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The ‘madness account’:

An examination of madness and writing within the fictional and autobiographical works of Bessie Head and Janet Frame.

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract

Bessie Head and Janet Frame are two writers who have not been read comparatively. Despite this, both authors engage in writing about 'madness'. Bessie Head presents madness in her fictional work *A Question of Power* (1973) as well as in her various life-writings (letters). Janet Frame presents madness in her fictional work *Faces in the Water* (1961) and her autobiography *An Autobiography* (1982). The current field labels these fictional works as 'autobiographical', and it pays close attention to madness as one area where the supposed commonalities between life experiences and fictional accounts justify this labelling. Current research on autobiography is divided along the individualist tradition of 'male' autobiography and the newer forms of autobiography, which not only employ the 'autobiographical pact' but stretch the conventions of autobiography into a whole host of emerging subcategories (autofiction, confessional literature, faction etc.). The current field does not consider that equating a 'mad' author with a 'mad' character in fiction is a limited approach to representations of madness. Focusing on 'scriptotherapy' and the 'madness account', my research addresses this gap in the literature. Reading the texts comparatively produced varied results for 'madness'; Frame's account of madness is richest in the fiction she decidedly claimed as not autobiographical, while Head's life-writings reveal her fictional account of 'madness' as autobiographical but dissatisfying, it fails to express her real-life experiences accurately. Reading all four texts together and applying 'scriptotherapy' to each provides insights into the role of 'madness' within each text and its impact on each author. This research fills a gap in the current research by revealing a broader view of 'madness' in the works of both Frame and Head.

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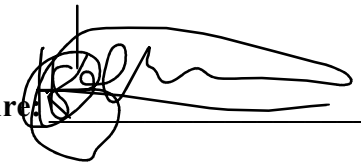
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Introduction

Janet Frame (1924—2004) and Bessie Head (1937—1986) are two writers who have not been written about comparatively. This is understandable: Janet Frame was a white writer from New Zealand who grew up in her familial home and died in New Zealand. Bessie Head was mixed-race and born under the South African apartheid regime, she was separated from her mother at birth and, as an adult, forced into political exile in Botswana, where she remained until her death. Yet, if these seemingly intractable differences have proved inimical to comparative projects, it is worth noting that both Janet Frame and Bessie Head spent extended periods in mental institutions, that such institutions are discussed in both their 'fiction' and 'life writing', and that both writers have also been labelled as expressing the symptoms of 'schizophrenia'. Despite significant cultural and geographical gulfs between them, then, the broader factors which connect these writers are gender, life-writing, fiction writing, and 'madness'. With these factors in mind, I hope to engage in two types of reading. The first of these readings will read each writer's respective engagements with fiction and life-writing together, despite genre boundaries, to consider the relationships between the works. I will undertake a comparative reading of Frame's roman-à-clef, *Faces in the Water* (*Faces* 1961/2018)[1] and her more strictly autobiographical text, *An Autobiography* (*Auto* 1989/1990). Similarly, Head's novel *A Question of Power* (*AQP* 1973/2018) will be read with her published letters. Secondly, I hope to engage in a comparative analysis in which the discoveries of the aforementioned mode of reading (the significance of life-writing and fiction when read together) provides a framework

[1] There are multiple in-text citations throughout this project which will have two years of publication. The first is the first year of publication of the work which I include as it aids to the works historical context. This historical context aids my arguments throughout the thesis. The second year included in the in-text citation is the year that the copy I reference from was published. From here on the novels will be referenced using the shortened italicised version of their names.

within which Head and Frame may be read. What I hope to show with such a cross-analysis is both Frame and Head's mutual investment in blurring the lines between biography and fiction. By analysing the writing of both writers in relation to one another, I hope to reframe current approaches to how Frame and Head should be understood, and to reorient more broadly current understandings about the difference between fiction and biography vis-à-vis the scriptotherapeutic representation of 'madness'.

The readings which take place within my comparison do not easily fit into that area of study that is traditionally termed 'comparative literature'; instead, I take an approach which uses 'comparison' as a broader approach to reading. At its simplest, 'comparative literature' is the act of comparing works written in different languages (Domínguez et al. 2014). It is language that George Steiner (1995) emphasises when he defines 'comparative literature', the linguistic component of 'comparative literature' being that which is privileged and essential to any attempt at 'comparative literature' (9). Traditionally, then, 'comparative literature' is about translation, what one discovers about texts when they are translated and read alongside other texts. While Domínguez and Steiner agree that comparative literature must be read across linguistic borders, and these borders can be a number of things (i.e., temporality, culture, language); it is only Domínguez who seems to read the major difficulty of this: "what counts as a language"? (xii). With this difficulty in mind, it is interesting to consider how 'comparative literature' might be rearranged. Katherine Arens (2005) suggests that three major categories have controlled that which is studied once this translation has occurred, "period, genre, and problem" (124). Of these three it is only genre, "structural conventions that allow literary works of art to emerge within specific intertextual traditions" (Arens 125), which she wishes to keep while the field of 'comparative literature' redefines itself. A refreshed field of 'comparative literature' would present itself as "built around notions of genre, textuality, and intertextuality

within cultural contexts, taking texts as materialities of communication" (127). The type of "communication" that Arens believes it is possible to focus on is then the communication which occurs when "groups whose consciousness is defined with respect to others within a shared (but not uniform) cultural space" (130). Arens is working against a definition which would define 'comparative literature' (only) as the act of translation across a variety of borders, and she introduces instead a new definition and focus on 'comparative literature' as that which studies communications between people who share a "cultural space" introduces new opportunities.

