflection of her fragile and vulnerable state of mind. Obviously Eulalie's coke-drinking, to use one example, is an easily recognizable symbol of American culture that Aidoo employs as a shorthand for her audience, but more developed examples of Eulalie's alienation and loss of language would have helped situate the victim of diaspora in a more convincing historical context.

Yet Eulalie's presence on stage may compensate for some of these shortcomings for the contrast between her self-consciousness of being black as illustrated in her private memories of cursing her face in the mirror (p.20) and the African women's lack of racial awareness - and shame - is striking. Whereas the deflated Eulalie consumes machines and alcohol to alleviate her loneliness, the barren woman's loneliness is channelled through a language which gives her an expansive presence on stage. The play's pathos and realism, as well as its dilemma tale structure, bring the audience into a space in which their participation reduces the distance between actor and listener, between insider and outsider. The dances, the games and the sounds of the different "languages" give voice to the everyday experiences of a people trying to determine their positions within a world that is constantly "running forward, forward, forward..."

Aidoo's second and last play, Anowa, was first performed in the early 1970's, after its publication in 1970. She takes pleasure from the fact that both her plays are still performed today in schools throughout Africa,²¹ and she was in London when Anowa made its London debut in the Spring of 1991. The play examines historical events and legends born from

them in an attempt to illuminate the moral dilemmas that have shaped the consciousness of Aidoo's people. Although Anowa cannot be placed in the specific tradition of the dilemma tale, its oral structure is still intended to provoke the contemporary audience into responding to the events and moral insights, and in many ways, it is a much more complex and disturbing play than The Dilemma of a Ghost.

The play weaves together many different tale motifs drawn from Aidoo's personal and communal storytelling experiences. She borrows Anowa's name and certain moralistic elements from the "classical African folktale that is virtually common to all African micro-nations about a girl who goes against the wishes of her people and marries a man whom they don't approve of." Aidoo continues in her storytelling fashion:

There are literally as many versions of this tale as there are African villages. In some places, the man turns out to be a python who threatens to swallow the girl up. In virtually all the stories when they walk out of the village, the path closes behind them and she cannot go back. And the man becomes a python, a leopard or a skull, and there is usually a pit or a cave in front of her into which she disappears...In some of the traditional versions, she comes back, but in my play, it would have gone against the grain of her personality. She is not one to buckle down and say 'now I'll go back.' Although in fact after her death, they threaten to take her body back to her parents which ties up the whole thing traditionally.²²

This folktale is used in various ways by other writers, including Tutuola in The Palm Wine Drinkard and Armah in Two Thousand Seasons. But Aidoo also gives credit for her own Anowa to a song, based on a regional tale, that her mother sung her as a child. It was another didactic tale about a destroyed marriage and the need "to watch what you say privately and publicly to people". Aidoo said "this notion of something between a man and a woman in the privacy of their home eventually deteriorating into a public washing of dirty linen" both intrigued and bothered her a great

deal and grew in her mind "until it took the form Anowa is."²³ Aidoo claims that her mother cannot recognize the story she originally told,²⁴ but it obviously planted the seed which gave birth to Aidoo's own creation:

The woman in the story had a different name...(and) had been in a kind of dispute with her husband. She accuses him of something she had to prove in public. She calls him dirty: something you don't do in a traditional environment. The man who was filthy rich took the case to the elders, and the case was subsequently blown literally out of all proportion. It became something the whole community got involved in. The man answered: 'ok, if you think I am dirty, then give me a bath publicly so that everyone will know that I am now clean.' And of course the notion of cleanliness in such a context has got all sorts of mythical and psychological implications. The woman knew by his reaction that the marriage was virtually through because, of course, no couple can go through that kind of drama publicly and still stay married. The woman cried and cried and asked to be forgiven. The story ended, according to my mother, with a marriage destroyed.²⁵

The suicides in Aidoo's play are her own idea and obviously have wider interpretive implications than the traditional cautionary tale. Although tragic, Aidoo's reconstruction focuses on a different kind of tragedy than the one Armah depicts in his Two Thousand Seasons. He erects the Anowa archetype as a symbolic representation of "one rememberer (who) herself lost speech before she could finish telling of that time, and there was none to give even a borrowed voice to what her dying body held."²⁶ The voice of Armah's "Anoa" becomes the collective unconscious of a suffering people as Armah weaves the original legend into an historical reconstruction that sees the female as a symbol of water, of regeneration and rebirth. By contrast, Aidoo chooses not to construct abstract images of history but prefers to explore the character of Anowa herself by going behind the myth to question why Anowa "lost her voice" and what the consequences of her unconventional behaviour were. Unlike Armah, Aidoo



gives Anowa a language of her own and attempts to demystify the legend that perpetuates a kind of condemnation of "knowing her own mind". Aidoo sees Anowa as a woman who is trapped within a narrowly ascribed female role and suffers under an oppressive (male) power structure. She examines what the legend doesn't tell us and tells us the legend from a female perspective. Aidoo juxtaposes the heroine's personal dilemmas against historical events and slavery in late 19th century West Africa to illustrate the parallels between women's roles and slavery, between the "girl in the folk tale" and "all the good men and women" who must not "try to forget."²⁷

The dramatic structuring of Aidoo's play contributes to the central meaning in that a series of arguments and counterarguments inform the action and expose the tensions between men's and women's conceptions of their relationship to power. The play is divided into three "phases": the "First Phase" is set in Anowa's village, Yebi, and establishes the traditional norms and values from which Anowa wishes to escape. The "Second Phase" sees Anowa and her husband "On The Highway" attempting to shape new identities, and the "Third Phase" marks the end of their journey of discovery in "The Big House At Oguaa." Within each phase, recurring "pairs" of various male/female characters voice their differences and establish their attitudes to change, attitudes which at times appear to contradict the physical proceedings in the play. Aidoo's thematic ordering of historical events with legendary interpretations and her structuring of dialogue within a dilemma tale framework create a dramatic impact directly linked to the oral tradition which inspires her art.

As in The Dilemma Of A Ghost, Aidoo opens Anowa with a symbolic framing device, but in this instance it is not a fleeting "Bird of the Wayside" that issues a warning but "The Mouth That Eats Salt and Pepper", a

symbol linked directly to the oral means of communication. The Old Man speaks of their history whereas the Old Woman speaks of the legend that connects Anowa to this history. Both serve as opposing yet complementary symbols in which The Old Man represents a progressive view of social change in which the errors of the past are recognized and a more humane vision of the future is perceived whereas the Old Woman symbolizes a stultifying traditionalism that never questions the structures of its own meaning. The Old Man eloquently opens the play by recounting the historical facts connected to his people's slavery: while citing the Bond Treaty of 1844 which legitimized European expansion on the West Coast of Africa and linking this to his own peoples' search for "protection against their own warring kinsmen from the North", he recognizes, with great shame, a "bigger crime" had been committed by the younger generation who insensitively perpetuated the slave trade that had been complacently tolerated by their elders. The Old Man situates Kofi firmly in this process but places Anowa outside of it: she is "not a girl to meet everyday". The Old Woman complements his wisdom by situating Anowa in the realm of myth; she is "something else! Like all the beautiful maidens in the tales". But unlike the reflective Old Man, the Old Woman rejects Anowa's individualism that threatens the traditional communal identity, a rigid and fixed identity which exposes female vulnerability in the face of male privilege.

Aidoo links the Old Woman's self-deception to the deceptive nature of myth itself and similar to Bessie Head, she seeks to reinterpret her history and the myths that inform it, but chooses to use females to represent the conservative force in the society. In "Phase One", Anowa's mother, Badua, dominates the stage with her cooking activities and succeeds in "stirring up" a lot of reaction from her passive, ineffectual husband

and strong-willed daughter whom she does not "want to behave like the girl in the folk tale" (p.15). Although Aidoo initially manipulates the audience into condemning Badua's "hysterics", she is also trying to show that behind her attempts to preserve the status quo lies an individual who is deeply ambivalent about her ascribed female status. She wants to protect her daughter from the "shameless" fate of priestesses who, "in the end...are not people. They become too much like the gods they interpret"; she wants Anowa to be "a human woman", one who will live as she has lived, "among the men and women of the clan" (p.12) so that her own self-worth can be verified. To have her daughter reject everything she embodies is to be told she embodies nothing of value. In the "Second Phase" when Badua hears of Anowa's "prosperity" and gets involved in another of her many arguments with her husband, she claims that before Anowa left, "she should have waited for me to tell her how to marry a man..." When she gets no response from him, she says "A good woman does not have a brain or a mouth" (p.33), a statement which seems to contradict her sense of self worth which is busily directing everyone else's life. But she clings to a false sense of security, the volume of her movements masking the silence of her "place" within a system that inhibits real female movement and growth. Traces of a self-conscious realization that a woman's life leaves something to be desired surface when she responds, quietly, to her husband's contention that Anowa's soul is "hovering on the outer fringes of life and always searching for something" with: "Who is not searching in life?" (p.33). As the Old Woman questions Anowa's right to "bring us new rules to live by" (p.41), Badua and the other gossiping women of the community perpetuate their own inequality by conserving the rules that give them no "brain or mouth". Afraid of being victimized and ostracized, "like the girl in the

story", they are critical of Anowa's pretensions to place herself apart. They distance themselves from those who threaten their order, yet their "hysterics" reveal the extent to which their defensiveness betrays their ambivalence as women. The Old Woman, voicing the most extreme condemnation of wayward female behaviour, blames Anowa for eating Kofi up, a "type of happening out of which we get stories and legends"(p.63). Presented alongside the Old Man's more considered opinions, the Old Woman, with her "shrieking", glaring, spitting and coughing stage antics, acts as a kind of dramatic device that allows the audience to see that she represents a dying breed, a symbol of traditional tales that need to be re-interpreted and placed in a more historically balanced context.

Kofi and Osam, who stand in opposition to the women's voices, illustrate how the system of male privilege functions with the society. As Badua complains and "stirs", Osam complacently smokes his pipe and refuses to take any responsibility for his daughter's fate. This is echoed through Kofi's actions: he complacently accepts an oppressor's "language" by asking "What evil lies in having bonded men?... (p.37). Unable to accept Anowa's "restless soul" and "unfeminine" desire to "be on the roads", he tries to contain her "strong ideas" by pronouncing that once he obtains slaves - and thus power - he will "be the new husband" and Anowa "the new wife" (p.27). Yet there is nothing new in Kofi's design: the parallel between his desire to own slaves and the desire to control his wife are the exploitative and destructive forms of power that contributed to the "bigger crime" the Old Man refers to in his opening speech. In "Phase Three", Kofi's new clothes and opulent surroundings, including an acquired fireplace and picture of Queen Victoria, attest to how much he shares with the white man's own system of exploitation. The sound of the horn at the beginning of the last

phase announces Kofi's personal declaration of power and indicates the extent to which he has turned his back on his own people:

Turn your face, the jealous!
Close your eyes, the envious! (p.43)

Unable to see himself in his own history, he loses touch with his true identity, his suicide being not merely a reflection of his failed masculinity, but of his failed humanity.

Kofi's ability to adapt to the changes around him are in stark contrast to Anowa's refusal to change. As Kofi's clothes get more elegant as the play develops, Anowa remains in her same pair of cloths throughout the play indicating her identification with the "slaves." Again, this action is undercut by the play's real meaning: Kofi is only able to accommodate himself to superficial changes. He is not a "new husband" any more than Anowa is a "new wife". Anowa's resistance to her husband's materialism is a testimony to her moral strength, not a weakness expressing fear to adapt to real change. She has always had a kind of self-consciousness that placed her apart from her culture's rigid conception of femaleness. In "Phase Two" when she is beginning to find a language to shape her identity, she angrily responds to her husband's accusations that she was talking like a woman: "And please, how does a woman talk? I had as much a mouth in the idea of beginning this trade as you had. And as much head"(p.29). But in "Phase Three" when she is wiser and lonelier, she laments the tragedy of not learning to be a woman, of not being able to think or talk as her culture instructs:

Someone should have taught me how to grow up to be a woman.
I hear in other lands a woman is nothing. And they let her know
this from the day of her birth. But here, O my spirit mother,
they let a girl grow up as she pleases until she is married.
And then she is like any woman anywhere: in order for her man
to be a man, she must not think, she must not talk. O-o, why

didn't someone teach me how to grow up to be a woman? (p.52)

Anowa has nowhere to go; she remains the archetypal wayfarer, "with no belongings either here or there" and is able to clearly articulate the link between female experience and slavery:

One can belong to oneself without belonging to a place. What is the difference between any of your men and me? Except that they are men and I'm a woman? None of us belongs. (p.36)

Women, like slaves, are defined as belonging to others; both the economic and psychological implications of this (non) relationship deprive them of an identity - and a home. Anowa may belong to herself but her tragedy at the end of the play lies in the fact that she has "nowhere to go". Her soul cannot find a home as the pit of despair swallows her up. Kofi's own "dirtiness" is not heeded by others who in the end lay it "at Anowa's doorstep"(p.63).

But the Old Man who possesses an understanding of his history does not assign blame; he sees Anowa as "the heroine in the story". His "outsider vision" corresponds to Anowa's wayfarer status as both characters embody the desire to rescue "the story" from its legendary, mythical status and give it some historical continuity so that it can be "true to itself". The Old Man's voice echoes Anowa's actions as Aidoo, through her own morality tale, warns her listeners of the consequences of ignoring their own history.

Aidoo's conceptualization of the staging of Anowa creates the effect of homelessness and establishes that the heroine's inability to be herself is the result of others forcing her on to the wayfarer's path. The Upper Stage represents the houses of her parents and her husband whereas the lower stage, closer to the audience, signifies the open road. The closed nature of the houses where Anowa's individualism is not tolerated contrasts

sharply to open, rambling space where Anowa's strength and restless spirit are not confined. This "openness" allows her to voice a new identity that gives shape to her moral integrity but ironically, it also denies her a means of finding a place, a context in which her language can be heard. Aidoo establishes the immediate audience as this context who, as "outsiders", are meant to legitimize the heroine's vision of enclosure:

People can be very unkind. A wayfarer is a traveller. Therefore to call someone a wayfarer is a painless way of saying he does not belong. That he has no home, no family, no village, no stool of his own; has no feast days, no holidays, no state, no territory...(wayfarers) are of account only when there are not freeborn around. And if they fare well among us, it is not so among all peoples. And even here, who knows what strange happenings go on behind doors? (p.37)

The audience witnesses Anowa in her privacy behind these doors where she sits "barefooted" and "forlorn", remembering the story her grandmother had told her of "her travels" on the open road. What her grandmother tried to repress bursts forth in the heroine's dream, signifying what resounds in the collective unconscious of a people:

I dreamt that I was a big, big woman. And from my insides were huge holes out of which poured men, women and children. And the sea was boiling hot and steaming. And as it boiled, it threw out many, many giant lobsters, boiled lobsters, each of whom as it fell turned into a man or woman, but keeping its lobster head and claws. And they rushed to where I sat and seized the men and women as they poured out of me, and they tore them apart, and dashed them to the ground and stamped upon them. And from their huge courtyards, the women ground my men and women and children on mountains of stone. But there was never a cry or a murmur; only a bursting as of a ripe tomato or a swollen pod... (p.46)

Anowa finds the language to give birth to the consciousness of a victimized race and sees herself as a symbol for Africa itself, brutalized and silenced by a history of oppression and exploitation: "...any time there is mention of a slave, I see a woman who is me and a bursting as of a ripe tomato or a swollen pod"(p.47). Aidoo's striking imagery here illustrates

how her construction of female subjectivity differs to her male counterparts' use of woman as allegory: instead of woman becoming an image, being born from an abstract idealization of "Mother Africa", Aidoo's image is born from a woman, denoting Anowa's subjectivity is structured through her dream language. The audience is forced to focus on one woman's reality and the language through which her (female) experiences are articulated, not on a symbolic representation of woman as a particular set of experiences.

That this nature of female subjectivity is determined by a social process becomes apparent when the audience encounters the slave girl who resembles Anowa "of a long time ago". She appears on the Upper Stage after "the voices of an unseen wearied multitude being to sing 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot'" to echo Anowa's dream of slavery and suffering. She is full of vigour and a kind of spiritual freedom as she flirts with the slave boy who is obviously attracted to her carefree beauty. The Girl recognizes Anowa is "like a ghost, talking to herself" but identifies with her. Aidoo establishes her as the innocent, naive young Anowa who had not yet grown up to realize the implications of her female/slave status. She does not understand the implication of Anowa's lament to herself "'O my husband, what have I done, what have I done'" (p.49) as Aidoo alludes to her own childhood story-song that gave birth to this play about how (not) "to grow up to be a woman". As the presence of the "wizened" Anowa with close-cropped hair contrasts to the freedom-seeking young "Anowa", the martyred heroine acknowledges the historical link she has with the Girl:

You said it right, my child. But the elders gave the ruling before you and I even came: 'The string of orphan beads might look better on the wrist of the leopard but it is the antelope who has lost his mother.' (p.51)

Deprived of the right to work by her "dirty" husband, Anowa is not even able to re-claim her road: ... "going away is one thing. Being sent away is another" (p.56). Anowa has lost her language, her "most ordinary words have ceased to have any meaning for me" and she regresses into a giggling childish world since she has "gained nothing from behaving like a grown-up all my life" (p.58). Anowa's tragedy is that she has gone unheard. Anowa is more than a tale about slavery and the way men and women are confined to - and perpetuate - the systems that shape their lives. It contains a wider vision that could be linked to the use of the Antenteben in the play. This "single, delicate but wild wind instrument", a symbol for Anowa, contributes to the effect of homelessness and isolation but implies a life-giving source, fragile but constant, "wailing in loneliness", marking the end of the Old Man's words but opening the way for the audience's response. Aidoo's dramatic form and its link with the oral storytelling tradition suggest that it is the audience's responsibility to rescue Anowa from her isolation, to acknowledge that "the girl in the folktale" cannot be divorced from the historical continuity that links past to present, tradition to change. Although Anowa's body is returned to its traditional enclosure, her "spirit" returns in Aidoo's subsequent works and "certainly (does have) something to say" about the possibilities for wayfarers on the open road.

II. THE SHORT STORIES

"...I pride myself on the fact that my stories are written to be heard, primarily."²⁸

Aidoo's conceptualization of her short stories as a kind of oral performance indicates the extent to which the oral tradition of storytelling has influenced the way she uses the literary medium to expose the conflicts between western and traditional ways of perceiving reality. Her short stories, many of which were written around the time of her plays,²⁹ reveal her constant interest in involving her audience in the framework of the constructed narrative. Although Aidoo would love to see her stories translated into Fanti and "taken into the villages to be told",³⁰ she writes mainly for the western-educated African who, as in her plays, is manipulated into responding to the issues the storyteller raises. The skill with which Aidoo incorporates the oral dilemma tale tradition into the short story genre is a tribute to her talent as a storyteller who wants to give her audience "a stage", a space in which individuals have access to a discourse that enacts the political nature of their everyday lives. Yet the audience is conceived on a more formal, removed level than in her plays and this contributes to the linguistic tensions and the conflicts borne from them. The audience, through reading or listening to a reading of her stories, are exposed to a modern, standardized English articulated by characters whose self-conscious expression highlights an awareness of their alienation caused by a westernized education. In contrast, the non-literate traditional men and women who speak in a colloquial manner unselfconsciously express the conflicts their traditiona'

roles as men and women have created. As in The Dilemma of a Ghost, Aidoo wants to convey the differences between modern and traditional realities as a way of establishing a historical continuity within a discordant community. The way she integrates the literate (western) and oral (traditional) mediums reveals the extent to which the form and language of her stories become the crucial determinants of her thematic concerns with the colonial legacy and the post-colonial, cross-cultural conflicts her characters - and audience - are required to address.

Aidoo's stories obviously do not have the same visual detail or striking climactic movement as her plays, but what they lose in physical effectiveness is compensated for by a subtle rendering of the complexity and diversity of individual voices trying to make sense of their fates. The short stories in the anthology No Sweetness Here, which were published for the first time as a collection in 1970,³¹ complement some of the themes concerning women's language and its relationship to their roles Aidoo explores in her plays. But the stories in the anthology, if taken as a whole, cover a wider range of human experiences and in many ways, reflecting the nature of story as oral performance, could be interpreted as a series of dramatic scenes with points and counterpoints presented to the audience for consideration. Aidoo's stories should be viewed in sequence reflecting the separate but unified strands of a society in the process of social, economic and political transformation.

The first story in the anthology "sets the stage" for the subsequent stories, and both thematically and structurally points to the fact that "everything counts". Aidoo claims this is the last story of the anthology to get written,³² and it is not difficult to see why she chose the story of a female "outsider" to frame the context in which the other stories are

told. Sissy, the archetypal "sister" who later appears in Our Sister Killjoy, speaks in a modern standardized English reflecting the nature of her western education that has given her a language with which she is able to articulate the insecurity she feels in relation to her "otherness" as well as the distance that exists between her male counterparts' and her own gendered reality. Sissy's self-conscious expression gives shape to her identity as an outsider, a process which Aidoo structurally mirrors in her subsequent stories: her use of language, in the process of becoming conscious of itself, gives shape to textual identities that are fluid and plural, outside standardized (western/male) categories of enclosure. As Sissy is unable to resolve the contradictions her own articulated African female identity has exposed, Aidoo refuses all attempts to resolve the written/oral linguistic tensions inscribed in her stories, tensions that highlight the multiplicity of voices seeking to be heard.

The story is told in a westernized narrative form which opens with a nameless young woman reflecting on the past when "she used to look at their serious faces and laugh silently to herself". Despite the closeness she felt to those whom she knew "as intimately as the hems of her dresses", the gazing female establishes a distance between herself and those for whom it was "so much easier...to talk about the beauty of being oneself". The female subject considers the constraints imposed by "them", the nameless others: "not to struggle to look like white girls. Not Straightening one's hair. And above all, not to wear the wig." (p.1) but is unable to do more than "laugh silently to herself" while acknowledging the difficulty of being oneself. She is identified as an African female only in relation to her sexual and racial otherness: she is not like "them", the men who tell her to reject western sexual images represented by the wig, nor is she like

the "white girls" who represent an idealized sexual image that the men hypocritically embrace. But it is not until she returns home that the narrator is able to find the language to articulate her awareness of what it means to be an African female in a cultural context that denies African women a sense of pride and self-respect.

When Sissy leaves her brothers behind and finds herself on her own African soil, she could not "believe her eyes". The wigs and bleached skins, like "a plague that made funny patchworks of faces and necks" (p.4), made her question the unreality of her homecoming. She felt a stranger, "the one *black* girl in the whole city..." But "wearing her own hair", she was going to confront her students and "tell them what was what". Yet the committed teacher, unable to recognize her own people, is left alone and vulnerable, faced with the contradictions and bitter expectations of one who has been betrayed. Wondering if "she was in another country", she becomes fixated on the national beauty contest and is forced to accept that her people have betrayed themselves: "The winner. The most light-skinned of them all. No, she didn't wear a wig. Her hair, a mulatto's, quite simply, quite naturally, fell in a luxuriant mane on her shoulders..." (p.7) The silent laughter becomes the vomit of disgust as she questions what value her education has given her as a woman and what meaningful role she could play in her country's development.

Aidoo introduces the wig, along with other "second-hand machinery from someone else's junkyard" to symbolize false western values and a woman's betrayed sexual and racial identity. Although her male compatriots on the foreign soil were the first to point out that the wearing of wigs "means we have no confidence in ourselves", they were not ready themselves to "give up those aspects of their personal dream which stood between them and the

meaningful actions they ought to take". Aidoo exposes a bitter "war of the sexes" intensified since "the old days" that leaves women defensive and insecure, the men threatened and angry. But the ironic self-awareness of her isolation in the opening of the story turns to a fully developed recognition of her alienation on her home soil as she sees what the wigs and bleached skins - the masks of female denial- mean to her people. Sissy, named by her brother, is at first defensive of her brothers' self-righteousness, but soon recognizes the distance that separates her experiences from theirs: as they find excuses to remain abroad, she finds a language to expose the hypocrisy of those who are afraid to confront "the ropes with which we are hanging ourselves"(p.6).

The fact that "Everything Counts" is the only story in the anthology written entirely from a narrative viewpoint using standardized English illustrates Aidoo's attempt to frame the context of her stories within a western linguistic structure. But this structure is neither inflexible nor exclusive as Sissy's narrative reveals. Constrained by the historical determinants that have imposed the western framework, Aidoo subverts the narrative so that Sissy, in becoming conscious of the male and white constraints imposed on her, articulates an identity that neither resolves nor fixes her relationship to her sexual and racial otherness. The story closes with an ambiguous reference to "the other thing about the revolution", implying that movement, change and new ways of being are yet to be defined. Aidoo's subsequent stories address this process of defining that does not exclude men but clearly places the African female on centre stage.

By implicitly questioning the framework of narrative construction - and closure - Aidoo opens up the space for many different kinds of voices

that reflect the disparate, fragmented nature of Africa itself. The second story, "For Whom Things Did Not Change" sadly illustrates the gap between the western-educated African and the rural people who have not benefited from westernization like their post-colonial "masters". As Aidoo uses different kinds of language to illustrate the different narrative perspectives, she exposes how the confusion of sexual roles, articulated by Sissy in the first story, is perceived by male characters. But the insertion of a female voice disrupts the urban/rural male dialogue and establishes a presence that signifies the limitations of the male perspective.

The language of the western-educated doctor contrasts with Sissy's reflective monologue in the opening story. Although both "outsiders", Kobina does not speak with the same degree of self-consciousness or self-irony as his female counterpart. Like Sissy, he gradually begins to understand the implications of his western education but never articulates an awareness of his vulnerability precisely because his privileged male status does not demand it. Kobina's self-assured educated tone establishes the distance that exists between himself and his man servant as he expresses his impatience and resentment at being likened to the exploitative white man:

'I'm mad but I think I'm sane enough not to drink pressed, homogenized, dehydrated, re-crystallised, thawed, diluted and heavens-knows-what-else orange juice, imported from countries where oranges do not grow, when I can eat oranges.'

'What you say, Massa?'

'Never mind, Zirigu.' (p.15)

Kobina's language is characteristic of the politically aware but existentially anguished young men who grace the pages of Armah's novels.

Their language of alienation seems naive and passive, unaware of its ability "to make a difference":

There should be something said for open spaces. And yet what? Nothing. It should be possible that if one can see several miles out in front, into the distance, one should be able to see into time... There are as many cramped souls around here as there are among the dwellers down there. In the thick woods and on the beaches. Like everyone else the poets were wrong. They lied. But Zirigu is alright. And so is his wife, the Mother. They are alright, like all of us. Alright. I only hope that one day, they will learn that we are all the same...
...And yet, here I go again, old yam has to rot in order that new yam can grow. Where is the earth? Who is going to do the planting? Certainly not us - too full with drink, eyes clouded in smoke, and heads full of women... and our hearts desiring only nonsensical articles from someone else's factory... (p. 20-22)

This monologue contrasts with Sissy's self-reflections but she is unable to speak of "we"; she uses the lonely "I" which reflects the battle she faces alone. Kobina seems unaware of what he represents to others, and even when he is able to articulate the confusion over Zirigu's sexual identity, he does not stop to consider his own position in the scheme of things:

When a black man is with his wife who cooks and chores for him, he is a man. When he is with white folk for whom he cooks and chores, he is a woman. Dear Lord, what then is a black man who cooks and chores for black men? (p.17)

As Kobina and Zirigu attempt to bridge the linguistic gap that represents their different tales of survival and "independence", Setu's own voice is inserted to present a female perspective which is acutely sensitive to the abuses of male power. In the colloquial rhythms of their language, the old couple speak of their history, Zirigu displaying a more resigned attitude than his wife who is filled with anger and a desire to protect those most vulnerable to their community's (un)changing fortunes:

'O Allah, what times we live in. What rulers we have. How can men behave in this way who are our lords?'
'Mm. Was it different in the old days, Setu my wife? Did not the lords take the little girls they liked among the women?'
'Zirigu, I do not know. I'm sure you are right. But Allah has made it so. All women are slaves of our lords. These new

masters are not Believers. It is not Allah's will. And they are shameful acts.'

'But my wife, what are you saying? When a man is your lord, he is your lord...When the white men were here, did he not do the same? Sleep with very little girls, oh, such little girls?'

'I do not know, Zirigu, I do not know, my husband... Yes, I saw some of these things, when those people were here...'

'I do not know Zirigu, but it is certainly good that all my children are boys. It is good I never had a daughter. Because if I had a daughter, and I knew a big man was doing unholy things with her, then with a machete in my own hand, I would have cut that big man to pieces myself! (p.10-11)

Setu's repetition of "I do not know Zirigu" establishes both the ritualized context of the couple's oral exchange and the traditional role of female deference. But the fact that Aidoo constructs a female argument within a fixed, ritualized context suggests the subversive nature of Setu's traditionalism. The audience learns, through Zirigu's story, that Setu helped her husband regain a sense of his own identity in the face of degradation and humiliation: "We should never forget who we are, that's all"(p.29). But in the narrative exchange that is not mediated by a male voice, Setu's language of anger and discontentment gives shape to an identity that will not let her forget that she is a woman "for whom things did not change", a woman who has suffered - and is still suffering - from the economic and social implications of that reality.

As the story closes with Zirigu questioning the meaning of "Independence", the ambiguity recalls Sissy's reference to the revolution, to the need to change those structures which contain the pain and anger of a denied independence. Setu's female perspective provides a kind of "third dimension", a depth and sense of immediacy to a story about men's confused relationships to power and women's vulnerability in the face of this confusion. Despite their worlds being as disparate as Kobina's and Zirigu's, Setu and Sissy share a specific kind of (female) isolation that

is connected to this vulnerability. Aidoo develops this theme more fully in the title story of her anthology, but the ordering of her stories reveal her own sense of immediacy in establishing the structures of male subjectivity which continue to be threatened by the subversive challenge of female difference.

"In the Cutting of Drink" is narrated entirely within an oral framework by a young man who has returned from the city to tell his elders about the search for his sister who left the village twelve years ago. There are no monologues by alienated western-educated Ghanaians speaking standardized English and the reading audience is made aware of its exclusion from the communal context of this story. The physical "cutting of a drink" and the narrator's direct speech to specific individuals, including his mother, establish a close - and closed - listening audience who share moral values that are distinctly at odds with the strange, alien world of western imports:

But my elders, I do not want to waste your time. I looked round and did not find my bag. I just fixed my eyes on the ground and walked on... Do not ask me why. Each time I tried to raise my eyes, I was dizzy from the number of cars which were passing. And I could not stand still. If I did, I felt as if the whole world was made up of cars in motion. There is something somewhere, my uncles. Not desiring to deafen you with too long a story... (p.30)

As the oral, communal audience is drawn in - and at times interrupts the story's flow by inserting personal comments, true to the nature of oral storytelling - the reading audience is left out, made aware of its formal function as Aidoo seeks to emphasize how distant the literate audience has become from its oral traditions. Aidoo doesn't need to insert an authorial voice to remind the readers of this distance, but chooses instead to

dissolve her own structural function in order to draw the readers in and establish a continuity with the oral, traditional culture from which they have become divorced. She does this by creating a sympathetic narrator who does not condemn or dismiss those at odds with his world but who is searching for a means to incorporate the outside world into his own.

The nameless storyteller is sharing with his own people, who represent a secure, morally well-defined, sheltered rural life, the events that took place in the city. He tells of his astonishment at the cars, the food, the lights, the disco - all symbols of the alien western culture - that he feels ambivalent about. In the city he found an old friend who initiated him into a new life style which made him feel terribly self-conscious:

'You know I cannot dance the way you people dance,' I told him.
'And how do we dance?' he asked me.
'I think you dance like the white men and as I do not know how that is done, people would laugh at me,' I said. Duayaw started laughing. He could not contain himself. He laughed so much his woman asked him what it was all about. He said something in the white man's language and they started laughing again. Duayaw then told me that if people were dancing, they would be so busy that they would not have the time to watch others dance. And also, in the city, no one cares if you dance well or not...

(p.34)

This self-consciousness is expressed by his recognition of that other language which mocks him, which "doesn't care", but which he must learn to imitate to prove his "manliness": "I hope I am making myself clear, my uncles, but I was trembling like water in a brass bowl"(p.35). Aidoo wants to show that his journey in search of his sister, Mansa, is a journey of masculine discovery where his morally intact perception of the world is shattered by the immoral, disturbing life he has encountered in the city. As he dances with the woman whose "lips with that red paint looked like a fresh wound"(p.36), he is both drawn to and repulsed by the flagrant

sexuality she represents. As his sexual desires awaken, his own vulnerability is exposed.

The narrator returns to the traditional context when he continually interrupts his own tale by self-confidently displaying his "manly" taste for drink, "Cut me a drink, for my throat is dry, my uncle..." (p.33). He has brought back to the village the knowledge that the other, once alien world, poses a threat to his developing masculine identity. Unlike Zirigu in the previous story who could "never forget who (he was)", this young man is exposed to the "unrestricted" women of the city who represent the breakdown of the traditional order where sexual roles are clearly defined. Their uprooted lives pose a disruptive, influence as well as an appealingly seductive type of sexual freedom because they break the traditionally restricted patterns. The storyteller, both structurally and thematically, represents the inevitable and ominous changes that are destabilizing the traditional community. The sister's promised return at Christmas indicates the hollowness of western influences for it seems unlikely she would be able to confront her people given the type of work that she is doing. Yet Mansa will always be their daughter, as the mother's emotionalism confirms, and her loss to the city is a loss to the community as a whole: "What was necessary was that even if Mansa was dead, her ghost would know that we had not forgotten her entirely. That we had not let her wander in other people's towns and that we had tried to bring her home..." (p.32).

Aidoo's use of the city as an alluring seductress seems to be a deliberate attempt to revise the well-used metaphor for she does not construct the women as destructive temptresses but rather links them to her narrator's own vulnerability by allowing him to sympathize with "his sister's" plight:

What is there to weep about? I was sent to find a lost child.
I found her a woman.
Cut me a drink...
Any kind of work is work...This is what Mansa told me with a
mouth that looked like clotted blood. Any kind of work is work...
so do not weep...
...Any form of work is work...is work...is work! (p.37)

Yet as he tries to defend his sister, whose own defensiveness reveals her awareness of what she has become, the community is not fooled by the hollow assertion that "any form of work is work..." The storyteller identifies with her pitiable position although expressing disgust for her flagrant sexuality, his own desires frustrated. They are both vulnerable to the city's exploitative, "uncaring" nature and she ends up neither seducing him nor destroying him for he returns to the village and "cuts a drink", affirming his allegiance to his people. But Mansa's relationship to her community remains more problematic, like Ebla in Farah's From A Crooked Rib. The brothers have a place to return to whereas their sisters could not be easily absorbed back into the traditional folds of the community. Mansa's spirit, like the archetypal Anowa, is condemned to wander aimlessly for her voice cannot find a home. Her brother tells his communal audience that he "found her a woman", an image left curiously open and undefined. Perhaps Aidoo leaves the last word with the "outside" audience who is left to consider what that womanhood actually entails - and what Mansa would have to say about it.

The rest of the stories in the anthology, except for the last story, are all narrated by female voices, voices that encompass many different perspectives from women of different ages and different backgrounds. Aidoo thus emphasizes the plural nature of female experience whose fluid expression challenges and undermines the rigid structures that seek to

restrain it. "The Message" does not depict a journey of sexual awakening but describes a journey of self-affirmation when an old village woman goes in search of her "only pot which had refused to get broken" by western technology. Yet, the literate audience is again forced to debate how the narrowness of the traditional society which circumscribes group perceptions makes the individual vulnerable to the fragmenting, destructive nature of western social relations.

Aidoo combines both oral and non-oral forms of language in "The Message" to contrast the way the grandmother, Esi Amfoa, speaks and thinks to the way the people in the city behave. The sensitive, caring old woman is forced to confront the alien European culture, full of its strange technology and unsympathetic, patronizing nurses, highlighting the conflict between modern and traditional values and life styles. Unlike the previous story where the young man returned home to tell his tale to his community, the old woman in "The Message" is seen leaving her communal base and travelling on the open road to the city, experiencing her isolation as it occurs, in the present tense, her immediate future threatened and insecure.

The story opens with an oral exchange which reveals that Esi Amfoa has received a "tengram" informing her that her only grandchild has been "opened up" in the hospital in Cape Coast. The old woman's incomprehension is shared ^{with} the villagers in her community whose repetitive language and colloquial rhythms establish the communal structure of her life:

'Look here my sister, it should not be said but they say they opened her up.'

'They opened her up?'

'Yes, they opened her up.'

'And the baby removed?'

'Yes, the baby removed.'

'I say...'

'They do not say, my sister.'

'Have you heard it?'

'What?'

'This and this and that...'
'A-a-ah! that is it...'
'Meewuo! '
'They don't say *meewuo*...'
'And how is she?'
'Am I not here with you? Do I know the highway which lead to Cape Coast?'
'Hmmm...'
'And anyway how can she live? What is it like even giving birth with a stomach which is whole...eh?...I am asking you. And if you are always standing on the brink of death who go to war with a stomach that is whole, then how would she do whose stomach is open to the winds?' (p.38)

Aware of the constant vulnerability of women's bodies, as the high rate of infant mortality and recurrent body imagery suggest, Esi Amfoa is distinctly repulsed by modern technology which represents destruction to her. She has heard bodies are "cut up" and used for "instructions" and her journey to the city is perceived as a kind of ominous pilgrimage marking "the end of (her) and (her) roots"(p.43). When she is on the open road, feeling ill, the smell of the lorry's petrol causes her to consider her own physical fragility and arouses feelings of resentment towards the others in her community who "make me feel as if I had been a barren woman instead of only one with whom infant mortality pledged friendship..."(p.42). Determined not to be seen as a pitiable old woman, she courageously goes in search of her granddaughter to return her to the traditional enclosure, "if the government people allow it"(p.39). The alien culture represents loss, disruption and unnaturalness: her only son Koja Amisa was a "sodja" killed in "the great war overseas" (p.40) and she fears having to bury his only daughter which would break the natural rhythms of the life and death cycle:

If I had been someone else, I would have given them all away before I died. But it does not matter. They can share their own curse. Now, that is the end of me and my roots... Eternal death has worked like a warrior rat, with diabolical sense of duty, to gnaw my bottom. Everything is finished now. The vacant lot is swept and the scraps of old sugar-cane pulp, dry sticks and

bunches of hair burnt... how it reeks, the smoke! (p.43)

This language of tragedy evokes the smoke-filled city that is coming into sight as Esi Amfoa's journey brings her closer to her inevitable death.