The dual readings I have proposed (readings for comparison) function to understand the communication that happens between Janet Frame and Bessie Head, and the influence of 'madness' on this communication. Frame and Head both write in English and do so in a similar period in psychiatry, the 1950-60s. The shared communication of each writer, however, is that of 'madness'. While a traditional 'comparative reading' between these authors might not occur, I believe that reading across 'genre' and "intertextuality within cultural contexts" allows me to engage in a 'comparative' reading of each author with themselves and with one another. To achieve the first type of comparison is to accept a blurring of 'genre' as a boundary and instead look at how genre functions in texts which recount 'madness' (Arens 127). Janet Frame's *Faces in the Water* (*Faces*) discusses 'madness' in ways that betray striking similarities to her autobiographical work, *An Autobiography* (*Auto*). Reading each text for 'madness' allows an opportunity for comparison between the representations of 'madness' within her novel which has a 'true' and holistic autobiography to act as a counterpoint. Unlike Janet Frame, Bessie Head does not have an autobiography to compare her fiction to. However, she was a prolific and highly descriptive letter writer, her correspondence with Randolph Vigne and Patrick Cullinan was both frequent and informative. Her correspondence is of such value that both

have published collections and these letters allow a comparison between Head's life writing and her work *A Question of Power* (*AQP*). It is the 'madness' within *A Question of Power,* similar to Head's own experiences with madness as she portrays it in her letters and correspondence, which marks this novel as a work of fictional autobiography. Each of the authors labels her novel 'fiction' but these works are termed 'autobiographical', blurring the genre boundary between those terms. Why 'madness' and 'autobiography' go together, particularly in the fictional works of these novels despite their 'factual' counterparts, is what I hope to understand by comparing the authors to themselves. Beyond this, the ability of 'madness' to highlight the cultural contexts that each writer shares, and to bring them into communion with one another, is another achievement of comparative reading. These comparisons will take place in Chapters 1-3.

Before beginning I want to explain why I have referred to madness as 'madness' throughout my thesis. My use of inverted commas throughout is an attempt to place scepticism on the term through a visual marker. I do this because I want to complicate the ready acceptance of the concept of 'madness'. The term 'madness' has only recently been used to refer to a state of internal destabilisation visited upon a person by their collapsing psyche. For much of history 'madness' has been conceptualised as something external, visited upon a person by spirits. Beyond this, it appears that 'madness' is also a field or heterotopia where difference can be relegated and contained. 'Madness' is, therefore, not a concrete concept but a space of containment, or a term used to facilitate language's control over reality. This is the same as writing (as either 'autobiography' or 'life-writing') in which we hope to exert control over our lives by turning them into language. 'Madness' is a component of broader discussions around autobiography, confession and sexuality, and this is shown in Michel Foucault's approach to each of these areas. This broader context must, therefore, be explored if the power of 'madness'

can be established. I have already stated that both Janet Frame and Bessie Head's novels are referred to as 'autobiographical fiction'. What this means, as a category or genre, as opposed to the broader title of 'life-writing' is worth exploring. But what exactly is autobiography? and is it possible for women to write autobiography? While autobiography is the act of creating the self through writing, this genre includes, and is pre-dated by, confession. In his work, *The History of Sexuality Volume I* (1978), Foucault claims that it is the confession which reveals discourse's ability to exert control over an individual's thoughts and sense of self,

> [C]onfession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation (61-2).

The consequence of this is that the expression of sexuality must be turned into discourse which is performed for an authority. It is in this way that confession establishes the structures through which sexuality has been controlled in the West; when one's sins are turned into discourse, and such things may not be spoken unless to a priest (an authority), then sexuality becomes something silenced and only discussed in the form of confession.

While sexuality exemplifies how the performative aspect of language can lead to control, confession as a form is not always enacted in the way Foucault presents above. Historically,

confession created the sense of an individual's fallibility and pointed to the universal difficulties of existence outside of divine knowledge, but the advent of the enlightenment meant a withdrawal from the notion of "divinity"; and instead of confession verbalising a "sin" or "transgression," it became "an exploration of intimacy, emotion, self-understanding as aspects of a nascent bourgeois subjectivity" (Felski 1998 87). Hence, this notion of expressing "subjectivity" outside of the confessional gives rise to autobiography. Autobiographies date back to the Western Enlightenment and are the life story of an individual and their universalising story. Autobiography is the "expression of individual authority in the realm of language", or writing about the self that is "the "mark" or "imprint" of man's power: his linguistic, psychological, and institutional presence in the world of letters, people, and things" (Stanford Friedman 1998 73). What separates autobiography from other forms, and what constitutes this attempt at 'presencing', is at the heart of debates about autobiography and one writer, Philip Lejeune, believes he has the answer. In their work *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2010), Smith and Watson list two criteria which must be met for something to be considered autobiographical by Lejeune, "the 'vital statistics' of the author, such as date and place of birth and education, are identical to those of the narrator; and an implied contract or 'pact' exists between author and publisher attesting to the truth of the signature" (8). In this way, an autobiography must be placed in the historical time of the author (it cannot be set in a time before or after the author) and must reveal the author as the narrator.

Autofiction, which is the combination of fiction and autobiography, allows for the novel to take on some elements of this "pact" while playing with the temporality (or any other elements it wants) of the novel. When considering how autofiction differs from autobiography, Ferreira-Meyers (2015) states that while autofiction claims "nominal identities" (that is to say the

author, narrator, and main character are one and the same) it claims fiction in "its narrative terms" and "peritextual information" (136-7). It is this label of 'autofiction' or 'autobiographical fiction' which seems best suited for both Frame and Head's novels. Why this is the case, and why terms such as life-writing as well as autobiography are not more accurate labels for the works, is related to their status as female writers.

The elements that are essential to autobiography do not appear as readily in women's autobiography, begging the question of women's ability to write madness at all. Similar to sexuality, the act of being a woman requires negotiation through language and confession. In her chapter "The Book of Ambiguity" Bell (2018) provides a useful quote,

> Since antiquity women have played the role of confessor to male doctors who have provided an audience for their fantasies; the male doctor and female patient often collaborating in the creation of a hysterical female persona. Women, it would seem, have had a long history of understanding the ambiguous creation of first and third person selves of understanding the masks all women wear. Such masks have been used to navigate the social construction of insanity that has historically been employed to subjugate difference and the female body (151).

Women, as Bell notes, create their first and third person selves through the role of confessor. Yet, before this confessional mode of therapy was used to navigate 'insanity', as Bell claims, it served its purpose in inspiring frank discussions of female sexuality. Irene Gammel (1995) traces the popularity of confession to the sexually frank confessional (and autobiographical) writings of Baroness Elsa (150). The Baroness and her writing mark a point in female writing where the guise of autobiography allowed women to speak on subjects considered "taboos" (Gammel 152). Works such as the Baroness's were the product of the popularisation of psycho-analysis but, instead of navigating between two selves and performing for their

doctor/priest/husband, the language and form of such works allowed for something different; Gammel writes that:

> female confession should be seen not as a tool to reach an illusory sense of liberation, but rather as a genre that allows the woman to poke holes in, to disrupt and caricature, official discourses of truth. Deliberate 'speaking out' produces a discursive field that allows women to reclaim their voices and shock those in power (162).

While men searched for universal truths in their texts, women employed such personal texts to work against the universalising 'facts' with which they are burdened. Language created alienation, but the role of the reader in such texts proved its ability to enact disalienation as well. This interaction with the audience in the female confession marks the departure of what can be expected from female 'life-writing.' Fulfilling more of those qualities Lejeune asserts, female autobiography emerges from the hidden depths of this form of confession.

At its best, a woman's autobiography will manoeuvre between a "political-cultural" text and an act of "self-presencing" so that the autobiography creates both an "I" and a "We" (Goldman 1998 290-2). For the female writer, "Woman" is a cultural category, one which is forced onto her by the social order which orders her existence, it is not something that she can claim but something which she must navigate. In the case of the autobiographer then, writing is not an alienating act or "the result of creating a self in language, as it is for Lacanian and Barthesian critics of autobiography" (Stanford Friedman 76). Instead, it is something which speaks against the alienation already afforded by the category of "woman", and "alienation from the historically imposed image of the self is what motivates the writing, the creation of an alternate self in the autobiographical act" (Stanford Friedman 76). Women's autobiography is, therefore, the act of writing the alienated self and creating an alternate self who cannot be found in universalism. Female autobiography, it seems, cannot exist on its own but is sustained through

its negotiation between reader and self. Whereas men's autobiography is sustained by its notion of a coherent subject who can be asserted in a text, it would appear that a woman's self is created in her text through a process of negotiation. Her first-person self, then, is subject to the autobiography and how it is read.

For both Frame and Head the topic of 'madness' cannot be separated from the concept of 'madness.' 'Madness' as a category serves its function in two ways: it creates alienation within the self and outside of the self. The process of removing this sense of alienation is that which is the purpose of therapy. Yet, it is not entirely clear if a woman can experience this freedom from alienation. Therefore, 'madness' and how women express 'madness', as well as how it is treated, is worthy of investigation.