The lorry, as well as the telegram, images of western technology, represent a form of communication which have become part of the old woman's world. The communal exchanges and arguments in the lorry expose the villagers' attitudes to the city where old age is not respected, where "modern wives", "thin and dry as sticks", are useless because they cannot bear children "in a decent way", and where young men wear "hired or borrowed" suits while pretending they have jobs. The falseness of city life heightens the communal context of the lorry ride where the villagers support each other to the chorus refrain "o you drivers". The driver, who serves as a link between the village and the city, is portrayed as the old woman's guide to the new world. His care and respect for Esi Amfoa indicate that he is a kind of mediator and life-saving symbol.

At the hospital the language changes abruptly to standardized English as the nurses inhumanely and callously dismiss the old woman's feelings:

'You are looking for somebody and can you read? If you cannot, you must ask someone what the rules in the hospital are. You can only come and visit people at three o'clock.' (p.44)

Reading, rules and time-keeping, all alien to the old woman's world, here become the sterile symbols of a technological culture where even a person's name no longer has any meaning. The telegram's barren message illuminates the larger message that there is no communication between the two distinct worlds, as the juxtaposition of the two languages reveal. Aidoo's sympathies lie firmly with the resilient old woman who is "twinned" with her granddaughter, also named Esi Amfoa, "a tough bundle" (p.46). Their life-giving abilities contrast sharply to the patronizing, smug attitudes

of the nurses whose "starched uniforms" and "cassava stick" bodies aren't even worth anyone's wrath.

Yet the western technology saved Esi Amfoa's granddaughter - and ultimately saved the old woman as well for the telegram and the lorry brought her closer to her "last pot". Aidoo links technology to language itself: its meaning is determined by the social context in which it is used. The old woman initially perceived technology as destructive because of what she had "heard". But her experiences have proved otherwise and she is left questioning the traditional perceptions: "So they lay them in state even in hospitals and not always cut them up for instruction?" (p.46) The journey she embarks "alone" with nothing but a "little bundle" (p.45) gives birth to her own tearful identity as she tries "hard to rise and look at the only pot which had refused to get broken". "The Message" closes with an act of defiance and strength, connected to the traditional world which is vulnerable to the "life-denying" social relations in the city. But the sterile, restrictive language of the nurses is not able to undermine the humane, faith-restoring language of the driver whose ability to communicate brought the old woman closer to her roots.

Another old woman narrates the next story, "Certain Winds From The South", but instead of embarking on a journey that moves forward, M'ma Asana looks back over the tragic circumstances of her life in an attempt to find the strength to communicate tomorrow's fate with her daughter: "Show me a fresh corpse my sister, so I can weep you old tears." Aidoo, linking this character to the process of social change, conveys the tragedy of women's lives with a language that is perceived through the old woman's body. A type of womb imagery dominates this story: women are imprisoned by

the "pregnancy and birth and death and pain" cycle of their lives, but because of this, they have acquired a special sensitivity to the historical forces that are determining their fates. Like the old women in the previous stories, M'ma Asana recognizes the "pitiable" circumstances that have shaped female experiences, and her language of tragedy connects her to the other rural women whose constant struggles with the physical vulnerability of their femaleness symbolize a wider social malaise that threatens both their individual and communal identities:

...When there are no more pregnancies, there are no more births and therefore, no more deaths. But there is only one death and only one pain... (p.47)

Aidoo effectively juxtaposes the individual's dilemmas with the community's concerns, thus establishing both the private, personal nature of female experience, as witnessed through the use of monologue, and the historically and culturally-specific social process that has structured a woman's subjectivity, as established by the oral context of the story. M'ma Asana speaks with a language of the body that does not merely reflect her physical memories but which gives shape to an identity that connects her to her daughter whose physical resilience connotes a life-sustaining continuity that has not been destroyed. As in "The Message", this continuity is constantly being threatened and disrupted but is able to survive as Aidoo's stories rescue women from a fate that confines them to the silence of their individual pain.

The story opens with M'ma Asana surveying, through misty eyes, the barren landscape of her present existence as she feels "a sharp little ache, just a sharp little one (shoot) up from somewhere under her left ear". Aidoo subtly alludes to the hearing/listening function which is being threatened by the seeing/reading dimension of the outside world:

"'You never know what evil eyes are prowling this dusk over these grasslands..."(p.47). The survival of oral tradition, "full to bursting" with possibilities "in the old days" is now a barren pit of old memories, its natural cyclical rhythms disrupted by "certain winds from the south".

M'ma Asana constantly feels her life through her womb which has witnessed the birth of only one daughter and only one grandson: "The pit of her belly went cold. then her womb moved and she had to lean by the doorway. In twenty year, Fuseni's had been the only pregnancy and the only male birth...twenty years and the first child and a male!" (p.47-48).

Aidoo's economy of language and physical imagery point to M'ma Asana's intuitive grasp of her historical circumstances. Although she does not outwardly question the importance the traditional order places on male children, she is able to critically value what her role as a mother, a wife and now as an aging grandmother has given her: "Show me a fresh corpse my sister, so I can weep you old tears". She speaks to her sisters who share a common destiny. Since there are fewer pregnancies, the life-death-rebirth cycle has been threatened as her empty moving womb signifies.

The old woman blames the men of her husband's generation for deserting their community to go to the South but reluctantly accepts that the new economic reality leaves her son-in-law little choice but to do the same. This repetition of loss reopens old wounds that can only be understood in the context of her femaleness: "Then the news came. It did not enter my head, for there all was empty. Everything went into my womb. You were just three days old"(p.54). As she identifies with her daughter, she laments her destiny: "Is his family noted for males that rot? No, certainly not. It is us who are noted for our unlucky females, There must be something wrong with them... Or how is it we cannot hold our men? Allah, how is it?'

(p.51). Experiencing a burning awareness of her vulnerability as a woman, "the news was like fire which settled in the pit of my belly" (p.54), M'ma Asana searches for a means to rescue her daughter from a fate imprisoned by the language of her body.

Aidoo constructs a type of monologue where M'ma Asana recounts her past to her daughter who still sleeps. By having her talk to herself, Aidoo is emphasizing both the isolation and loneliness of the older woman's life as well as her determination not to let her daughter suffer the same pain. In pre-empting her daughter's reactions and questions by looking at the social and economic factors that have shaped her history, M'ma Asana is testing the validity of her language that is no longer confined to her womb, symbolic of an individual female pain. The self-consciousness of the wider determinants of this pain gives birth to a new way of understanding - and articulating - the specific forces which have shaped her daughter's life as well as her own. This wisdom gives her the confidence to tell her daughter the story of their lives, thus re-establishing the oral continuity that risked being subverted by the asocial implications of the monologue.

M'ma Asana is able to articulate a strong condemnation of her husband for "he need not have gone to be a soldier"(p.53). His competitive masculinity would not let him "sit by and have the other boys out-do him in smartness"(p.53) and M'ma Asana remembers how the impact of the shiny, pressed uniforms disrupted the villagers' stable identity as a community and marked the decline of the male's traditional role of provider. When he was sent off to war with "the German-people", the old woman, not able to understand the "Anglis-people's rule", intuitively grasps the absurdity of fighting "in other people's war"(p.54). But when she contrasts her husband's situation to her son-in-law's, she realizes the changes, in which

her husband's generation colluded, have now become much more ominous and destructive. The traditional community's entire means of survival is now threatened as famine - and barrenness - loom on the horizon. She is left with the knowledge of her daughter's strength and will to survive:

I had told myself when you were born that it did not matter you were a girl, all gifts from Allah are good and anyway he was coming back and we were going to have many more children, lots of sons...you had a lot of strength, for how you managed to live I do not know. Three days you were and suddenly like a rivulet that is hit by an early harmattan, my breasts went dry... Hawa, you have a lot of strength. (p.55)

Born with strength and still possessing it, the past and present linked, the daughter is able to give her mother something to live for. An awareness of the continuity between her own life experiences and her daughter's, experiences characterized by the female cycles of reproduction, has made M'ma Asana recognize the value of female children who will not let their mothers "rot". As the story closes with M'ma Asana preparing to make "a real good sauce", the audience is left with the stark image of two isolated women huddled by a fire on a barren landscape, tragically symbolizing the pain - and the resilience - of the female condition.

Whereas the two previous stories focused on older women's attempts to reaffirm a life sustaining continuity that was being threatened by disruptive western influences, the title story of the anthology, "No Sweetness Here", portrays two younger women's destitution and powerlessness at losing that tenuous human thread. The very sad story, which was "based on an actual happening about a woman who had a son who was bitten by a snake",³³ explores the relationship between a western-educated teacher, reminiscent of Sissy in the opening story, and a traditional rural woman who has nothing in her life except a beautiful son. Aidoo does not want to

apologize "too much" for her pessimism³⁴ and the fact that she chose "No Sweetness Here" as the title story of her anthology suggests its linguistic and thematic concerns make it the centre around which all the other stories revolve. Sissy's self-conscious articulation of her alienation in "Everything Counts" is now developed within a rural context, thus encouraging a comparison to Kobina in "For Whom Things Did Not Change". The storyteller in "In the Cutting of a Drink" also speaks in the first person - but to a different audience, and the title story indirectly poses "what might have been" if Esi Amfoa's and M'ma Asana's only water pots had been broken. The stories that follow continue to explore women's urban and rural experiences, but "No Sweetness Here" is the only story that specifically brings together two women from different backgrounds and shows how their different languages shape their individual identities and reflect the nature of the conflicts they are facing.

The story is told from a limited first person point of view by the village school teacher, "chicha", who had gone "the white man's way" (p.58). The narrator, like the oral storyteller, is conscious that she is addressing an audience, but unlike the traditional storyteller, she talks in a modern, articulate manner, self-consciously establishing her identity as the educated outsider. She calls herself "an immodest girl" (p.56) for dwelling on a male child's "indecent beauty" and constantly distances herself from the villagers by noting the difference between her rigid, mechanized conception of time and their non-western approach:

The evening had not yet come. My watch read 4:15 pm., that ambiguous time of day, which these people, despite their great astronomic knowledge, have always failed to identify. (p.57)

Her use of "these people" establishes her link with her audience who are

also outsiders, formally separated from the villagers' activities and denied a voice in the story's structure.

Throughout the story, Chicha carries a clock and always notes the exact time she does things, thus establishing how conscious she is of her actions. But she is aware of the irony of her time-telling: having gone "the white man's way", she has acquired westernized values that feel meaningless as they do not correspond to the values and rhythms of the villagers. By continually referring to the exact time, she is mocking her western values just as she mocks her western "liberated" image when she refers to her immodesty. This self-consciousness allows her to articulate her discomfort at the lack of integration between traditional and modern ways of viewing the world, represented by the opposing flexible/rigid attitudes to time:

It had not been laid down anywhere in the Education Ordinance that schoolchildren were to be given holidays during local festivals. And so no matter how much I sympathized with the kids, I could not give them a holiday, although Ahobaa was such an important occasion for them. (p.64)

Kobina and Zirigu in "For Whom Things Did Not Change" also act out a time-keeping conflict but Kobina never displays the same ironic awareness of the implications of his rigidity. As he attempts to reduce the difference between himself and the villagers, arrogantly and naively claiming that "we are all the same", the teacher makes no attempts to force such a comparison, aware that the restraints imposed by western education leave her powerless and apart.

Chicha's feeling of powerlessness is in marked contrast to the way the villagers perceive her, and this further heightens her sense of isolation. To them she is a strong, self-sufficient teacher, highly respected for what she contributes to the community. Chicha addresses the villagers using

their colloquial rhythms and expressions, reminding her outsider audience that "it was always the Fanticised form of the English". Although she was conscious of herself as an outsider, the villagers appear to have easily absorbed Chicha-teacher and the language she brings into their community and proudly made them their own:

'Kudiimin-o, Chicha.' Then I would answer, 'Kudiimin, Nana.'
When I greeted first, the response was 'Tanchiw'.
'Chicha, how are you?'
'Nana, I am well.'
'And how are the children?'
'Nana, they are well.'
'Yoo, that is good.' When an old man felt inclined to be talkative, especially if he had more than me for an audience, he would compliment me on the work I was doing. Then he would go on to the assets of education, especially female education, ending up with quoting Dr. Aggrey. (p.58)

The oral context of the villagers' daily life is established as the reader is made to recognize not only his/her distance from this context but also the extent to which western influences are changing traditional values. Yet Chicha is ultimately questioning these new values. Under the mask of the caring schoolteacher lies a vulnerable and isolated young woman who becomes aware, like Sissy in "Everything Counts", that her own education has created a situation full of contradictions and bitter expectations.

This division between appearance and reality is illustrated by Chicha's relationship to Maami Ama, the mother of the beautiful child. On one level, the women appear as opposing examples of "strong" and "weak" female characters. At the beginning of the story, Chicha is playfully threatening to kidnap the boy Kwesi and cane him if he is bad, projecting an image of a powerful, self-assured woman. Maami Ama, although also playing, reacts by tearfully over-protecting her son, defensively insisting Chicha lash her instead. The lonely, insecure mother whose dependence on her son epitomises her isolation contrasts sharply to the self-confident

school teacher with a position of prestige and responsibility within the community. But is this prestige hollow and meaningless? Under the surface, Chicha is drawn to Maami Ama not only because she wants to protect the "lonely mother", "lonely son" (p.65), but because she identifies with Maami Ama's vulnerability and isolation in a society where women's self-perceptions are inherently linked to their roles as mothers. Aidoo has shown in the previous stories that women are valued - and value themselves - according to how well they fulfil their culture's expectations of motherhood. The childless Chicha recognizes the situation her "been-to" status has created and she uses the boy in the same way his mother does, to compensate for her own lack of self worth. When the boy dies, both women see their own futures stretching out like a barren landscape.

The reasons for Maami Ama's isolation in the village are never fully articulated as the outsider Chicha does not understand "the face" of this community. There is no question that Kodja Fi was a "bullying, selfish" husband but Maami Ama's own discontent and fear of not being able to live up to what is expected of her cause her to make her son everything in her life: "'My husband, my brother; my father, my all-in-all where are you?'" (p.63). This idealization of the boy, obviously connected to his beauty, has certain sexual undertones that can be linked to the snake bite when Maami Ama's Garden of Eden is destroyed. But Maami Ama's passivity and self-sacrificial interpretation of motherhood become translated into the sacrifice of her own womanhood. When Maami Ama's mother warns her that in marriage "a woman must sometimes be a fool" (p.61), the insecure woman misunderstands that her mother is advising her to play the game to guarantee her survival but not to have any illusions about it. Cunning and pride are essential for self-respect and for the respect earned from

others. Even Maami Ama's own relatives are angered by her lack of cunning at the divorce proceedings and condemn her for "allowing them to take (Kwesi) away from (her)" (p.68).

But Aidoo does not condemn Maami Ama for her loss. Rather, she implies that the weakness in the community's value system where a woman's identity is inseparable from her worth as a mother is responsible for trapping the characters in their own paradoxical situations. It is not surprising that the women in the community are the first to voice the tragic consequences of the paradox that has shaped Maami Ama's fate. The natural cyclical rhythms have been irreparably silenced as "there is only one death and only one pain..." and the women mourn the loss of that life-sustaining continuity:

'What can we do indeed? When flour is scattered in sand, who can sift it? But this is the saddest I've heard, that he was his mother's only one.'

'Is that so?' another visitor cried. 'I always thought she had other children. What does one do when one's only waterpot breaks?' she whispered. The question was left hanging in the air. No one dared say anything more. (p.73-74)

By contrast, westernized Chicha has no language for tragedy and this inability to share and communicate leaves her even more alienated, aware that the fragile thread that linked her to these people had been severed. Her symbolic closing of the door at the end of the story as she sees Maami Ama kneeling, clutching Kwesi's books like a Bible, signals a narrative closure that leaves the audience with nothing more to say, the dilemma tale buried with the loss of all hope.

But on the traditional level, the story has no closure. Although based on real events, the traditional symbol of the snake to represent the mysterious outside forces that can't be explained open up a number of debates. Kwesi's beauty, for example, is problematic - and Aidoo intended

it that way. She says "if the story were retold in our language, I can imagine people saying: 'Ah, what did you expect? He was so beautiful, he couldn't possibly have expected to survive.'...It's the whole delicate nature of physical and spiritual beauty and its vulnerability."³⁵ The juxtaposition of Kwesi's death with the local festival Ahobaa, which celebrates the man who offered himself as a sacrifice to the gods to save his people from a pestilence is striking. Was Kwesi meant to be sacrificed as well, and for what purpose? Or did "the village (displease) the gods in some unknown way and that is why they (took) away this boy"(p.72)? Considerations divorced from Chicha's rigid world of rules and time-keeping, they implicitly call into question her own reaction to the boy's beauty and suggest that perhaps Kwesi's sacrifice was necessary in order that she be made aware of "the pestilence" of being unable to articulate the nature of her own tragedy as a western-educated woman.

On a structural level, the village women create the context for all these considerations but they too fall victim to another kind of pestilence. They assign blame and abuse each other rather than focus on the real cause of their discontent. Having no identity apart from their children, women are set apart from themselves because of their children and end up "talking no sense", thus perpetuating disunity, not debate. Aidoo insinuates that inarticulate speech is the other face of speechlessness: both reveal powerlessness and a lack of awareness that only imprisons women further in their incoherence.

In the process of narrating the story, Chicha articulates the painful realization that her own situation is just as problematic as Maami Ama's. She comes to realize that her western values have created illusions in her own life, illusions which have been shattered by Kwesi's death. Despite

the seeming independence her westernization has given her, Chicha discovers that her only escape from her loneliness was to invest her own hopes in the male child. Fantasizing into the future, she constructs an image of Kwesi in which he would be famous, handsome and idolised, a kind of media creation, through whom she would realise herself:

I went over the most presumptuous daydreams I had indulged in on his account. 'I would have taken him away with me in spite of his mother's protests.' She was just being absurd. 'The child is a boy, and sooner or later, she must learn to live without him. The highest class here is Primary Six and when I am going away, I will take him. I will give him a grammar education. Perhaps, who knows, one day he may win a scholarship to the university.' In my daydreams, I had never determined what career he would have followed, but he would be famous, that was certain. Devastatingly handsome, he would be the idol of women and the envy of every man. He would visit Britain, America and all those countries we have heard so much about. He would see all the seven wonders of the world. 'Maami shall be happy in the end,' I had told myself. 'People will flock to see the mother of such an illustrious man. Although she has not had many children, she will be surrounded by her grandchildren. Of course, away from the village'... (p.72-73)

Chicha's self-conscious mocking at the beginning of the story has turned to a sad kind of self-irony for her daydreams have now been poisoned by Kwesi's snake. Maami Ama's sacrificed motherhood has made Chicha aware of her own vulnerable womanhood. Her daydreams have no place in the real world - a barren world for women where there is "no sweetness here".

The following two stories continue to explore the nature of female self-deception and the language through which it is characterized. In "A Gift From Somewhere" and "Two Sisters", Aidoo does not continue to give her westernized female characters a self-conscious voice which gives shape to their alienation nor does she allow her village women a self-confident language of tragedy. She creates female characters whose perceptions and

language place them in opposition to the women of her previous stories in order to highlight the diversity of female experience as well as to cast shadows on the new westernized constructs of femaleness which are as constricting as the traditional definitions of womanhood. But Aidoo has more sympathy for the non-literate woman caught between two worlds than the westernized female who has little awareness of her role in the new order. The woman in "A Gift From Somewhere" is a much more complex character than Maami Ama in "No Sweetness Here": despite upholding the conventions and values "set for (her) life" (p.81), she displays discomfort and dissatisfaction at her fate and fantasizes, like Chicha, about a way out. But she is never able to self-consciously articulate the implications of this fantasy, like the westernized teacher, nor go beyond the limits of her own monologue in an attempt to connect her to other women's awareness of their shared vulnerability. Her isolation is more self-induced than Maami Ama's and as a result, the audience is left to consider the ambiguous portrait of a woman whose self-delusions trap her in her own vicious circle of self-defeat.

The opening scene in the story sets the stage for the ironic context in which the rest of the story must be viewed. Aidoo uses the tool of dramatic irony to expose her audience to both a deceptive Mallam who tries to convince a woman her sick child will not die, although he knows his words are meaningless, and to a woman who obediently does as the Mallam instructs, although she knows she is being deceived. Juxtaposed against the oral exchanges between Mallam and Maami Fanti, the inner thoughts of both characters are revealed to an audience who must act as a kind of mediating body between the unquestioning traditional view of a world, as witnessed through the oral dialogue, and individual doubts about the

validity of this world, expressed through the characters' private reflections. On a structural level, Aidoo is capturing the tensions between oral literature and the use of western narrative techniques. These techniques allow the storyteller access to a different use of language which, within the literate medium, is able to construct private doubts, doubts which symbolize how the medium has disrupted oral, communal forms of exchange.

After witnessing each characters' inner monologue of disbelief, the literate audience is manipulated into condemning the Mallam for his selfishness and sympathizing with Maami Fanti for her plight. The Mallam privately addresses his God:

Allah, the child is breathing but what kind of breath is this? I must hurry up and leave. Ah...what a bad days this is. But I will surely not want the baby to grow still in my arms! At all...for that will be bad luck, big bad luck... And now, where is its mother? This is not good. I am so hungry now. I thought at least I was going to earn some four pennies so I could eat. I do not like to go without food when it is not Ramaddan. Now look - And I can almost count its ribs! One, two, three, four, five... And Ah...llah, it is pale. I could swear this is a Fulani child only its face does not show that it is. If this is the pallor of sickness... O Mohamet! Now I must think up something quickly to comfort the mother with. (p.78)

Maami Fanti speaks only to herself, traditional reassurances representing merely rhetorical facets of a familiar life:

Who does the Mallam think he is deceiving? This is the third child to die. The others never looked half this sick. No! In fact the last one was fat...When I eventually went in to pick up my baby, he was dead.
...O my Lord, my Mighty God, who does the Mallam think he is deceiving? (p.80)

The childless woman is seen questioning the traditional structures of womanhood which are inseparable from reproduction and motherhood:

Should any of my friends hear me moaning, they will say I am behaving like one who has not lost a baby before, like a fresh bride who sees her first baby dying. Now all I must do is to try and prepare myself for another pregnancy, for it seems this is the reason why I was created...to be pregnant for nine of the

twelve months of every year...Or is there a way out of it at all? And where does this road lie? I shall have to get used to it... It is the pattern set for my life... (p.81-81)

The second part of the story is narrated by Maami Fanti in a kind of monologue similar to M'ma Asana's in "Certain Winds From the South". But contrary to the old woman who was searching for a language to relieve her of her isolation, Mami Fanti does not speak from the depths of her body but rather mouths praises that seems ritualized and superficial. The audience begins to question the tone of the narrator who no longer doubts the Mallam but praises him as she upholds the traditional values of motherhood which she once so poignantly questioned.

Her sick baby, Kweku Nyamekye, "a gift from God", survived and so did all her children after him. Of course she will praise the traditional structures which have secured her position away from the grips of barrenness. She upholds the traditional taboos assigned to her by the Mallam and like Mami Ama in "No Sweetness Here", she plays the sacrificial role of the Mother; she is glad the scar of her husband's lashes is on her and not on her son.

Yet, she is not unaffected by the influences of modernization and hopes her son will become "a real scholar", free of the taboos that have imprisoned her in her maternal role:

...If the Mallam came back to tell me that I must stop eating fish and meat altogether so that Nyamekye and the others would live, I would do it. I would. After all, he had told me that I could explain the taboo to Nyamekye when he was old enough to understand, so he could take it up himself. But I have not done it and I do not think I shall ever do it. How can a schoolboy, and who knows one day he may become a real scholar, how can he go through life dragging this type of taboo along with him? I have never seen any scholar doing it and my son is not going to be the first. Now, I will go on observing it until I die. For how could I have gone on living with my two empty hands? (p. 83)

Like Chicha, she lives vicariously through her children, her own identity defined by taboos and sacrifices.

But behind this traditional woman's language the irony established in the opening scene reappears - in a different form than is structured through Mami Fanti's silences. She is still dissatisfied with the set patterns of her life and thinks she has found "a way out of it all" - through her son. Content to sing the praises of her traditional fate, her fantasies and attitude to her community reveal a kind of rebelliousness that is locked in a circle of self-deception. No longer questioning where the "road" of motherhood lies, her monologue does not reflect a sensitivity to the historical changes shaping her life but reveals a coyness and desire to be seen as different:

- I swear by everything, I do not understand people who complain that I am spoiling them, especially him. And anyway, is it any business of theirs? Even if I daily anointed them with shea-butter and placed them in the sun, whom would I hurt? Who else would be concerned apart from me? (p.83)

Her tone of self-effacing innocence becomes even more calculated when she speaks of the problems with her husband, feigning hurt and surprise when in actuality she does have a lot more to say:

...Oh I was hurt...As if I am the boy's only parent...that morning I was hurt and when I opened up my mouth, all the words which came to my lips were, 'I thought this boy was going to be a scholar, not a farm-goer. What was the use of sending him to school if I knew he was going to follow me to the farm? This made him more angry. 'I did not know that if you go to school, your skin must not touch a leaf!' I did not say anything. What had I to say?... (p.84)

Mami Fanti's inability to say more leaves her a victim of her own silent rebelliousness. Her self-imposed isolation connotes her communal loss and is reflected by her loss of language. Her conformity is as paradoxical as

her individuality, and the story closes with her praising those who helped her as she appears to be a victim of her own illusions of escape.

Yet Aidoo is not as critical of Mami Fanti as her ambiguous characterization might suggest. The promised rewards of a western education provided an outlet for Mami Fanti's long standing dissatisfaction and could be seen as the trap that the vulnerable woman fell into. She does not have the same experience or wisdom of Aidoo's older rural women, and her misdirected ambitions are more a testimony to her society's weaknesses than to her personal defects. Torn between the security of established norms and a defensive rejection of them, Mami Fanti's manipulative language is no match to the "two sisters" whose game-playing reveals other ways women perpetuate their own victimization.

The context of "Two Sisters" cannot be separated from "Everything Counts" and "For Whom Things Did Not Change" because the women represent everything that Sissy questioned and that Setu disdained. Aidoo's urban characters use standardized English but do not have the same level of self-awareness as Sissy or Chicha to articulate their situations; in fact, Aidoo has written a satire that, as Lloyd Brown perceptively states, "dons the style of the woman's magazine format in order to take a close survey of the urban middle-class woman."³⁵ And the fact that this story "was first recorded as a short radio play by the Transcription Centre, London"³⁶ in the late sixties indicates the extent to which the oral function of Aidoo's art has been maintained in an appropriately modern context which reflects her thematic concerns. Unlike the conventional storyteller who directly involves the audience, the technological medium creates a distance between one or more narrators and the anonymous audience, representing the non-participatory, individualized structures of modern societies that exclude

and isolate individuals in their private worlds where communicating with others often seems impossible, as in the case with Chicha and Sissy, or false, as with the two sisters.

But the use of the radio "to stage" this particular story is very intriguing, and it is surprising Aidoo has not been more involved in the medium.³⁷ McLuhan's designation of the radio as a "hot medium" which serves as "a subliminal echo chamber of magical power to touch remote and forgotten chords...an extension of the critical nervous system matched only by speech itself"³⁸ suggests its use has many functions similar to the traditional oral storyteller. In fact, McLuhan has noted its radical political potential which could also be considered in terms of the didactic nature of storytelling: "The power of radio to retribalize mankind, its almost instant reversal of individualism into collectivism, Fascist or Marxist, has gone unnoticed."³⁹

The story is written for Aidoo's peer group, a young audience of alienated westernized Africans who Aidoo would like to reach. She creates an atmosphere that aims to expose the sterility of a morally barren society where self-deluding individuals are unable to break the unnatural cycle of their isolation. Like the women who wore wigs in "Everything Counts", the two sisters chase after the imported dreams that lead them nowhere. But unlike the opening story where the narrator's personal tone sets the audience apart from the subjects of discussion, "Two Sisters" involves the audience in the action, and this subsequently produces a self-consciousness that paradoxically distances them from the limited world the characters inhabit. This is particularly effective in the context of a radio performance:

All those gestural qualities that the printed page strips from language come back in the dark, and on the radio. Given

only the *sound* of a play, we have to fill in *all* of the senses, not just the sight of the action. So much do-it-yourself, or completion and "closure" of action, develops a kind of independent isolation in the young that makes them remote and inaccessible...⁴⁰

Although the moral, didactic message remains consistent in Aidoo's storytelling, her structural techniques vary to reflect not only the characters' individual concerns but the audience's potential to respond to collective dilemmas.

"Two Sisters" opens with Mercy absorbed in her unhappiness because she can't find a man rich enough to satisfy her material desires. The narrative monologue is broken by her new black shoes, ironically given to her by a rich man, that sing:

Count, Mercy, count your blessings
Count, Mercy, count your blessings
Count, count, count your blessings.

They sing along the corridor, into the avenue, across the road and into the bus. And they resume their song along the gravel path, as she opens the front gate and crosses the cemented courtyard to the door. (p.88)

The shoes' voice, "more realistic than their owner", contrasts to Mercy's fantasy of waking up "on the morning of her glory" (p.88) and exposes the ironic relationship between human beings and their commodities. A dialogue between the two sisters follows the song in which the older sister's desire for marital respectability appears just as self-deluding as Mercy's idea that liberated womanhood means loving "several men at the same time" (p.91). Connie clings desperately to a man who cheats on her while Mercy anxiously chases men who belong "to so many women already" (p.92), men who are only interested in her for her sexual favours.

After the two sisters unsuccessfully attempt to communicate with each other, the human narrative is again broken by the sound of Mercy's shoes

that this time do not sing but disturb, in conjunction with the other familiar sounds, the silence underlining the women's daily lives:

That silence again. There was only Mercy's footsteps as she went to put her plate in the kitchen sink, running water as she washed her plate and her hands. She drank some water and coughed. Then as tears streamed down her sister's averted face, there was the sound of her footsteps as she left the kitchen. At the end of it all, she banged a door. Connie only said something like 'Oh Lord, O Lord', and continued sitting in the kitchen. She had hardly eaten anything at all. Very soon, Mercy went to have a bath. Then Connie heard her getting ready to leave the house. The shoes. Then she was gone. She needn't have carried on like that, eh? Because Connie had not meant to probe or bring a quarrel. What use is there in this old world for a sister, if you can't have a chat with her? ...Their parents were good Presbyterians. They feared God. Mama had not managed to give them all the rules before they died. But Connie knows that running around with an old and depraved public man would have been considered an abomination by the parents. (p.92-93)

Constrained by both traditional definitions of womanhood and the imported stereotypes that perpetuate their misery, the women are trapped in roles from which they are unable to escape. Yet, given Mercy's name and Connie's sensitivity, is the audience to pity them or condemn them - or both?⁴¹ Setu's words in "For Whom Things Did Not Change" point to Mercy's collusion in the society's amorality: "'And so people try to profit by their daughters by giving them to the big men? And they sometimes even encourage them...? ...'I spit upon such big men! I spit upon such mothers! I spit upon such daughters!'" (p.13) Similarly, Connie may question her sister's activities but her own passivity and blind faith indicate her unwillingness to come to terms with the repetitive pattern of her own life, although Aidoo does portray her as a woman with few choices.

As well as the shoes, Aidoo also uses the sound of cars to heighten the audience's awareness of imported goods which represent the characters themselves:

A big car with a super-smooth engine purred into the drive. It actually purrs: this huge machine from the white man's land.

Indeed, its well-mannered protest as the tyres slid on to the gravel seemed a lullaby compared to the loud thumping of the girl's stiletto shoes. (p.93)

The fifty year old "big man's" polished style contrasts to "the child's" awkward sophistication as the two drive to the "Gulf of Guinea" where the triteness of their conversation is replaced by a voice from nature who detachedly comments on the impersonal and artificial activities of human beings who play meaningless games to fill the empty space of their daily lives:

Dear little child came back from the playground with her toe bruised. Shall we just blow cold air from our mouth on it or put on a salve? Nothing matters really. Just see that she does not feel unattended...The natives sacrifice to him on Tuesdays and once a year celebrate him. They might save their chickens, their eggs and their yams. And as for the feast once a year, he doesn't pay much attention to it either. They are always celebrating one thing or another and surely they don't need him for an excuse to celebrate one more day. He has seen things happen along these beaches. Different things. Contradictory things. Or just repetitions of old patterns...People are worms, and even the God who created them is immensely bored with their antics. (p.96)

This voice effectively intersects the story at its middle: Mercy's shoes are now replaced by Connie's tears, something that her husband hates, "for like so many men, he knows it is one of the most potent weapons in women's bitchy and inexhaustible arsenal"(p.96). In the second half of the story, Aidoo appears to sympathize with this sister who feels powerless to leave her misogynist husband or control her disreputable sister. Yet Aidoo is also critical of her for living in a dream world where she deludes herself into believing that the laughter she shares with her husband "will keep them together for some time"(p.99). The cliché that the arrival of the new baby will "magically" abolish their problems points to a woman who

defends a morality that is as empty as her sister's. Both sisters are trapped in their illusions, their borrowed language as hollow as their superficial aspirations. The story closes with Connie astonished at her sister's repetitive pattern, and she is unable to respond to the reality that the audience was clearly able to predict: "Connie just sits there with her mouth open that wide..." (p.102). This "open" ending ironically marks the closed, cyclical nature of the characters' lives where nothing changes, and where no one goes anywhere.

The next story which is narrated through the perspective of a ten-year-old village girl contrasts sharply with Aidoo's satirical condemnation of urban womanhood in "Two Sisters" and refreshingly asserts the importance of communal allegiances that have been undermined by westernization. "The Late Bud" is a kind of cautionary tale and is the only story in the anthology that focuses on the fears and desires of a daughter. Yet this simple, moving story ultimately pays tribute to mothers, as in Aidoo's other stories, while acknowledging the important bond they share with their daughters.

The story opens with a moral saying that warns the young of their familial responsibilities: "'The good child who willingly goes on errands eats the food of peace'" (p.103). As in many of Aidoo's other works, including her plays and novels, food is an important symbol connoting nurturance, communal sharing, or a kind of misunderstanding associated with differences rooted in language. In "The Late Bud", the food of peace is linked to the young girl's fear that she does not belong to her mother. Yaaba is a lazy child who is physically fed well but is denied that special nurturance and sustenance from her mother that she craves:

But there was something which disturbed Yaaba. No one knew it did, but it did. She used to wonder why, every time Maami called Adwoa, she called her 'My child Adwoa', while she was always merely called 'Yaaba'.

'My child Adwoa, pick me the drinking can...My child you have done well...'

Oh, it is so always. Am I not my mother's child? (p.104-105)

Aidoo hints at the tragedies in the community that have disrupted the natural links between mothers and daughters, tragedies the children must be protected from and that the women - and men - mourn together:

But you see, one does not go around asking elders such questions. Take the day Antobam asked her granddaughter where her own daughter was. The grandmother also asked Antobam whether she was not being looked after well, and then started weeping and saying things. Other mothers joined in the weeping. Then some more women came over from the neighbourhood and her aunts and uncles came too and there was also drinking and libation-pouring. At the end of it all, they gave Antobam a stiff talking-to. (p.105)

The tone of the narrative resembles the oral storyteller whose didacticism is meant to provoke the audience into debating their moral responsibilities. Yaaba states a young, naive view of what goes on in her community:

After all, our elders do not say anything interesting to themselves. It is their usual complaints about how difficult life is. If it is not the price of cloth or fish, then it is the scarcity of water. It is all uninteresting. I will always play with my children when I grow up. I will not grumble about anything... (p.106)

This is disputed by her mother who warns "the late bud" of what it means to be a woman:

'Aa. My Father God, who inflicted on me such a child? Look here, Yaaba. You are growing so be careful how you live your life. When you are ten years old you are not a child any more. And a woman that lives on the playground is not a woman. If you were a boy it would be bad enough, but for a girl it is a curse. The house cannot hold you. *Tchia*.' (p.108)

The tragedy of being female in this particular culture is echoed in Aidoo's other stories, and this young girl, motivated by the fear of her

marginalization and devaluation, acts to gain her mother's approval. And as in Aidoo's other stories, the men seem of little significance, their absence indicating the disruptions in the community which leave the women dependent on each other for sustenance and support. Yaaba's decision to embark on a mission that would fetch her mother some red earth to help her with the chores reflects her growing awareness of what she shares with her mother, but it is not until she experiences a particular kind of pain that she is able to gain full consciousness that she is her mother's child.

Yaaba's accident is her rite of passage into womanhood. Lying bandaged and weak in bed, she responds to her mother's voice. Although afraid to use her own voice, she acknowledges the pain that links her to her mother:

I want to know whether Maami called me her child. Does it mean I am her child like Adwoa is? But one does not ask our elders such questions. And anyway, there is too much pain. And there are barriers where my chest is.

Probably tomorrow...but now Maami called me 'My child!'...
And she fell asleep again. (p.113)

Yaaba has tasted the "food of peace" as the audience witnesses that the blossoming of a young girl into womanhood is connected to the unspoken pain she shares with her mother. The soft and delicate voice of "the late bud" paves the way for the mature wailing voices found in the next story which continue to express the hope that daughters will look back through their mothers and not let their communal bond be destroyed.

Whereas "Everything Counts" opened Aidoo's anthology with a solitary voice expressing modern concerns, the penultimate story "Something To Talk About on the Way to the Funeral" effectively closes the anthology with communal voices expressing traditional conflicts. All the stories

essentially lead to this one which both structurally and thematically serves as another kind of framing device linked to "Everything Counts". This tale, narrated in an oral context, acts as a kind of balance to Sissy's "outsider" voice and leaves the audience with a sense of continuity and communal identity that was excluded from Aidoo's opening story. But the literate audience is also excluded from this context, made aware of its own outsider status and forced to become conscious of the disruptive effect its "listening" signifies. Aidoo refuses to resolve the tensions or end her tales with "closed" meanings, and thus demands an involvement from her readers, their exclusion paradoxically serving as the entry point to her stories' unanswered questions.

"Something To Talk About on the Way to the Funeral" is basically about the life of a woman who has just died. Her life-story is told by two of the women from her community who are on their way to her funeral. The story is completely narrated by the two women who could represent the type of chorus found in Aidoo's plays. But this chorus doesn't voice opposing viewpoints found in Anowa nor does it duplicate the dilemma structure found in The Dilemma of a Ghost. Rather, the women share a communal voice and their gossip provides an opportunity to think aloud and share a language which shapes their life experiences. Throughout the dialogue, which is the story's structure, the narrators play the same role as the oral storyteller, expressing the dilemmas governing their lives and speaking to an insider audience who shares their concerns. This chorus acts as a framing device and echoes the voices of the other traditional older women in Aidoo's stories who struggled resiliently to maintain their dignity and "life-lines" in the face of adversity and hardship. Aidoo wants to establish a continuity and collective identity: the "loosened tongues" of

the chorus women reinforce the communal context of Aidoo's art which rescues women from the anonymous realm of otherness.