According to Foucault, 'madness' and its treatment was popularised from the 18th century onwards. In *Madness and Civilisation* (1961/1984) Foucault writes that 'madness' in the 18th century was no longer considered an external event, or "the presence of imaginary transcendences", but was instead the result of idleness, the only solution to which was the placing of such individuals outside of society and within the hospital (136). As a completely juridical system, confinement hoped to provide employment for those who found themselves outside of the bourgeois ethic of labour. It moves from the world of the "irrational" (vapours) and instead is the result of the "madman" crossing "the frontiers of bourgeois order of his own accord and alienates himself outside the sacred limits of its ethic" (136). To be mad was to enact an alienation from the ethic of work and that resulted in internment. However, by the 19th century, this desire to create labour through the asylum was abandoned. Instead of hoping to reform the alienated through labour, new treatment techniques introduced Christian morality into the asylum. These techniques aimed to reform the madman through this morality; claiming

that the madman is mad because he allows his alienation, an alienation he has control over. In this new model, rejecting such alienation (and so rejecting the freeing act) allows the madman to become a willing member of the social confines of his time, allowing his freedom from the asylum.

Within the asylum the patient found himself alienated from the subject that was himself through his relationship with the doctor and through the various structures of asylum life. Despite his separation from the "bourgeois environment" the institution creates a separation again by modelling itself off as a "kind of microcosm in which were symbolized the massive structures of bourgeois society and its values" (162). If the patient hoped to be free of this environment he would have to acquiesce to its principles, to find himself enveloped by the ethics he has seemingly rejected through his moral failings, failings which are the cause of his madness. This treatment plan is expanded upon by Freud. According to Foucault, Freud places the confinements of the asylum within the doctor so that in the doctor's hands "he created the psychoanalytic situation where, by an inspired shortcircuit, alienation becomes disalienating because, in the doctor, it becomes a subject" (166). The conclusion then, of mass confinement, is that the 'madman' exists only within the doctor after a process of psychoanalysis. If the 'alienated' self is willing and believes in the doctor, he may become 'disalienated' through talk therapy. The asylum is the confinement of the alienated individual who, through his belief in the disalienating power of the doctor, may choose to be cured. However, this view has a specific focus on men.

As has already been established, traditional modes of therapy are complicated by the introduction of gender. Bell states that women have a tradition of "collaborating in the creation of a hysterical female persona" and that masks are essential to navigating the various social

constructs which "subjugate difference and the female body" (Bell 151). This desire to subjugate difference and control the female body is at the heart of how 'female madness' functions. In her work, *The Female Malady* (1985), Elaine Showalter traces the connection between women, madness, and English culture from 1830 to 1980. In this work, she argues that there appears to be "a fundamental alliance between 'woman' and 'madness'" (3). Furthermore, she states that,

> These dual images of female insanity—madness as one of the wrongs of woman; madness as the essential feminine nature unveiling itself before scientific male rationality—suggest the two ways that the relationship between women and madness has been perceived. In the most obvious sense, madness is a female malady because it is experienced by more women than men (3).

Showalter's work covers three distinct historical phases, psychiatric Victorianism (1830–1870), psychiatric Darwinism (1870–1920) and psychiatric Modernism (1920-1980). She uses this method in an attempt to reveal the link between the 'scientific' and social controls throughout the treatment of madness. Each of these periods is essential because, while they drive theories of 'madness,' they also produce written works by female authors which reveal the constant collaboration that Bell implies. Essential to these works is their fictionality, which employs literary devices to both enact female hysteria but also to reveal the subjugation women experience, revealing how 'madness' connected all these factors. From the Victorian era and onwards, women's bodies were confined to the home and their sexuality was confined to the realm of 'madness'. Foucault (1978) states that during the Victorian era, women were considered as "thoroughly saturated with sexuality" (104) and this bolstered the belief that 'madness' was an inherently female trait, a deviance from moral codes and societal norms. For a Victorian woman to be mad, she must exhibit behaviours which resist her assigned role within the domestic sphere.

With the rise of the middle class, there was a coinciding rise of Victorian domesticity. Domesticity refers not only to the home but to a shared set of cultural practices which encode "relationships, behaviors and things" (Hamlett 2014 7); such domesticity is the result of control, not only by the state, but as the consequence of an emergence of "cultural hegemony, the governance of the self, the establishment of social norms" thus the control of people "by themselves in an attempt to create and conform to such hegemony" (Hamlett 12). Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* (1847/2006) uses Bertha Mason as the social deviant who becomes mad when she abandons her role of wife. As Jane Eyre begins to veer into a world of moral deviance, Bertha becomes increasingly 'mad' and is unable to be confined within the domestic spheres which have held her body captive. As Jane and Bertha function as doubles, this tension is resolved when Bertha and the home are burned down. Jane is removed from the ruinous freedom of a woman without a domestic sphere, while also escaping the same domesticity which had entrapped Bertha. Thus, Victorian ideals about femininity and madness are explored in Brontë's text but safely, through the doppelgänger. The reason for this double and its ability to enact 'madness' is essential to several women's texts during all of Showalter's historic periods. The doppelgänger, within each of these novels, experiences a particular type of 'madness'—it cannot conform to the societal expectations which are placed on it and thus it deteriorates (Rigney 1975). Rigney argues that these doppelgängers function as "studies of alienated female consciousness in opposition to a male society" (11), and that they perform this task by acting as the externalisation of the experiences of their authors. It is this externalisation that Charlotte Perkins Gilman employs when recounting her experience and she displays how Victorianism meets Darwinism in modes of treatment.

While ‘gender’ was an important aspect of asylum life under Victorian domesticity, and treatments were specialised to gender distinctions (treatments for such women included sewing, cleaning and cooking), it was the rise of Darwinism which ushered into psychiatry a unique emphasis on gendered treatments. Unlike Brontë, Gilman experienced the effects of being a woman who does not confine herself adequately to the role of the wife but is placed in ‘madness’ as a refuge from her failed domesticity. In her novella *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892/2009), Gilman produces a representation of the treatment she experienced in America at the end of the 19th century. The narrator is confined to her bed and seen only by her husband, who is also her doctor. According to Ussher (2011), Gilman describes in the work Silas Weir Mitchell’s bed-rest cure, which comprised of a woman’s confinement to a darkened room for a period of six to eight weeks while she was forbidden from any physical or mental activity (68). In the novella the main character is not allowed to write, the result of which is that the woman becomes obsessed with wallpaper and her double. Unable to be cured by domesticity alone, and unable to enact a treatment through writing, the narrator is only free once her double is free. She enacts this fate by destroying the wallpaper, but her sanity is not certain. While Gilman’s novella shows the failure of such Darwinian/domestic treatment techniques, these techniques, as well as psychiatric Darwinism, continue to approach women through difference and subjugation.

Throughout her life, Virginia Woolf fell victim to Darwinian thinking as well, the ideology of this movement is explained by Showalter here,

> In defining insanity, they also moved beyond the large and simple categories of aberrant behavior the Victorians used to classify lunatics —moral insanity, melancholy, mania, and so on—to the more ambiguous manifestations of eccentricity and deviance which they hoped to annex. The most characteristic and revealing metaphor of Darwinian

> psychiatry was that of the "borderland," the shadowy territory between sanity and madness which sheltered "latent brain disease" and the "seeds of nervous disorders" (105).

It is through her character of Septimus in her novel *Mrs Dalloway* (1925/1996) that Woolf creates an autobiographical account of all her experiences with similar rest-cures; these cures were aimed at treating the hysteria she had shown since girlhood. Beyond this, Septimus serves as a stringent critique of the limits of Darwinian thought after the first world war. Septimus is a man experiencing total withdrawal (melancholia) after returning from war. He stands in for the common male experience at the time. The trenches, which famously demanded that men feel none of their more 'feminine' urges and perform with the utmost 'masculinity', brought home men who found themselves dislocated from any ability to perform as full individuals. After their heroic exploits men were expected to return to homes they no-longer fit into. Just as the domestic sphere becomes a prison for women, men too found themselves entirely ensconced and alienated from a world they had once known. Woolf's novel cleverly traces the events of a single day for the mother/wife of Mrs Dalloway while also revealing the incarceration and suicide of Septimus. Unlike Dalloway, who returns to the domestic sphere, Septimus chooses death over the patriarchal influences of the Bradshaw's of the world. Septimius's crucifixion on the pavement of the mental asylum is indicative of the lack presented by 'rest-cures'. Woolf's novel traces a trend that psychiatry follows, "Only when hysteria, under the new name it was given during the war, became a widespread malady of men did the talking cure enter English psychiatric practice. Not feminism but shell shock initiated the era of psychiatric modernism" (Showalter 164).

Consequently, one may incorrectly assume that 'gender' no longer plays a role in psychiatric treatment after the advent of a revelation like 'shell shock'. While psychiatric modernism did

present the popularisation of modern talk-therapy, this therapy is not free of gendered methods of application and control. The talk-therapy popularised by Freud and his followers allowed for a means of treating the mentally ill beyond simply enacting rest-cures and domestic activities. It did not allow for, however, the destigmatisation of mental illness and the removal of the paternalistic influence of the therapist. Instead, under this new therapy, "hysteria" morphs into the clinical catchall of "schizophrenia"; a medical disease of which the popular treatments were "insulin shock, electroshock and lobotomy" (Showalter 205). It is Sylvia Plath's autofictional novel, *The Bell Jar* (1963/2008) which presents both strong arguments for anti-psychiatry and shows how the field of women's madness and literature changes by the 1960s. Sylvia Plath, according to Farland (2002), writes the novel "not only as an autobiographical account of a highly personal experience of psychiatric illness, but also as a trenchant social critique of psychiatric institutions" (222). While some may argue that Plath's work does employ the same doppelgänger expected of women's writings about 'madness', she also creates a text which disturbs this clear distinction between narrator and mad subject because Esther Greenwood does present with elements of madness. Esther's freedom from domestic entrapment through marriage comes with the cost that is her institutionalisation and her placelessness once she is free of such structures. As both a critique of the institutions at the time and something written in the confessional mode, Plath creates a work that no longer appeals to the modes of negotiation that talk therapy has demanded. Coinciding with this novel's attempt to re-enact 'madness' through the guise of fiction and the narrator is the popularisation of the final relevant school of thought for this exploration into 'female madness'. Under the anti-psychiatry movement 'madness' is not seen as innately feminine but is rather the consequence of being confined to the 'feminine'.