The symbolic funeral in the story also serves as part of the framing device in which the collective significance of the other stories can be emphasized. As well as mourning the loss of the dead, funerals also celebrate the life of the individual who played a part in the community's welfare. The two women are mourning the type of life Auntie Araba was forced to live due to sexual inequalities, male insensitivity and disruptions caused by western influences. These themes are found in Aidoo's other stories where there is "no sweetness here". But the two women are also celebrating Auntie Araba's resilience and determination to make the best of her life that did not have any privileges or easy opportunities. As Aidoo's older women were able to voice their consciousness of a bitter reality, these two women use a language that sustains that knowledge: by both celebrating and mourning Auntie Araba's life, they are articulating their commitment to the women in their community who will not die forgotten.

The women in "Something to Talk About on the Way to the Funeral" establish the importance of Auntie Araba's role in the community by referring to her "bread song" that will be "the chief song at the funeral this afternoon" (p.114). The women recount how the song grew out of Auntie Araba's work but has since been passed down through the generations of females whose lives she influenced. The song, like Auntie Araba's voice, reflects the changing melody - the fortunes of her own life as well as other women's. A "delicate thin sweetness that clung like the asawa berry on the tongue" characterizes Auntie Araba's beauty where "her plaits hung at the back of her neck like the branches of a giant tree, while the skin

of her arms shone like charcoal from good wood" (p.116). At that time, she was sent to learn how to "mess around with flour" from "some lady relative" in the city but was sent back to the village when the lady's husband made her pregnant. Then her song "roughened a little. Then all of a sudden, it changed again, completely. Yes, it was still a woman's voice. But it was deeper and this time, like good honey, was rough and heavy, its sweetness within itself" (p.115). This reflects the changes in her life and the problems she faced due to a number of factors, including her son. But the "sweetness within" Auntie Araba's soul caused her to protect her son and the girl he made pregnant. The woman took the young Mansa home and their relationship blossomed: "Some people say they were like mother and daughter. Others that they were like sisters. Still more others even said they were like friends" (p.121). When her son did not marry Mansa but another city girl, the village women received no male support: "His lawyer father thought it advisable for him to wed that (other) girl soon because they were afraid of what the girl's father would do" (p.124). When she died, the chorus women say it was her son "who drove away (her spirit)" and Mansa, who was forced to leave her child behind to find work in the city, "left with her soul" (p.125). At this point in her life Auntie Araba stopped baking, her work having no meaning, her life no longer having a song. The chorus women lament that the "familiar song" which "had been around for over twenty years" will no longer be sung by Auntie Araba. But it will be continued to be chanted by the other women of the community: "Yes, it is still a woman's voice" one chorus woman remarks as she and the other woman sing praises to Auntie Araba's undying influence in the community. "A good person does not rot" (p.125) can be heard throughout this story - and some of Aidoo's other stories - as the rest of the village

gathers to the tune of the bread song in order to pay tribute to Auntie Araba and her life, a life that can be "danced to".

The women telling the story respect Auntie Araba's determination although they are not strangers to the changes disrupting the whole community. They speak of the men, both the "lawyers or doctors or something like that" and the other educated "big men" with a familiar contempt. They are critical of Auntie Araba's spoiling of her son, but admit they would have done the same if they had been in her position. This familiar theme of using sons to establish a better life is juxtaposed against the recognition that daughters are the ones who provide the support the mothers need. The various strands from the other stories all come together here, as the chorus women lament their vulnerabilities and celebrate their strength to withstand all that they have suffered.

Auntie Araba's life can be understood in relation to her work, as the bread song symbolizes. She is both the victim of male exploitation and western changes as well as a resourceful rural woman who attempts to keep her family together. Sent away at a young age to learn the skill of baking (fancy) bread which was initially useless in a rural context, she did not let her own tragic pregnancy destroy her; she became more determined to "tighten her girdle" and "give her son a good education". The chorus women recognize the support Auntie Araba received from her own mother which she in turn passed down to her daughter-in-law. The repetition of "a good woman does not rot" refers more to the resilience of generations of females than to the individual woman. Auntie Araba's imagination and insightfulness made it possible for her to create something useful with her bread baking skills, and the rest of her life testifies to her continual determination and independence despite the painful setbacks caused by the

various men in her life. The chorus women's contempt of men is consistent throughout the story as one remarks that Auntie Araba is going to go to heaven while the other replies: "If there is any heaven and God is not like man, my sister" (p.121). Unlike the son, Mansa sent money home and never forgot her "mother" who passed on to her the breac song that guaranteed her survival. As Aidoo closes the story with a question about Mansa's loyalty, the audience has no doubt as to Auntie Araba's influence on future generations; like Esi Amfoa and M'ima Asana, "a good woman does not rot".

The way Aidoo has constructed the women's dialogue further reinforces the tight communal structure that is being threatened by disruptive western influences. The women are aware "outsiders" may be listening, thus they continually come close together by saying "bring your ear nearer" and "I don't want anyone to overhear us". The literate audience is made aware of the oral context of the story and of the traditional sharing from which they are excluded. The women are trying to preserve the community's structure which is impossible as both the form of the story (the literate medium) and the content (western influences) illustrate. The tragedies of their own lives, one being "away in the mines", the other who "sits in the village waiting for the travellers" link them to other village women who mark the passing of time in relation to the death of their children. But Aidoo as storyteller asks her own audience to consider the women's unanswered questions and rescue them from a silent fate for "what shall we do if we let go of funerals?"⁴²

The last story in the anthology serves as a kind of postscript that illuminates some of the issues raised in the previous stories from a different perspective. Aidoo uses the single voice of a male who

questions, like Chicha and Sissy, what his western education has given him. "Other Versions" is another kind of modern dilemma tale that asks the audience to acknowledge the importance and meaning of motherhood, a dominant theme that resounds throughout the anthology. The young man who tells the story speaks in standardized English and establishes a familiar tone with his audience through his questions and informal speech. But like the western-educated women in "Everything Counts" and "No Sweetness Here", this nameless storyteller gradually becomes conscious of his outsider status and the only consolation to his confused identity is the memory of his mother who symbolizes a forlorn and exploited Africa. Despite the sad note on which Aidoo chooses to close her anthology, the bread song from the previous story can be heard wailing in the background, celebrating as well as mourning African womanhood.

"Other Versions" focuses on a young man's growing awareness of the self-sacrificial role his mother plays. His self-consciousness caused by his experiences abroad has enabled him to articulate, like Sissy in the opening story, an alienation that leaves him confused and lost. He recognizes the empathy he feels to his mother - and to all "mothers" of Africa - who remain unselfish and proud in the face hardships caused by westernization. But unlike Sissy, it is not his journey "home" that triggers his self-awareness but his journey abroad where his separation from those who most influenced his life deeply affects him. The story begins with his recollections of his life at home where he was involved in the business of getting an education and earning money and establishes a humorous tone, reminiscent of Achebe's irony, that masks the sad transformation that lies ahead. As a young boy on a educational scholarship, he was made aware of the importance and scarcity of money but

finds that when he takes *The Tailless Animal* to the village to offer his mother some of his hard-earned cash, she refuses it: "'Ao, I to am coming to something I this world. Who would have thought it? I never slept to dream that I shall live to see a day like this...Now that I too have got my own man who will take care of me...'" (p.129). Like some of the women in the other stories, this mother sees her "liberation" in terms of her son's success, her own role not offering any self-fulfilment. Her son who responded to her wish that when he got his first pay, he take something home (p.128) is confused by her refusal but dismisses it with a gesture befitting the educated male: "You know how women carry on when they mean to? She even knelt down to say a prayer of thanks to God and at that point I left the room. Yes, and after all this business she didn't take the silly money" (p.129). Yet behind this dismissal is a kind of exasperation at his mother's attitude and a condemnation of patriarchal priorities. As he demands "Whose child was I?" (p.130), he asks his audience to acknowledge the kinds of dilemmas facing mothers, dilemmas which can be heard echoing throughout the other stories in the anthology.

It is not until the young man goes abroad that the full significance of his mother's predicament becomes clear. Invited to his sponsor's house for dinner, he is paraded as an exotic commodity that gets consumed by greedy Westerners: "The food was gorgeous but the main course for the evening was me" (p.132). The meaning of his outsider status becomes even more pronounced when he is introduced to the sponsor's part-time cook, also "from Africa", and then later encounters on the subway "another black woman" whose fur-lined coat made him think of "the other one who had been in the Merrows' kitchen while they ate and I ate" (p.134). Reminding him of his own poor mother, these women aroused a sympathy and guilt in the

narrator who recognized that they were relegated to the lowest jobs and had the poorest lives. Unable to reap the "benefits" of a western education, they still remained the kindest and most unselfish people he had encountered. As a male he does not share their fates, but as an African he identifies with their status. Race, gender and class considerations all come together in this story as Aidoo calls on her audience to recognize what pulls her people apart - and what can bring them together.

Aidoo does not suggest that the son in this story is irresponsible, unlike the son in the previous story. The tribute he pays to his mother is "another version", another way of looking at experience as well as another way of telling stories. As in her plays, Aidoo blames systems and values rather than individuals for the tragedies affecting people's lives and this other version is meant to signify the possibilities open to the storyteller. Aidoo has constructed another version of "Mother Africa" that does not glorify the sacrifice mothers make in the name of their sons. Rather, Aidoo politically implies that until Africa, resilient as it is, refuses to sacrifice itself in the name of a borrowed success, it will remain the forlorn image of an exploited continent that is represented by the young man's anguished mutter at the end of the story - "'O Mother'".

The themes and dilemmas found in Aidoo's short stories are similar to the concerns she develops in her plays although the short story genre allows Aidoo to approach her audience from a more formal distance and question the ways in which stories can be told through a literary medium. Whether giving voice to the non-literate people of her community whose traditional roles are undergoing severe changes or articulating the modern concerns of her westernized characters, Aidoo skilfully includes or

excludes her audience according to the nature of the specific conflicts portrayed. But it is not until the appearance of her first novel, published seven years after Anowa and No Sweetness Here, that Aidoo addresses the political implications involved in reading her texts and challenges those prying eyes and ears of outsiders who threaten to disrupt the African female-centered voice that refuses to be silent.

III. OUR SISTER KILLJOY

But how can I help being so serious? Eh, my Love, what positive is there to be, when I cannot give voice to my soul and still have her heard? Since so far, I have only been able to use a language that enslaved me, and therefore, the messengers of my mind always come shackled?⁴³

A modern dilemma tale - directed at an African man but written in the form of a letter that never gets sent. The western-educated African woman has so "great a need to communicate" that it leads her attempting to engage her African male counterparts despite knowing, from experience, that it will be misconstrued, laughed at or silenced. An open dialogue aborted, Ama Ata Aidoo closes her novel, Our Sister Killjoy, with the heroine alone, flying on her way back to Africa from Europe, reflecting on the difficulty of finding an authentic female voice that will be heard by her African brothers, but also a voice that will not be appropriated by a western audience:

So you see, My Precious Something, all that I was saying about language is that I wish you and I could share our hopes, fears and our fantasies, without feeling inhibited because we suspect that someone is listening. As it is, we cannot write to one another, or speak across the talking cables or converse as we travel on a bus or a train or anywhere, but we are sure they are listening, listening, listening. (p.115)

An African woman writer's dilemma tale - directed at an African audience but written within a western structure that deviates from the conventional, unified shape of the novel.⁴⁴ A product of a western education, the modern African woman writer creates a fragmented voice that reflects the alienated experiences of an African woman who is in search of a language, a new way of conceptualizing these experiences that ultimately

aim to synthesize the fragmented consciousness of an uprooted people, her people:

This is why, above all, we have to have our secret language. We must create this language. It is high time we did. We are too old a people not to. We can. We must. So that we shall make love with words and not fear of being overheard. (p.116)

This secret language that Ama Ata Aidoo searches for in Our Sister Killjoy highlights the complex issue of the writer's relationship to her audience. In her previous works, Aidoo has alluded to the fact that a non-African audience may be "listening", but it is not until Our Sister Killjoy, published in 1977, that she addresses this fact. The novel, both structurally and thematically, resists identification with western male literary traditions but Aidoo also appears to be implicitly questioning the ways in which the First World feminist reader can enter African female-centred realities and interpret the unfamiliar codes produced by the text. We are attracted to a story about an "African New Woman" whose journey into Europe's "heart of darkness" turns the exotic, reified image of womanhood on its head and explores the growing consciousness of a woman coming to terms with her own identity and means of self-fulfilment. But does this signal a common terrain for female identification? As non-Africans, we are reminded that our "listening in" is intrusive and prevents Aidoo from speaking directly to her own people. As with some of her short stories, Aidoo wants to keep her "outsider" audience at a distance - a political and literary device that makes the First World feminist reader all the the more aware of her limited vision and need to resist universalizing female experience and expectations which are not only culturally specific but politically charged.

In Our Sister Killjoy Ama Ata Aidoo makes a forceful plea to her African compatriots who are transplanted on a spiritually barren foreign

soil to return home. Their moral and cultural values are misdirected and fragmented, and her adoption of the modern "novel" form reflects these western concerns. But Aidoo, in an attempt to articulate the modern dilemmas facing her people, has combined both poetry and prose as a means of juxtaposing the political against the personal. A satirical, political voice serves as a backdrop to highlight the personal adventures and inner feelings, narrated in the third person, of the main character, Sissie, as she goes to Europe and experiences what it means to be a black woman in an alien environment. The naive Sissie embarks on a journey of self-discovery and returns home to Africa a much stronger, more independent and self-assured woman who realizes, despite the pain and bitterness it causes, what her responsibility to her people - and ultimately herself - entails. As Sissie's consciousness develops, Aidoo weaves in poetry that resembles the form of a song with its chorus-like structure and variations on a theme. The poetry/song is echoing Sissie's individual experiences on a wider, more generalized landscape. The poetry parts of the novel resemble the function and structure of the epic tale which, originally based on oral improvisation and connected to preliterate cultures, has a cyclical structure that evokes a journey motif. Aidoo's African epic, tragic in character and moral in tone, has an impersonal, dignified narrative style which is more remote and objective than Sissie's personal narrative but is nonetheless closely connected as Aidoo weaves a fine line between subjective and objective responses, between personal dilemmas and political concerns. In this novel, Sissie emerges as the female version of the epic hero who wants to fight for the honour and survival of her people.

So why does Aidoo end her novel with a letter? After two plays and several short stories that draw on the tradition of oral storytelling, is

Aidoo now ominously warning of the death of communal art, of her own art? Despite her intention to engage her audience, is "our sister" so disillusioned that she is gloomily forecasting, in true "killjoy" fashion, the end of her role as a storyteller? Or is Aidoo hinting at another type of closure that wants to leave behind, to exclude all those who do not share her African female-centred consciousness, a consciousness turned in on itself as a means of resisting attempts to appropriate an image of African womanhood for needs other than the writer's own?

Perhaps the answers lie in the epic form itself: the opening lines of the novel point to the cyclical nature of Sissy's voyage where she sets off alone to rescue her people and returns home alone, the tragedy being her people wanted to be left behind. But her own needs become visible as she refuses to compromise with both her African brothers and western demands. The woman warrior retains a sense of her integrity as she searches for a language that cannot betray her, a language that rejects "so much of the softness and meekness...all the brothers expect of me and the sisters... which is really western" (p.117) as well as a language that would affirm her own self worth is more honourable than a compromise with a "private white audience for whom (the superior monkey) performs his superior tricks" (p.130). Nameless to others, the archetypal Sissie names a new African female identity that does not merely define itself in relation to others, but an identity which values its relationship to itself.

The opening five pages of Our Sister Killjoy indicate the way Aidoo envisions the relationship between form and content. The irony of the opening line: "Things are working out / towards their dazzling conclusions..." which are placed on the stark background of two otherwise

empty pages, emphasise both the irrelevancy of the "ticky-tackies" that "surround", "block" and "clutter" lives/pages and the frightening prophesy that "things are working out", seemingly against one's control. But Aidoo's carefully controlled language attacks that very premise that "talks of universal truth, universal art, universal literature and the Gross National Product" (p.6). These are the ideas that have made her people lose touch with their sense of history, a history that evokes "the massive walls of slave forts standing along our beaches" (p.5). The empty opening pages symbolise both the loss of language and the uselessness of a false language as spoken by the "moderate" and "academic-pseudo-intellectual" Africans who, like dogs, chase the "latest crumbs" being thrown at them by defending interests that "are not even (their) own." Aidoo's novel is addressed primarily to her African "brothers" who, not wanting to confront their victimization, are only perpetuating it, unaware of how they are hurting their own people. As an educated African, Aidoo shares some of her brothers' experiences and thus understands their dilemmas abroad, but as a woman, her experiences have placed her outside of their reality as well.

The full title of the novel, "Our Sister Killjoy or Reflections From A Black-Eyed Squint", establishes Sissy's perception of her brothers - or rather their ironic view of her - as well as her attitude to the world in general. Whose "sister" is she? Obviously her fellow Africans recognize her as one of them, as "belonging to the elite, whatever that is" (p.107), as one of the "migrant birds of the world". But through her use of irony, Sissy clearly indicates she is buying no part of their dreams, a true killjoy who recognizes that "migrations are part of the general illusion of how well an unfree population think they can do for themselves" (p.89). Her criticisms and anger directed at her own people leave them defensive

and leave her full of despair. Despite the numerous references to her own naivete, the self-conscious Sissy, "from knowledge gained since", is able to see the world more clearly, through her black-eyed squint. What she sees is neither joyful nor hopeful for until her brothers realize how much they are needed at home, Sissy will remain a lost sister and a lost lover - her need for Africa greater than her need for romance.

After the initial five pages of the novel, Sissy leads us "into a bad dream" where she journeys into that unreal, foreign territory of nightmarish Europe. The opening chapter serves as a type of chorus, a prologue which frames the action of the rest of the novel. The recurring symbols like food, archetypal "Sammys" and consumer goods are juxtaposed against feelings of distaste, distress and powerlessness as Sissy begins to gain an awareness about the "where", "when" and "how" her people lost control of their own lives and found themselves without a language to fill the blank spaces on the page. Her sarcasm and satire reveal a political awareness that doesn't uphold the supremacy of western values, an awareness which essentially mocks the hypocrisy of those who want "to make good again". Sissy had been chosen to go to Europe, something that "her fellow countryman" had seen as a kind of "dress rehearsal for a journey to paradise" (p.9). This man whose real name she was never to discover was referred to by her European hosts as "Sammy". His enthusiasm, eagerness to please and familiarity with them "made her feel uneasy" and her distaste would never disappear as "Time was to bring her many many more Sammys. And they always affected her in the same way..." (p.6).

Sissy's journey of self-development continues when she is made conscious of her blackness, ironically by someone speaking a language she barely understands, and "for the rest of her life, she was to regret this

moment when she was made to notice the difference in human colouring". The harsh reality of "Power, Child, Power" is a nightmare from which Sissy can't escape as she "came to know that someone somewhere would always see in any kind of difference, an excuse to be mean" (p.13). The episode ends with a kind of epic simile that evokes the relationship between power and exploitation, between "A way to get land.../gold and silver mines,/ Oil/Uranium/Plutonium/Any number of ums-" and the suffering of the powerless.

The second and longest chapter, "The Plums", recounts Sissy's personal experiences as a black woman working with an international youth group planting Christmas trees in southern Germany. The absurdity of the Bavarian widows who were attempting to purge their guilt and fill in the gaps of their own lives left damaged by a war they wanted to forget was not lost to the black-eyed squint. Against this background Sissy meets a German woman, Marija, who comes to embody everything that was unnatural and tragic about the isolation of life in Europe. Marija is in a sense also a widow, a victim of a society that had destroyed bonds between people. Forced into a stultifying existence where looking after her son was her one pleasure, Marija lives her life through her son, hoping her Little Adolph would make it, "would go to university, travel and come back to tell her all about his journeys" (p.60), a theme explored in a specifically African context in Aidoo's short stories where the economic as well as the psychological motives are highlighted. The German women's situation causes Sissy to think about her own mother and reflect on the universal loneliness of motherhood in a primarily social and psychological context; she acknowledges the contradictions women are faced with when they are denied

lives of their own but feel guilty when they desire "to be alone...Just for a very little time...may be?":

It is
Heresy

In Africa
Europe,
Everywhere.

This is
Not a statement to come from a
Good mother's lips -

...
Yet
Who also said that
Being alone is not like
Being
Alone? (p.49)

These lines, like the other poetic passages in the novel, although not part of the action, reflect Aidoo's internal comments which are triggered off by the action in the story. The poetry attempts to place the personal conflicts in a broader context to illustrate that suffering and powerlessness are not isolated, individual problems but part of a whole system that continues to survive by feeding off individual misery. The poetic voice is more Aidoo than Sissy, but in the last chapter, as Sissy returns home, the separation between poetry and prose disappears. Sissy's and Aidoo's voices merge to reconstruct "that secret language", the only hope left for their people. Marija is distinctly excluded from this language, although her life epitomises what it means to be a woman anywhere in the world:

Any good woman
In her senses
With her choices
Would say the
Same

In Asia
Europe
Anywhere:

For
Here under the sun,
Being a woman
Has not
Is not
Cannot
Never will be a
Child's game

From knowledge gained since

So why wish a curse on you child
Desiring her to be a female
?
Beside, my sister
The ranks of the wretched are
Full,
Are full. (p.51)

Although in theory Aidoo speaks of a shared sisterhood, Sissy, the woman warrior, believes that her first priority is to honour her own people. Her interactions with Marija force her to examine her own life and she comes to learn that a shared loneliness does not create a sustaining life-force: Sissy has much empathy for Marija's fate but their world views and cultural differences artificially bring them together and naturally pull them apart. Aidoo explores the cultural differences through the use of food and the women's misreadings of each other's concept of hospitality. Food, that universal symbol of sharing and nourishment, is also a symbol of hospitality turned sterile and unnatural.

The symbolic significance of food emerges in "The Plums" chapter as Aidoo establishes not only the relationship between women and food production, as represented by Marija's generous sharing of food and Sissy's "The Bringer-of-Goodies-After-Lights-out" role, but also depicts the obscenity of food surplus in the west where people stuff themselves in an attempt to satisfy other unfulfilled desires. This is symbolized through the depiction of Marija's sexual frustrations and the hypocrisy of foreign

aid and the Third World rulers who feed themselves "intravenously" with riches, oblivious to the poverty in their own peoples' lives. Against Aidoo's angry poetic voice we see Sissy and her companions "benefiting" from western hospitality as they "were required to be there, eating, laughing, singing, sleeping and eating. Above all eating". Their function was purely symbolic: why should they worry about anything, "even if the world is rough, it's still fine to get paid to have an orgasm...or isn't it"(p.35)?

The tinned, synthetic, unnatural food represents Europe itself where those who embrace it end up ghosts of their former selves:

Brother,
The internal logic is super-cool:
The only way to end up a cultural
Vulture
Is to feed on carrion all the way... (p.39)

Sissy is initially seduced by the overabundance and the novelty of the food, particularly the plums, which represent her desire to experience a new world. They also serve a greater symbolic function: Marija's nurturance towards Sissy is enacted through the plums which evoke Sissy's sensual femaleness and colour:

...What she was not aware of, though, was that those Bavarian plums owed their glory in her eyes and on her tongue not only to that beautiful and black Bavarian soil, but also to other qualities that she herself possessed at that material time:

Youthfulness
Peace of mind
Feeling free
Knowing you are a rare article,
Being
Loved.

So she sat, Our Sister, her tongue caressing the plump berries with skin-colour almost like her own, while Marija told her how she had selected them specially for her, off the single tree in the garden. (p.41)

But "in knowledge gained since", Sissy is able to reflect back on the nature of Marija's hospitality which placed Sissy in the dangerous position of being the object of someone else's dreams and sexual desires. Marija's preoccupation with feeding Sissy reveals the frustrated, unnatural life Marija is forced to live where she is deprived of a community of human activity. Her life-giving past, which reminds Sissy of her own background, makes a sharp contrast to her sterile present:

They grew in her mother's garden. The black currents did. Plenty, plenty. And every summer since she was little, her one pleasure had been preserving black currents - making its jam, bottling its juices. And she still went home to help. Or rather, she went to avail herself of the pleasure, the beauty, the happiness at harvest time: of being with many people, the family. Working with a group. If they had met earlier, she could have taken Sissy home for that year's harvest... (p.50)

The "plenty, plenty" of her childhood community is now a nostalgic memory that she tries to reproduce by giving all of herself to Sissy who represents everything the German woman lacks in her own life. Though flattered, Sissy recognizes that Marija's loss of her sense of self is born out of a "kind of loneliness overseas which is truly bad", a disease like "the cold loneliness of death" which is slowly killing Aidoo's own people whom she fears will also become ghosts of their former selves.

As well as using Marija as a vehicle for forcing Sissy to examine her own life, Aidoo also uses the relationship between the two women to explore gender roles and note specific contrasts between western women's and African women's lives. When she arrives on foreign soil, Sissy detects it is not at all "normal" "for a young / Hausfrau to / Like / Two Indians / who work in / supermarkets" (p.23), and realises that Marija "was too warm for Bavaria, Germany" where prying neighbours thought that a friendship between a black woman and a white woman who didn't even speak the same

language was something perverse: "SOMEONE MUST TELL HER HUSBAND" (p.44). Despite Sissy sensing "a certain strangeness about Marija", she had no reason to question whether ulterior motives lay behind her hospitality. When Marija makes sexual advances, the surprised Sissy is able to empathize with Marija's tear shaped

L
O
N
E
L
I
N
E
S
S

"like a rain cloud over the chimneys of Europe" (p.65), that has forced her into the alienated position of sexually desiring other women. In this context, Aidoo appears to perceive lesbianism as a reaction against a culturally-specific type of isolation but does not accept it as an alternative for a better world: it remains a symptom of a woman's pain in an unhealthy society where individuals' sexually repressed desires force them into extreme behaviour patterns. "How does one / Comfort her / Who weeps for / A collective loss?" But Sissy's ability to remain sympathetic to Marija reveals Aidoo's refusal to dismiss or vulgarize a difficult theme, and as one critic has said, "Aidoo's account of a homosexual relationship differs from that in many African novels because it is so detailed and avoids a monothematic, pejorative treatment."⁴⁵

Their complex relationship, which portrays both the common ground and the racial and social differences between the women, is considered from many angles. Before Sissy becomes aware of Marija's sexual motives, she plays with the idea of being a man and imagines "what a delicious love affair she and Marija would have had if one of them had been a man":

Especially if she, Sissie had been a man. She had imagined and savoured the tears, their anguish at knowing that their love was doomed. But they would make promises to each other which of course would not stand a chance of getting fulfilled. She could see Marija's tears... (p.61)

Although only a "game", this type of gender role-playing lets Aidoo explore male/female relationships and question why black men become involved with European women when it is clear "The Guest Shall Not Eat Palm-Nut Soup". Despite the rare "successes" of such relationships, most end up leaving the black man "lost", "Changed into elephant-grey corpses...Their penises cut" (p.62). Racist societies have no compassion and Sissy is determined not to forget this. But later, when Marija hears of Sissy's imminent departure, Sissy finds herself enjoying the pain she was causing the German woman:

It hit her like a stone, the knowledge that there is pleasure in hurting. A strong three-dimensional pleasure, an exclusive masculine delight that is exhilarating beyond all measure. And this too is God's gift to man? She wondered. (p.76)

Aidoo is attempting to make a parallel between racial and sexual exploitation. Sissy is able to exploit Marija as long as Marija continues to be the masochistic female just as the white man is able to exploit the black man as long as the black man continues to play the scapegoat. Sissy in many ways becomes impatient with Marija's "femaleness", but having the humanity and insight due to her own recognized vulnerability, Sissy reflects "Whoever created us gave us too much capacity for sorrow" (p.68). It is the socially constructed systems that force people into unhealthy behaviour patterns, and Aidoo makes it clear that gender divisions, like racial divisions, must be exposed for their absurd and frightening distortion of human potential. The intolerant and uncompassionate environment of the cold European nightmare affects all people in different ways, and as Sissy leaves Marija, taking with her memories of the tragedies

of wasted possibilities in the forms of some plums, Aidoo's poetic voice can be heard echoing through layers of Sissy's consciousness:

'We are the victims of our History and our Present. They place too many obstacles in the Way of Love. And we cannot enjoy even our Differences in peace.' (p.29)

In the third chapter, *Our Sister* shifts her ground to explore the alienation of her own people living in the "cold strange land where dogs and cats eat better than many children" (p.99). Having sympathetically understood the isolation of western women's lives, the African Sissy does not need the rallying cry "Sisterhood is powerful": her own experiences and history force her to see "group survival" from another angle. Arriving in her colonial home, England, she is astonished at the number of wretched black people and "wondered why they stayed". She remarks that the women were especially pitifully dressed in tattered, cheap clothes and knows that "in a cold land, poverty shows as nowhere else". Her sadness soon turns to anger as she begins to understand that "migrations are part of the general illusion of how well an unfree population think they can do for themselves. Running very fast just to remain where they are" (p.89).

She stops asking questions and articulates her anguish at hearing the feeble excuses and outrageous lies her people have invented in order to justify their betrayal of their own families: "We have all fallen victim, / Sometime or / Other" (p.98). But Aidoo doesn't totally excuse them and her bitterly satirical voice can be heard calling attention to the price Africans have paid by allowing their difference to be "appropriated" in the name of western "interests":

Awards?

What
Dainty name to describe
This

Most merciless
Most formalised

Open,
Thorough,
Spy system of all time:

For a few pennies now and a
Doctoral degree later,
Tell us about
Your people
Your history
Your mind...

Tell us
Boy
How
We can make you
Weak
Weaker than you've already
Been.

And don't you get any ideas either
No
Radical
Interpretative
Nonsense from
You, Flatnose. (p.87)

Having learned about "difference" through her experiences with Marija, Sissy doesn't waste any time acknowledging that due to her "colour - and our history" Africans have little in common with the Scots, the Welsh, and the Germans she meets. She dismisses the ignorance of those non-Africans who think the thing that "binds the Germans, the Irish and the African - in that order naturally - together" is "OPPRESSION" (p.93). Aware of the danger one kind of appropriator, "that professor in Humanities and genius in both Forgetfulness and Invention", Sissy is forced to examine the attitudes of her own people and realises "every minute, every day...Ghana opened a dance of the masquerades called Independence, for Africa" (p.95).

The consciousness that shapes the African experience abroad takes the form of Kunle in this chapter, another "Sammy" who defends "science"

without grasping a moral sense of his own history as witnessed by his justification of the Christian Doctor, Dr. Christian Barnard, who used a South African black man's heart to save a white man:

Yet she had to confess she still had not managed to come round to seeing Kunle's point: that cleaning the bassa's chest of its rotten heart and plugging in a brand-new, palpitatingly warm kaffirheart, is the surest way to usher in the Kaffirmillennium. (p.101)

Kunle ends up "killed by the car for which he had waited for so long" as Sissy mourns for him and all the others who symbolically are killed by false western promises and tricked into embracing the "security" offered by their ex-colonial masters:

...although the insurance policy had been absolutely comprehensive, the insurance people had insisted it did not cover a chauffeur driving at 80 M.P.H. on the high road...He had taken out his policy with a very reliable insurance company... Foreign, British, terribly old and solid, with the original branch in London and cousins in Ottawa, Sydney, Salisbury and Johannesburg... (p.108)

The insurance policy represents the use of the coloniser's language to promise and conceal its emptiness. Aidoo appropriately ends the chapter with a reminder of how language has silenced and enslaved her own people who have littered "the pathways of / History" (p.96) and lost their way home.

The novel closes with Sissy's letter - to that one special brother, to all her African brothers, but ultimately to herself. It speaks about the importance of language, of group survival and of reconstructing the future. It celebrates Sissy's strength as a woman but mourns what she has lost as a result of her newly-defined womanhood. The letter is full of pain and compassion and to me is one of the most moving personal statements found in African literature today.

Aidoo's and Sissy's voices merge to explain how language still remains a collective creation that can only have value if people recognize what Sissy's "killjoy" function serves:

Of course, we are different. No, we are not better than anybody else. But somewhere down the years, we let the more relaxed part of us get too strong. So that the question was never that of changing into something that we have never been. No, we only need to make a small effort to update the stronger, the harder, the more insensitive part of ourselves. (p.116)

Sissy recognizes the dialectic between the past and the present, between the "loss of perspective" and the language that will recapture it: "the question is not just the past or the present, but which factors out of both the past and the present represent for us the most dynamic forces for the future." Sissy empathizes with her people who "have been caught at the confluence of history and that has made ignorant victims of some of us" (p.118), but condemns her people for remaining "past masters for fishing out death", for staying in Europe where all they have learned is "how to die":

To come all this way just to learn how to die from a people whose own survival instincts have not failed them once yet... I do not laugh enough... I remember how my old friends and I used to scream with mirth at home, looking at how we were all busy making fools of ourselves... Maybe it was the sun and the ordinary pleasure of standing on our own soil... Our beautiful land? One wonders whether it is still ours. And how much longer it will continue to be...

A curse on all those who steal continents!... (p.120)

By attempting to reconstruct a new language in the hope of communicating with her people, Sissy also reclaims her lost identity as an African woman. Yet she can only do this by not sending the letter: her initial intention in writing the letter was to tell her brother how much she missed him, how much she needed and loved him, "whatever that means". But she gives up romance in favour of her own dignity and self-integrity.

Aidoo's closure which appears to destroy the communal function of language really marks the birth of a new female African identity that has rejected its "otherness" and returned home, the letter being an affirmation of how much Sissy is worth to herself.

Our Sister Killjoy is in many respects the most optimistic of Aidoo's works. Although it touches on many themes and issues found in her previously written plays and short stories to reveal that her basic interests in seeing Africa as "free and strong and organised and constructive" have not changed,⁴⁶ her novel goes a step further in establishing a female voice that is in the process of becoming conscious of its potential and strength. Of course the "novel" form allows for such development and therefore it is not surprising that Aidoo's latest work to be published is another novel, "a love story" that reflects some of her previous concerns as well as establish new ones.

But as Aidoo's fictional character returns to its source, the difficult journey of the African woman writer continues. Ama Ata Aidoo speaks openly about the hardships she encounters in her own patriarchal culture that ignores or silences women's voices, voices that want, above all, to be heard at home, from their own centre:

I am convinced that if Killjoy or anything like it had been written by a man, as we say in these parts, no one would have been able to sleep a wink these last couple of years, for all the noise that would have been made about it. If Killjoy has received recognition elsewhere, it is gratifying. But that is no salve for the hurt received because my own house has put a freeze on it.⁴⁷

Aidoo goes on to recount the story of how one of her own colleagues at an African university appeared to dismiss women's literature as not being of importance in Africa:

Dialogue, January 1980: My head of department (a good friend and a well-known writer himself) and I are discussing the latest edition of the book which had just then come out in New York. We are both going on about how well laid out it is, the beautiful type used, etc. Then I remark that unfortunately my impression is that the publishers don't seem to care much whether they sell it or not.

"What a shame," says he, "because there are all these women's-studies programs springing up in universities all over the United States. Surely they would be interested in it..."

And I bled internally. Because although the protagonist of the story is a young woman, anyone who read the book would realize that her concerns are only partially feminist, if at all. In any case, what if they are? Feminism is about half of the human inhabitants of this earth!⁴⁸

As first world feminists, we find ourselves "listening in", often uncomfortably, but trying to place ourselves in an unprivileged position in an attempt to understand the kinds of parameters that determine African women's writing. These parameters highlight the political difficulties not only of deconstructing feminism in an international context but of creatively writing about women's experiences, as Aidoo has done, for her own people.

IV. FURTHER CONTRIBUTIONS: CHANGES - A LOVE STORY

Aidoo's most recent work, Changes - A Love Story, was published in the Spring of 1991 and in the preface Aidoo makes "a confession to the reader" and "an apology to the critic":

Several years ago when I was a little older than I am now, I said in a published interview that I could never write about lovers in Accra. Because surely in our environment there are more important things to write about? Working on this story was then an exercise in words-eating! Because it is a slice from the life and loves of a somewhat privileged young woman and other fictional characters - in Accra. It is not meant to be a contribution to any debate, however current. ⁴⁹

Yet the novel does make a valuable contribution to the canon of African women's writing and looks at the current - and not so current - debate about marriage and relationships from a refreshingly original perspective. The modern female protagonist, Esi, reminiscent of the independent Sissy in Aidoo's previous writings, leaves her first marriage because she cannot accept the demands her husband makes on her to be "a proper wife". Ignoring the astonished and disappointed reaction of friends and family, Esi falls in love and agrees to marry her lover and become his second wife. The novel traces the romance, the marriage and its informal dissolution as Aidoo charts the development of Esi who grows - and changes - while "facing up to the dilemmas of being a modern woman."⁵⁰

Aidoo sets Esi's personal dilemmas within the political context of marriage and recognizes, as Our Sister Killjoy illustrates, that "life is not just politics or the liberation struggle, or even economics: love is political, and everything is intertwined."⁵¹ The modern African woman wants love and relationships not defined in terms of patriarchal constructs but in terms of her own self-fulfilment. That is difficult for women

anywhere and Aidoo's novel, written as a kind of internal dialogue with an African female audience, reveals just how problematic it is for the modern African woman who, either single or married, always seems to be on the losing end. At first the novel appears to be a "traditional woman's novel" with its romantic encounter in the opening pages, but Aidoo subverts this form by undercutting it with irony and exposing the hardships women face not only in traditional polygynous marriages but in an urban polygynous setting as well. Although marriage issues have been addressed by several African writers, including Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Ba, the actual focus on the second wife's position is a new angle that Aidoo has chosen to develop in order to draw attention to the limited choices in African women's lives. Esi is an educated career woman who decides to marry for love. She discovers that being a second wife is no better than being a mistress. Polygyny in a modern context deprives Esi of the traditional rights and family support and does not accommodate her needs. But what can? Aidoo acknowledges that "Esi has a right to her search. At the end of the book she hasn't found it. But I believe myself that the search, the journey itself, is worth a whole lot - as much as getting to the end."⁵²

Aidoo places Esi's journey on African soil: she is not an alienated "been-to", returning from abroad deeply affected by her overseas experiences, neither is she an urban woman searching only for the material benefits that westernization promises. She is intelligent and self-conscious about what it means to be a modern woman who is susceptible to others' expectations. The novel opens with Esi "feeling angry with herself" as she drives to her office to do extra work: "...why couldn't she ever prevent her colleagues from assuming that any time the office

secretary was away, *she* could do the job? And better still, why couldn't she prevent herself from falling into the trap." Aidoo poses the dilemmas as Esi searches for new ways of defining herself in relation to others, ways which must find a language to communicate the anger and confusion within her "unseen soul".

This inability to find an appropriate language is powerfully illustrated by Aidoo when Esi gets raped by her first husband. His anger is directed at her sexuality whereas she is left contemplating the dilemmas of the African woman who has no language to call her own:

Marital rape. Suddenly, she could see herself or some other woman sociologist presenting a paper on:

'The Prevalence of Marital Rape in the
Urban African Environment'

to a packed audience of academics. Overwhelmingly male, of course. A few women. As the presentation progresses, there are boos from the men, and uncomfortable titters from the women. At the end of it, there is predictable hostile outrage.

'Yes, we told you, didn't we? What is burying us now are all these imported feminists ideas...'

'And, dear lady colleague, how would you describe "marital rape" in Akan?'

'Igbo? ... Yoruba?'

'Wolof? ... or Temne?'

'Kikuyu? ... or Ki-Swahili?'

'Chi-Shona?'

'Zulu? ... or Xhosa?'

Or ...

She was caught in a trap... (pp.11-12)

The coloniser's language is not authentic and the indigenous languages are inadequate. Similar to Sissy in Our Sister Killjoy, Esi continues to battle with the problem of language, now on her home territory. Aidoo does not appear so concerned with distancing herself from those who may be "listening in", for in this novel they seem almost irrelevant to the discussion, but ^{she} _A undefensively establishes the problems facing African feminism which is searching for a language to call its own. By pre-empting

criticism from her African (male) audience, Aidoo is attempting to show that marital rape is not a culturally-specific experience - or a western import - but something male-constructed language does not acknowledge:

...the society could not possible have an indigenous word or phrase for it. Sex is something a husband claims from his wife as his right. Any time. And at his convenience. Besides, any 'sane' person, especially sane women, would consider any other woman lucky or talented or both, who can make her husband lose his head like that.

What does she use? Some well-known stuff?

It must be a new product from Europe or America...(p.12)

Dismissing the inadequacy of her western-educated methods of abstract analysis, Esi defines how she feels, the first step in "making a decision" to reclaim an identity that has been denied:

And here she was, not feeling academic or intellectual at all, but angry, and sore...And even after a good bath before and after, still dirty...Dirty! Ah-h-h-h, the word was out. (p.12)

Aidoo counterbalances Esi's feelings of dirtiness and sexual disgust by placing her protagonist's love affair with Ali within the fluid context of sexual desire and passion. The numerous descriptions of a woman's subjective pleasure when making love and the way she feels about her body are rare in African literature. Aidoo breaks new ground not only by writing about sex and a woman's self-consciousness about her body from a female perspective, but by allowing Ali to observe Esi's uniqueness, she shows how the male gaze does not have to degrade and objectify female sexuality. Esi is not a siren or a temptress out to destroy him:

He had slept with a great number of women in his time, but he knew very few women from his part of the world who even tried to be at ease with their own bodies. The combination of forces against that had been too overwhelming -

traditional shyness and contempt for the biology of women;
Islamic suppressive ideas about women;
English Victorian prudery and French hypocrisy imported
by the colonisers...

All these had variously and together wreaked havoc on the mind of the modern African woman: especially about herself. As far as Ali could tell, he told himself, most women behaved as if

the world was full of awful things – beginning with their bodies. His wife Fusena, a good woman if ever there was one, was no exception. (p.75)

Despite Ali's egotistical behaviour, Aidoo portrays him as a sympathetic character. Aidoo admits that she doesn't "have any respect for the kind of man who discards women as though they are every morning's paper" but goes on to say she approves of Ali "because, despite being in love with Esi, he refuses to betray his first wife."⁵³ Aidoo depicts Ali as an indulged man, a product of his background where he was a spoilt and pampered "only son", but she holds the society responsible for this: "It's not me but society that has indulged men, so they're always armed to take care of their own interests, not of us."⁵⁴

Those who do the indulging are the mothers, aunts and sisters of the men, and this has a satirical strain to it when seen in the context of Oko, Esi's first husband. Aidoo is less generous to him than Ali, but she does allow him a voice to present his point of view and give his reasons for "That Morning" when he "jumped on Esi". The self-centered Oko, dominated by malicious and interfering women, could not bear having "to fight with your woman's career for her attention...(this being) not only new in the history of the world, but completely humiliating" (p.70). Aidoo poses an important dilemma – for both men and women – and leaves the audience to debate the issue.

Refusing to abandon her interests in oral literature, Aidoo attempts to incorporate the structure of the dilemma tale into the novel's framework. This is most apparent when Aidoo gives the older women a voice to express their dissatisfaction and incomprehension at Esi's desire to marry Ali. Reminiscent of the traditional women in Aidoo's stories and

plays. Esi's grandmother and mother attempt to debate Esi's problem but end up arguing about what it means to be a woman:

Nana: What? Now don't you dare turn into a child and melt on me. You should know by now that I do not approve of many things these days. Like many ways of behaving and speaking. Not because they are new and I'm old, but because they are just bad.

Ena: Mother!

Nana: You shut up. Since you have already called your daughter a child, and you are my daughter, maybe I should call you a child and treat you like one. (She pauses.) Listen, you gave birth to Esi. But when was the last time you wiped any shit off her bottom? ... She is a woman. And remember that after you have called someone a child, there is nothing you can tell her which she is going to find useful.

Ena: I meant: look at my life. It hasn't been much of anything. What can I take out of such a life and give to anybody? Even is she is my own child? And Esi had such high school education and she is such a big lady.

Nana: Because my daughter, it is not our fault that you and I did not go to school. I can also forgive myself and you that we have not made money...Even not having more than one child is not so bad...

Ena: After all, some have none at all.

Nana: Indeed, some have none at all.

Ena and Nana: But only fools pity themselves.

Ena: And no one forgives fools.

Nana: Eyiwaa.

Ena: Not even themselves.

Nana: Thank you! (pp. 113-114)

As Esi listens to this from the isolated confines of a room, she regrets "she could never be as close to her mother as her mother was to her grandmother" and recognizes what her own education has given her. Taken away at an early age from her mother and first language, "which is surely one of life's most powerful working tools", she is condemned, like Anowa, "to roam in strange and foreign lands with no hope of ever meaningfully re-entering her mother's world". The older generations' oral dialogue and sense of pride contrasts with Esi's own narrative monologue and self-pity. The excluded Esi realizes, like Sissy and Chicha from Aidoo's stories, that

she has no language of her own and that "all this was too high a price to pay to achieve the dangerous confusion she was now in and the country now was in" (p.114).

Aidoo places Esi's personal dilemmas in a wider political context and hopes that "a whole people would soon have answers for them" (p.115). This hope is ironically expressed by the grandmother who, acknowledging that women have been "swallowed up" in the same way that Africans have allowed themselves "to be regularly sacrificed to the egos of the Europeans", states: "It can be changed". At the close of a moving and poignant speech in which Nana explains to Esi that "being a wife...is being a woman" and that the marriage ceremony "was a funeral of the self", Nana gives "those who are prepared to try" her wisdom and support:

'Do I think it must always be so? Certainly not. It can be changed. It can be better. Life on this earth need not always be some human being gods and others being sacrificial animals. Indeed, that can be changed. But it would take so much. No, not time. There has always been enough time for anything anyone ever really wanted to do. What it would take is a lot of thinking and a great deal of doing. But one wonders whether we are prepared to tire our minds and bodies that much. Are we human beings even prepared to try?

'Otherwise, it is very possible for life on this earth to be good for us all. My lady Silk, everything is possible.' (p.111)

Despite "the delay in her awakening" (p.139), Esi gradually begins to articulate the contradictions in her relationship with Ali and accept that "his fashion of loving had proved quite inadequate for her". She knows she cannot go back to her village, to her traditional roots, to tell them of her changes because she knows her grandmother "would take her to the priestess and ask her to have Esi's soul called up for an interview"(p.165). A modern Anowa who cannot expect her "unseen soul" to find answers to her questions, Esi will carry with her "bone-blood-flesh

self" the wisdom of her grandmother and the knowledge that female friendships are "the most constant thing in her life".

Although Aidoo has portrayed numerous female friendships in her previous works, this is the first time she has used two educated African women to debate - and share - the dilemmas affecting their lives. By doing this she is acknowledging the existence of an educated African female audience and inviting them to enter the dialogue. Anowa, as well as Aidoo's Sissy and Chicha, found themselves alone and speaking only to themselves, their loss of language symbolic of their isolation and loneliness. But Esi and Opokuya have established a special closeness and become engaged in conversations that reflect the preoccupations of urban professionals attempting to have meaningful jobs as well as to be successful wives and mothers. Esi's and Opokuya's personal problems are as different as their physical appearances, but they help and learn from each other. Esi's little car, a symbol of her "freedom of movement", however tenuous, eventually gets passed on to Opokuya who provides Esi with a secure refuge and food for thought:

'Why is life so hard on the professional African woman?' Esi asked, her voice showing that she was a little puzzled.

But Opokuya wasn't having any of her self-pity. So she countered rather heavily. 'Why is life so hard on the non-professional African woman? Eh? Esi, isn't life even harder for the poor rural and urban African woman?'

'I think life is just hard on woman,' Esi agreed, trying to calm Opokuya down.

'But remember it is always harder for some other women somewhere else,' Opokuya insisted. Both of them sighed. (p.51)

Female experience is different everywhere and despite Esi, the statistician, being blind to certain realities, Opokuya, the midwife, knows that individuals all have their own stories to tell.

Aidoo gives us snatches of some of these stories as we learn that the Ali's first wife, Fusena, feels inadequate because she was not more educated, and that Ogyaanowa, Esi's child, would grow up knowing that what was going on between the sexes "was not quite normal". Perhaps she would have more say when she grew up, unlike her namesake, and be able to find that "grown-up language" (p.5) that did not exclude her. But Aidoo wanted to focus on one woman's story of development and "wickedly" demonstrate through her "that marriage itself, and its assumptions are part of the problem. No matter what kind; polygamous or monogamous marriage, but marriage itself."⁵⁵

Aidoo chooses the novel form to weave together the lives of her characters and reveal the "changes" that one modern woman goes through in her search to discover the answers to life's questions. Unlike Our Sister Killjoy, the structure of Changes is relatively unproblematic and conventional, but this only serves to highlight what one critic has termed the "deviant" nature of the text: "Is it satire, parody, tragedy? It appears to elude all categorization..."⁵⁶ Despite all of the "changes" of genre that Aidoo's writing has gone through in order to reflect the different kinds of dilemmas her characters from different backgrounds are facing, her ability to make her audience "listen" has remained constant. Although Changes - A Love Story makes a valuable contribution to the kind of feminism that seeks to understand the cultural specificity of female experience, it is hoped that Aidoo's own house "will not put a freeze on it" as they did with Our Sister Killjoy, and that it will cause a lot of noise in Africa... As Aidoo says, what is important is that your own people are going to hear you.

PART THREE

THE UNPRIVILEGED OUTSIDER: THE IMAGINATIVE VISION OF BESSIE HEAD

Writing is not a male/female occupation. My femaleness was never a problem to me, not now, not in our age. More than a century ago, a few pioneer women writers, writing fearfully under male pseudonyms, established that women writers were brilliant thinkers too, on a par with men. I do not have to be a feminist. The world of the intellect is impersonal, sexless... I have worked outside all political and other ideologies, bowing to life here and there and absorbing all that I felt to be relevant, but always fighting for space and air. I needed this freedom and independence, in order that I retain a clarity of thought, in order that my sympathies remain fluent and responsive to any given situation in life.¹

Bessie Head's refusal to associate herself with the "ideology" of feminism and her assertion that her "femaleness was never a problem" contrast sharply with Ama Ata Aidoo's contention that "feminism is about half the inhabitants of this earth". Yet despite her attempt to resist any kind of label, ("nothing hems me in"), Bessie Head confirms that "black women have a certain history of oppression within African culture" and that she "can apprehend people's - women's - suffering."² It is this sensitivity to female experience that links her to Ama Ata Aidoo but also places her apart. Conceptualizing her audience differently, Head constructs a kind of female subjectivity that underlines both her ambivalence to and admiration for her female characters who are attempting to come to terms with their own femaleness. This struggle is carried out not merely in a specific socioeconomic context but within a symbolic parameter that reflects the nature of women's otherness. It is into this realm of otherness that Bessie Head inserts her outsider vision, a vision that refuses any kind of closure and makes no claims for privileging

meaning within restrictive gender - or racially - specific categories. "I think of myself as a woman of Southern Africa - not as a black woman but as an ordinary and wryly humble woman."³ In this process of unprivileging her own femaleness and blackness, Bessie Head forces her readers into an unprivileged position as well, and it is at this intersection that Bessie Head's writings are most illuminating - and most problematic.

Although both Head and Aidoo are constantly questioning socially constructed paradigms through their writings, Head's means of subversion is different to Aidoo's. The historical and social factors of her South African background and the psychological difficulties that shaped her life as an exile in Botswana contribute to her highly individualistic perspective. Unlike Aidoo, she says that she was unaware "of a special writing tradition" although she mentions Bertolt Brecht, for "his insistence on practicality, that the artist is a servant (who) concentrates on social problems" and D.H. Lawrence for his "huge view of life."⁴ She also praises Olive Schreiner, "a rich woman with that huge view"⁵ but seldom gives recognition to other African writers. In fact, in two recently published letters that were written in 1980, Head states that she finds Achebe's writing "flat and dead" although she acknowledges "the early three (novels) as an historical recreation of African's past." She is just as dismissive about Nadine Gordimer who in her view "lacks warmth and love and that chill, cold humourless world of hers repelled me so much I never investigated her thought." And although admitting "the clarity of Doris Lessing's political thought arouses profound respect", Head also rejects her "feminist novels" in which she "disliked the image of a woman continually in bed with men she despises...Her books are very attractive to white women, seeming to mirror their world."⁶

Despite these dismissive observations of other writers, Head is applauded, more than Ama Ata Aidoo, by various women writers such as "Angela Carter, Nikki Giovanni, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker (who) have acknowledged their indebtedness to Head as a model and inspiration" as well as by many critics, both African and non African, who praise the contribution she has made to the body of African literature.⁷ Yet Head is not widely read in African universities⁸ and it has been reported by the well known African critic, Lewis Nkosi, "that to this day Head remains virtually unknown in certain African literary circles."⁹ Head recognizes "that there is this urge to define one's audience more from the point of view of black readership because they are very conscious of appearing on the stage" but claims that "before one is necessarily black, one is first a storyteller - mankind's storyteller."¹⁰ Head recounts an incident in which a lecturer in Nigeria "said he found a coolness and detachment in my writing that was un-African" and goes on to tell of how a Zimbabwe student told her: " 'We read Ngugi, Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah and we find things there that we can identify with. But with you we are disorientated and thrown into Western literature.'"¹¹ Head admits that she "cannot stand the heat of the day, so there's a kind of coolness and detachment in my work...And the heat of the day is whether you're *black* and how intensely you communicate your *blackness* for a *black* audience. And it doesn't work out like that. Roughly, OK, I've got an environment and a complexion, and I admit this, this and this, but I shape the future with this cool stance, the view that's above everything."¹²

This "huge view" that is "above everything" is problematic for the first world reader as well as for her African audience. Bessie Head sees herself as an outsider and appears to exploit this position in her writings

by seeming to align herself with her non-African readership. She presents historical background to fill in the gaps for her unknowing audience, unlike Aidoo and other African writers who are working within a specific traditional framework. Her native language is English¹³ and she has no historical sense of belonging to a particular community: "I have a specific kind of background, partly educated by missionaries, but I lack an identification with an environment."¹⁴ Yet Head refuses to explain and summarize for her audience. She creates conflicting discourses and narratives, and consistently reminds her readers of their outsider status, thus denying them the possibility of fixing meaning within closed parameters. The African environment, with its specific economic and social constructs, provides the contextual framework for her novels and short stories, but she creates some fictional characters who resist identification with any national, racial or gender-specific category. Her African readership finds this problematic, but the first world reader, looking for signs of difference, is denied even this grasp on matters. Head involves or distances her audience differently than Aidoo; she attempts to disarm them and make them part of her story's structure so they may participate, in true story-telling fashion, in the shaping of the future:

I often use this technique: I'm *carrying* you away with me, "Come!" Now people dislike you working in this way. It's particularly bad in *A Question of Power* because the "Come!" is into horrible things...People begin to say at page 50, "No.no!" And they pull back and say, "I'm not reading it".

But this technique of "Come!" makes the reader dependent on the writer. *Maru's* style is: I want a new attitude towards racialism and so I create a highly vivid and original character. You have no alternative but to come up to his level...

At least he is going to give you some new insights into racial prejudice and how *he* solves it with his gods in his heart. People don't like to be swept away like this with the story... They try to find some way to get rid of the story. But the story

is intended to linger with its lessons and reflections.¹⁵

Head's perspective is obviously determined by her individual experiences and the need to make sense of the hardships she suffered. The tragic circumstances surrounding her life provide the reader with certain clues to understanding the structural and thematic implications of her writings. But there is still an element of mystique about this lonely South African woman¹⁶ who does not fit easily into any South African literary tradition -coloured, black or white. Contrary to what many had assumed, she was never part of the Drum magazine group of writers like Can Themba and Richard Rive, and her writing rejects that hard edged urban realism of her contemporaries in the 50's and 60's. Critics have likened her *with* Gordimer and Lessing, an idea she probably would have dismissed, and she remains today an isolated southern African voice who, as one critic says, possesses the "ideal biographical legend".¹⁷

Head's own account of her life is sparse, but she allows us enough information to see how much she suffered as a result of apartheid. She was born in 1937 in a mental hospital in Pietermaritzburg, to a wealthy white woman, judged to be insane, who had become involved, after a broken marriage, to the family's black stable hand. She was adopted by a white family but returned soon after because of her colour. She was then adopted and raised by a poor "coloured" couple whom she thought to be her real family. When the husband died and Head's foster mother could not financially care for her any longer, she was, at the age of thirteen, sent to a mission orphanage in Durban. There was she told, in a very cruel way, about her background, an incident which caused her to hate missionaries and the type of Christianity that they represented for the rest of her life. She left to gain a teaching certificate in 1955, attempting to get a good

education as instructed by her mother from a letter written in the mental institution. After teaching for a short while and later working as a journalist, she lived in different South African cities before voluntarily leaving South Africa in 1964 on a one-way exit permit with her son. She had been married for a short while to "a gangster" who refused to divorce her, but little else is known about that part of her life. She lived a very poor life as a "stateless person" in Botswana writing her novels and short stories, and suffered a nervous breakdown in 1969. She was finally granted Botswana citizenship in 1979. She died from hepatitis in her adopted community, Serowe, in 1986.¹⁸

The numerous sketches and essays Head has written, as well as the interviews she has given indicate that "the chief source of biographical data - her first three novels - present her life filtered through her rich but necessarily inventive literary imagination."¹⁹ It is this literary imagination that flourished when Head started living in Botswana that deserves the most attention. Her life as a journalist in South Africa for Drum magazine's sister publication, The Golden City Post, in which she wrote columns for young people ('Hiya Teenagers!' and 'Dear Gang')²⁰ produced little of literary or political value although the articles published in the more politically oriented The New African are attributed to some of the difficulties she had when applying for a South African passport.²¹ Head always shied away from any kind of direct political involvement and admitted she preferred to live "on the edge of that world",²² mistrustful of all political organisations and movements. Her journalistic endeavours mostly centred around churning out "weekly romances",²³ vestiges of which appear in her novels. Head acknowledges that "that background of journalism benefited me later for my particular

kind of style. I am not loose and baggy. I'm very concise and taut, and I intend saying as much as possible in the most economical way. I think that journalistic background later contributed to my style as a writer."²⁴

But what contributed most to Head's thematic concerns was Serowe. She states that the environment of South Africa "completely defeated me as a writer", South Africa being "a country where it was impossible for black people to dream." In Botswana she found "an environment where all people are welded together by an ancient order" and having found some level of security, claimed that she could not "be considered as a South African writer in exile, but as one who has put down roots." She confirms that certain themes she writes about "have been mainly shaped by (her) South African experience."²⁵ Thus, her fragmented past has given her a double-edged vantage point in understanding the need to articulate an African identity although her writings reflect a questioning of what this identity signifies. Aware of the debilitating effects of being a "coloured" raised in South Africa, Head recognizes that the outsider must search for a home but at the same time realize this home has existential connotations that resist stasis and complacency. The themes in her novels and short stories are all woven into the fabric of the outsider journeying towards selfhood and what he/she encounters on the way - both internally and externally. And although Head claims there is "an autobiographical continuity"²⁶ to her novels, her fiction cannot be seen as merely autobiographical variations that reflect her own specific struggles. Her attempts to authenticate her own experiences can be seen in the way she perceives her readers - themselves outsiders - who are forced not only to empathize with her characters' exiled status but must question their own understanding of it. This ultimately entails the use of the reader's own imaginative ability to

acknowledge the symbolic significance of Head's creative vision. Although the relationship between the reader and the text is most clearly articulated in Head's short stories, the subtle use of her various narrative techniques in her novels also illustrates the unfolding tension between the Other and the Self and the process that seeks some kind of reconciliation.

I. Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind

The framework on which Head constructs her creative vision is obviously African – its soil, its people, its specific relationship to movement and change. The implications of this are most visible when one considers Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind, the last work that was published in Britain before her death in 1986.²⁷ Despite Head's three novels and numerous short stories, it's interesting to note that she returned to a nonfictional terrain to pay tribute to the village where her imagination was nurtured. In the introduction Head comments:

It was by chance that I came to live in this village. I have lived most of my life in shattered little bits. Somehow, here, the shattered bits began to grow together. There is a sense of woveness, a wholeness in life here; a feeling of how strange and beautiful people can be – just living. People do so much subsistence living here and so much mud living; for Serowe is, on the whole, a sprawling village of mud huts. Women's hands build and smooth mud huts and mud courtyards and decorate the walls of the mud courtyards with intricate patterns. Then the fierce November and December thunderstorms sweep away all the beautiful patterns. At the right season for this work, the mud patterns will be built again. There seems to be little confusion on the surface of life. Women just go on having babies and families sit around outdoor fires at night, chattering in quiet tones. The majority, who are the poor, survive on little. It has been like this for ages and ages – this flat continuity of life; this strength of holding on and living with the barest necessities. (p.x-xi)

It is with these "barest necessities" that Head was able to reconstruct her own life by taking what was offered and renaming its significance.

Referring to a line in a poem by Telmaque, "Where is the hour of the beautiful dancing birds in the sun-wind?", Head says, "At some stage I began to confuse Telmaque's lines with a line of my own and I renamed Serowe the village of the rain-wind" (p.x). This village and its inhabitants with their daily struggles appear in countless imaginative

forms in Head's fiction, but only by looking at the framework, those "barest necessities", can one begin to see the architectural shape and direction of her vision.

SEROWE Village of the Rain Wind, published in 1981, records the oral history of a people through three distinct eras, all carved out by three great leaders intent on social reform and change. Head never idealizes the men however - "An outsider cannot but appreciate the contradiction of these great rulers who unwittingly acted as liberators" (p.xiii) - for she recognises the power of the ordinary Serowans who "have never lacked direction." Without their individual strength, the task of reform would have been impossible and the main theme that is woven throughout their stories is their resilience and capacity to reconstruct their lives. The African soil is harsh and poverty a way of life, but by developing their autarkic skills, the Serowans have displayed a remarkable dynamism that reflects Head's respect for those who "wanted to change the world"(p.xv).

The direct recording of various peoples' individual stories prevents Head from projecting an idealized version of a people involved in social change for Head includes all the contradictory strands of those resistant to change, those who opt for the new while irresponsibly dismissing the past, and those, like the unmarried mothers who have suffered from the breakdown of family life. These inevitable contradictions are central to her stories and contribute to the complexity of her creative vision. Head does recognise that even the selection of oral histories she chose to include in Serowe is tempered by her own personal involvement in "causes and debates". This seems to contradict Head's contention that she avoided political involvement, but perhaps the small community created a more conducive atmosphere for the artist who desired to weave her own pattern:

I admit a love for those causes, so that my definition of the soul of Serowe may eventually be condemned as too one-sided and favouring the themes of social reform and educational advance which have been a reality of village life. The story, and it is a beautiful one, has a long thread." (p.xiii-xiv)

This patterning focuses on the theme of reconstruction. The oral histories reveal that "the construction of Serowe intimately involved its population. They always seem to be building Serowe with their bare hands and little tools - a hoe, an axe and mud - that's all. This intimate knowledge of construction covers every aspect of village life" (p.xii). Not only does Serowe include accounts of building homes, roads, schools, "the barest necessities", but it also describes how people have constructed the values by which they live. There is ultimately a sense of sharing, of communal responsibility and a basic distrust of external impositions that destroy the spiritual core of the community. The fine line between maintaining the beauty of "ancient patterns" yet accepting the necessity of change was understood by the two great leaders, Khama the Great and his son, Tshekedi Khama. Head says, "Tradition, with its narrow outlook, does not combine happily with common sense, humanity and a broad outlook" (p.xiii), but attributes the leadership of these two men to the genius which set Serowe on its path to wholeness.

Head doesn't underestimate the difficulties involved in this journey and uses this theme in her fictional art on both the real and the symbolic levels. Head learned to reconstruct her own life not only by participating in the daily life of the villagers, but by recognising what she, as an outsider who "put down roots", shares with them. Her readers are outsiders as well but her personal concern with "social reform and educational progress" inevitably includes her readers in the task of reconstructing

their own vision in order to build the framework by which they can understand their own fragmented, outsider status. Head notes:

I choose the main theme of the book myself - that of social reform and educational progress. The other themes of the book people of Serowe developed themselves during the year I moved in and out of their homes..." (p.xv)

These "external themes" - self-help, migration and an intimate knowledge of construction - are central to all of Head's writings. At the core of her artistic intention is the desire to educate and reform, and in her fiction she carefully balances the real and symbolic meanings within the African context. Her short stories are all variations of these themes, presented like a symphonic anthology with its melodies and counterpoints, whereas her novels, which form a kind of progressive trilogy,²⁸ depict a steady transition from the real to the symbolic through the structural use of her narrative technique. The symbolic terrain is the area where the non-African reader and the text are most closely linked, an area that coexists with the African terrain, thus creating a puzzling tension. But it would seem that this is Head's intention: to define the ambiguous relationship not only between the reader and the text but to constantly question her own sense of belonging and identity which is African yet which rejects the limitations of any cultural specificity. The journey from Otherness to Self begins with a specific culturally determined consciousness yet its destination ultimately aims to supersede restricted categorization. Whether this is actually possible or not Head doesn't try to answer: she avoids the realms of absolutes, the ideal, the paradise that appears impossible to define - and find - but instead concentrates on the process, the wanderings, the migratory patterns that can only be reconstructed through the imagination, the "self-help" guide to wisdom and understanding.

The desire to eschew any absolute "truth" reflects both Head's recognition of the endless, fluid power of the imagination to reconstruct as well as her level-headed awareness that the past itself offers no absolute guidelines. She states: "Serowe is an historic village but not spectacularly so; its history is precariously oral" (p.xii). Nothing can be - or should be - taken for granted and this insight allows her to question the old men's memories of the history of the Bamangwato people, and to pose alternative reconstructions that would not exclude but bring out those threads that have become submerged beneath atrophied imaginations. The various narrative personae she uses in her fiction constantly underline how she sees her own precarious role as storyteller, and in turn this causes her readers to recognize their precarious role as critics. Yet the inclusion of Patrick van Rensburg in Serowe, an outsider who made a positive contribution to the development of the village by instigating reform but constantly seeking not to exploit his position through claims of privilege and greatness, testifies that Head sees the concept of being an "outsider" not as an intractable state but as a frame of mind. She records the lives of the villagers from a desire to pay tribute to this "basically humane society" which she has become a part of and wishes to contribute to. Her own voice is not that of a detached anthropologist but of a person who now belongs and who owes much to those men who provided the signposts:

...unlike his father Khama, who was naturally gifted with a form of poetic-visionary expression, all Tshekedi Khama's utterances and writings are so downright, pragmatic, commonsensical and geared to the real world, that today in Serowe, this is the strongest theme we inherit from his era. (p.75)

Both visionary and pragmatic herself, Head, the storyteller, has set down

her own signposts and it is left up to her audience to interpret their meanings and find the common ground on which the imagination can reinterpret what goes into the construction of humanity.

II. THE NOVELS

I have found that the novel form is like a large rag-bag into which one can stuff anything - all one's philosophical, social and romantic speculations. I have always reserved a special category for myself, as a writer - that of a pioneer blazing a new trail into the future. It would seem as though Africa rises at a point in history when world trends are more hopefully against exploitation, slavery and oppression - all of which has been synonymous with the name, Africa. 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.²⁹

Head lays the imaginative groundwork for a new kind of morality in her first novel, When Rain Clouds Gather, published in 1968.³⁰ Although she considers it to be her "most amateur effort"³¹, she says it is important to her "in a personal way. It is my only truly South African work, reflecting a black South African viewpoint." It grew out of dialogues she had with a young refugee from Zimbabwe who "wanted an alternative to war and power...he had no faith in the future black leadership of Zimbabwe." Head considers her first novel as providing "an alternative for young men. I created a symbolic type of refugee personality."³²

The novel is narrated from a detached third person perspective and depicts the exploration of several fragmented voices which are attempting to come to terms with their exiled status and to reconstruct their lives on the isolated, barren terrain of Golema Mmidi, a name meaning "to grow crops." The novel concentrates on the agricultural transformation of the village, on the difficulties and joys that such a transformation entails and portrays the important role that women play in the realization of the community's hopes. But against the background of Head's realism lies another domain that Arthur Ravenscroft has perceptively articulated as "a shadow novel that works in the dimensions of allusiveness and embryo

symbolism."³³ When Rain Clouds Gather can be seen as a rudimentary vision of Head's new morality that grows into maturity in her later novels.

Although its clear narrative structure and realistic setting make it the most accessible of all her works, it alludes to a mythical realm where both writer and audience are implanted with the knowledge of what a growing consciousness entails.

Perhaps the key to understanding this growth of consciousness, this process from Otherness to Self, lies in Head's conception of the duality of forces which give birth to movement and change. Both thematically and structurally, Head's fiction unravels the complex relationship between reality and myth, between good and evil, exile and belonging and the male/female dynamics that not only define relationships between people but depict the struggle within individuals to make some sense of their own wholeness. The characters in When Rain Clouds Gather all represent part of a fragmented consciousness that is attempting some kind of reconciliation between the forces that inhibit growth but also create the impetus to change. Both the barren, harsh terrain of Golema Mmidi and the unfulfilling pasts from which the characters are attempting to escape serve as the basis which nurtures the vision of growth. To Head, escape is a necessary but impossible task and all that can be done is to transform, not leave behind, a barren landscape that will always threaten and plague the individual's spiritual survival. Head explores this process primarily through her main character, Makhaya, the exile who, as his name signifies, is one who stays home (p.9), his home not being a closed off paradise but one that is filled with all the ambiguities of what it means to belong. Lloyd Brown refers to Makhaya as a visionary and a sceptic,³⁴ and I see Makhaya as a projection of Head's own conception of her function

as a writer. She presents herself as both a visionary and a sceptic, aware of the dual nature of her own creative function. In the process of dreaming and questioning, she unravels those various "invisible threads" that weave "a patch of cloth" of commitment to those who also want social change.

The transformation of the world, of one's own environment is ultimately a process that begins with self-transformation. Head espouses a kind of individualism that is not common in African literature but she understands that this individualism is dependent on the communal structures that are inherent in a kind of collective consciousness that corresponds well to the "ancient beauty" of Africa's heritage. Mirroring the narrative structuring of When Rains Clouds Gather, fragmented voices only realize some kind of unity when they interact with other voices to reveal the dialectical nature of change. Head best illustrates this point through the relationship that develops between Makhaya and Gilbert, the "giant, massive" figure who couldn't understand evil but only "Utopia" and "the greatest dreams about it" (p.31). Gilbert admits that he, like Makhaya, was running away from an undesirable past and both men become like "blood brothers", using their individual talents to overcome the "major blockages to agricultural progress" (p.34). They share their wisdom in which Gilbert could articulate the "Utopia" in a practical, down-to-earth kind of way whereas Makhaya knows of the other depth, the "shut-away worlds where the sunlight never penetrated, haunted worlds full of mistrust and hate..." (p.81). The recognized symbiotic nature of these visions was implicit to a kind of movement that "called for a compromise" (p.81). Makhaya realizes that "only through Gilbert...he discovers in himself a compassion for the whole great drama of human history" (p.134). The struggle on the land

represents the struggle in Makhaya's mind to free himself from the hatred of his past, and gradually Golema Mmidi "seemed like a dream he had evoked out of his own consciousness to help him live, to make life tolerable" (p.137). It is only through his interaction with both good people and the evil Matenge, who represents "the epitome of this darkness with his long, gloomy melancholy, suspicious face and his ceaseless intrigues, bitter jealousy and hatred" (p.45), that Makhaya is able to stop running in a frenzy of self destruction and recognize that what lay dormant in his imagination now needs the nourishment to "reach up to a life beyond the morass in which all black men lived" (p.166).

Makhaya's strength grows not only in relation to Gilbert but obviously in relation to Matenge who personifies everything he hated within himself. As he begins reconstructing his own future, the self-destructive evil no longer dominates or obsesses him and subsequently, the evil Matenge loses his control and fades away as there is no longer any use for him; he had "to face a tomorrow without any future" (p.177). Similarly, the collective will of the good villagers "did not want an evil to impose itself on them, and they quickly and silently decided to suppress it". But the memory of Matenge cannot be destroyed, "he was in all their thoughts, hovering like a great, unseen shadow over the whole village" (p.182). His presence is as important both to Makhaya's personal growth, for what it symbolically represents, and to the villagers' realization of their "garden of Eden", for how could they "ever have clarified their ideas had they not lived under the shadow of blind opposition" (p.187)? Without the ability to choose and see alternatives, there is no struggle, no journey, no "God...who stalked (man's) footsteps along the dusty pathways" (p.184). This theme is explored in greater detail in Head's next two novels, but in

this gentle first novel, Mma Millipede who "mixed spiritual counselling with practical advice" emerges as the storyteller who guides her children into her yard of wisdom and warns them of Africa's two destinies in which they played a part: they could follow the path of the wise but greedy Solomon who had a harem to satisfy his lust for power, or they could follow the nameless, ordinary man with no shoes who "continued to live where he always had - in the small brown birds of the bush, in the dusty footpaths and in the expressions of thin old men in tattered coats" (p.185). Head, her own storyteller, mirrors Mma Millipede's function as she leads her audience into the realm of myth in order to question the role it plays in interpreting its own symbolic choices.

The audience is presented with Dinorego, one of Africa's anonymous old men, who remains nameless when he first encounters Makhaya at the crossroads and guides him on the pathway that does not "lead to fame and importance" but on the one that "might lead to peace of mind" (p.20). Head says she is very conscious of creating characters who take "this grand stand", who are able to "rise above cultural groupings" and be examples for others to emulate.³⁴ Dinorego represents a kind of mythical character who is able to guide the others on their perilous journey and he serves as the male counterpart to Mma Millipede. He is also the storyteller who had "retained a wistful memory" of the paradise that once existed (p.37) and awakens the hopes of others as he observes: "This is God's country...people can't fight, not even kill an enemy" (pp.20-21). As people are drawn to his wisdom, Dinorego, "guided by his own strange rules" like a god himself, symbolizes the strength needed to make the memory real so that others could participate in the rich potential of its growth. He recognises that "there were things in Makhaya he would never understand

because his own environment was one full of innocence", but like God's "favourite mouthpiece" (p.187), he wants to give a home to those who are fleeing "a horror of life" so that they may share his "innocence, trust and respect": "he felt a close bond with Makhaya, the way God usually feels towards the outcast beggar rolling in the dust" (p.97). As Mma Millipede poses the choices and Dinorego remembers what could be, Head symbolically has restructured her own function as the storyteller who presents a vision but leaves the choice open for her readers to debate what significance their own participation entails.

A male/female duality also exists within other structures characterized in When Rain Clouds Gather. Makhaya's controlled, seemingly dark nature is attracted to the passionate, intense warmth of Paulina. Both characters examine their own sexual experiences, "awful cesspits where no one really cared to take a second look" (p.111) and are attracted to each other's strengths. Paulina does not represent the "docile and inferior (women who) remained their same old tribal selves" (p.68) that Makhaya finds so limiting, and Makhaya was not one of those "wilting, effeminate shadows of men who really feared women" (p.93). As they learn to value each other they are able to come together to form a kind of healthy interdependence which reveals the nature of Head's idea of sexual equality, an equality based on respect and love, not on fear and power. Similarly, the dual-faceted Gilbert, who had "acquired a number of conservative ideas about marriage" but is able to adopt a certain male "humility and tenderness" (p.103) learns to respect the "changeable, unpredictable" Maria: "There were two women in her - one was soft and meditative and the other was full of ruthless common sense, and these two uncongenial personalities clashed and contradicted each other all the

time..." (p.101). Head doesn't explore the implications of this but she never underestimates the difficulties that go into working out a system of equality as her first novel constantly depicts the ambiguities that are part of "the ever changing pattern of life" (p.103). At the end of When Rain Clouds Gather, when Makhaya finally "comes home" to Paulina, he is still tormented "with question after question" and recognizes he might have "to knock down" his God and step "into a black, silent death never to live again" (p.186). But the "Good God" plans his revenge for Makhaya's silent threats: what could be worse than to "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" (p.187)? Makhaya has a long way to go but at least now he has found a reason for his identity, his name - "the one who stays home". Head prepares to end her novel with an indication of the complexity and fluidity involved in the process of change by stating "preparations for progress took place long before progress even started" (p.187).