A prominent figure in the anti-psychiatry movement of the late 1960s was R.D. Laing, and his work *The Divided Self* (1960) proved to be a successful disruption to the popular theories of its time. Laing proposed that psychosis was a response to the compartmentalisation of the individual within a fragmented society. Modernism revealed this dislocation of the individual from the world in which they inhabited as a core tenant of 'madness' and Laing noted that this effect was at its height in women who experienced both "repression" and "oppression" within the family and were forced to develop schizophrenia because of the "contradictory messages and demands about femininity women faced in patriarchal society" (Showalter 222); schizophrenia acted as the ultimate protest against the feminine role. Yet, central to Laing's theory is still the notion of a privileged interpreter, a "true physician priest" who follows the schizophrenic on their "voyage into inner time and space" and "attends that journey and watches over the traveller" (Rigney 62). Laing proposes that, while the domestic sphere causes a retreat into "schizophrenia", it is only with a doctor's assistance that they may be returned to their 'whole' selves. Women, it seems, must still perform for their doctors if they wish to be cured, no matter the current formulation of 'madness'. The pattern throughout these texts and treatment programs is the same—while a woman aims to alienate herself from the oppression enacted on her as a woman, this alienation is considered 'madness' and is cured by her performing for her doctor in a manner which he deems appropriate for disalienation. The therapeutic mode, however, and theories of 'madness', clearly cloud this relationship and 'gender' presents an almost unsurmountable obstacle to treatment. How, then, can a woman overcome 'madness'?

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I have already declared that there is something which draws the labels of 'madness' and 'autobiography' together in fictional writing and I want to argue that this 'something' is confession. 'Madness' creates a blurring of genre, as any attempt to write about it traverses into the ambiguous realm of confessional literature. In my section on 'madness' above I have shown how it is nearly impossible for women to escape the label of 'mad' and how institutions and treatments are unable to adequately cure it, because 'treatment' is an act of reassimilation rather than a holistic cure. As well, I have revealed that female autobiography is not about representing an 'I' as much as it is an attempt to produce a text which affirms, and therefore creates, the category of 'Woman.' Hence, under 'madness' an 'I' is produced for the doctor and under autobiography an 'I' is produced to reveal a 'We'. In either case, the notion of a singular first person becomes impossible due to these constant negotiations which must take place. It would appear, then, that both 'autobiography' and 'madness' find themselves entangled in the same mode of representation: confession.

How this confession creates an 'I' for the writer is revealed through 'scriptotherapy'. In 'scriptotherapy' this created 'I' is completely normal and, perhaps, expected even. In her work *Shattered Subjects: Women's Life-writing and Narrative Recovery* (1999) Suzette A Henke coins the term 'scriptotherapy' to define women's writing which discusses traumatic events as a method or means of healing from them. To establish the foundation and qualifications for 'scriptotherapy', Henke must first bring forward the conditions that qualify women's writing for that term. Henke believes that life-writing best demonstrates what 'scriptotherapy' is. She describes such life-writing broadly:

> In my own thinking about women's life-writing, I have defined the genre broadly, and sometimes metaphorically, to include confessional forms, autofictions, diaries, journals, and the bildungsroman, as well as autobiography and biomythography. What

> all these genres have in common is an author attempting to fashion an enabling discourse of testimony and self-revelation, to establish a sense of agency, and to unearth a panoply of mythemes that valorize a protean model of female subjectivity (xvi).

In its creation of both a sense of agency and creating a model of female subjectivity, 'scriptotherapy' both enacts and departs from the type of confession that is employed in talk therapy. The basic premise of this psychoanalysis is, for Henke, "a psychoanalytic working-through of repressed memories brought to the surface and abreacted through the use of language and free association" (xi). Henke hopes to establish that trauma is effectively an issue of memory, stating that "the object of psychoanalysis" and also "of autobiography and scriptotherapy" is to achieve the goal set out by Herman; to "'reassemble an organized, detailed, verbal account, oriented in time and historical context'" from the "'fragmented components of frozen imagery and sensation'" that constitute trauma or traumatic memories (Herman qtd. in Henke xviii). To write about 'madness', as an attempt to cure it, it must contain, therefore, some attempt at the autobiographical. Instead of creating the self through language, as seems to be the role of the analyst in the Freudian model, Henke asks if the therapeutic power of psychoanalysis might reside more in the experience of "'rememory' and reenactment than in the scene of transference posited by Freud?" (Henke xi) and does so by stating that, "A great deal of evidence now suggests that the formulation of narrative cohesion can reconfigure the individual's obsessive mental processing of embedded traumatic scripts" (Henke xviii).