The ambiguity of Head's utopia which resists any absolute, fixed state reflects the way she conceives of the relationship between the artist and his/her work. The only characters Head literally kills off in this novel are Matenge, the embodiment of evil, and Paulina's son, Isaac, the embodiment of all innocence and good. Perhaps Head named Isaac after the Biblical character who was supposed to be sacrificed but was saved in order to signify that the boy was not really sacrificed to the hostile environment, as first appears: his mythical significance as all that is good redeems him. Or perhaps Head is alluding to the Isaac/Nwoye character in Things Fall Apart and the unnecessary sacrifice of Ikemefuma. Deeply affected by his friend's death, Nwoye slowly changed and discovered within

his "parched soul" a new way of being, a new identity. As Head's Isaac slowly rotted away on the barren, isolated landscape, he found within himself the imaginative power to create beautiful carvings from this nothingness, carefully shaping individual designs to a vision that was only visible in his mind. The only carving he did not make himself - the minute crocodile - but exchanged with another, serves to emphasize Makhaya's dawning awareness that one's imaginative dreams are nourished by others, for "where had the boy seen a crocodile" when water is only a wistful memory or a distant hope? Like all dreams with their nightmarish side, the boy's ashes symbolize the fragility of life whereas his carvings represent the solidity and hope of his vision. It is the artist's vision that cannot die and on some levels Head seems to self-consciously want to dissolve her own function, almost kill herself off in relation to her audience and say: "Don't look at me but at my vision and contribute to it" as Makhaya did to Paulina's little girl's model village by adding trees. The nameless little girl, like Isaac, could also represent Head, the artist (storyteller) who has created her own model village based on her African experiences but seeks to dissolve her audience's structural outsider status by bringing them in so they can contribute to her own model village and give it a name. Whether it is the old and wise, like Dinorego and Mma Millipede, or the young and innocent, like the children, Head mimics their function to plead with those outside the model village: "We're morality...for God's sake stop the slaughter, we're on your side. We're morality and we're on your side" (p.171).

Head acknowledges the destructive "otherness" that threatens society and individuals, and seeks to bring everyone, including her audience, "home", home representing the knowledge and faith in human potential. Like

the rain clouds that gather, it is the possibilities of what people are capable of realizing, not the actual achievements, that sustain the impetus needed to live:

You may see no rivers on the ground but we keep the rivers inside us. That is why all good things and all good people are called rain. Sometimes we see the rain clouds gather even though not a cloud appears in the sky. It is in our heart. (p.168)

Against the realistic, barren landscape, the "shadow novel" hovers closely, alluding to imaginary boundaries taking embryonic shape: as individual rain clouds hint at "the perilous journey" to reach the destination where "everything was uncertain, new and beginning from scratch" (p.188), Head's audience is left to interpret these shadowy new beginnings. In Head's next two novels, the fragmented voices, the narrators, change their structural shape and are slowly brought home to begin focusing on their own internal dualities. Characters continue searching for a communal terrain, a common language, initially between themselves but eventually this leads them to confront the language within themselves, its understanding a necessary prerequisite for belonging.

The question of language and who is telling the story seems a key issue in Head's next novel, Maru, published in 1971.³⁵ Although the novel centres around Margaret Cadmore and her emerging consciousness as an artist whose "special purpose" is to help her people, her narrative voice is often overshadowed by Maru's, the dominant male voice that "dreams the same dreams" (p.124) and manipulates her into realizing the potential of her creative powers. The novel depicts the lives of four interrelated characters who, in a "strange tangle of secret events, secretly...all

assisted each other" (p.116); yet, the very "secrecy" of their interactions points to an allegorical terrain where characters appear to be using each other, both unconsciously and consciously, to come to terms with their individual psyches and the implications for self transformation. Although A Question of Power is considered to be Head's "most ambitious work",³⁶ it seems to me that Maru is in many ways more complex due to the irresolution of the major conflicts which don't really make sense until the final novel in the trilogy makes visible the strands of Head's particular woven "patch of cloth."

Maru, Head's favourite work, in her own words "is a kind of fairy-tale/love-story."³⁷ It is a transitional novel, poised between the stark realism of When Rain Clouds Gather and the surrealist discourse found in A Question of Power. Although the novel doesn't revolve around the agricultural growth of a community, as the other two novels do, nature images are still central to Head's vision and it is obvious Head is relating "the language of the novel to the folk tradition and emphasizes the interaction between her characters and their natural environment."³⁸ The setting is still an African community; the only "physical exile" is the Masarwa school teacher, Margaret Cadmore, who is based on one of Bessie Head's mission teachers with the same name who made a great impression on her: "She had this *wild* unpredictability and she could make simple, rough and beautiful sketches of life."³⁹ But Head also states that "It is not acknowledged that the early part of Maru is an autobiographical account of my life in South Africa"⁴⁰ and "the passive, still girl was my own eyes watching the hideous nightmares which were afflicting me..."⁴¹

The other three central characters, who occupy positions of leadership and privilege within the community, can be seen as both "real" characters

and as imaginary projections of Margaret Cadmore's own psyche, mirroring the conflicts she has within herself. The three develop a specific attraction to the outsider, Margaret, and it is through their attempts to bring her "home" that Head reveals the basis on which the audience can evaluate their actions. But the audience is not kept so distanced as it was in When Rain Clouds Gather. Despite numerous dialogue sequences, Head constructs much of her narrative around the characters' inner thoughts and the reader is invited to enter the individual psyches and to question the "symbolism" of their inner conflicts. The repetitions and obsession with certain concepts confirms this, and Head seems to maintain an interesting equilibrium between the realistic, daily interactions of the characters and the surreal structures of their internal minds. Head, using her "writer's tricks"⁴¹, beckons the audience who, carried away into the story's structure, are left questioning how one can deconstruct the internal workings of the soul. Margaret, the archetypal outsider, comes to Dilepe village armed with "a type of personality that would be unable to fit into a definition of something as narrow as tribe or race or nation" and she represents "all that was the epitome of human freedom". Although she had learnt her "common sense" from her older, though more limited namesake, Head notes that she "lived on the edge of something" and the novel unravels the struggle that she goes through "to gain control over the only part of her life that was hers, her mind and her soul" (p.16). Margaret's growing consciousness of herself as an artist mirrors Head's developing conception of herself as a writer, one who wants to pay tribute to her African identity, as Margaret, the Masarwa does. But Head also wants to reduce the distance between herself and her audience, her "huge" message boldly

outlining the story which "is intended to linger with its lessons and reflections."

Unlike the opening sequence in When Rain Clouds Gather where Makhaya was escaping from his past, Maru opens with an epilogue that indicates where Maru and the women he has brought "home" have escaped to. Despite the idyllic terrain, the opening paragraph indicates a feeling of discomfort, of trapped potential and threatening unfulfilment. The epilogue doesn't make sense until one has read the whole novel but acts as a kind of warning where Maru sets down specific markers for the reader in a kind of cautionary tale that reveals more about himself and his internal conflicts than it does about the external reality from which he has escaped. The terrain is anonymous - it could be anywhere - but produces more questions than provides answers. Its ambiguous, unreal quality grows out of the events in the rest of the novel which describe a man attempting to "translate his dreams into reality". But the dreams have not yet been realized; they still persist in a shadowy zone: "...there was a depth of secret activity in him like that long, low line of black, boiling clouds" (pp.7-8). Unlike the optimistic tone of When Rain Clouds Gather in which the gathering rain clouds symbolized hope, the "secret activities" of Maru's rain clouds "were not promising rain. They were prisoners, pushed back, in trapped coils" (p.5) of their own potential. Maru is only able to ask questions and voice his fears, a seeming contrast to the authoritative, at times "deceitful" way he manipulates events in the rest of the story. The character steps out of the "public" African setting and narrates the confusion in his own "private" terrain - his mind - which causes the reader to question the motivation for his actions. Head calls him one of her "strong, silent men" who is drawn in "bold, simple outlines to convey huge

messages". She purposely constructed him, like Margaret, to have "hugely passive qualities", a necessary prerequisite for "new insights":

The thought has been carefully worked out. You cannot equal such a thought on racialism as Maru has. He sits alone with his thoughts. It irritates people because he is this sort of god-like man who is going to give you final messages. The thing is this man is so huge and unpredictable that he has these strange choices, that he has these strange reflections, that he has all the comfort and he reaches beyond this to understand the life of people who have been oppressed by *his* class. His class have obtained all kinds of wealth and privileges. It's a character maybe that you would not encounter, but he is needed to sort out a situation like this.⁴¹

As Maru's thoughts focus on Margaret, the woman he loves, she persists in loving his arch rival, Moleka. Margaret isn't conscious of her own Self; she too exists in a state of unrealized dreams, a shadowy zone that doesn't even have a voice of its own: "...she would see the tears too, yet be unable to account for them on waking because she had no mental impression of her dreams, except those of the room in which she loved Maru" (p.9). It is only when Margaret is able to recognize and thus banish the other room for herself, to consciously narrate her own story, that the two will be able to share a common terrain and create their own language of equality in which they can nourish each other in a soil of growth.

But in this "great love story", that doesn't happen. We only see the beginning, the "preparations for progress" when Margaret is unconsciously driven to paint some of those "mental impressions of dreams" but it is only when she is able to paint her whole story that she will have created a "kingdom of her own" (p.34). In Maru, Head is concerned with Margaret's ability to imagine, to anticipate love, something that has been denied her all her life.⁴² She can only realize her potential when she reconciles her love for Maru and Moleka and replaces Maru's male voice to become her own

storyteller. Until then, both she and Maru will remain unequal partners, prisoners in their own paradise, separated from the respective counterparts (Dikeledi and Moleka), their private selves unable to effectively challenge the public consciousness which needs transforming. In this novel, Head uses Maru's voice to convey the urgency of such changes: "...very often I have needed a masculine vehicle just because there was nothing else that would suit it."⁴³ In Head's next novel, we see a female voice emerging to tell her own story, a voice that is still guided - and manipulated - by a god-like man, but a voice that does eventually recognize its own Selfhood.

Head maintains a complex balance between the private and the public levels in Maru both through her narrative structure which weaves in and out of the private psyches of her characters and through the recurrent themes which reflect how the public consciousness is trapped within restricted, unimaginative boundaries. Head appears to challenge her readers to reconstruct these boundaries through an active use of the imagination. The text demands to be read on different - and simultaneous - levels: the opening epilogue depicting an anonymous, threatening terrain that exists in the mind abruptly changes to a threatened African landscape where people consciously define themselves against others; four characters interact on a level of everyday reality but suddenly seem really only to be symbols on which each individual is projecting his/her own desires and fears and working out personal conflicts, like a kind of allegory; talking goats and broken necks appear to confirm the surreal, allegorical structure which is abruptly obscured at the end of the novel when Head concludes with a political statement about the nature of racial prejudice. The storyteller is appealing to her listeners to use their mythic imagination which is the only common ground on which we can formulate a new language to reconstruct

a common terrain of understanding: "... (there has) to be characters who convey eternity, because the message is intended to live. The characters, the book, the whole creation, is intended to live."⁴⁴

As in When Rain Clouds Gather, there exists in Maru a kind of sexual duality that defines itself on both the thematic and structural levels. An interesting dichotomy exists between the men and the women as well as between the men themselves and the women themselves. These dichotomies exist both within the realistic discourse of the novel and within the allegorical mode. The most well developed example is the relationship between Maru and Moleka. Both are fighting a power struggle over a woman but also both are attempting to work something out about themselves and their own sense of wholeness. They have a kind of symbiotic relationship, like Gilbert's and Makhaya's, but their interactions produce a more marked visible tension where working together seems desirable yet impossible. The banishment of Moleka from Maru's private paradise leaves Maru without Moleka's "dark shadow...to balance the situation" (p.8). Maru's potential becomes trapped, his creativity lacking motivation and power to propel it along. And when Moleka falls in love with Margaret, "something killed the old Moleka in a flash and out of one death arose, in a flash, a new Moleka" (p.32). Likened to the sea, he becomes lost, "trying to grasp a depth of what he might gain" (p.76). Maru's shadow that was always next to him, that he had grown accustomed to (p.33), disappears and he eventually starts "to give orders right and left" and appears to have lost the will to explore that deep sea. The men can not grow without each other.

Both men were equals; "they were kings of opposing kingdoms" except Maru was the "king who had insight" who feared Moleka's power that was concealed behind the closed door, "but Maru knew of its existence because

if he touched Moleka's heart with some word or gesture a cloud would lift and he would see a rainbow of dazzling light" (p.32). The potential of undiscovered worlds, full of peace and hope, intrigues Maru, whereas his poetry nourishes Moleka. Maru equates Moleka's power to the sun: arrogant, dominating and ruthless - "Did the sun have compassion and good sense? It only had the ego of the brightest light in the heavens" (p.58). Perhaps that is where Makhaya would have found himself if he had chosen the path "to fame and importance". Maru rejected its "dizzy, revolving energy" and prefers to see himself like the moon, "an eternal and gentle interplay of shadows and light and peace" (p.58). Yet the sun-moon cycle is now threatened because an external force proves to be more powerful than its bond. Or are the men destroying themselves in the pursuit of earthly passions that only cause jealousy, hatred and turmoil?

Love has always been the most important prerequisite for Head's new world, and without it the journey itself cannot even begin. But Head distinguishes between this most saintly feeling and its counterpart, sexual passion, which to her implies imprisonment, not growth. Seen in this light, perhaps Moleka didn't have the potential for rebirth that at first appeared possible, although he by no means is the embodiment of evil like Seth, Pete and Morafi who ended up being "bombed" by their fear of Maru. In A Question of Power Head opens up that door to Moleka's hidden potential and unleashes the force of his "passion" which Maru had guarded until his departure. But it is Maru who is the more ambivalent character in this novel - and Head's next - for the imaginative consciousness appears to be "half demon" (p.70) and also is capable of unleashing a destructive force, not through passion but through reason:

When had they not worked hand in hand? They would do so again except as enemies this time. The way he saw it, it could not be

helped, but he intended coming out on top, as the winner. It was different if his motivation was entirely selfish, self-centred, but the motivation came from his gods who spoke to him in his heart. They had said: Take that road. Then they had said: Take that companion. He believed his heart and the things in it. They were his only criteria for goodness. In the end, the subjection of his whole life to his inner gods was an intellectual process. Very little feeling was involved. His methods were cold, calculating and ruthless. (p.74)

Maru did win; he obtained the object of his love through often uncompassionate methods and gives Margaret everything, except her own voice. Yet he is not satisfied; something eludes him and perhaps it is not until A Question of Power that Head tries to resolve some of these contradictions that appear to plague her as much as her characters. But when she says "the clue to Maru and Moleka lay in their relationship to women" (p.34) she is also implying the clue to women lay in their relationship to Maru and Moleka. Both men fall in love with Margaret as a means of satisfying their own needs, but what about Margaret's needs and how she ends up not really being able to choose - or even think for herself? The battle of her conflicting desires is in her own mind and Head presents the men as allegorical symbols - Maru as creativity and Moleka as power - struggling to control Margaret's vulnerable psyche. Due to her childhood experiences, Margaret has a built-in defence mechanism, what Lloyd Brown calls a kind of "individualistic self-protectiveness"⁴⁵ that only Maru is able to penetrate because they share the same gods. But Margaret will remain haunted by her passion for Moleka until she can consciously articulate exactly what he signifies to her. Margaret must "selve her otherness" and become her own storyteller; she needs to free herself from male manipulation and control that dominates both the public, real world and the private world of a woman's consciousness, a

consciousness that has internalized male perspectives and language. This is attempted in A Question of Power.

Unlike her ethereal relationships to Maru and Moleka, Margaret's concrete friendship with Dikeledi seemed to nourish and help her come to terms with her potential. Dikeledi notes that Margaret was in a "constant flux and inter-change between her two images" and often seemed "unable to project that hidden power" (p.71). She gives the paints to Margaret to help her realize her artistic talent and seeks to protect her friend in the same way Moleka sought to protect Maru. There is an obvious parallel between Dikeledi and Moleka, just as there is between Margaret and Maru: "Dikeledi's kingdom was like that of the earth and its deep centre which absorbed the light and radiations of a billion suns...a true complement to (Moleka's) own kingdom of radiant energy" (p.83). But she was vulnerable like Margaret and placed in the dubious role as "the puppet" of Maru's schemes and the potential victim of Moleka's maleness. Although her vanity is what first motivates Margaret to paint, the women have a tender and compassionate relationship, symbiotic like the men's, and its only threat seems to be not love but their respective obsession with male power:

Dikeledi only became more pensive and silent towards the latter part of the year, while her friend Margaret grew in strength of purpose and personality. Perhaps the constant communication and affection assisted the subconscious change in the way Dikeledi became more like Margaret and Margaret more like Dikeledi, or perhaps it was Dikeledi's love which brought to the forefront the hidden and more powerful woman who dwelt behind the insignificant shadow. 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. (p.112)

In A Question of Power female power shows its destructive potential, but in this novel of transition, the dark, internal forces are contained within the gentle, "unfolding landscape", although the audience was alerted

to the "black storm clouds" at the beginning of the novel and this heavy atmosphere seems to act like a dark shadow, constantly threatening and undermining the love that is continually expressed in Maru. The audience, like Margaret who "lived on the edge of something", occupies an ambiguous terrain between reality and myth, between gentle love and its shadowy counterpart as Head seems to be alluding to the exiled state of the imagination in general. Can it exist apart from the public, real world which gives form to its vision and perpetuates its need to struggle? Head ends Maru with a public, directly political comment that confirms her second novel is not only "a more 'political' novel than When Rain Clouds Gather",⁴⁶ but a novel which reveals that freedom, born from the imagination, has a continually ambivalent relationship to political power. Perhaps the wind of freedom is only a fleeting possibility, a sample of the "fresh clean air" that will turn "fetid" again unless "the question of power" is voiced in a new language in which the exiled imagination can choose its own terrain to call home.

The fact that A Question of Power, Head's third novel, first published in 1974,⁴⁷ has been given the most critical attention and received the most international acclaim can perhaps be attributed to its autobiographical content as well as to its portrayal of madness which has always been a powerfully attractive theme to those who are interested in exploring feminism and marginalization as well as the literary imagination and its creative potential. Many critics have analysed Head's complex novel from a number of angles that range from a Freudian "psycho-existentialist"

explanation that traces the protagonist's breakdown to her childhood experiences in South Africa,⁴⁸ to an explanation of Head's use of different cultural mythologies and symbols.⁴⁹ The novel has been situated, though with little more than a few lines of acknowledgment, in the tradition of *madness within the African novel* and likened to novels by Achebe, Armah, Ngugi and Awoonor which depict not only colonialism but "racism, apartheid, neo-colonialism in all its forms" as the fundamental dehumanizing and alienating practices that lead to mental disorder.⁵⁰ Head has also been placed in the black "womanist" tradition, along with Mariama Bâ, Paule Marshall and Toni Morrison, where "black women go mad. Unlike negatively presented white madwomen, the black women in novels written by black women knows in her subconscious that she must survive because she has people without resources depending on her..."⁵¹

Obviously a lot more has to be uncovered about the similarities and differences of Head's inscription of madness to other African women writers and first-world women like Plath, Woolf and Lessing whose use of specific images and metaphors in their novels indicate that they "depict insanity in relation to sexual politics and state that madness, to a greater or lesser degree, is connected to the female social condition."⁵² And any important study of women and madness would have to include Jean Rhys who does not separate race or gender in the construction of her tragic heroine in Wide Sargasso Sea, a novel which responds to Charlotte Brontë's "madwoman in the attic". As Spivak says, "At least Rhys sees to it that the woman from the colonies is not sacrificed as an insane animal for her sister's consolidation."⁵³ The culturally specific imagery and archetypal symbolism of different writers deserve close scrutiny that would contribute substantially to deconstructing feminism in an international context.

Katherine Frank appears as one of the few feminist critics to recognize that "the analysis of female archetypes - the identification and hypothesized rationale for them" would make a useful critical springboard, for "if the madwoman in the attic is the spectre that haunts woman-authored nineteenth-century English fiction, it is the madwoman in the village who haunts the novels of Rebekah Njau and Bessie Head..."⁵⁴

Yet, the literary context of Head's use of archetypal symbolism must ultimately be connected to her experiences as an African woman who is attempting to inscribe herself, as Cixous says of European women writers, to "put herself into the text - as into the world and into history - by her own movement."⁵⁵ Head does not disguise the fact that A Question of Power is "totally autobiographical...a kind of verbatim reportage" although she acknowledges she "put in question marks and doubts...the book's continually written with gaps and blanks."⁵⁶ The novel attempts to make some sense of the "tremendous disturbance (Head) began to experience from 1968 until late 1970,"⁵⁷ a period when Head was hospitalized and in which she claims she became the "Botswana national joke."⁵⁸ In interviews and letters she is very open about that period in her life and at times appears to regret having written the novel, although she claims she wanted to write it as an apology to the people she offended and also to save herself from suffering "in some other life."⁵⁹ She recognizes "the key in the book is high pitched and hysterical",⁶⁰ but never consciously relates it to the struggles she personally experienced as a woman attempting to write with her own voice. Yet it seems to me one of the dominant tensions that emerges from the novel is that of a woman struggling with patriarchal notions of time, history and woman's otherness in order to redefine - to reinscribe - herself as an active recorder rather than a passive recipient

of her own life. The fragmented narrative voice and non-linear structure of the novel depict one woman's "strange journey into hell" to discover who she was (p.14). All her life Head/Elizabeth the protagonist was too busy being "flung unpleasant details" by men who denied her "time to examine her own hell" (p.12). By addressing the "question of power", Head slowly begins to transform her consciousness from one who is an outsider, a passive (non)reader/receiver to one who is able to begin jotting down fragmentary notes and discovering her own creativity and ability to belong - ultimately to herself.

One critic recently has analysed this process of transformation from object to subject, from "passive receiver of horrors" to become "a subject, an 'I'" by stating that "Elizabeth must name the horror; she must write this text. And in so doing she displaces the abject onto the written word and the reader. We must share in her victimization." She goes on to compare A Question of Power to Alex La Guma's A Walk In The Night:

Both books use images of excrement, obscenity, and filth to show the horror of oppression. The filmic presentation of these images, too, is similar. We are forced not only to share the horrors, but to see them. It seems, however, that the two writers use the abject for different means. Head disarms the abject by making everyone, including the reader, a part of it. In La Guma's text, the power of the abject remains firmly intact; it appears to be ceaselessly alienating.⁶¹

The visual images that Head creates are linked to her use of archetypal symbols that have the capacity to activate the reader's own unconscious reactions to dilemmas that are not purely personal concerns of the writer herself. Even more than in her other novels, Head deliberately carries us with her into a new symbolic terrain where we also participate in creating not "dead worlds, only new worlds." (p.100) Head's account of her breakdown cannot be understood only in terms of a specific environmental

experience, South African in nature; it is more than an third person autobiography. Given Head's numerous mythical and symbolical references, the novel must be understood as an allegorical journey into the collective unconscious whereby archetypal images help the reader to locate meanings within different kinds of human experiences. The constant tension between the novel's polarities (male/female, insider/outsider, destroyer/creator, etc.) serves as the structural basis upon which Head introduces various archetypal figures battling for control of a woman's voice and the means to shape her identity. The fact that Head doesn't draw on purely African images to elucidate her archetypes indicates her intention to expose the universal nature of that struggle and to reveal that the meaning lying in the collective unconscious serves as a key for unlocking a collective consciousness whereby all individuals would take an active responsibility for creating new world of meaning. As Elizabeth learns "to 'read' rather than participate in and 'name' rather than be named" by the oppressive structures that perpetuate her otherness,⁶² Head's audience embarks on a parallel journey, equally complex, where the act of reading becomes a non-passive and disturbing experience that directly relates to the meaning of Elizabeth's own reality - a reality where the female voice gradually begins to define its own terrain and understand its creative potential.

The novel opens with a reference to the key archetypal figure, Sello, whom Head immediately places in a context that defies construction to any specific culture: "It seemed almost incidental that he was African. So vast had his inner perceptions grown over the years that he preferred an identification with a particular environment" (p.11). He saw himself as "just anyone" and "a woman in the village of Motabeng paralleled his inner development. " Elizabeth and Sello "were twin souls with closely-linked

destinies and (had) the same capacity to submerge other preoccupations in a pursuit after the things of the soul" (pp.11-12) The duality of these two seem to imply some sort of male/female dichotomy where Elizabeth becomes entirely dependent on "Old Father Time" and where Sello himself, as the drama unfolds, reveals his dependence on Elizabeth for understanding certain things about himself. The fact that Sello, the prophet, is merely an imagined projection from Elizabeth's own subconscious suggests Head is attempting to construct an archetype that signifies Elizabeth's male side; in Jungian terms, her animus:

...that was the only reasonable explanation of the relationship between Sello and her. The base of it was masculine. Right from the start, Sello had the air of one who was simply picking up the threads of a long friendship that had been briefly interrupted at some stage. It was as if he was saying: 'Do you remember this occasion when we met and worked together?' Because a spectacular array of personalities moved towards her, crowded with memories of the past. They were all Sello in his work, as the prophet of mankind. She seemed to have no distinct face of her own, her face was always turned towards Sello, whom she had adored. At least, that was her stand in the few perceptions which awakened in her. She seemed to have only been a side attachment to Sello. The nearest example she could give to it, was that of a Teacher and his favourite disciple, such as many religious men had had. (pp.24-25)

But the "teacher/disciple", Father/child relationship is inherently asymmetrical and only by developing "a distinct face of her own", the base of it feminine, can Elizabeth hope to achieve some sort of balance between Sello's maleness and her own femaleness, a necessary step to an actualization of the Self.

The process is not an easy one and the employment of a surrealist narrative structure, where time and space make no coherent sense to the reader, indicates Head's recognition of the need to explore beyond the known and travel into a realm of experimentation probing the potentialities of feeling and imagination. This realm/structure refuses to accept

established restraints that inhibit a freedom to rearrange and reorganize certain "givens", in the name of the real. Although Sello is a "real" person from Elizabeth's village, her interactions with him take place on a symbolic terrain, both desirable and horrendous, that enables her to project - and make sense of - a part of herself which had remained "unread", unquestioned:

...one night she was lying staring at the dark when it seemed as though her head simply filled out into a large horizon. It gave her a strange feeling of things being there right inside her and yet projected at the same time at a distance away from her. She was not sure if she were awake or asleep, and often after that the dividing line between dream perceptions and waking reality was to become confused. (p.22)

The novel's structure alternates between the two confused realms of dream and reality as the audience is often left confused and unable to differentiate between the dream perceptions and waking reality. Only through the integration and transcendence of these two contradictory states can Elizabeth - and essentially all people - hope to achieve a kind of active understanding of their own personal development.

Elizabeth's development is contingent on her own understanding of what Sello - and the other archetypal figures - mean to her. The audience never really gets a sense of who Elizabeth actually is until the end of the novel, which is about new beginnings, when she becomes conscious of her own voice. Initially she questions "who was she?" (p.14) and appears to be a loosely defined, weak person who was easily suggestible, "in an easily invaded world" (p.105) like a "wilting puppet" (p. 13), "entirely dependent on Sello for direction and equally helpless, like a patient on his doctor for survival..." (p.35). Unless she is able to build up her own "immune" system, no doctor/prophet/father will be able to protect her from the evil/disease that is part of her whole system/psyche/reality. The novel is

essentially about Elizabeth questioning her own weakness and dependence on others and how they define her; it is about learning to discover not only what she is but what she is not; it is about listening to both the male and female voices within the self that shouldn't, ideally, be at odds with each other. It is only when Elizabeth is able to understand the strength and symbolic implications of her own femaleness and become her own prophet that she is able to free herself from any kind of dominance and find a balance of power within her self. By listening to the archetypal wise old man within her, "I'm very old, you know, in my soul. I have completed a billion cycles in my destiny. You are only two" (p.34), Elizabeth, the child, drawing on the unforgotten "instinctual" wisdom stored in her soul, grows up by using her imagination to experience the truth of both the good and the evil within her and learns to seek wisdom, not power, to become the female prophet to whom others can turn to for guidance.

But before Elizabeth can reach this level of awareness, she has to confront all the shadowy characters within her soul, both male and female in orientation, experience the implications of their symbolic hold over her, and define herself in relation to what she judges to be good and evil - a kind of working out of her own system of morality. Her conscious "male half", Sello, activates countless other archetypal images within her unconscious to produce a variety of choices Elizabeth must respond to: "She had seen from the beginning that she had no distinct personality apart from Sello...He moved into her person, silently. Elizabeth turned and looked at Sello. He averted his face. It was Buddha, and the only face she had acquired apart from Sello. A series of pictures unfolded before her" (p.32). Head evokes an image of Buddha to alert her audience to the didactic, moral nature of Sello's role for Buddha was "a great man of

wisdom (who) found the path of deliverance for himself and for others, although he was wholly human."⁶³ Buddha's first "wandering mission" took him into the realm of good and evil where "the only good remedy for evil is healthy reality."⁶⁴ Elizabeth eventually discovers this and by journeying "the slow descent", she is eventually able to project an image of "the wife of Buddha" who "toppled (the master) out of (his Nirvana)" (p.201). Head gives Buddhism a female face: Sello learns the intrinsic value of Elizabeth's strength for Goodness cannot confront its essential otherness, Evil, unless it has recognized the implications of its own internal wholeness. This wholeness has both male and female qualities. Through Sello, Elizabeth is able to discover the strength of her femaleness; through Elizabeth, Sello is able to admit the weakness of his maleness. Together they form a "creative complement" (p.199) who seek to be part of and transform the world that is constantly threatened by its failure to come to terms with its otherness.

This realm of "Otherness", the evil within each individual and thus society in general, cannot be destroyed and the greater the attempt to repress or disown it, the stronger is the threat of it bursting forth like "destructive molten lava" to reek chaos and havoc within the world: "It did not matter who had planned evil. It was always there, the plan. But deeper still was human compassion" (p.34). A Question of Power attempts to unravel the relationship between good and evil through both its surreal narrative form and its psychological content. Elizabeth's internal dreams reflect an external reality where racism, cruelty and exploitation are part of everyday life away from the paradisaal terrain of Montabeng. Yet even the village is threatened by racism, poverty and hardship. No paradise is possible although one constantly strives for it as the only possible

direction life can take. Elizabeth's conscious efforts to confront the negative in Montabeng give way to a more creative, compassionate environment where human resources are used in a productive manner, similar to the agricultural dynamics of the community described in When Rain Clouds Gather. It is one of Head's paradoxes that the daily life of Montabeng is easier for Elizabeth to cope with and in fact saves her sanity, whereas the internal tensions in her mind threaten her creative contribution to the garden. The unconscious has to become aware of what one's everyday behaviour signifies. Even when Elizabeth's breakdown threatens the stability of her external behaviour, she is able to achieve a balance by becoming conscious of the healing symbols that are part of her daily routine in the garden of nurturance and compassion. At the end of the novel, her new beginning, Elizabeth begins "to jot down fragmentary notes such as a shipwrecked sailor might make on a warm sandy beach as he stared back at the stormy sea that had nearly taken his life" (p.204). Elizabeth becomes an active recorder of her own history, reinscribing herself into her own life as Head, the shipwrecked sailor, describes the stormy journey and recognises her alterity in a realm where time marks only its beginning. Head's autobiography uncovers the process of discovery: through its form and content, the novel shows how individuals' psyches are projected onto and create society's structures in all its forms, while at the same time it illustrates the interactions within the society are a reflection of the structures of the individual psyche. Consciousness or a kind of active wisdom is the key to establishing a balance between dream perceptions and waking reality, between the goodness inherent in each individual and the evil that threatens a disequilibrium in the society as a whole.

Elizabeth's conversations with Sello, whose rational and logical deductions, as befit the Logos principle,⁶⁵ help her to develop her own Eros nature⁶⁶ which for so long lay dormant and repressed to such an extent that it surfaced in an evil, twisted form in the character of Medusa who suddenly "walked into Elizabeth's person" (p.33). Sello produces the Medusa archetype which terrifies Elizabeth so enormously because she sees an extreme form of herself in this destructive, vengeful female goddess who personifies Elizabeth's otherness, an otherness she has not yet assimilated and who symbolizes her own self-hatred and self-destructiveness:

I'd not taken note of real living people because so many fantastic images surround me, and they must talk and move all the time, and when they address me I just burst out with the right lines on cue as though I am living with a strange "other self" I don't know so well. And you know Sello? He has a terrible Medusa hidden away in his subconscious. She's so real to me that I live in terror of her all my days. That's why I broke down. It's Medusa. She scared me from the first moment I saw her. She's unlike any other woman I've ever seen in my life before. She's haughty, arrogant and there's some awful things unfolding here...I feel frightened and lost... (p.58)

Through the complicated narrative, Head reveals a certain "method to her madness" that becomes lucid when the audience is confronted with the implications of the various timeless myths that the writer has used to give meaning to her experiences. Head, the outsider, writes A Question of Power in an attempt to become an insider; she has learned to read, to deconstruct the horrors afflicting "the other self", Elizabeth, a woman who is struggling to make connections and understand the patterning of her own history - a history that Head is in the process of reinscribing:

...She struggled over and over to link the brief snapshots, the statements he made and the torture of certain states of mind, into some coherent, broad pattern. There was a strange parallel in her observations to mankind's myths - they began to seem vividly true. Nearly every nation had that background of mythology - looming, monstrous personalities they called 'the Gods', personalities who formed the base of their attitudes to

royalty and class; personalities whose deeds were hideous and yet who assumed powerful positions, presumably because they were in positions of thunderbolts, like the Medusa. Then again the story was shaded down to a very personal level of how a man is overwhelmed by his own internal darkness; that when he finds in himself in the embrace of Medusa she is really the direct and tangible form of his own evils, his power lusts, his greeds, his self-importance, and these dominate him totally and bring him to the death of the soul. (p.40)

The Medusa myth functions as a receptacle in which man can project his own evilness and thus avoid taking responsibility for his own actions. The sexual nature of the snake-haired goddess unleashes in the male-dominated Elizabeth not only a disdain for her "perversions which she paraded as desirability", a kind of morality devoid of love, but also a "suppressed contempt" for the man who lets the evil woman dominate him. Elizabeth on one level identifies with the Medusa's "high-pitched ferocity" that rumbled "beneath her consciousness like molten lava" (p.24). Angered at being a victim of Sello's cruel manipulations, she notes: "It only needed someone to bring the hot lava to the surface for her to find that a process of degradation, scorn and wild, blind cruelty had its equivalent of wild, savage vengeance in her" (p.98). Elizabeth projects her hatred onto her own maleness which she identifies as having a weakness for "raw passions." Sello becomes to her a "grotesque murderer", the monk whose "mind was turned down towards earthy things" (p.99). Elizabeth's own animus appears to betray her and becomes a mere shadow of its potential: "Sello in the brown suit" is a weak, ineffectual character whom Elizabeth can no longer depend on. Consequently, she is forced to succumb to Medusa's strength and become vengeful and dominant like her, projecting onto others what she cannot bear within herself. Or she can find another way of self perception where her maleness and femaleness would not be at war devaluing each other but would be working together to form a harmonious balance. But at this

stage in the novel, Elizabeth, the passive receiver, is still out at sea. She is not yet ready to topple Buddha from his Nirvana and realize he is "just like everyone else"; by putting her hopes of survival solely on him, she is just as guilty of creating false gods/goddesses as he.

At the end of the "Sello" chapter, Elizabeth broods "on the logic of goodness alone":

...'He has performed some delicate operations. He has seen that evil and good travel side by side in the same personality. He has diagnosed the evil, isolated it and ended it. There's no more Medusa.' (p.98)

These "delicate operations" become fully comprehensible to Elizabeth by the end of the novel when Sello admits to her why he manoeuvred the whole thing:

'It wasn't power that was my doom. It was women; in particular a special woman who formed a creative complement to me, much like the relationship you and I have had for some time. She was captivating and dazzling. I liked slaves. I could never say goodbye. I could never accept rejection. I was too important. I tried to break her. She had your power. She broke free and unleashed centuries of suffering and darkness. Nothing stood in the way of her prestige and self-esteem; she was God. She was like Dan with a terrible will, with magic rituals and all kinds of tricks. I saw the story repeating itself...' (p.199)

Elizabeth never destroys Medusa from whom "flows the dark stream of terror and destruction" (p.92) but tells Sello to "find another punch bag for your girl. I'm not her match"(p.93). By admitting she is unable to combat this kind of evil on its own terms, Elizabeth is gaining the kind of wisdom that enables her to voice - and ultimately define - her own system of morality that has no place for the Medusa's vengeful lust. Sello in all his forms must inevitably die, strip himself of all his vesture garments, in order to be reborn again, not as a prophet but as her complementary

counterpart. For this to happen, Elizabeth must test the strength of her newly conceived female awareness which up to the end of the "Sello" chapter "eludes" her. She states she does not want to contribute "to creating dead worlds, only new worlds" and the new world that emerges in the "Dan" chapter follows a parallel pattern to the previous chapter in that Elizabeth herself must be reborn with a new found awareness in which her female strength is capable of resisting the "extreme masculinity" that is out to silence and destroy her own capacity to construct herself in her own image, with her own voice.

Whereas Elizabeth disdained the weak, ineffectual Sello in the brown suit, reminiscent of the "unmanly" men from her South African past (pp.44-45), her overly dependent female nature, not yet able to step outside and read/understand its intrinsic, independent value, becomes attracted to Dan who is a projection of everything she thinks she craves: "She was entirely dependent on what he would do...More than anything, the extreme masculinity of the man instantly attracted her" (p.105). Transferring the need for a protective father figure (never having known her own African father) from Sello onto Dan, Elizabeth, like the confused reader, has not yet become conscious of what her experiences with Medusa in the previous chapter signify. Dan, who "is fooling around "the Father's name", represents a kind of African trickster god who wants to steal from Elizabeth the gold (goodness) she has within her (p.108). Using his (twisted) powers of persuasion, he entices the vulnerable Elizabeth into his realm of evil where he proceeds to humiliate and reify her to the extent that she not only questions her own sexuality but her total self worth. That Dan represents Sello's own evil side becomes apparent when one considers that Sello's weakness was for women he could "break" - women who had not yet

become total objects in his own image. Dan's parade of countless female stereotypes, one-dimensional passive "dolls", depicts the potential destructiveness Sello himself was capable of. Elizabeth can either become like all of Dan's women or she can rise like Medusa and avenge the death Perseus inflicted on her (p.99). Yet Elizabeth slowly begins to recognize from her encounters with Medusa that she cannot choose either pathway for she was opposed to "the brutal murderer for love". Like Sello, Dan had become "one of the greatest teachers she'd worked with, but he taught her by default - he taught iron and steel self-control through sheer, wild, abandoned debauchery; he taught the extremes of love and tenderness through the extremes of hate; he taught an alertness for falsehoods within, because he had used any means at his disposal to destroy Sello. And from the degradations and destruction of her life had arisen a still, lofty serenity of soul nothing could shake" (p.202). Through the dialectical process of self-questioning emerges a new identity that transcends the limitations of its former fragmentary nature. The voices of Elizabeth/Head become the same at the end of the novel as Elizabeth begins to actively acknowledge her own creative potential, a process that is linked to her "writing" and her work in the garden.

Despite Head's seemingly naive insistence that love is the principal agent for the soil of growth, she never loses sight of the evil nature of power that constantly threatens her paradise. Although she develops these ideas more successfully in her short stories, she does reveal, through Sello, "the many layers of awareness" that mark the timeless zone of myth:

I never showed him (Dan) the terrible power behind the milksop monk. I operated it in the background, to kill him. We've taken away the major danger, because that power combined with his will to evil could create such darkness it would be oblivion. That's what they were all like before the time of darkness, or, as it is said, the fall of man. They saw their powers and killed mer-

cilessly...If the things of the soul are really a question of power, then anyone in possession of power of the spirit could be Lucifer. (p.199)

Elizabeth emerges as the wife of Buddha where male and female work together and hopes that "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" (p.201). Lloyd Brown feels Bessie Head "is insisting on the pervasive influence of masculine-oriented notions of power, not only in men and in social institutions, but also within women themselves..."⁶⁷ Head's novel shows how destructive it is when females internalize and thus fall victim to these notions of power, and at the same time, she draws a parallel to the pervasive influences of "white/colonial"-oriented notions of power that are equally debilitating to coloureds/blacks. But although racial identity in the novel plays an important role and is indeed linked to imbalances of power, Head's conventional use of dark/light, female/male imagery suggests that she is more interested in the symbolism of the inner world than the more socially outward-looking constructions of gender and race. That only men engage her in useful political discussion, that a good blond-haired woman is able to conquer the bad dark-haired one indicate the problematic nature of Head's discourse. Although she wanted to reveal "a private philosophical journey to the sources of evil,"⁶⁸ her inability to go beyond conventional archetypes and language to conceptualize the journey is disappointing and sets her apart from Aidoo's more self-conscious and creative use of language.

The means by which Elizabeth is able to affect a reconciliation between the many layers of her dual-faceted psyche does not exist just within the terrain of her imagination, her dream-like world, but also lies

within the environment of Montabeng. The people she encounters mirror the archetypal images in her own mind; in fact, they both trigger the images and embody them. She must learn to make sense of their symbolic meanings which serve as the keys to her survival. Eugene, the South African educational theorist, appears in the "Sello" chapter as a kind of wise old man who says he understands Elizabeth's exiled state and want to help her. Later Tom, the young American, emerges as the person with whom Elizabeth starts discussing her political and moral ideas; through this process, Elizabeth begins to consciously transform her personality which previously had resembled "an ambiguous mass." Camilla, "with dark, unfathomable eyes" (p.79), had the arrogance of the Medusa whereas Birgette, the blond-haired Dane, displayed a soft and sensitive air of wisdom where her only code in life was nobility (p.81). Elizabeth is immediately attracted to "the anguished face of the blonde girl, full of shadows as though she secretly endured an intolerable sorrow" (p.80) and identifies with her "devil-may-care" attitude when Birgette decides to tell Camilla that she is a racist. Evil cannot be avoided but only confronted as Elizabeth was able to learn through her dealings with Medusa and Dan. There is also the dependent, wife-like personality of Kenosi who eventually overcomes her dependence and manages the garden on her own when Elizabeth is too sick. The woman whom Elizabeth says she would marry if she were a man is able to acknowledge the importance of both her own and Elizabeth's contributions to the garden. They work together as two strong souls. These characters, though "real" in the sense of Head's autobiographical renderings, must be read as imaginary projections of a woman who is learning to write in her own notebook the story about her struggle for salvation.

The novel closes with references to poetry and literature, and Elizabeth's tribute to her new found selfhood that is contained within "her land" - Africa. The character of Shorty, Elizabeth's son, emerges from the shadows for up to the end of her nightmare, he is always present as he mimics her words and travels "the journey alongside her." He is part of herself and not only represents the reason why she didn't eventually kill herself, but serves as a model for Elizabeth's "new dawn" and "new world". As she reads his poem about men and other things that can fly, she recognizes that God, that "unseen Being in the sky", is not so much a projection of "the Father" but rather, a reflection of the Self: "There is only one God and his name is Man. And Elizabeth is his prophet" (p.206). The use of the language - Man signifying individuals - distorts the meaning and seems to deny the gender-specific aspects of Elizabeth's experiences. By giving the prophet a female face, Elizabeth appears to be freeing herself from patriarchal notions of history and time, and writing herself into the world. But if her language remains imprisoned in patriarchal discourse, has she really asserted a new female identity? Elizabeth becomes just "like anyone" and thus has the ability to explore the creative potential within the boundaries of her own imagination. She can now articulate the importance and function of reading her own history - but from what perspective? As she steps into the realm of literature and "opposes the basic trend", the audience must fill in the gaps and do the same. Head as outsider reads an Indian novel which exalts the poor. This mirrors the outside audience's reading of an African novel about an unprivileged outsider. It is not intended "'to entertain and to satisfy our lust for the amazing...'" (p.206), but reminds us of our own

unprivileged position within the worlds of meaning. A Question of Power, like Maru, lingers with its "lessons and reflections".

That Bessie Head has incorporated a kind of new symbolic terrain drawn from Indian, African and Western myths testifies to the universal nature of the archetypal patterns she has structured her third novel around. Always maintaining a detached eye, "a part of her mind which was still a free observer of all this laughed with silent contempt" (p.146), Head becomes her own "blabbermouth", a "great orator" who "only recorded the one-sided view of her own observations and speculations. The rest of it was in the hands of Sello..." (p.201). By stating that Sello had much to account for (leaving open the male perspective?), thus ending "the story like that, unresolved" (p.201), Head is implying that there is still a long way to go to unravel that nature of power and that lost Paradise, the fragmented self that seeks wholeness. As the collective unconscious must find the means to become conscious of its collective responsibility, Head continues the journey of exploration in her short stories which belong to the African soil but encompass a terrain beyond "the place of sand" where the underground water supply flows in the direction of "the brotherhood of man."

Yet in what direction does Head's "sisterhood" flow? The novel is centered around the specificities of a female-centered consciousness, but in the end, Head doesn't acknowledge that her femaleness has been a problem for her. Conventional patriarchal constructs of language and archetypal symbols are never questioned and Head's attempts to "unprivilege" her sexual identity reveal an ambivalence about femaleness that has persisted in her three novels. The question of sexual passion is never resolved, and whether symbolic or realistic, male characters act upon the passive female,

even when she becomes "Man's" prophet. Of course Head is interested in complementary "male/female" dynamics, but her inability to re-examine the ways in which these dynamics are articulated pose a problem for the reader. Searching for meanings through language, the outsider audience cannot locate a discourse to correspond to a vision that challenges prevailing assumptions about the way we perceive others, and ultimately ourselves.

III. THE SHORT STORIES

The wandering travellers of ancient times came unexpectedly upon people sitting around their outdoor fires. 'Who are you?' people asked. 'I am the dreamer and storyteller,' they replied. 'I have seen life. I am drunk with the magical enchantment of human relationships. I laughed often. The big, wide free world is full of innocence...' One imagines that those people always welcomed the story-tellers. Each human society is a narrow world, trapped to death in paltry evils and jealousies, and for people to know that there are thoughts and generousities wider and freer than their own can only be an enrichment to their lives. But what happens to the dreamer and storyteller when he is born into a dead world of such extreme cruelties...in South Africa, who is one talking to? People there are not people but complexions and hair textures - whites, Coloureds, Indians and Africans. Who can write about that? Where is the wedge of innocence and laughter that resolves so many human ills?⁶⁹

In order to recover "that wedge of innocence and laughter", Head turned her attention to her adopted village, "that quiet backwater", where she began to derive a sense of security from "an environment where all people are welded together by an ancient order."⁷⁰ She recognized that "having defined the personal, my work became more social and outward-looking."⁷¹ The short stories in her anthology The Collector of Treasures, published in 1977,⁷² "were the spilling over of the interviews with the village people she had done for the Serowe book."⁷³ But they are not merely tales of innocence and laughter: they are also harsh tales of survival and cruelty that continually question our own innocence and understanding. They develop many of the themes explored in her novels but concentrate, more directly, on the lives of women who suffer "from all the calamities that befall an inferior form of human life"(p.92). And above all, they are tales of belonging and exile, tales that bear the familiar Head landmarks that guide the reader into the

realm of the imagination where dreaming is a necessary requisite for storytelling.

Due to the "outward-looking" nature of the stories, it seems likely that Head wrote them in the early to mid 1970s's, after she had recovered more fully from her breakdown and laid the ghosts of her past to rest. Exact dates are not known, but before the publication of the anthology, "some of the stories appeared in various magazines such as Encounter, Essence, The Magazine for Black Women, Black World, and Ms. Magazine. 'Witchcraft' appeared in an anthology, Quarry '76: New South African Writing (Ad Donker, Publisher, Johannesburg 1976)."⁷⁴ Unlike the novels, the stories are not autobiographical, although some of the characters previously encountered, particularly the idealized males who occupy the symbolic realm, appear in the stories. Variations of Maru and his "huge view of life" attract the reader's attention, as do some of the female characters who suffer in similar ways to Elizabeth. Head may pick her characters from the Serowan landscape, but as in her novels, she uses her imaginative vision to give them shape and purpose. This vision doesn't really change throughout her various writings, but her interests shift in the short stories for she uses the genre to concentrate more directly on the nature of female subjectivity and how it is perceived by both insiders and outsiders. Head appears to resolve some of her previous ambiguities about femaleness, although her stories continually challenge the reader's ability to locate meanings from a distanced perspective. In many ways, Head's stories are more structurally complex than her novels and it is surprising so little critical attention has been paid to them.

Head's method of storytelling is distinctly different to Aidoo's - and other African writers whose historical circumstances did not deprive

them of a sense of belonging to a particular tribe or ethnic group. Head exploits her outsider status in her stories by deliberately distancing herself from the community whose tales she narrates so that her stories reveal a ambiguous, unresolved tone. Her intention is to reinforce not only her own outsider status but also her literate audience's "unknowingness", an audience whose members are forced to search for a way to enlarge their vision of a world from which they are exiled. Like Aidoo, Head uses for her point of departure the framework of the traditional dilemma tale in which the audience is expected to debate the moral questions raised by the storyteller, but she not only involves the real audience but also a fictive or "knowing" audience who are part of the communal structure of her stories. Unlike other storytellers who do not openly acknowledge the fictive audience but allude to it by subtly pretending to remind their listeners of half-forgotten historical events, Head frequently fills in the gaps by giving some kind of historical comment so that the "unknowing" reader may situate the stories within a specific cultural context, thereby acknowledging their realistic viability. Yet this structural tension becomes even more complex when in some of Head's stories her own voice completely disappears or when she disconcertingly shifts her tone and narrative persona within the same story so that the "outsider" voice can no longer be heard. At times Head appears to dissolve her own structural function as narrator and become part of the excluded audience, all the more aware of its limited vision. In the process, Head subtly leads her audience into the realm of myth where her characters become so stylized that no reader is allowed to identify with them - or even accept them as plausible - but must use his/her own imagination, as Head has done, to translate historical

experiences into a symbolic realm that questions the universal nature of existence. We must not only read her stories to learn about the experiences of her Botswana villagers and how their history has shaped their consciousness, but must also learn to use the mythic imagination to shape our own moral vision of a future where we will no longer remain "outsiders", exiled from ourselves and each other.

The stories in The Collector of Treasures should be read in sequence, viewed not as separate tales of a fragmented universe but as tales with a definite ordered purpose encompassing a unified vision of a society undergoing social change. Head, who "likes a sense of continuity", apparently "wrote to her publisher that the order in which the stories appeared was very important."⁷⁵ The opening story is the thematic model on which all the other stories are based. "The Deep River: A Story of Ancient Tribal Migration " basically recounts a conflict that developed within a tight-knit community that led to some of its people breaking away and migrating to an area which is now in Botswana. The tensions between "the face" of the whole group and the "individual faces" of its members are explored, as are Head's well known themes of the corruptibility of power and the need for a more "tender and compassionate" world based on love. The fact that women are blamed for causing the conflict when in reality they have no power, "they are not allowed to know their own minds", is another issue Head later explores in some of her other tales, varying the situations and historical settings so the dilemmas can be debated from all angles. In many ways, Head has constructed the first tale as an archetypal variation of man's Biblical expulsion from Paradise where women are held responsible for the exiled state of the human race. But she explores this concept from many angles

in her subsequent stories which raise more questions than they resolve and thus call for a reappraisal of everything that has been taken for granted. Although Head's stories each intend to entertain and educate in the true tradition of oral storytelling, they also form a unified collection of treasures that question the very basis of myth around which all our lives are constructed.

The opening story also serves as a structural model from which the other stories flow. The "deep river" metaphor evokes a mythical world everyone can imagine but no one can journey to. A conflict has "ruffled the deep river" and all that remains is a "memory of (the) history" one aspires to recapture but time and distance make the journey a purely imaginary endeavour. In an unprecedented footnote to the story, Head has clarified that "some historical data was given to me by the old men of the tribe, but it was unreliable as their memories had tended to fail them" and therefore she has reconstructed "an entirely romanticized and fictionalized version of the Batolaote tribe" (p.6). Head, the outsider, cannot speak for a people but combining a few strands of their history with her own imaginative desire to explore that deep river, she speaks through them. She constructs her own myth in order to fill in the gaps of an incoherent past. Thus, the purpose of her mythical construction has a wider symbolic significance than to merely reinforce the ethics of a particular community. Her ability to distance herself from the constraints of the original myth indicate that she sees myth as a vehicle for imaginatively exploring what is possible in the future. Head is attracted to the universality and timelessness myths in general have to offer and her tales seemed designed to consider the problematic aspects of human experience and why we have arrived at where we are today,

excluded from a paradise we constantly search for but can never reach. Head's stories illuminate the paradoxes of good vs. evil, male/female relationships, power vs. love, and in setting herself up as mediator of these timeless conflicts, she is inviting her audience to participate in the ritual enactment of her myth. But she never lets herself or her audience get too involved to the point of forgetting they are outsiders, excluded from this world while at the same time are part of its reconstruction. Head's mythical context and shifting narrative persona evoke both a collective responsibility and an awareness of the impossibility of ever resolving the dilemma which can only be found in that lost history which the myth has come to symbolize. The myth is like the deep river whose only existence is in the power of our imaginations, but it is the only direction we can travel in if we don't want to remain in exile, condemned to wander aimlessly in search of this lost history.

Head begins "The Deep River..." with the storyteller's ritual words "long ago" and continues to speak of the deep river, thus situating both her audience and herself in a mythical space where "people lived without faces". But conflict "ruffled the deep river" and what has emerged is not the memory of the "origins and original language" of the Talaote tribe but a memory of the movement from one face to individual faces, from the silence of the river to the language that gave it movement. The people of Monemapee, named after the chief "whose face was the face of all people" lived a life based on rituals and on an order no one appeared to question or ruffle, an order where no individual face emerged. This paradise remained intact, and the people, aware of the dangers of the hostile tribes that threatened them from the outside, only closed in on

themselves, "like one face", accepting the "regimental levelling down of their individual souls" (p.2). The language Head uses to describe the ritual of the corn harvest reinforces the ritual nature of myth, although an underlying tension seems to emerge which questions the very premise of this myth, this paradise that appears to lack soul. Head observes the ritual from a distance, respectfully but ambivalently, and it is only when she is able to question that myth of paradise that she takes the audience with her into an alive, real world where "the people awoke and showed their individual faces".

After the opening sequence, the pace of the storyteller speeds up for the deep river paradise - slow, even and silent - now becomes full of "ripples". Dialogue replaces the rituals and individual voices replace the silent face of the tribe. Head begins the section of this story with "Now", a word that can be heard capturing the anticipation and enthusiasm of a storyteller who has much to share with her audience. The reader enters "a world where women were of no account" (p.3) but where one man's love for a woman is splitting the tribe in two. The tensions between maintaining that one face or following the dictates of one's individual heart is characterized by Sebembele whose dilemma becomes the dilemma of the whole community. Beneath the even tempo of the distant paradise, secrets - hidden fears - have emerged that call into question the very nature of that paradise. Is a society justified - or even capable - of repressing individual needs and desires? Is the whole concept of paradise a myth that people cling to out of fear of taking responsibility for their own actions? Sebembele, trapped in his anguish, realizes he must leave the community, for the security and goodness it once offered cannot outweigh his individual desire to follow his own soul.

Sebembele's brothers' power struggle acts as a kind of catalyst that forces him to realize this paradise has nothing more to offer him: "Sebembele looked at them for a long moment. It was not hatred he felt but peace at last...His bothers were forcing him to leave the tribe" (p.5).

The people in the community recognised "they had a ruler who talked with deeds rather than words" (p.6) and found that they were divided into two camps when they had "to offer up their individual faces to the face of this ruler". One camp resisted the new face: "...it was too out-of-the-way and shocking...Theirs was not a tender, compassionate and romantic world. And yet in a way it was". The other camp offered their love and support to Sebembele "even though he has shown himself to be a man with a weakness" (p.7). The irony is that Sebembele's "weakness" for love, for a woman is in fact his strength and the community's weakness. This "paradise", unable to resolve the contradictions between its divine "laws" and human face falls apart - and all because of a woman. One is left with the feeling that what Sebembele and his followers leave behind will turn into a garden of evil ruled by his two corrupt brothers. Unlike the Christian myth, here the good choose to leave this "paradise", hoping to find a real paradise that can accommodate their love and human desires.

As Head shifts her narrative in the last page of the story to the voice of an objective outsider, she captures the feelings of the old men who "keep on giving confused and contradictory accounts of their origins, but they say they lost their place of birth over a woman" (p.6). Yet she challenges their interpretation by her own imaginative reconstruction. Just as Eve was blamed for Adam's downfall and their expulsion from

paradise, the old men are reinforcing the myth that "women have always caused a lot of trouble in this world". Head questions this; she questions the lack of humanity men have for women and the myths that have shaped our identity. All that remains of the identity of the Talaote tribe is their name, meaning "all right, you can go". The name has an ambiguous, open-ended tone - go where? how? - and can be heard echoing throughout Head's other stories. There seems to be a strong parallel between the way Head conceptualizes both language and myth: although necessary, they both define and restrict; yet, used imaginatively, they are capable of freeing and guiding individuals on their stormy journey beneath the deep river in search of particular truths. The old men, immobile and resentful, bemoan their fate and "shake their heads" in despair when they could be rejoicing that they have been given the freedom "to go": by reinterpreting their past, they could find the impetus to redefine their future.

The rest of the stories in the collection are all variations on the archetypal myth described in the first tale, and the reader follows the ancient patterns of migration in an attempt to uncover a real paradise the can accommodate an exiled wanderer's vision. Although Head doesn't concentrate on only the female condition, most of her stories involve some comment on the issue raised in the first story - that women are not allowed to know their own minds but (or because of this) are responsible for causing "a lot of trouble in this world". The stories function in different groups, working around similar themes, and in the title story of the anthology, "The Collector of Treasures", Head ties up many of the individual strands, only to pose more dilemmas about the human condition.

Yet out of the tensions that the dilemmas create, Head is constantly able to envision a type of moral utopia, the new paradise, based on love and complimentary sexual roles as the destination the migrators seek, as destination that resembles an oasis amidst the barren wasteland her characters are travelling through.

Whereas the first story witnesses the expulsion from paradise, the second story recounts one woman's attempts to re-enter it. "Heaven Is Not Closed" is like an extension of the first model where individuals, denied that mythical home, search for ways of repossessing it. Although the historical setting differs from the first tale - in this story people are placed in the colonial era where Christianity is slowly eroding the indigenous religion - Head still relies heavily on the myth where exiled individuals never stop trying to open "the doors of heaven" that have been closed on them. Head's choice of a woman to illustrate the myth is an appropriate extension of the first story. Although women have been said not "to know their own minds", Galethebege in this story is a beautiful example of one woman who does know her own mind but ironically is denied that responsibility until her death. The "simple and good heart" of the woman is not enough to combat the dual patriarchal institutions of religions and marriage, and Galethebege dies carrying the burden of all human suffering while symbolizing the hope for redeeming the human race. Head does not cast her in the Eve stereotype, as "one who has caused a lot of trouble in this world", but as a victim of a society where women were not allowed to question their "station in life" nor "to be involved in controversy and protest" (p.11). Although Galethebege accepts both the dictates of her husband and the church, she dies "a magnificent death" following the dictates of her heart that had

been suppressed for so long. Head explores how an individual's inner sense of integrity and beliefs are often at odds with the society's rules which impose a conformity on the community and stifle individual self fulfilment.

The questions that arise from the tension between "what is" and "what could be" - between the real and the ideal - form the basis of this dilemma tale that sees the old man rekindling "the dying fire" of the continuity between generations and sparking the minds of the young to debate their historical condition. Head uses fragments of reality to reconstruct myth on both the thematic and structural levels. "Heaven Is Not Closed" is like "a tale within a tale" where Head, the outsider, uses the old man, Modise, to reconstruct the myth of Galethebege's search for redemption as a means of redeeming the art of oral storytelling. She starts the story from the omniscient narrator's point of view, recounting the "magnificent death" of the saintly Galethebege who everyone in the village loved and respected. Then Head goes back to explain how Galethebege achieved this holy position, but she does this through Modise as he is the only one of the villagers who holds the insider's key that would unlock the truth behind the significance of Galethebege's death. Through his gestures and tone of voice, he becomes the storyteller with something exciting to offer, like the narrator in the first tale. Modise was the only one who "observed, with great practicality that Galethebege was not in the correct position for death". As the wise old man, he gives both comfort and satisfaction to his specific audience but also, he wants to unsettle them by making them aware of the gaps in their history which can only be filled with imaginary speculation. As the insiders of

the community "found themselves debating the matter in their minds", their gusts of astonished laughter (p.12) establish an atmosphere of knowing and sharing from which Head and her audience are excluded. Their joy perhaps reflects what is inherently familiar to them and is an affirmation of what lies in their collective unconscious memory. They have discovered the ability to believe in themselves again and this only reinforces the inadequacy of the outsider's own perceptions.

Modise speaks of the historical conflict between the two religions and exposes the vulnerability of the community that started falling apart not because of a woman but because of a belief that would not accept "a tender compromise". Galethebege "had been born good" and her choice of sharing "the final secret of life" with her Christian God reveals she, like Sebembele, is searching for a paradise based on values that do not exclude and exile. But Head is also showing that whereas Sebembele had the option to leave the tribe, Galethebege as a woman has no such choice to leave. Yet, the story suggests, through Modise's praise and the children's laughter, that this forced compromise was beneficial to the tribe whose dying fires have been rekindled and to Galethebege herself who dies a saintly death, guiding her people to that mythical paradise.

Although "Heaven Is Not Closed" actually celebrates custom and community whereas "the Deep River..." does not, Head is not interested in the apparent discrepancy but rather wants to develop her dialectic between the individual faces and the supportive collective structure. They need not be mutually exclusive as the theme of the inevitability of romantic love which runs through both stories symbolises. The need for compassion, love and tolerance represent the continuity that unifies the two stories in which both a man and a woman are seen to know their own

minds. Head not only illustrates a complementary view of male and female experience but searches for a reconciliation of opposing forces that should not separate people but bring them closer together.

The third story in the anthology, "The Village Saint", resembles a cautionary tale that illuminates the dangers involved when both language and myth remain unchallenged and static. Unlike the two previous tales whose saints, inherently inward looking and motivated by love, attempted to transcend the limitations of their communities, the village saint in this story is in search of nothing except her own material comfort. To achieve that, she fools her community with her glib language and exploits her own family with a power that is as corrupt as it is false. But what is particularly interesting about this story is the way it is told and the questions it raises about the way myths not only define but can also, as with the old men of the first story, imprison people in their own illusions.

The narrative persona in "The Village Saint" is entirely that of an insider of the community. The confidence and communal assurance in the opening paragraph betrays a voice that does not resemble the outsider's honesty and ambiguity in the two previous stories. The narrator speaks with pride of the fact that "people were never fooled by facades" and goes on to explain how the village lost its patron saint, Mma-Mompatl. Yet the voice never questions why the villagers were deceived for so long and Head has joined the audience's ironic reading of the villagers and counterbalances with an objective outsider's distrust^{of} the insider's subjective acceptance of the myth that "was so long and so austere and holy that it was written into the very stones and earth of village life"

(p.13). In many ways this story enacts the problems involved in reading Head's complex tales: only by determining where the author is can the audience begin to make sense of what she is trying to say. The villagers in this tale, like the old men in the first tale who saw their past as a closed universe, become victims of their own illusions precisely because they are not inward looking, self-critical or objective. This does not mean that Head does not empathise with them, but she is critical of their limitations and the duplicitous role they play in Mma-Mompati's exile.

Both the language the narrator uses and the symbolic way language is defined in the story illustrates Head's desire to encourage the reader to question the "one face" of the storyteller. When describing the birth of Mompati the narrator claims "as most people know" and continues to assume throughout the story that the audience shares the villagers' insights, perceptions and values. But this makes the literate audience all the more aware of its distance from the oral tradition. And this distance, ironically, is what is needed to supersede the static, ritualized framework of myth. To the village narrator, there is no dilemma that needs debating - Mma-Mompati was lost "despite (their) acute insight into human nature"; to the outsider there is a dilemma that encompasses the fundamental debate of how we judge ourselves and others and form our moral vision of the world.

The narrator in this tale is as unreliable as a village gossip. The pretence of knowing and understanding everything is suspicious enough, but the ease, suddenness and viciousness with which the villagers turn against Mma-Mompati reveals an imbalanced, exaggerated judgement of her. The saintliness of Mma-Mompati was constructed around her ability to use language: "She had a professional smile and a professional frown of

concern for everything, just like the priests. But topping it all was the fluidity and ease with which she could pray" (pp.14-15). They continue to rally around this "wronged woman" when her husband walks out on her, preferring love to a false divinity, and they resemble the villagers in the first story who choose not to join Sebembele on his journey. But there is no debate in this story about love: only one voice which presumes, quite confidently, that there are no other sides to the story.

The villagers' respect for Mma-Mompatati soars when she impresses the court during her divorce proceedings with her convincing language: "The whole village memorized her great court oration because she repeated it so often thereafter." Language resembles a repetitive ritual that draws its strength from its form which impresses and not its content which here seems irrelevant. The villagers turn quite suddenly against Mma-Mompatati when Mary Pule, her younger counterpart, beats her at her own power-hungry game involving deception and deceit. The villagers, desecrating the myth of Mma-Mompatati's saintliness end up facilely erecting another myth of her unsaintliness, unaware that this myth is equally unreliable given that the language which shaped it has not changed its essence. Mma-Mompatati still continues, now as a woman and not as a saint, to bury the dead and pray for the sick as Mary Pule's facade, "that concealed a tenacious will" remains intact. She has replaced Mma-Mompatati as the dominating and manipulative force in Mompatati's life.

Perhaps the character of Mompatati can illuminate the villagers' own inability to find a language that is not empty or deceptive and can explain why the villagers remain loyal and supportive of him throughout his life. In an unconscious way, the villagers appear to identify with

Mompati: he represents the face of the community - on the surface, the possessor of a commanding voice yet under this facade, the blind victim of his own vulnerability. Is this not the way the reader comes to see the storyteller and the villagers in general? The over-confident narrator is untrustworthy and cannot be accepted at face value just as Mompati himself appears suspect: a storekeeper with no goods, a defender of causes but really a victim of others' strategies, a man whose "poor blood" implied he could discard his mother as easily as she had used him against his father, a speaker of "wisdom" whose words were no more than empty proverbs and ridiculous wishes. A weak, helpless man who preferred words to deeds - to Head, a fatal flaw, - Mompati symbolises the face of the community, impressed with the sound of language and oblivious to its limitations. The "deep booming bass" of Mompati contrasts to Mary Pule's "plaintive, tremulous voice" and both extremes mask the reality of what lies behind the image of the voice. Unable to see behind these facades and arrive at a balanced, objective appraisal of their shortcomings, the villagers will remain in the stagnant water, unable to reach the deep river of their imaginations that would end the cycle of deceit and corruption.

In the final analysis, however, the audience is left with compassion - unintended by the storyteller - for both Mma-Mompati whose final deeds and not words cannot be harshly condemned and her husband whose different kind of exiled state reveals his strength and the villagers' narrowness. The fictive storyteller, unconsciously and ironically, is cautioning outsiders about the insiders' own vulnerability if their world remains insular and self-complacent. "The Village Saint" is obviously not a tale about women and their "vampire-like" ability to manipulate and control

language but is intended as an allegory about the tension between subjective responses and objective reflections and their interrelationship with the powerful weapon of language which can both blind and enlighten.

Head continues to use the allegorical structure in her parable "Jacob: The Story of a Faith-Healing Priest". The character of Mma-Mompati is replaced by the evil prophet Lebojang who exploits peoples' good faith to make money for himself, but when his deeds are discovered, he is killed and returns in his death to warn others of his suffering and guilt. Perhaps like Mma-Mompati who continues to pray for the sick, Head also gives Lebojang a chance to redeem himself, indicating that evil can be overcome through good deeds. In many ways, Lebojang ends up a symbol to proselytize what saintliness is not: "Once his other deeds became known people were to ponder deeply on the nature of evil" (p.28). This idea is further enacted through the character of Jacob who, "born to suffer, experiences suffering to its abysmal depths" (p.24) in his daily life, was able to transcend all the evil that plagued him by supplanting, as his name indicates in Christian mythology, good deeds initiated by the god with whom he communicates. Like the Christian Jacob, Head's Jacob has an invisible ladder in which the "Voice of his God" descends to give him the faith to heal the suffering of the world. His goodness is complemented by Johannah, the woman who opens up "a whole new world of learning and living" for him by balancing his spiritual saintliness with an earthly holiness, thus enabling the symbolic mother and father to lead the exiled children to the Promised Land.

This satisfying story raises the moral dilemmas outlined in the previous tales and gives another version of the individual's attempts to regain that lost paradise. In fact, the way Head opens the story with a description of "the sleepy village of Makaleng" seems to indicate that perhaps the paradise already exists but people are incapable - or unwilling - to recognise what lies at their doorstep: "Makaleng was one of those far-away wonders of the world which people sometimes visited but never thought of inhabiting..." (p.19) It is like an oasis amidst the drought-stricken landscape that exists in the "far-away" terrain of the imagination. Makaleng resembles a mythic paradise complete with a river that both "flowed in torrents" and "shimmered like mercury". Unlike the "one face" of the river in the first story, this river is composed of many "individual faces" that gives the village a soul composed of both good and bad elements, like the river that cuts the village in half and the seasons that influence life's tempo. Head appears to be taking the myth of paradise apart again and questioning how it functions in our imaginations. In this story, it is not necessarily the journey that is so important but what we do with the "far-away wonder" when we come within its reach. We approach it cautiously, aware of its miraculous "summer grass" but like the children unable to enter the foreboding garden with the "ferocious vampire-fly", we know the pain that lies in store if we inhabit the realm of our imaginative powers. So we visit it, aware that we are outsiders although we are still drawn to the prophetic truths our imaginations are capable of creating. Perhaps to Head, the tragedy - and beauty - of the human imagination is that it does not seek nourishment but suffers and thus "unconsciously creat(es) legends about...saintliness" (p.22). Makaleng did not intrigue its neighbours

because of its rich soil but "was famous in the hearts of ordinary people because it had two prophets" (p.20).

The two prophets obviously represent the opposing forces of good and evil present in our own minds which are in turn projected onto the society we have created. Head describes the prophets as inhabiting the "sunrise" and "sunset" parts of the village, aware of the others' existence but as incompatible - and symbiotic - as despair and hope, selfishness and generosity, truth and falsehood. The moral utopia is similar to the ones imagined in Maru and A Question of Power. Head reiterates what both Margaret and Elizabeth came to realize: the sheer faith of believing in one's inner strengths to heal is enough to destroy the evil that eats away at one's sanity. Through Jacob's nights of "persecution and torture" and with the "sacrifice" of his brother, Isaac, his God appears "to take care" of him. This God, who resembles Sello and even Maru, is a projection of an individual's inner consciousness for Head notes: "It was never quite clear to those who loved Prophet Jacob just who his God was...in moments of inspiration, appeared to be the width and depth of his own experience and suffering..." (p.21)

After establishing Jacob's past life and telling how he got to his present state, Head shifts the narrative voice to the old man himself. The audience is suddenly forced to remember that it is Jacob's story, not Head's:

Jacob is old now. He related these experiences of his childhood without bitterness. He will tell you that his uncle, as though prompted by a subconscious guilt, sent him and his brother to the night school of Makaleng village together with all the small cattle-herding boys...he even remembers the way they were taught to sing the alphabet and clap their hands. (p.24)

At this point Head seems to be questioning her own imaginative

reconstruction of the parable while at the same time questioning Jacob's perceptions:

There is a point in his story when you begin to doubt Jacob's sanity and that of his God. Somehow you don't doubt his adult experiences and his conversations with God, but you doubt cruelty and stress placed on a young and helpless child...(p.25)

As the old man recounts how the voice of God spoke to him, Head and her audience "lean forward" and question what God has actually given him. The questions are purposely left unresolved for "to an outsider there never seemed much coherence in what was going on between Jacob and his God. But the way in which he expressed this relationship in deeds arrested the attention. Everything about him was very beautiful and simple and deeply sincere. He had too, one of the oddest churches in the whole wide world" (p.25). By reinforcing both her own and her audience's outsider status, Head is pushing the audience to examine their own values in relation to the old man's. Is it not the failure of our own imaginations that "what was going on between Jacob and his God" seems incoherent? Is his beauty, sincerity and simplicity so much divorced from our own reality that we can only doubt Jacob's sanity? To Head, we have lost that ability to heal ourselves and thus are exiled from Makaleng, able to visit it in legend but like the neighbouring villagers suffering from drought and hunger, it has never occurred to us to inhabit it permanently, perhaps more afraid of Lebojang's sores than Jacob's faith-healing powers.

The innocent children are the first ones able to enter Jacob's paradise. At the beginning of the story Head pits them against the forces of evil by recounting how they, unlike their stupid cattle, were

aware of that evil enclosure that held terror and suffering. The knowledge but not the experience of evil made them the perfect inhabitants of Jacob's world where joy and sharing were "the only goodness there". Unlike the adults who associated money with Lebojang's "stunning powers" but were unable to see how their blood was being sucked, the children's untarnished minds led them easily into Jacob's yard where the "vampire-fly" held no threat. The outside narrator at this stage finds it all quite unlikely although "no one seemed to question the uniqueness of this" as the children showed up promptly for his sermons, "not that they comprehended anything" (p.29). Gradually the poor and those who suffered the most saw their only hope lay with Jacob's own stunning powers - a healing power that demanded nothing except "an exchange of gifts" and a love for good deeds. The "family" only become complete when the "real woman" Johannah comes to provide the practical and traditional awareness needed to balance and complement Jacob's spiritual consciousness: "I am a real woman and as the saying goes the children of a real woman do not get lean or die" (p.39). But this perfect relationship is even too much for the villagers to bear and they "rub their eyes in disbelief and doubt their sanity". Again, Head uses her audience to represent both the "knowing" insiders who witness the events and the "unknowing" audience who can only be sceptical. As outsiders, we are excluded from participating in the idyllic world that Jacob and Johannah have created, this paradise that appears open only to those who have the imaginative strength of the children who are not tempted to enter the vampire-fly's "dark jungle of stalks and leaves".

But the story doesn't end like a romantic fairy tale. Lebojang's spirit comes back to haunt the villagers and remind them of their sins.

In order to appreciate the depth of Jacob's saintliness and what he had to offer, the villagers are confronted with Lebojang's memory - a memory that is meant to both warn and appease. Head remains the outsider but gives some clues as to why Makaleng continues to remain a "far-away wonder":

People say the soul of Lebojang returned from the grave. At night it kept on knocking on the doors of all the people to whom he had sold potions. Some of these...fled. Some went insane. Some people also say that Lebojang's soul is like Lazarus. Lebojang only wanted to tell the people whom he awoke at night - his fellow ritual murderers - to desist from taking the lives of people because of the agony he was suffering now. (p.36)

The "conscience" that controls the evil that exists in our imaginations is enough to make us flee from ourselves or go insane in defeat. But like Lazarus that Jesus raised from the dead with his faith-healing powers, Lebojang becomes a symbol of redemption and hope: mirroring the sores Lazarus had to sustain, Lebojang renounces his sins for the guilt and suffering are too much for his conscience to bear. The faith-healing priest inhabits the distant Makaleng, a mythical paradise that Head has visited in order to reconstruct the memory that lies within reach of the imagination, a memory plagued with both good and evil as with a conscience that is unable to find peace. Head is unable to stay: she continues her journey for there are still other sides to this paradise that must be explored before the exiled can find a home.

The rest of the stories in the anthology are still variations on the mythical journey metaphor outlined in the opening tale except they occupy the much more historically visible terrain of the late colonial and political Independence era and illustrate the devastating effects on an already uprooted people. The underlying tone of pessimism which pervades

most of these stories is counterbalanced by Head's utopian vision, although at times no mythical paradise seems powerful enough to combat the the spiritual poverty of a reality where individuals are suffering "from a kind of death-in-life" (p.47). Head's themes and forms continue to intertwine as the audience witnesses the gradual move from the male narrators in the opening stories to female voices which attempt to communicate women's responses to their historical condition, a communication made rich because of the female "gift to sift and sort out all the calamities of everyday life with the unerring heart of a good story-teller" (p.108).

The story "Life" marks an interesting departure from the way Head has used the allegorical structure in her previous tales. The audience becomes unsettled to discover that the visible Head landmarks of good vs. evil, Life vs. Death are obscured as the tension between the realistic and allegorical modes never resolves itself. Head is not only resisting the readers' attempts to ritualize and categorize her art, but aims to convey that peoples' attempts to create a simple and single-minded view of experience and language are inadequate and only obscure the complexity of life in general.

Head begins the story with an objective historical appraisal of Botswana on the verge of independence and describes how people attempted to "absorb" and "reject" from the outside what was useful and harmful to them. She sets up the allegory of a simple life and then undermines it by showing how "the murder of Life had this complicated undertone of rejection" (p.37). By using the women of the community to narrate the story, women who "continued to stand by her" until they could no longer follow Life "to those dizzy heights", Head is commenting on peoples'

desire to resolve and understand life's problems which they never seem capable of doing. Everyone had their own simple language which exposed the narrowness of their vision: Life had her motto "live fast, die young and have a good-looking corpse"; the men had their "king" Lesego who passed judgement "on all aspects of life in his straightforward and uncomplicated way" and was supported by the white judge with his ready-made formula, "a crime of passion"; and the beer-drinking women, with "a language all their own", had only the words of an imported Jim Reeves song to express the loss of their faith-healing powers.