In this way, Henke proposes that, in place of the psychotherapist, female life-writings allow female authors to work through their trauma without being observed by a second consciousness. The writer thus becomes, through this process of therapeutic reenactment, both the analyst and the analysand. The text is therefore able to heal the writer through the 'scriptotherapeutic' process. How the text heals its writer is dependent on its ability to unite

the fragmented subject into a cohesive whole and this is the ultimate goal of a scriptotherapeutic text. Essential to life-writing is the process whereby the texts "double back" on themselves "in haunting self-referentiality" (Henke xv). Henke is explaining how the subject is created in a scriptotherapeutic text, a text in which the author must be able to act as a witness to themselves. This witnessing produces three subject positions within the text, described by Henke as "first, the authorial consciousness, or subject of enunciation, narrating the autobiographical story in a series of recollected, sometimes discontinuous episodes, second, the early, fragmented (and often traumatized) version of the self, and, finally, the ostensibly coherent subject of utterance evinced through the process of narrative disclosure" (xv). Whatever genre the writer employs within the broader category of 'life-writing' the result is similar, "the author recasts his or her life narrative in the shape of a salutary paradigm that offers both a myth of origins and an implicitly teleological model for future development" (Henke xv). Through life-writing, therefore, an author is able to rewrite herself; a paradigm supported by both the history of confession and the tradition of talk therapy.

It is this term 'scriptotherapy' that I wish to apply to both the life-writings and autobiography of Bessie Head and Janet Frame because I believe it is through this term that 'madness' as a heterotopia is revealed. Foucault (1998) places five principles on heterotopias but they can be summarised for the most part as "emplacements", "with the curious property of being connected to all other emplacements, but in such a way that they suspend, neutralise, or reverse the set of relations that are designated, reflected or represented by them" (178). As Kraus (2013) posits: "Heterotopias are social spaces which offer themselves for individual meaning-making, require a low level of self-positioning, and offer a place for working on new self-positions or new configurations of such positions to transcend or subvert forced other-positioning" (79). As I have argued, 'confession' creates a self who exists within and outside

of language and ‘madness’ creates a self who exists outside of acceptable spheres of existence. In either case ‘madness’ accurately contains the individual who is beyond and within the powers of language. To see how ‘madness’ enacts this heterotopic nature is easiest in the type of comparative reading I have proposed for both Frame and Head. Ultimately, ‘madness’ works across multiple spheres and one of these is genre. Another is that of ‘translation’. The chapters which follow will expand upon the type of argument I have proposed in this chapter.

Chapter One: Janet Frame's divided and distinguished self and the role of scriptotherapy.

"Really, if you want to write you have to be desperate to write."—Janet Frame

Janet Frame is the author of two texts which deal with 'madness' and the act of 'autobiography', but each serves as a form of 'scriptotherapy' in its own way. *Faces in the Water* (1961/2018) traces the incarceration of Istina Mavet within two New Zealand mental institutions. The novel follows the narrator, Istina Mavet, over the course of nearly a decade as she moves from Cliffhaven to Treecroft and then back to Cliffhaven. The novel is an account of the horror and dehumanization experienced by mental patients within the wards, it acts as a case study for such an experience. Frame's *An Autobiography* (1989/1990) was published first in three parts and then in its entirety. The autobiography traces Frame's girlhood, her university entrance, the publication of her first novel, a stint in Europe and her eventual return to New Zealand. The autobiography is littered with Frame's experiences of personal tragedy, and her family as well as her writing present as major topics within the work. Of her experiences in mental hospitals, however, Frame writes only about what led to her hospitalisation, the consequences of her treatment and the jobs she had each time she was allowed parole from the hospital. If *Faces* is about nearly a decade spent in mental hospitals, *An Autobiography* is about the life spent outside of mental hospitals. Read comparatively, Frame's novel *Faces* is the tale which would fill the silence that Frame has inserted in her autobiography, the story of 'madness'. The reason for this omission has to do with 'madness' as well as 'scriptotherapy'.