Yet the inside female narrators become aware of their own vulnerability in the face of the tyrannical male power structure which distinguishes them from the inside narrators of "The Village Saint". Although the women acknowledge the strength of the community with its enormous "tugs and pulls" and try to help Life cope, they realize that what they can do as women is limited as their sorrowful song "When Two Worlds Collide" ominously alludes to continuing injustices against people in which women seem to be the primary victims.

The two incompatible worlds do not merely suggest the Life/life and Lesego/death dichotomy: like the tension between the individual faces and the face of the whole community, both worlds contain desirable and undesirable elements and are not mutually exclusive. Life possessed the desire to live fully but lacked the "mental equipment" to look into her own world and foresee the implications of her attraction to "the power and maleness of gangsters" that Lesego embodied. Life is like an aimless wanderer who lost sight of her destination before Death snatched her soul. Exiled from the "one face" when young when her parents went in search of the false paradise in Johannesburg, having no memory of a past and nothing

but a desolate house and a weed entangled garden to return to, Life can articulate her colonized mentality through the only language she knows: the language of money. An inevitably ruined paradise, a reified language and an inability to look inside her own soul leave Life occupying the barren reality of an existence with no deep river to guide her. The colonized victim, ordered to return home pending "Independence", has lost sight of her own history and symbolises the mentality of a people robbed of all hope. And when Life meets Lesego, "one evening death walked quietly into the bar" (p.41), the narrator prepares the audience for the "fatal conclusions". Lesego found himself drawn to Life because of "that undertone of hysteria in her". He wanted to subdue, control and triumph over an essentially threatening force in his own life which would destroy his power, male ego and reputation. Although his friend, Sianana, tells him "You could have walked away..." (p.46), Lesego only contributes to "this mess and foolishness" because his "clarity and quiet indifference of thinking" lacks compassion and a vision where violence would not be seen as a solution to resolving life's complex tensions.

The outside narrator's voice returns at the end of the story to suggest: "Maybe (the beer-drinking women) had the last word on the whole affair." Although the women appear fatalistic and are only able to mourn their powerlessness in the face of the world's turmoil, their story of "Life" implicitly suggests their desire to find their own language to describe what could go right when "two worlds collide".

The next two stories are concerned with the most evil, destructive parts of a mythical heritage, that of witchcraft and child sacrifice. Both stories are set in the time right around independence but they depict

the most desperate, confused aspects of communities who are anything but free from the political and physical reality of the time as well as from the self-destructive power that exists in a corner of the collective psyche. Despite the strength people have drawn from their mythical pasts, Head continues to show how past memories can distort the present and hinder the journey to the mythical paradise where that corner of evil, like Lebojang's spirit, can warn but cannot control.

"Witchcraft" depicts one woman's lone battle against "one of the most potent evils in society" and her fierce determination to resist an unconscious self-destructiveness that resulted from her exiled status within the community. Like most of Head's stories, "Witchcraft" weaves the personal with the political, realism with allegory, and illustrates the relationship between an individual's perception of good and evil and the actual reality of these two forces. If the dream, the will to imagine "goodness" is absent, then the spiritual poverty of people's daily lives seems eventually to catch up with them. But if an individual is able to construct an imaginary ideal and keep that as a constant moral guide, then the individual will develop a stronger inner strength that makes the nagging evil easier to control. Jacob, Galethebege and now Mma-Mabele in "Witchcraft" all possess that complex vision that contrasts to the simplicity of their daily lives. It seems when Head is describing the most extreme and fantastical elements of good and evil, her stories are demanding to be read as parables where her "outsider" voice does not disappear but aims to ensure her audience doesn't become lost or mistrusting as it did with "the Village Saint" or feel despairing as it did with "Life".

After establishing the "lingering and malignant ailment" of witchcraft which has come to have no identifiable power source since the breakdown of the traditional kinship network, Head introduces "the face" of the community which is insensitive to individual pain and values women only by "their ability to have sex". Mma-Mabele, named after the benevolent corn mother, is not immune to the ostracism she suffers having been labelled "the he-man" despite her insight "to observe that life was all wrong..." (p.49).

The reader enters Mma-Mabele's nightmarish journey "of gloomy pain and brooding" reminiscent of Elizabeth's breakdown in A Question of Power. The woman suffers like Jacob, but in this story, Head shows us the depth of Mma-Mabele's suffering by actually describing the physical experience. In "Jacob..." she outrightly acknowledges her audience's disbelief that anyone could be "so good" yet suffer so much, alluding to the limitations of the audience's own imagination. But in "Witchcraft" we don't have to question Mma-Mabele's sanity. Her distorted inner reality is only a reflection of the distorted and grotesque values in the outside world against which she is reacting. We cannot doubt her vision for there is no measure which gauges the limits of the imagination's power. Without understanding the full extent of the nightmarish vision, we will not be able to believe in the necessity of the other vision, just as extreme but the only alternative for survival. Mma-Mabele was either going to wither away and succumb to her own fearful powers, or use that power against the tyranny of centuries to affirm that she has the right - and the ability - to believe in her own faith-healing strengths. At the end of the story, Mma-Mabele realises that one must only have faith in oneself for not even her benevolent God, an abstract concept, can help abolish the fear of life

and create that will and determination needed to feed her children, the concrete source of a mother's commitment to survival, as her name-sake testifies.

Whereas "Witchcraft" illustrates the power to resist the evil found in the collective unconscious, "Looking for a Rain God" tragically shows what happens when the "deep river" dries up and individuals lose their way "on their journey to their own lands". Of course the story painfully describes how drought threatens physical survival and provokes individuals into acts of desperation, but the intensity of the nightmarish descent into depravity and the language which shapes this experience evoke Mma-Mabele's "unreal" world, like Elizabeth's in A Question of Power, where her perceptions of good and evil take precedent over the reality.

The family in the story leave the village in search of nourishment, like Sebembele's journey, but this family's hope is short-lived because the silence of the cruel sun has killed off the movement of the imagination that is sustained by the deep river. The evil from "an ancient memory" surfaces in the old man Mokgobja's fragile psyche to destroy humanity, embodied in the children, "happy in their little girl world", innocent and ever so vulnerable.

The storyteller who narrates the incident is obviously an insider who poignantly empathises with the family's fate for "all the people who lived off crops knew in their hearts that only a hair's breadth had saved them from sharing a fate similar to that of the Mokgobja family. They could have killed someone to make the rain fall" (p.60). The voice also takes for granted that "it was really the two women who caused the death of the little girls" (p.59). Head is provoking the reader's ambivalence:

although sharing the narrator's compassion and sense of tragedy, one can only condemn how the people failed themselves. Perhaps at the end of the story, Head is subtly implying that "strain and starvation and breakdown" will remain unacknowledged and "inadmissible" until people are able to counterbalance these kinds of evil with an undistorted vision that does not accept "killing" as the only means of rescuing their parched souls.

In contrast to the sordid, hellish world described in "Looking for a Rain God", the next tale, "Kgotla", embodies "a holy world", a kind of paradise where people go "to discuss around them, to pontificate, to generalize, to display wit, wisdom, wealth of experience or depth of thought" (p.62). The helpless old Makgobja with his evil "ancient memories" is replaced by two saint-like old men who reveal the goodness of "time immemorial." And the blame directed at women for all the world's problems is now magically transformed into praise for how they have helped to solve them. The story captures the beauty of the oral dilemma tale's function, both through its content and by its structure in which the kgotla represents the terrain where all of Head's stories must be assessed. The kgotla also resembles Jacob's Makaleng, one of those "far-away wonders", but a place that is now not merely visited but inhabited by people who realize that "the finest things often come from far-off places..." The distant ideal has been incorporated into the men's way of acting where "it was not so important to resolve human problems" (p.62) then to recognize "There is no peace anywhere, either for those who have eyes and for those who have not" (p.67). This insight does not provoke despair but rather faith that one's responsibility in life is to help

others and by embarking on this journey, one will ironically be brought back to one's own doorstep.

But there is a subtle hint of destructive elements that constantly threaten the balanced peace, elements both external and internal to the village. Perhaps the encroaching indifferent bureaucracy is not as threatening as the insiders' own blindness which is potentially more disruptive to the kgotla's human face. But the old men's philosophical approach seems to counterbalance the age-old jealousy, greed, mistrust, and venomous tongues: "it was all of the same pattern, repeating itself from generation unto generation" (p.62). The old men listen to all sides, consider things carefully and speak with wisdom, confident of the sounds of their own voices as well as of the language they use. They make an outsider's objective assessment of insiders' subjective responses, aware of the need to create peace among people is a form of commitment of peace to themselves. By emphasizing the audience's outsider status throughout her tales, Head has put the reader in a role similar to the one the old men play in "Kgotla". And they have understood that instead of exiling women, they should be brought home - rather than causing "a lot of trouble in this world" women can appear, given the chance, as part of the world's solution.

The enchanting, magical world of children who bring joy and laughter to communities is the subject of "The Wind and The Boy" where Friedman "had a long wind blowing for him" and "an odd musical lilt to his speech. But the villagers' laughter of recognition turns to tears of incomprehension when the boy's long wind is tamed by "progress". This "odd musical" story alludes to Defoe's Robinson Crusoe but instead of the

"Freed-man" being a master of technology, the African Robinson Crusoe (Man Friday?) is destroyed by it, perhaps signalling the mortality of the "timeless, sleepy village" and the futility of trying to outwit it, although "it was discussed thoroughly from all sides until it was understood" (p.75).

What is striking about this story is the relationship the boy had to his grandmother, Sejosenye, who fed him with stories inspired by the western Robinson Crusoe but seasoned with her own individual imaginative flavour. As she makes up "a story on the spot", the voice of the female storyteller replaces the male storytellers Modise and Jacob, and she succeeds in sparking off her audience's - Friedman's - imagination by awakening the tough little boy's tenderness and sensitivity. She invents the inner hunting ground of Robinson Crusoe's paradise where brave loners accomplished heroic deeds, but when Friedman enters this jungle, he is killed off by an outsider force... Is Head warning of the dangers involved when western models are transplanted on African soil, models that celebrate a kind of individualism that undermines the community's identity? Yet both Sejosenye's stories and the villagers' treatment of Friedman were responsible for feeding his sense of specialness, thus exposing their own ambiguity to the "one face". The storyteller's tales end as the old woman dies talking and laughing to herself, her vulnerable audience silenced by their own confusion.

Although the female storyteller seems well established in the remaining tales which describe the effects of the breakdown of family life on women, the inside narrators can still be as blind and as unreliable as they were in "The Village Saint". In "Snapshots at a Wedding", the

village narrator asserts "no one is fooled by human nature" and implies, indirectly, that despite their ability "to keep up with" changing times, educating females does more harm than good. The narrator accepts, through the gentle and respected bridegroom, Kegoletile, that one should marry "women who were big money-earners" and that "it didn't pay to look too closely into his heart" (p.78). Kegoletile is about to marry Neo, "a new kind of girl with false postures and acquired grand-madame ways", although he loved the traditional, humble Mathata. The villagers never question their own contradictory attitudes to money and status, a by-product of colonial education, but channel their malaise into an over-zealous attachment to traditional ways, their defensiveness exposing their own vulnerability to change. As outsiders we can't trust the villagers' hostility to Neo, just as we couldn't trust the viciousness directed at Mma-Mompatati in "The Village Saint", and perhaps end up feeling a little sorry for the young bride, exiled as much by traditional insecurities as by her education, an education that could not reconcile itself to a society's disregard of women.

These attitudes are exposed in a series of "snapshots" starting with the opening frame that captures the gentle, unreal-like quality of the ritual wedding preparation that has remained unchanged for centuries:

Wedding days always started at the haunting, magical hour of early dawn when there was only a pale crack of light on the horizon. For those who were awake, it took the earth hours to adjust to daylight. The cool and damp of the night slowly arose in shimmering waves like water and even the forms of the people who bestirred themselves at this unearthly hour were distorted in the haze; they appeared to be dancers in slow motion, with fluid, watery forms. (p.76)

The picture is "distorted", having a "fluid, watery form" almost as if it is not fully developed. Slowly "a modern wedding" comes into focus that

reveals, beneath the orderly ritual facade, a village in a state of anomie.

After a series of individual "fixed" poses a spark of life comes out of the deceptively even tempo of the ritual ceremony, a spontaneous gesture that gives both an ironic significance to the wedding and underlies the very ambiguity of what being a "wife" in changing times actually entails. The "majestic, regal" aunt who clenches her fist and pounds the ground gives her seal of approval by acknowledging the bride and attempting to reinstate her into the traditional folds of the community. But the very violence of her order: "Be a good wife! Be a good wife!" reveals the inherent precariousness of the concept. This precariousness is rooted in the realisation that the old ways are no longer inevitable and as the story ends, the audience is left with the final snapshot, a blurred, over-exposed picture, distorted by its own vulnerability.

Head's intention in shifting her narrative persona between "knowing" insiders and the "unknowing" outside audience becomes very transparent in "The Special One" where Head elects to use a first person narrative voice - something she has never done before - to represent the unknowing outsider who gradually becomes exposed to the divergent and varied voices of the villagers who give the author "confused and contradictory accounts" of how they perceive the happenings in their society. A comparison with the opening story is unavoidable here as both stories, drawn from historical data but reconstructed by Head, address the problem of affixing blame on women. But whereas the old men in "The Deep River..." just shake their heads and accuse, the women in "The Special One" at least appear to

want to reconcile their differences with the opposite sex as the end of the story illustrates. Head's moral utopia does not exclude women or place them in an inferior position where "they don't know their own minds" nor does it separate men from women. The "moral" which ends this story, although intended primarily to be interpreted literally, also appears to have a figurative connotation that Head addresses in the next tale, the idea that monogamy implies not just "one marriage partner" but consists of love, sharing and equality as was found in Jacob and Johannah's ideal partnership. Gaenametse and her priest appear to be part of the Jacob/Johannah archetype except in "The Special One", Head examines the female "Johannah's" side of the experience.

"I was a newcomer to the village" Head states as she begins to explore the many individual faces of a community. She remains a detached observer, sceptical when told by her colleague, Mrs. Maleboge that "women were just dogs in this society". But when she witnesses the pathetic Gaenametse, "there is not water", transformed by Mrs. Maleboge's nourishment and compassion at the baptismal party, she became deeply moved and did not have to be told again about the way females were treated. The rest of the tale centres around Gaenametse's strange behaviour, her stories of Mrs. Maleboge and the erratic women's attempts to dress like her friend. The outside narrator becomes totally confused when a gossipy neighbour warns her of Gaenametse's bad reputation. The observing "I" in this story replaces the "unknowing" audience in the previous stories who ends up doubting the insiders' perceptions because they seem too "unreal" and extreme to be reliable. In this story, what is important is not whether Mrs. Maleboge has a good facade that deceives the villagers or whether there is any truth in the village gossip, but that Mrs. Maleboge

cared enough to help someone who was obviously "off her beam" due to some kind of intense inner suffering. The newcomer cannot help feeling concerned with the implications of all the contradictory stories and ends up affirming that "women are just dogs in this society".

The imagery of men acting like dogs appears in the title story from the anthology, "The Collector of Treasures", which ties together many of the themes from the previous stories to create a very disturbing and painful portrait of a society since its political independence. The previous tales in many ways all lead to this one where the violence of reality comes into conflict with the tenderness that is trying to contain it, and the result is a frightening critique of the fragility of the human imagination. Head never loses sight of her moral utopia - there is always found "gold amidst the ash" - but the stormy journey has become extremely difficult: women appear to have fewer choices since the breakdown of the traditional family. Galethebege in "Heaven Is Not Closed" is able to reach a compromise and still retain her saintliness whereas Dikeledi in "The Collector of Treasures" has no such options. She couldn't "walk away" from her husband for she had children to care for, and the forced compromise she ends up with - a life in prison for murdering him - hardly suggests a solution to the problems plaguing an "independent society". Dikeledi, named after her mother's tears, symbolises the struggles of a people who have a long way to go before the cycle of violence can be replaced by a spiral of peace in order that the children can enter the Promised Land and be named after their mother's hopes.

Head confirms that this story, like the other stories in her collection, "is very related to things I had experienced in the village".

In one of her interviews she recounts the story of an abandoned woman with four children who could not afford the school fees for her eldest son. The husband, "for the first time in eight years agrees that he will talk it over with her...they're in a hut together and she slits off his genitals." Although totally shocked by the story, Head realizes that it "is evocative of the strain women go through here rearing children when they've been abandoned...(her actions) showed the *deep* psychological trauma the woman had lived with."⁷⁶ Yet Head goes on to clarify that she uses many "tricks" when writing about "real people" in order to enhance the didactic quality of her fiction:

The character in "The Collector of Treasures" isn't in the end exactly just a simple woman broken and neurotic by rearing children on her own for eight years, and she commits a murder. When I borrowed that, the woman eventually built up is no longer simple; she's one thousand women represented in one. So you cannot ask questions along the line of some work that is straight, flat and non-fiction, and a books (sic) full of a writer's tricks...In a lot of fiction the personalities are completely distorted to serve the purpose of the story - particularly if it is giving a new direction to life, and a future.⁷⁷

The women Head constructs in this story draw strength from their own voices as they share their stories in prison of this "terrible world". Dikeledi, an archetypal outsider, has managed to salvage some of the remnants of the "deep loves that had joined her heart to the hearts of others" (p.91) she had collected on her journey. Head reveals: "The magnificences in women I drew on and I put into Dikeledi Mokopi."⁷⁸ She uses her "hands of strange power" to grow beautiful designs she invents "in her own head" and begins to weave her life with the lives of the other prison women to create a kind of idyllic world based on mutual love and care. In many ways this world is an extension of her life with Kenalepe where "the two women had going one of those deep, affectionate, sharing-

everything kind of friendships that only women know how to have" (p.94). But it is no alternative to what should be: no world is complete that exiles either women or men. "The Collector of Treasures" is a complex story that doesn't condone Dikeledi's own "crime of passion" but tries to understand why someone who is so good is denied the power to use the treasures she has collected on her journey beneath the deep river of the imagination.

As in her other stories, the male/female ideal that Head sets up in this story is the relationship between Paul and Kenalepe: another version of the Jacob/Johannah archetype. Paul, perhaps named after the Christian St. Paul who was a symbol of charity and visionary hope, reminds the audience of Jacob who also had the "power to recreate himself anew". Head introduces a kind of sexual idealism that complements the "love" idealism she portrayed in "Jacob" which serves the same function: without the desire to heal our past wounds, we cannot possibly transcend the limitations of our miserable reality. Yet Dikeledi, as a single mother, can not participate in this male/female "monogamist" terrain that Jacob and Johannah, Gaenametse and her priest and now Paul and Kenalepe inhabit.

But perhaps the Thebolos were "too good to be true" and only the imagined antithesis to Dikeledi's naked reality, like an oasis on the barren horizon. The real world seems full of "the other kind of man in society...the one (which) created such misery and chaos that he would broadly be damned as evil" (p.91). Head clarifies her anger by stating that these kinds of men are the victims of their historical heritage and shows how during the historical process they ended up fleeing "their own inner emptiness" and using women as the scapegoats of their destructiveness. She uses the grotesque image of the dogs chasing the

bitch in heat to represent the thoughtlessness and insensitivity that has motivated men's instinct to survive. This kind of man is a stark contrast to the "poem of tenderness" that Paul embodied and a continual threat to humanity's will to live. Head admits that "there is very little concentration on Garesego" for she is more interested in creating ways that help "shape the future"; she constructs Paul as " a huge man ...(who is) going to solve all the problems of family life."⁷⁹ As in her novels and other stories, despite her tendency to romanticize and construct "male saviours", Head is above all trying to redress an imbalance in male/female dynamics and imagine a world where men are generous and caring, and women are listened to and valued.

This ideal is envisioned in the last story of the collection. Counterbalancing the harsh reality in "The Collector of Treasures" with an utopian vision, Head obviously wanted to end her "symphonic" anthology with the familiar gentle and gay melody that has weaved its way in and out of her other tales. In "Hunting" the melody singularly dominates the finale as the deeper and more ominous bass tones fade out quietly, leaving a pure, crystal-clear tune ringing in our memories as it guides us on our departure.

In contrast to the opening story where people were participating in the ritual of the corn harvest, "Hunting" is set in the "favoured" season where life is rich and survival is guaranteed. And whereas the women in "The Deep River..." "followed each other in single file" to "pay" their chief, the men in "Hunting" had the freedom to group as they choose and to share their food equally with each other. The symbolic hunt also evokes a search for a better life that requires resilience, co-operation and

imagination. Head is no longer "reconstructing" a world based on men's memories but is creating "what could be" through the lively voice of the female storyteller. Her final tale seems to have superseded the restrictions of past myths for Head has created new symbols, a new mythology where Sebembele and his love have found their paradise based on an ideal compromise between "individual faces" and "the one face". This paradise doesn't exclude, but accepts; it does not blame but understands. The "chiefs" do not seek power by exploiting but share and live "like everyone else". The deep river is no longer stormy or even visible but gently nourishes the land to produce enough for everyone to feast. And the complementary relationship of the Tholo/Thato imitation of the Jacob/Johannah archetype symbolises the emerging male/female dichotomy and the synthesis of opposites which at last have found the balance needed to "recreate anew".

The female principle embodied in the character of Thato contains all the elements of hardship, mistrust and despair found in Dikeledi's reality but haunted by her dreams, like Jacob, she ends up accepting a "God-like" man who was morally rich and "incapable of hurting life." Head's male principle always seems to evoke the "spiritual saint" whereas the female principle signifies the more "earthly" holiness. Jacob, Paul, Tholo are the removed, idealized "God-like" figures whereas Johannah, Kenalepe and Thato remain the earthly anchors with a much more concrete and believable past history. The women are more recognizable and less stylized than the men who, as she shows in "The Collector of Treasures", represent two extreme types: the saintly Pauls are needed to counterbalance the "dog-like" Garesegos so prevalent in society. One is born out of an ideal conception; the other is picked from the pages of history.

In "Hunting", Tholo "seemed to run away from all the conflicts of life" whereas Thato "had the capacity to live with the conflicts of life in a way he had not". They merge together to create one vision of how people could live. Even their names imply a separate identity but a shared "face". Tholo ironically says "nothing can sort out the world" as his good deeds reveal he is trying, in his own way, to make things better. Thato complements his silences and detachment with the involved, gifted voice of the storyteller that not only "sifts and sorts out all the calamities" involved in male/female relationships but also asserts "people will have to help..." (p.109). The spirit of hope implies what true independence should signify: a tractor/technology that benefits everyone and does not destroy or isolate; projects that involve, produce and create new opportunities so that the community can grow together and not fall apart "in a dizzy kind of death dance of wild destruction and dissipation" (p.92).

As we leave the bitter old men to mourn how they lost their place of birth over a woman, we hear the female storyteller's voice hunting for a means to help her own people, sustained by the knowledge of the imagination's potential. Perhaps "the richness of her communication" also reflects Head's faith in her own storytelling abilities.

Walter Benjamin claims that "we have witnessed the evolution of the 'short story', which has removed itself from oral tradition and no longer permits that slow piling one on top of the other of thin, transparent layers which constitutes the most appropriate picture of the way in which the perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of a variety of retellings."⁸⁰ If we read Head's stories in The Collector of Treasures as

a thematically unified portrait of Botswana village life, then we witness a kind of layering that has not removed itself from oral tradition. Stories are told and retold by various narrative voices, including voices from a female perspective, as Head refuses any kind of closure or explanation. She leaves room for others to imaginatively contribute to the reconstruction of a moral vision that does not exclude the wandering travellers from any time.

Head is one of the wandering travellers who has been able to dream despite the obstacles created by her cruel birth. Through her novels and short stories she has imagined a utopian world of innocence and laughter, devoid of blame, cruelty and hatred. But she is not naive: she never loses sight of that other world that threatens her vulnerable vision as her writing exposes a kind of balancing act between extremes embodied in the duality of forces which create movement and change. Her thematic concerns are woven into her narrative strategies where she exploits her outsider status in order to illuminate the dynamics that prevent her from forming a privileged, insiders' perspective. Her novels deal more directly with the personal factors that have determined this approach, whereas her short stories don't focus so much on personal projections but depict how the insiders' conflicts shape her individual perspective as a outsider. Like Aidoo, her writings are situated within a specific socio-historical context but instead of excluding those who do not share her history, she aligns herself with her readers by sharing their confusion and disbelief. Head, as creator of these fictions, seeks to problematize the ways one can read her texts: she is not distrusting in the same way as Aidoo, but seeks to disarm her readers and challenge them into forming new insights into the nature of racial and sexual prejudices.

But Head also creates certain characters who resist identification with national, racial or even gendered specificities, and this complicates her vision further. The exiled Makhaya, Margaret and Elizabeth from her novels are depicted as characters who want to escape from the rigid categories of South African, Masarwa and female in order to join "the brotherhood of man". Yet their identities are inscribed into the specificities of their cultural, racial and gendered experiences and this puzzling tension highlights the complex relationship between reader and text. Head's audience, like her various outsiders, are given a similar task: they must form a moral vision of the world that does not exile or exclude, privilege or distort. But the complexity and diversity of the insiders' perspectives which are set against the outsiders' developing vision testify to the difficulty of this task.

Head's insiders, like Aïdo's characters, reflect a multiplicity of voices. Some question and challenge existing assumptions whereas others are imprisoned by their illusions, their language a reflection of their blindness. The female characters are often trapped and vulnerable, having few choices in their lives where persecution and injustice prevail. But many of Head's and Aïdo's female characters reveal a resilience and strength, embodying a hope in the possibilities for creating new worlds. Both writers articulate the concerns of their communities although Head, the outsider, is much more reluctant to satisfy the reader's desire for some sort of narrative closure. Through their narrative strategies, Aïdo distances herself from her non-African readers whereas Head, often aligning herself with them, constantly reminds them that they too are unprivileged outsiders, exiled from a world of meaning that is constructed by a language that signifies difference.

CONCLUSION

...just as there is an art of storytelling, strictly codified through a thousand trial and errors, so there is also an art of listening, equally ancient and noble, but as far as I know, it has never been given any norm...

Primo Levi¹

Ama Ata Aidoo's and Bessie Head's art of storytelling is inevitably linked to their understanding of "the art of listening". By using drama, the dilemma tale, inside and outside narrators, both writers invite their audience to listen closely and critically, to debate, to question, to participate in the ritual enactment of storytelling which is dependent on their listeners' responses. Aidoo and Head are themselves good listeners, aware that their stories have been created from the conflicts and dilemmas voiced by the people of the communities. They have transformed the art of listening into the art of storytelling in order to capture the essence of that orality in their art.

But Aidoo and Head are well aware that the process of writing, of inscribing orality, signifies the transformation of listening into reading. The communal sharing is lost, the literate audience is disembodied and distant, and new meanings are created by the silent gaps that separate the reader from the text. As western-educated Africans, the writers have constructed a specific readership who is generally different from the characters whose stories they narrate; thus their works signal a transformation of "the art of listening" into "the art of reading". In this process, they have established the problematic nature of reading from the perspective of an "unknowing outsider". By constructing a western-educated African audience like herself, Aidoo implicitly excludes the

first-world reader. Reading her works involves reading from a distance; Aidoo's texts dramatize the political issues of appropriation and exploitation, and although African feminism may intersect first-world feminism, it clearly wants to define its own historically specific parameters and not be subsumed under a universal rubric. Head refuses even to acknowledge a "feminist" perspective, seeing feminism as a western ideology that excludes and constricts. First world readers may locate feminist meanings within her texts but they are constantly reminded, as part of her constructed audience, that their reading from a distance does not allow them easy access to a world of meaning different than their own.

Inevitably, critics may offer ways of reading African women's writings that use specific approaches derived from western feminist literary theories. But Aidoo and Head are uneasy with attempts to resolve the tensions within the texts and their narrative strategies indicate that they refuse to have their meanings "colonized" by outsiders. In this process their writings share a common terrain. Though their themes and strategies of storytelling may differ, they have established an African women's literary tradition that is seeking "a room of its own":

African feminist criticism will rely on its historical links to white feminist and male cultural critics, but ultimately, because it speaks from the margins of both fields, it must not only "care to intersect" but build beyond them.²

In this study, I have attempted to show how this building beyond, a kind of dismantling and restructuring, has been carried out by Aidoo and Head whose works seek to establish a critical base from which others can build and contribute to, signalling the open-ended nature of their project. As critics, they have questioned and rejected certain African male constructs of womanhood, and as writers, they have created numerous

examples of female experiences that reveal the diverse and fluid nature of female subjectivity. Their different backgrounds and experiences have determined their approaches and interests, but their constructions of African female-centred realities reveal they do not conceptualize women in the same way as their male counterparts.

There is no evidence in either Aidoo's or Head's writings that there is a "female principle", or even a "male principle". Like Achebe, Head may be interested in a male/female dialectic, but this dialectic is more an internal process within an individual's psyche than a external dynamic that is reproduced by a society as a means of mystifying the female subject. Although Head's acceptance of conventional linguistic constructs such as the female as passive/the male as active can be criticized, she shows how the complementary interaction between male/female dynamics functions from a female perspective, as witnessed in A Question of Power. In this way, this text can be seen to complement Things Fall Apart, although Achebe is more interested in depicting the process of social change from a community's (male) perspective, whereas Head's novel focuses on the process of personal growth from a woman's (her own) perspective. Head's numerous male/female pairings, as well as the various male extremes and female interactions throughout her novels and short stories signify a balance and symbiosis that is in a constant state of flux, refusing any kind of closure.

Aidoo also creates male/female pairings in her works, but never in a symbolic context. Sometimes it is a man who reveals a deep understanding of a people's history where a woman represents traditional forces that resist change and understanding, as in Anowa. Yet Aidoo's play does not categorize so simplistically: the grandmother's vision contrasts with Kofi's blindness to the social implications of slavery. In both her plays

and short stories, Aidoo's traditional women articulate the contradictions inherent in their lives where change often signifies loss rather than gain. Aidoo also creates female characters whose wisdom and strength counterbalances some kinds of male passivity and weakness, and the female voice is sometimes seen to subvert male dialogues, as in "For Whom Things Did Not Change". Aidoo does not fix meanings within a male/female dialectic but concentrates on the diversity and constantly changing experiences of both male and female reality.

Aidoo and Head are obviously interested in the myths and legends that have shaped the oral histories of their communities, but they have refused to passively accept the fixed meanings that may have been attached to certain myths. Unwilling to reify female sexuality and construct women as temptresses and destroyers, they have built beyond male distortions and limitations. A Mame Water figure is not part of their agendas, and unlike Soyinka, when they describe a heroic woman, she is not seen in terms of her dangerous sexuality but in terms of her subjective responses to a "sexual otherness" and her ability to define herself above the narrow parameters of symbol and essence. Aidoo uses the traditional Anowa legend but adds to it and goes behind the myth to question certain assumptions about women's attitudes and behaviour. She sheds new light on the parallels between female roles and slavery, and essentially offers her audience a new vision of history. Similarly, Head questions the whole mythic apparatus in her anthology of short stories and offers new ways of freeing individuals from the restrictive myths that have shaped their consciousness. She does this by linking myth to language: both are powerful weapons that can blind or enlighten, restrict or guide.

The question of language – who uses it, how it controls or liberates – plays an important part in Aidoo's and Head's textual strategies. They recognize that language does not merely reflect an individual's subjectivity but helps to determine it, and although A Question of Power confuses this issue, Head's short stories, like Aidoo's writings, construct new ways of defining female subjectivity through an imaginative use of language.

The imagery Aidoo and Head construct through their discourse contrasts sharply with the writing of Ngugi who draws on conventional female symbols such as flowers, water, caves to establish an image of "Mother Africa". His use of the prostitute as an allegory for Kenya's historical development appears very limited, even dishonest, when one considers the numerous images of African motherhood and the variety of conflicts that resound in Aidoo's works. The diversity of mothers' voices and the depth of their individual experiences leave no room for allegory. Their subjectivity resists a general symbolising, and their histories are gender-specific. Attempts to read some of Head's stories as allegory are challenged by the writer herself who mistrusts simple explanations and paradigms that seek to enclose meanings within a restrictive framework.

Similarly, Aidoo and Head do not construct two dimensional "types" to depict how women are trapped within capitalism's polygynous structure. Although Sembene wrote Xala as a fable, accessible to his people, Aidoo and Head have chosen access through a different door. Preferring not to project the "Other" as an image in itself, their writings reveal an attempt to "serve the Other", to give psychological depth and individual voices to their female characters so that they may articulate their own identity and need for change.

And finally, Aidoo and Head do not need to exploit female subjects for their metaphorical potential. The woman as subject is central in their writings, her Otherness only an issue in terms of how others perceive her, or how she has lost herself and is looking for new ways of being. Farah may have tried to capture the different problems African women confront in their daily lives, but Aidoo and Head address these issues through their characters; they do not impose issues on them in a highly stylized manner where form takes precedent over content.

Aidoo's and Head's differences as writers do not separate them, but contribute to the complex landscape of African women's writings which is seeking to "build beyond" western and African masculist discourses. Head's particular South African background and the autobiographical aspects that informed her three novels give her a unique position in the African female literary tradition. Always the outsider, Head produced a vision that sought to erase national and tribal barriers. Yet her adopted home in Serowe and her anthropological work helped refine this vision, and her short stories reveal what the implications of her unprivileged status entail. Aidoo, on the other hand, writes with a certain confidence and control of language that reflects a privileged insider. A boldness of style and the courage to speak loudly on any issue, including female sexuality and desire, place her firmly in the forefront of African women writers who refuse to be marginalized. Together, these two women form part of a wider tradition which only African women can claim as their own.

Ama Ata Aidoo wrote a praise poem to Bessie Head after her death in 1986, and in this tribute Aidoo expresses her love and admiration for her sister, and hopes that Head's ancestral spirit will help guide African women in their daily lives. Aidoo places Head firmly on an "insider's

terrain", and in the end, Bessie Head is not a woman alone. The poem could also apply to Aidoo herself, to her own struggles, fears and hopes, and what she celebrates about Head is what we can also admire about her. Together, the two women embody the strength and support that other African women need to live, create and recreate - "nothing more, absolutely nothing less":

For Bessie Head

To begin with,
there's a small problem of address:

calling you
by the only name some of us
knew you by,

hailing you by titles you
could not possibly
have cared for,

referring you to
strange and clouded
origins that eat into
our past our pain
like prize-winning cassava tuber in
abandoned harvest fields...

Some of us never ever met you.

And who would believe
that but those who know
the tragedies of our land
where
non-meetings,
visions unopening and
other such
abortions
are every day reality?

If not all of it,
then some?...

To continue a
confession of sorts,

'Miss Head' will just not do.
'Bessie' too familiar.

Bessie Head,

your face swims into focus
through soft clouds of
cigarette smoke and from behind the
much much harder barriers erected by some
quite unbelievable
20th century philosophy,

saying more of
your strength
than all the tales
would have us think.

For the moment,

we fear and
dare not accept that
given how things
now
are,
poetry almost
becomes dirges and
not much more.

But
we hold on to knowing
ourselves as daughters of
darklight women
who are so used to Life
-- giving it
feeding it --

Death
was always
quite unwelcome:
--taking them by surprise --
an evil peevish brat
to be flattered
cleaned
oiled
pomaded
over-dressed and perfumed...

We fear to remember:

fatigued as we are by so much
death and dying and
the need to bury and
to mourn.

Bessie Head
such a fresh ancestress!

if you chance
on a rainy night
to visit

if you chance
on sunny day
to pass by,

look in to see
--how well we do
--how hard we fight
--how loud we scream

against the plots
--to kill our souls our bodies too
--to take our land, and
--feed us shit.

Come
benevolently
Dear Fresh Spirit,

that rejoining
The Others,
you can tell them that
now more than ever,

do we need
the support
the energy

to create
recreate and
celebrate...

nothing more
absolutely
nothing less.³

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Ama Ata Aidoo, "Wondering About Him Who Said No To The Glare Of The Open Day," Someone Talking To Sometime. (Harare: The College Press, 1985), pp. 68-72.
2. Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller", Illuminations, translated by Harry Zohn. (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 91-92.
3. Chris Weedon, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory. (Oxford; Basil Blackwell, 1987), p.21.
4. Kathleen McLuskie & Lyn Innes, "Women and African Literature", Wasafiri 8, (Spring 1988), p. 4.
5. ibid.
6. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures. (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 186.
7. Cora Kaplan, Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism. (London: Verso, 1986), p. 177.
8. Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, op. cit., p. 187.
9. Jonathan Culler, "Reading as a Woman", On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism. (London: Routledge, 1983), pp. 43-64.
10. See particularly Patrocinio P. Schweickart "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading", Speaking of Gender, ed. Elaine Showalter. (London: Routledge, 1989); and Mary Jacobus, Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism. (London: Methuen, 1986.), pp. 9-12.
11. There are numerous discussions, but see particularly: Roseann P. Bell, Bettye J. Parker, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Sturdy Black Bridges: Visions of Black Women in Literature. (New York: Anchor Books, 1979); Barbara Christian, Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writer. (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985); Mari Evans, Black Women Writers: Arguments and Interviews. (London: Pluto Press, 1983); Bell Hooks, Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism. (London: Pluto Press, 1981); Gloria Hull et. al., eds., All The Women Are White, All the Men are Black, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black women's Studies. (New York: The Feminist Press, 1981); Gloria Joseph and Jill Lewis, Common Differences: Conflicts in Black and White Feminist Perspectives. (New York: Anchor Books, 1981); Audra Lorde, "An Open Letter to Mary Daly", This Bridge Called My Back; Writings by Radical Women of Color, eds. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua. (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1981.) pp.

94-97; Deborah E. McDowell, "New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism", The New Feminist Criticism, ed. Elaine Showalter. (London: Virago, 1986), pp. 186-199; Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novelist in English", Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 11.1 (1985), pp. 63-80; Barbara Smith, "Towards a Black Feminist Criticism", The New Feminist Criticism, ed. Elaine Showalter. (London: Virago, 1986), pp. 168-185; Valerie Smith, "Gender and Afro-Americanist Literary Theory and Criticism", Speaking of Gender, ed. Elaine Showalter. (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 56-70; Alice Walker, In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose. (London: The Woman's Press, 1983); Susan Willis, "Black Women Writers: taking a critical perspective", Making A Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism, edited Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn. (London: Methuen, 1985), pp.211-237.

12. McLuskie and Innes, op. cit., p. 5.

13. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "French Feminism in an International Frame", In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics. (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 136.

14. Katherine Frank, "Feminist Criticism and the African Novel", African Literature Today 14: Insiders and Outsiders, ed. Eldred Jones. (London: Heinemann, 1984), pp. 34-48.

15. See Carol Boyce Davies, "Feminist Consciousness and African Literary Criticism", Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature, eds. Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves. (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc., 1986), p. 13; Susan Z. Andrade, "Rewriting History, Motherhood and Rebellion: Naming an African Women's Literary Tradition", Research In African Literature 21.1, (Spring 1990), p.92-93.

16. Florence Stratton, in her essay "The Shallow Grave: Archetypes of Female Experience in African", uses the idea of Gilbert and Gubar's images of "enclosure and escape" from Gilbert and Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic and applies it to an interesting reading of specific African women writers; and Margaret E. Tucker, in "A 'Nice-Time Girl' Strikes Back: An Essay on Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*", uses Helene Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa". Both Stratton's and Tucker's essays are found in Research in African Literature - Special Issue on Women's Writing 19.2, eds. Rhonda Cobham and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, (Summer 1988). Rhonda Cobham, in her Introduction to this issue, observes, "What becomes clear, however, in reading Tucker's application of Cixous's theory is that Cixous is not so much being used to explicate Head's creative writing as visa versa." p. 140.

17. Susan Z. Andrade, op. cit.

18. The only other large study by a single writer to be published is Glacele Taiwo's Female Novelist of Modern Africa (London: MacMillan Publishers, 1984) which contains a extremely limited analysis and deserves no critical attention.

19. See: Women In African Literature Today 15, ed. Eldred Durosimi Jones. Eustace Palmer, Marjorie Jones. (London: James Currey, 1987);

Ngambika, *op. cit.*; Research in African Literatures, *op. cit.*, (Summer 1988); Wasafiri 8, (Spring 1983).

20. I refer specifically to Flora Nwapa's Idu and Efuru; Buchi Emecheha's The Joys of Motherhood and Mariama Bâ's So Long a Letter.

21. This was taken from an interview in the Dutch edition of Bâ's So Long a Letter by Jan Kees van de Werk. I have quoted it from Mineke Schipper's "Mother Africa on a Pedestal: The Male Heritage in African Literature and Criticism" in Women in African Literature Today 15, ed. Eldred Jones, Eustace Palmer and Marjories Jones. (London: James Currey, 1987), pp. 48-49.

22. Elizabeth McGregor in The Guardian (April 22, 1991) reviewed a new book entitled A Gesture of Belonging, edited by Randolph Vigne (South African Writers) which contains letters Head wrote to Vigne over a 14 year period. To date, I have been unable to get a copy of this book which is not yet available through British publishers.

PART ONE: MALE CONSTRUCTIONS OF WOMANHOOD

1. Anna Rutherford, "Chinua Achebe" (interview), Kunapipi VII.1, (1986), pp. 3-4.

2. ibid, p. 4

3. ibid.

4. ibid.

5. This isn't standard in all of Achebe's early writings. See the short story "Akeuke". For a discussion of this story and Achebe's other "marginal lives", see C.L. Innes, Chinua Achebe. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Chapter 7.

6. Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart. (London: Heinemann, 1958), p.48. All further page references are from this edition.

7. Carol Boyce Davies, "Motherhood in the Works of Male and Female Igbo Writers; Achebe, Emecheta, Nwapa and Nzekwu", Ngambika, eds. Carol Boyce Davies and Ann Adams Graves. (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc., 1986), p. 246.

8. C.L. Innes, "Language, Poetry and Doctrine in Things Fall Apart", Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe, eds. C.L. Innes and Bernth Lindfors. (London: Heinemann, 1979), p.117.

9. For a discussion of Achebe's female characters in this novel, see C.L. Innes. Chinua Achebe, *op.cit.*, Chapter 9.

10. This story and the others cited are found in Achebe's Girls At War and Other Stories. (London: Heinemann, 1972).
11. G.D. Killam, The Writings of Chinua Achebe. (London: Heinemann, 1969), p. 102.
12. Ayi Kwei Armah, Fragments. (London: Heinemann, 1974). All page references are from this edition.
13. Gerald Moore, Twelve African Writers. (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1983), pp. 249-250.
14. Ibid. The meaning of the three Akan words used for chapter titles were found in the this text.
15. Sylvia Bryan, "Images of Women in Wole Soyinka's Work", Women in African Literature Today 15, eds. Eldred Durosimi Jones, Eustace Palmer and Marjorie Jones. (London: James Currey, 1987), p. 119.
16. Wole Soyinka, Kongi's Harvest. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967). All page references are from this edition.
17. See Carol Boyce Davies' article "Maids, Mistresses and Matrons: Feminine Images in Selected Soyinka Works" for a brief overview of Soyinka's female characters, Ngambika, op. cit., pp. 75-88.
18. Sylvia Bryan, op. cit. pp. 119-120.
19. I question Carol Boyce Davies' contention that: "Although colored by myth, she endangers not the man she loves but the deserving agents of oppression. This positive portrayal of Segi is effected because the author does not limit the character to attributes of the mythical *femme fatale* but draws on actual Yoruba history of heroic women." op. cit., p. 82. Daodu consistently sees her as a temptation and a disrupting influence. For example; "Oh Segi! I had thought tonight at least, I would keep my head." (p.44).
20. Sylvia Bryan, op. cit., p. 124.
21. Wole Soyinka, The Lion and the Jewel. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 53. The other page reference is from this edition.
22. Carol Boyce Davies, op. cit. p. 76.
23. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Petals of Blood. (London: Heinemann, 1977), p. 103. All further page references are from this edition.
24. G.D. Killam, An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi. (London: Heinemann, 1980), p. 6. Quoted by him from an interview in Ba Shiru, (Vol. 5, 1073), p.22.
25. Eustace Palmer, "Ngugi's Petals of Blood". African Literature Today 10, ed. E.D. Jones. (London, Heinemann, 1979), p. 160.

26. ibid.
27. David Cook and M. Okenimkpe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o. (London: Heinemann, 1983), p. 111.
28. Derek Walcott, "The Swamp" as quoted by Ngugi in the preface of Petals of Blood.
29. John D.H. Downing, ed. Film and Politics in the Third World. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987), p. 42.
30. Sembene Ousmane, Xala. (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 4. All further page references are from this edition.
31. Dorothy Blair, Senegalese Literature: A Critical History. (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), p. 135.
32. Downing, op. cit. p. 46.
33. Sembene says in an interview that "He got his first wife before becoming somebody. Along with his economic and social development, he takes a second wife who corresponds, so to speak, to a second historical phase..." ibid, p. 45.
34. Blair, op. cit.
35. Sembene Ousmane, The Money-Order with White Genesis. (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 3. All further page references are from this edition.
36. Kenneth W. Harrow, Faces of Islam in African Literature. (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1991), p. 191.
37. Nuruddin Farah, From A Crooked Rib. (London: Heinemann, 1970). All page references are from this edition.
38. Derek Wright, "Somali Powerscapes: Mapping Farah's Fiction." Research in African Literature 21.2, (Summer 1990), p. 23.
39. Nuruddin Farah, "Author in Search of an Identity" (Interview), New African, (December 1981), p. 61.
40. Nuruddin Farah, "Mapping the Psyche". Interview with Robert Moss in West Africa, (1 September 1986), p. 1828.
41. Barbara Turfan, "Opposing Dictatorship: a Comment on Nuruddin Farah's *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship*". The Journal of Commonwealth Literature XXIV.1, (1989), p. 173.
42. Derek Wright, op. cit., pp. 28, 29.
43. Nuruddin Farah, Sardines. (London: Heinemann, 1991). p. 5. All further page references are from this edition.

44. Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own. (St. Albans, Herts: Triad/Panther Books, 1977), p. 107.
45. Derek Wright, "Unwritten Realities: The Orality of Power in Nuruddin Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk*", Journal of Commonwealth Literature XXIV.1, (1989), p.189.

PART TWO: AMA ATA AIDOO

1. Sara Chetin, "Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo", Wasafiri 6/7, (Spring/Autumn 1987), p.27.
2. Ama Ata Aidoo, "To Be An African Woman Writer - An Overview and a Detail", Criticism and Ideology, Second African Writers' Conference, Stockholm 1986, ed. Kristen Holst Petersen. (Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala 1988), p. 158.
3. Adeola James, In Their Own Voices, African Women Writers Talk. (London: James Currey/Heinemann, 1990), p. 13.
4. Ama Ata Aidoo, "To Be An African Women Writer...", op. cit., p. 157.
5. James, op. cit., pp. 24, 19.
6. Chetin, op. cit., p. 23.
7. ibid.
8. ibid.
9. James, op. cit., p. 22.
10. Maxine McGregor, "Ama Ata Aidoo", African Writers Talking: A Collection of Radio Interviews, eds. Dennis Duerdin and Cosmo Pieterse. (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 24.
11. Ama Ata Aidoo, The Dilemma of a Ghost. (London: Longman Drumbeat, 1970). This information is given on the bottom of the "Characters" page that opens the play, page unnumbered.
12. McGregor, op. cit., p. 23.
13. Lloyd Brown, Women Writers in Black Africa. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), p.85.
14. William R. Bascom, African Dilemma Tales. (The Hague: Mouton, 1975). p.1. as quoted by Lloyd Brown, ibid.
15. In the Wasafiri interview (Chetin, op. cit.), Aidoo claims she conceived of it as a play, not a short story.

16. Ama Ata Aidoo, The Dilemma of a Ghost, op. cit., p. 2. All further page references are from this edition.
17. Chetin, op.cit., p. 26.
18. Brown, op. cit., p. 88.
19. James, op. cit., p. 21.
20. ibid.
21. Chetin, op. cit., p. 24.
22. ibid.
23. ibid.
24. James, op. cit., p. 19.
25. Chetin, op. cit.
26. Ayi Kwei Armah, Two Thousand Seasons. (London: Heinemann, 1973), p. 9.
27. Ama Ata Aidoo, Anowa. (London: Longman Drumbeat, 1970). The "girl in the folktale" (p.15) refers to her mother's telling of the original Anowa legend and the second quote, p. 46, to the grandmother's attempts to silence her history. All further page references are from this edition.
28. McGregor, op. cit., p. 24.
29. Chetin, op. cit., p. 24.
30. ibid, p.25.
31. Ama Ata Aidoo, No Sweetness Here. (London: Longman Drumbeat, 1979). All pages references are from this edition. Several of the stories were individually published in different magazines and journals between 1966 to 1970. See copyright page for a listing of specific magazines and journals.
32. Chetin, op. cit.
33. ibid.
34. James, op. cit., p. 17.
35. Brown, op. cit., p. 119.
36. Aidoo, No Sweetness Here, op. cit. This is stated on the copyright page.
37. Chetin, op. cit.
38. Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media. (London: Sorene Books Limited, 1967), p. 322.

39. ibid., p. 324.
40. ibid., p. 323.
41. Brown (op. cit.) condemns them whereas Kristen Holst Petersen pities them. Cowries and Kobos, eds. Petersen and Rutherford. (Denmark: Dangaroo Press, 1981), p. 103.
42. Ama Ata Aidoo, "To Him Who Said No To the Glare of the Open Day", Someone Talking to Sometime. (Harare: The College Press, 1985), p. 72. This poem was quoted in the Introduction.
43. Ama Ata Aidoo, Our Sister Killjoy. (Essex: Longman Drumbeat, 1981). All page references are from this edition.
44. James, op. cit., p. 15. Aidoo says: "I never describe it as a novel myself. When I have been forced to describe *Killjoy*, I have said it is fiction in four episodes...I leave it to the critic to say whether it is a novel or not."
45. Chris Dunton "'Wheyting be dat?' The Treatment of Homosexuality in African Literature", Research in African Literatures 20.3, ed. Bernth Lindfors, (Fall 1989), p. 433.
46. Chetin, op. cit., p.25.
47. Ama Ata Aidoo "To Be a Woman", Sisterhood is Global, ed. Robin Morgan. (New York: Anchor Books, 1984), p. 262.
48. ibid.
49. Ama Ata Aidoo, Changes - a love story. (London: The Women's Press, 1991), unnumbered page. All page references are from this edition.
50. Maya Jaggi, "Changing her tune" (Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo and review of Changes), The Guardian, (April 2, 1991), p. 22.
51. ibid.
52. "Interview - Ama Ata Aidoo on *Africa and Changes*" in Spare Rib, July 1991, p.34.
53. Jaggi, op. cit.
54. ibid.
55. Spare Rib interview, op. cit., p.33.
56. Jane Bryce, "Changes: Ama Ata Aidoo and Recent Writing by Ghanaian Women", unpublished paper given at Motherlands: Symposium on African, Caribbean and Asian Women's Writing, (Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 19 September, 1991).

PART THREE: BESSIE HEAD

1. Bessie Head, A Woman Alone (Autobiographical Writings), ed. Craig Mackenzie. (London: Heinemann International in AWS, 1990), p. 95.
2. Craig Mackenzie & Cherry Clayton, eds., Between The Lines (Interviews with Bessie Head, Sheila Roberts, Ellen Kuzwayo, Miriam Tlali). (Grahamstown, South Africa: The National English Literary Museum, NELM Interviews 4, 1989), p. 15.
3. Bessie Head, op.cit., p. 31.
4. Mackenzie & Clayton, op.cit., p. 9.
5. ibid, p. 17.
6. Charles Sarvan, "Bessie Head: Two Letters", Wasafiri 12, (Autumn 1990), p. 13.
7. Susan Gardner, "Bessie Head: Production Under Drought Conditions", Women and Writing in South Africa, A Critical Anthology, ed. Cherry Clayton. (Marshalltown: Heinemann Southern Africa (Pty) Ltd., 1989), p.226.
8. Bernth Lindfors, "The Teaching of African Literature in Anglophone African Universities: An Instructive Canon" in Wasafiri 11, (Spring 1990), pp. 14-15.
9. Gardner, op. cit., p. 230.
10. Mackenzie & Clayton, op. cit., p. 12.
11. ibid.
12. ibid.
13. Gardner states: "Bessie Head does not speak Afrikaans well and did not grow up in a coloured community, having instead been raised in an English-speaking orphanage in Natal. Thus she cannot be regarded as a coloured writer, drawing on the wide array of linguistic and social resources of a background in Cape Town's now-destroyed District Six, in the way that Richard Rive, for instance, can." Gardner, op. cit., p. 229.
14. Mackenzie & Clayton, op. cit., p. 15.
15. ibid, pp. 22-23.
16. In this particular interview, Head speaks of her "long life of loneliness", her "deep personal loneliness" and how that influenced her writing on several levels. ibid, pp. 17-18.
17. Gardner, op. cit., p. 227.
18. Bessie Head, op. cit., pp. 3-5, and from the chronology, pp. 104-105.

19. Craig Mackenzie's introduction to Bessie Head, A Woman Alone, ibid, p. ix.
20. Gardner, op. cit., p. 228.
21. Craig Mackenzie's introduction, op. cit., p. xiv.
22. Mackenzie and Clayton, op. cit., p. 7.
23. Gardner, op. cit., p. 229.
24. Mackenzie and Clayton, op. cit., p. 8.
25. Bessie Head, op. cit., pp. 62-64.
26. Mackenzie and Clayton, op. cit., p. 7.
27. Bessie Head, Serowe Village of the Rain Wind. (London: Heinemann, 1981). All page references are from this edition.
28. Arthur Ravenscroft, in his article "The Novels of Bessie Head" says; "The novelist's preoccupations would seem to suggest a steady progression from the first novel to the third...", Aspects of South African Literature, ed. Christopher Heywood. (London: Heinemann, 1976), p.175. ←
29. Bessie Head, Autobiographical Writings, op. cit., p. 64.
30. Bessie Head, When Rain Clouds Gather (London: Heinemann, 1968). All page references are from this edition.
31. Bessie Head, Autobiographical Writings, op. cit., p. 64.
32. ibid, p. 68.
33. Arthur Ravenscroft, op. cit., p. 179.
34. Mackenzie and Clayton, op. cit., p. 13.
35. Bessie Head, Maru. (London: Heinemann, 1971.) All page references are from this edition.
36. Lloyd Brown, op. cit., p. 175.
37. Mackenzie and Clayton, op. cit., p. 23.
38. Joyce Johnson, "Structures and Meaning in the Novels of Bessie Head", Kunapipi VIII.1, (1986), p. 64.
39. Mackenzie and Clayton, op. cit., p. 28.
40. ibid.
41. ibid, p. 22.

42. ibid, p. 18.
43. ibid, p. 12.
44. ibid, p. 22.
45. Brown, op. cit., p. 172.
46. Ravenscroft, op. cit., p. 183.
47. Bessie Head, A Question of Power. (London: Heinemann 1974). All page references are from this edition.
48. Adetokunbo Pearse, "Apartheid and Madness; Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*", Kunapipi 5. 2, (1983).
49. Joyce Johnson, op. cit.
50. Femi Ojo-Ade, "Madness in the African Novel: Awoonor's *This Earth, My Brother...*" in African Literature Today 10, ed. Eldred Jones. (London: Heinemann, 1979). p. 135.
51. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English", Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 11.1.,(1985), p. 74.
52. Barbara Hill Rigney, Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), p. 7.
53. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" , Critical Inquiry 12, (Autumn 1985), p. 251.
54. Katherine Frank, "Feminist Criticism and the African Novel", African Literature Today 14, op. cit., p. 39.
55. Helene Cixous "The Laugh of the Medusa" in New French Feminisms, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron. (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1981), p. 245.
56. Mackenzie and Clayton, op. cit., p. 24.
57. ibid.
58. Sarvan, op. cit., p.15.
59. ibid.
60. ibid.
61. Margaret E. Tucker, op. cit., p. 172.
62. ibid, p. 170.

63. Robert Graves, New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology. (London: The Hamlyn Publishing Group Limited, 1959), p. 346.
64. ibid, p. 354.
65. The Logos principle is defined as one which "finds expression in rational argument, logical deduction, and use of the word to further intellectual, social or spiritual means" in Anthony Stevens' Archetype. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 299.
66. Similarly, the Eros principle is defined as "the principle presided over by the Greek God of Love. In addition to being the secret lover of Psyche, Eros was responsible for co-ordinating all the elements which make up the universe, for bringing harmony to chaos, and for permitting life to develop on earth." Stevens, ibid., pp. 297-298.
67. Lloyd Brown, op. cit. p. 178.
68. Bessie Head, Autobiographical Writings, op. cit., p. 69.
69. ibid, p. 101.
70. ibid, p. 62.
71. ibid, p. 78.
72. Bessie Head, The Collector of Treasures. (London: Heinemann, 1977). All page references are from this edition.
73. Bessie Head, Tales of Tenderness and Power. (London: Heinemann, 1990), p. 9.
74. Bessie Head, The Collector of Treasures, op. cit., p. x.
75. ibid, p. 11.
76. Mackenzie and Clayton, op. cit., p. 14.
77. ibid, p. 23.
78. ibid, p. 14.
79. ibid.
80. Benjamin, op. cit., p. 93.

CONCLUSION

1. Primo Levi, The Wrench. (London: Spere Books, 1988), p.35.

2. Susan Z. Andrade, op. cit., p.91.
3. Ama Ata Aidoo, "For Bessie Head", Kunapipi VIII.3 (1986), pp.114-117.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Works by Ama Ata Aidoo:

Anowa, London: Longman Drumbeat, 1970.

Birds and other poems, (Children's poems) Harare: The College Press, 1987.

Changes - A Love Story, London: The Women's Press, 1991.

"For Bessie Head", (Poem) Kunapipi VIII.3, (1986), pp. 114-117.

The Dilemma of a Ghost, London: Longman Drumbeat, 1980.

The Eagle and the Chickens, (Children's story) Harare: The College Press, 1987.

No Sweetness Here, London: Longman Drumbeat, 1979.

Our Sister Killjoy, Essex: Longman Drumbeat, 1981.

Someone Talking to Sometime, Harare: The College Press, 1985.

Interviews and Nonfiction:

Anon, "Interview - Ama Ata Aidoo *on Africa and Changes*", Spare Rib, (July 1991), pp. 32-36.

Bryce, Jane, "Ama Ata Aidoo: A Further Departure", New African, (November 1985), p. 46.

Chetin, Sara, "Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo", Wasafiri 6/7, (Spring/Autumn 1987), pp. 23-27.

Jaggi, Maya, "Changing Her Tune", The Guardian, (April 2, 1991), p.22.

James, Adeola, In Their Own Voices, African Women Writers Talk, London: James Currey/Heinemann, 1990, pp. 8-27.

McGregor, Maxine, "Ama Ata Aidoo", African Writers Talking: A Collection of Radio Interviews, eds. Dennis Duerdin and Cosmo Pieterse, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1972, pp. 19-27.

Morgan, Robin, ed., "To Be A Woman", Sisterhood is Global, New York: Anchor Books, 1984, pp. 258-265.

Peterson, Kristen Holst, ed., "To Be An African Woman Writer - An Overview and a Detail", Criticism and Ideology, Second African Writers' Conference, Stockholm, 1986, Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1988, pp. 155-172.

Works by Bessie Head:

The Collector of Treasures, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1977.

Maru, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1971.

A Question of Power, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1974.

Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1981.

Tales of Tenderness and Power, Oxford: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1990.

When Rain Clouds Gather, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1968.

Interviews and Other Nonfiction:

Mackenzie, Craig, ed., A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings, Oxford: Heinemann, 1990.

Mackenzie, Craig and Cherry Clayton, eds., Between the Lines: Interviews with Bessie Head, Sheila Roberts, Ellen Kuzwayo, Miriam Tlali, Grahamstown, South Africa: The National English Literary Museum, 1989, pp. 5-29.

Sarvan, Charles, "Bessie Head: Two Letters", Wasafiri 12, (Autumn 1990), pp. 11-15.

Cited Works by Other Writers:

Achebe, Chinua, Anthills of the Savannah, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1987.

Achebe, Chinua, Girls at War and Other Stories, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1972.

Achebe, Chinua, A Man of the People, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1956.

- Achebe, Chinua, Things Fall Apart, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1958.
- Armah, Ayi Kwei, Fragments, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1974.
- Armah, Ayi Kwei, Two Thousand Seasons, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1973.
- Bâ, Mariama, So Long a Letter, London: Virago, 1982.
- Emecheta, Buchi, The Joys of Motherhood, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1980.
- Ekwensi, Cyprian, Jagua Nana, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1968.
- Farah, Nuruddin, From a Crooked Rib, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1970.
- Farah, Nuruddin, Sardines, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1981.
- La Guma, Alex, A Walk in the Night, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1968.
- Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Petals of Blood, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1977.
- Nwapa, Flora, Efuru, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1966.
- Nwapa, Flora, Idu, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1970.
- Rhys, Jean, Wide Sargasso Sea, Middlesex: Penguin, 1968.
- Sembene Ousmane, The Money Order with White Genesis, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1972.
- Sembene Ousmane, Xala, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1976.
- Soyinka, Wole, The Interpreters, London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1972.
- Soyinka, Wole, Kongi's Harvest, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- Soyinka, Wole, The Lion and the Jewel, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- Tutuola, Amos, The Palm-Wine Drinkard, London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1952.

SECONDARY SOURCES

- Abel, Elizabeth, ed., Writing and Sexual Difference, Brighton: The Harvester Press Limited, 1982.
- Adelugba, Dapo, "Language and Drama: Ama Ata Aidoo", African Literature Today 8: Drama in Africa, ed. Eldred Durosimi Jones, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1976, pp. 72-84.
- Andrade, Susan Z., "Rewriting History, Motherhood, and Rebellion: Naming an African Women's Literary Tradition", Research in African Literature 21.1, (Spring 1990), pp. 91-110.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, The Empire Writes Back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures, London: Routledge, 1989.
- Ashcroft, W.D., "Intersecting Marginalities: Post-colonialism and Feminism", Kunapipi XI.2, (1989), pp. 23-35.
- Banham, Martin with Clive Wake, African Theatre Today, London: Pitman Publishing Limited, 1976.
- Barnett, Ursula A., A Vision of Order: A Study of Black South African Literature in English (1914-1980), London: Sinclair Browne Ltd., 1983.
- Bascom, William R., African Dilemma Tales, The Hague: Mouton, 1975.
- Bell, Roseann P., Bettye J. Parker, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Sturdy Black Bridges: Visions of Black Women in Literature, New York: Anchor Books, 1979.
- Benjamin, Walter, "The Storyteller", Illuminations, translated by Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken Books, 1969, pp. 83-109.
- Blair, Dorothy S., African Literature in French: A history of creative writing in French from West and Equatorial Africa, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.
- Brown, Lloyd W., Women Writers in Black Africa, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981.
- Bruner, Charlotte H., "Bessie Head: Restless in a Distant Land", When The Drumbeat Changes, eds. Carolyn Parker and Stephen Arnold, Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1980, pp. 261-277.
- Bruner, Charlotte H., ed., Unwinding Threads: Writing by Women in Africa, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983.
- Bryce, Jane, "Changes: Ama Ata Aidoo and Recent Writing by Ghanaian Women", (unpublished paper), Motherlands: Symposium on African, Caribbean and Asian Women's Writing, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 19 September, 1991.

- Bukh, Jette, The Village Woman in Ghana, Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1979.
- Carroll, David, Chinua Achebe, London: The Macmillan Press Limited, 1980.
- Chinweizu, ed., Voices From Twentieth-Century Africa: Griots and Towncriers, London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1988.
- Chinweizu, Onwuchekwu Jemie and Ibechukwy Madubuike, Towards the Decolonization of African Literature, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985.
- Chrechain-Adelugba, Firinne Ni, "Self and Other in Sembene Ousmane's *Xa7a*", New West African Literature, ed. Kolawole Ogungbesan, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1979, pp. 91-103.
- Christian, Barbara, Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers, New York: Pergamon Press Inc., 1985.
- Cobham, Rhonda and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, eds., Research in African Literature: Special Issue on Women's Writing 19.2, (Summer 1988).
- Cook, David and Michael Okenimkpe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o: An Exploration of His Writings, London: Heinemann Educational Books Limited, 1983.
- Crow, Brian, Studying Drama, Harlow: Longman Group Limited, 1983.
- Culler, Jonathan, "Reading as a Woman", On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism, London: Routledge, 1983 pp. 43-64.
- Davies, Carole Boyce and Anne Adams Graves, eds., Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature, Trenton, New Jersey: African World Press, Inc., 1986.
- Downing, John D.H., ed., Film and Politics in the Third World, New York; Praeger Publishers, 1987.
- Dunton, Chris, "'Wheyting be dat?' The Treatment of Homosexuality in African Literature", Research in African Literature 20.3, (Fall 1989), pp. 422-448.
- Eagleton, Mary, ed., Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1986.
- Etherton, Michael, The Development of African Drama, London: Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 1982.
- Evans, Mari, ed., Black Women Writers: Arguments and Interviews, London: Pluto Press, 1983.
- Evasdaughter, Elizabeth N., "Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* Read As A Mariner's Guide to Paranoia", Research in African Literatures 20.1, (Spring 1989), pp. 72-83.

Farah, Nuruddin, "Author in Search of an Identity", New African (December 1981), pp. 60-61.

Finnegan, Ruth, Oral Poetry: Its nature, significance and social context, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Fraser, Robert, The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1980.

Frank, Katherine, "Feminist Criticism and the African Novel", African Literature Today 14: Insiders and Outsiders, ed. Eldred Durosimi Jones, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1984, pp. 34-48.

Gardner, Susan, "Bessie Head: Production Under Drought Conditions", Women and Writing in South Africa: a critical anthology, ed. Cherry Clayton, Marshalltown, South Africa: Heinemann Southern Africa (Pty) Ltd., 1989, pp. 225-235.

Gates, Henry Louis, ed., Black Literature and Literary Theory, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1984.

Ghali, Nouredine, "An Interview with Sembene Ousmane", Film And Politics In The Third World, ed. John D.H. Downing, Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia, Inc., 1987, pp. 41-54.

Gibbs, James, ed., Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1981.

Gilbert, Sandra and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination, London: Yale University Press, Ltd., 1979.

Gordimer, Nadine, The Black Interpreters - Notes on African Writing, Johannesburg: Ravan Press (Pty) Ltd., 1973.

Gordimer, Nadine, The Essential Gesture, London: Penguin Books, 1989.

Graves, Robert, New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology, London: The Hamlyn Publishing Group Limited, 1959.

Greene, Gayle and Coppelia Kahn, eds., Making A Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1985.

Grewal, S. et al., Charting the Journey: Writings by Black and Third World Women, London: Sheba, 1988.

Gugelberger, Georg M., ed., Marxism And African Literature, London: James Currey Ltd., 1985.

Gunner, Elizabeth, A Handbook for Teaching African Literature, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1984.

Harrow, Kenneth W., Faces of Islam In African Literature, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 1991.

- Hay, Margaret Jean and Sharon Stichter, eds., African Women South of the Sahara, Harlow: Longman Group Ltd., 1984.
- Heywood, Christopher, ed., Aspects of South African Literature, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1976.
- Hooks, Bell, Ain'T I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism, London: Pluto Press Ltd., 1982.
- Hull, Gloria T., Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, eds., All the Women Are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some Of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies, Old Westbury, New York: The Feminist Press, 1982.
- Innes, C.L., Chinua Achebe, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Innes, C.L. and Bernth Lindfors, eds., Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1979.
- Iyasere, Solomon O., "African Oral Tradition - Criticism as a Performance: A Ritual", African Literature Today 11: Myth and History, ed. Eldred Durosimi Jones, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980.
- Jacobus, Mary, Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1986.
- Johnson, Joyce, "Bessie Head And The Oral Tradition: The Structure of *Maru*", Wasafiri 3 (Autumn 1985), pp. 5-8.
- Johnson, Joyce, "Structures of Meaning in the Novels of Bessie Head", Kunapipi, VIII.1 (1986), pp. 56-69.
- Jones, Eldred Durosimi, "Ama Ata Aidoo *Anowa*", African Literature Today 8: Drama in Africa, ed. Eldred Durosimi Jones, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1978, pp. 142-144.
- Jones, Eldred Durosimi, The Writing of Wole Soyinka, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1973.
- Jones, Eldred Durosimi, Eustace Palmer and Marjorie Jones, eds., Women in African Literature Today 15, London: James Currey Ltd., 1987.
- Joseph, Gloria I. and Jill Lewis, Common Differences: Conflicts in Black and White Feminist Perspectives, Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1981.
- Kaplan, Cora, Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism, London: Verso, 1986.
- Killam, G.D., ed., African Writers or African Writing, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1973.
- Killam, G.D., An Introduction to the Writings of Ngugi, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1980.

- Killam, G.D., The Writings of East and Central Africa, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1984.
- Klein, Leonard S., African Literatures in the 20th Century: A Guide, Harpenden, Herts.: Oldcastle Books Ltd., 1986.
- Levi, Primo, The Wrench, London: Abacus/Sphere Books Ltd., 1988.
- Lindfors, Bernth, ed., Critical Perspectives on Nigerian Literatures, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1979.
- Lindfors, Bernth, "The Teaching of African Literature in Anglophone African Universities: An Instructive Canon", Wasafiri 11 (Spring 1990), pp. 13-16.
- Little, Kenneth, The Sociology of Urban Women's Image in African Literature, London: MacMillan, 1980.
- Lorde, Audre, "An Open Letter to Mary Daly", This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color, eds. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1981.
- Marks, Elaine and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., New French Feminisms: An Anthology, Brighton: The Harvester Press Ltd., 1981.
- McDowell, Deborah E., "New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism", The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory, ed. Elaine Showalter, London: Virago Press Ltd., 1986, pp. 186-199.
- McEvan, Neil, Africa and the Novel, London: MacMillan, 1983.
- McGregor, Elizabeth, "The Rage of Reason", The Guardian (25 April 1991), p. 28.
- McLuhan, Marshall, Understanding Media, London: Sphere Books Ltd., 1967.
- McLuskie, Kathleen and Lynn Innes, "Women and African Literature", Wasafiri 8 (Spring 1988), pp. 3-7.
- Mensah, A.N., "'Armah's Women" by Sara Chetin: A Rejoinder', Kunapipi XII.1 (1990), pp.118-123.
- Mills, Sara, Lynne Pearce, Sue Spaul, Elaine Millard, Feminist Readings/ Feminists Reading, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989.
- Moi, Toril, Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1985.
- Moody, H.L.B., Elizabeth Gunner and Edward Finnegan. A Teacher's Guide to African Literature: Prose Texts, London: MacMillan Publishers, 1984.
- Moore, Gerald, Twelve African Writers, London: Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 1980.

- Moss, Robert, "Mapping the Psyche" (Interview with Nuruddin Farah), West Africa (1 September 1986), pp. 1827-1828.
- Mzamane, Mbulelo, ed., Hungry Flames and Other Black South African Short Stories, Harlow: Longman Group Limited, 1986.
- Mzamane, Mbulelo Vizikhungo, "The uses of traditional oral forms in black South African literature", Literature and Society in South Africa, eds. Landeg White and Tim Couzens, Harlow: Longman Group Limited, 1984, pp. 147-160.
- Nagenda, John, "Generations in Conflict", Protest and Conflict in African Literature, eds. Cosmo Pieterse and Donald Munro, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1969.
- Nasta, Susheila, ed., Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia, London: The Women's Press, Ltd., 1991.
- Ngara, Emmanuel, Art and Ideology in the African Novel, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1985.
- Nkosi, Lewis, Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature, Harlow: Longman Group Limited, 1981.
- Obiechina, Emmanuel, Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
- Ogunyemi, Chikwenye Okonjo, "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English", Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 11.1 (Autumn 1985), pp. 63-80.
- Ojo-Ade, Femi, "Female Writers, Male Critics", African Literature Today 13: Recent Trends in the Novel, ed. Eldred Durosimi Jones, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983, pp. 158-179.
- Ojo-Ade, Femi, "Madness in the African Novel: Awoonor's *This Earth, My Brother*", African Literature Today 10: Retrospect and Prospect, ed. Eldred Durosimi Jones, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979, pp. 134-152.
- Okpewho, Isidore, Myth in Africa: A study of its aesthetic and cultural relevance, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Oosthuizen, Ann, ed., Sometimes When It Rains: Writings by South African Women, London: Pandora Press, 1987.
- Palmer, Eustace, The Growth Of The African Novel, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979.
- Palmer, Eustace, An Introduction to the African Novel, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972.

- Palmer, Eustace, "Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*", African Literature Today 10: Retrospect and Prospect, ed. Eldred Durosimi Jones, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979, pp. 153-166.
- Pearse, Adetokunbo, "Apartheid and Madness: Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*", Kunapipi V.2 (1983), pp. 81-93.
- Peters, Jonathan A., "Sembene Ousmane as Griot: *The Money-Order with White Genesis*", African Literature Today 12: New Writings, New Approaches, ed. Eldred Durosimi Jones, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1982, pp. 88-103.
- Petersen, Kirsten Holst, "First Things First: Problems of a Feminist Approach to African Literature", Kunapipi VI.3 (1984), pp. 35-47.
- Petersen, Kirsten Holst and Anna Rutherford, eds., Cowries and Kobos: The West African Oral Tale and Short Story, Mundelstrup, Denmark: Dangaroo Press, 1981.
- Petersen, Kirsten Holst and Anna Rutherford, eds., A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing, Oxford: Dangaroo Press, 1986.
- Rigney, Barbara Hill, Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978.
- Rutherford, Anna, "Chinua Achebe" (interview), Kunapipi IX.2 (1987), pp. 1-7.
- Sam, Agnes, "Bessie Head: A Tribute", Kunapipi, VII.1 (1986), pp. 53-55.
- Scanlon, Paul A., ed., Stories from Central and Southern Africa, London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1983.
- Schipper, Mineke, ed., Unheard Words: Women and Literature in Africa, the Arab World, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America, London: Allison and Busby Limited, 1985.
- Schwieckart, Patrocínio P. "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading", Speaking of Gender, ed. Elaine Showalter, London: Routledge, 1989, pp. 17-44.
- Sembene Ousmane, "Filmmakers have a great responsibility to our people", Art Politics Cinema: The Cineaste Interviews, eds. Dan Georgakas and Lenny Rubinstein, London: The Pluto Press, 1985, pp. 41-52.
- Smith, Barbara, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism". The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory. ed. Elaine Showalter, London: Virago Press Limited, 1986, pp. 163-185.
- Smith, Valerie, "Gender and Afro-Americanist Literary Theory and Criticism", Speaking of Gender, ed. Elaine Showalter, London: Routledge, 1989, pp. 56-70.

Sparrow, Fiona, "Telling the Story Again: Oral Traditions in Nuruddin Farah's Fiction", The Journal of Commonwealth Literature XXIV.1 (1989), pp. 164-172.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, "French Feminism in an International Frame", In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics, London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1987, pp. 134-153.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism", Critical Inquiry 12 (Autumn 1985), pp. 243-261.

Stevens, Anthony, Archetype, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982.

Stratton, Florence, "'Periodic Embodiments': a Ubiquitous Trope in African Men's Writing", Research in African Literature 21.1 (Spring 1990), pp. 111-126.

Taiwo, Oladele, Female Novelists of Modern African, London: MacMillan Publishers, 1984.

Turfan, Barbara, "Opposing Dictatorship: a Comment of Nuruddin Farah's *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship*", The Journal of Commonwealth Literature XXIV.1 (1989), pp. 173-184.

Turvey, Gerry, "'Xala' and the Curse of Neo-Colonialism", Screen: Other Cinemas, Other Criticisms 26.3-4 (May-August 1985), pp. 75-87.

Walker, Alice, In Search Of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose, London: The Woman's Press, 1984.

Weedon, Chris, Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory, London: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987.

Woolf, Virginia, A Room of One's Own, St. Albans, Herts: Triad/Panther Books, 1977. (First published by The Hogarth Press Ltd, 1929).

Wren, Robert M., Achebe's World: The Historical and Cultural Context of the Novels of Chinua Achebe, Harlow: Longman Group Limited, 1980.

Wright, Derek, "Parents and Power in Nuruddin Farah's *Dictatorship Trilogy*", Kunapipi XI.2 (1989), pp. 94-106

Wright, Derek, "Somali Powerscapes: Mapping Farah's Fiction", Research In African Literatures, 21.2 (Summer 1990), pp. 21-34.

Wright, Derek, "Unwritable Realities: The Orality of Power in Nuruddin Farah's *Sweet and Sour Milk*", The Journal of Commonwealth Literature XXIV.1 (1989), pp.185-192.

Zell, Hans, Carol Bundy and Virginia Coulon, A New Readers Guide to African Literature. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983.