Frame seems to write *An Autobiography* in response to the view that her novel *Faces* is anything but fiction. Part of the novel's reception as 'autobiographical' or a roman-à-clef has

to do with Frame and the conditions which surround the novel. Frame has credited her publishing of the novel with her desire to create an awareness of that which people experience when they are labelled as "mentally ill" or "mad" (King 2001 203). In truth, her writing of *Faces* can be traced back to an early form of writing as therapy. Patrick Evans (2011) writes that it was at the encouragement of R.H Cawley, her doctor and mentor, that Frame began her written account of all that she had experienced within various New Zealand mental institutions (83). The project, which she began in 1959, was meant to alleviate Frame of the trauma she had experienced while institutionalised. Its writing coincided with another verdict, that she had never suffered from schizophrenia. On Frame's freedom from the label of 'schizophrenia', Lim and Galletly (2019) write that it was Sir Lewis and his medical team who confirmed for Frame that she had never suffered from schizophrenia but that her symptoms were likely the result of her experiences in various New Zealand institutions (470-1). It is this same Dr Cawley who tells Frame that she should "shed her mantle of schizophrenia and adopt the 'word clothes' of the writer" (Blowers 2000 87). The novel therefore began as an attempt to overcome trauma through writing but also, of taking up the new identity of a writer. It should come as no surprise then, if, in her desire to free herself of 'schizophrenia', Frame makes no claim to 'madness' of any sort. The novel's author's note should be expected then: "Although this book is written in documentary form, it is a work of fiction. None of the characters, including Istina Mavet, portrays a living person" (*Faces* vi). This author's note reveals an awareness of the possible equating of a mad character with a 'mad' author. At the forefront of Frame's mind is the understanding that her diagnosis of 'schizophrenia' and her time in mental institutions will result in a reading of the text as something 'autobiographical'. It is almost as if she expects the sorts of readings that critics produce for the novel. While few critics deny the fictionality of *Faces*, they do struggle with the text's autobiographical nature. Donald Hannah (1992) has been criticised for engaging in a reading that is too similar to that of many of Frames readers;

a reading which "connected Frame to her mentally ill characters" and saw them as "entirely autobiographical" (Wood 2013 174). The reason that Hannah receives this critique is that he writes that Istina Mavet is "Janet Frame herself under another name" (74). Furthermore, he ends his review of the novel in the following way: "Case-history or work of fiction? Both really, I suppose" (Hannah 81). Yet, many critics refer to the fictionality of the text as the reason for undermining such a direct reading, stating that its artfulness ensures that Istina Mavet is dislocated from Frame and that the reader's attention should be turned to the use of language within the text, as opposed to examining it for traces of its author (Evans 2011; Fisiak 2011; Dean 2011; Wood 2013).

I do not want to discount Hannah's reading here, as others have done, due to their belief in the 'fictionality' of the text. I want to argue, instead, that the 'fictionality' of the text is emphasised only because it has the autobiography as its contrast and that this contrast is intentionally created by Frame. Yet, while I make this claim, I am also aware that to declare the novel an honest portrayal, something entirely autobiographical, is to deny its artfulness, its status as fiction. An emphasis on the novel's construction is shown again in King's biography when he recounts one of Frame's letters,

> She told Money that this text was 'most primitive and not meant for publication: it is simply an almost truthful account of a few past experiences, and not entirely truthful because so many more dramatic things happened that if I had included them the whole account would have seemed invented (207).

While critics may want to ensure that the novel is not read as anything but fiction its 'autobiographical' facts (its peritextual information and context) remain connected to Frame the author. The novel is still an "almost truthful account" despite its fictionality. It is this

connection which reveals the text's scriptotherapeutic nature and, in turn, the autobiography's scriptotherapeutic nature as well.

It is clear that *Faces* is a scriptotherapeutic text and as such it offers a solution to the omissions Frame presents in her autobiography. In her work, *Shattered Subjects,* Henke presents the term 'scriptotherapy'. 'Scriptotherapy' is not about simply recounting experiences as if one is in therapy (with the novel acting the role of the therapist) but is instead a "process of writing" and is, therefore, unique (Henke, 1999 xii). It functions, not only to allow for "the authorial effort to reconstruct a story of psychological debilitation and offer potential for mental healing" (Henke *xii)* but also allows that "both autobiography and autofiction offer a unique conflation of history and discourse, of verifiable fact and aesthetic fabulation" (Henke xiii-iv). When Dr Cawley suggests that Frame write about what she has experienced, and to do this in her novel, she does so in a manner that frees her from the scenes that had haunted her during her internment in New Zealand mental hospitals. Beyond this freedom, she achieves a claim to fiction, to fiction as something which does not represent her but is constructed out of all that which was external to her. This, in part, fulfils another aspect of 'scriptotherapy', the division of the self into threes. According to Henke, there are three subject positions within the autobiographical/ Bildungsroman text; "first, the authorial consciousness, or subject of enunciation, narrating the autobiographical story in a series of recollected, sometimes discontinuous episodes, second, the early, fragmented (and often traumatized) version of the self, and, finally, the ostensibly coherent subject of utterance evinced through the process of narrative disclosure" (Henke xv). What Henke is proposing is intriguing because it implies the subject-referent (first-person third-person) within any autobiography is inevitably going to shift positions, a consequence of which is that a text such as *An Autobiography* would present

different versions of the writer, and in this case, Frame. This division is reminiscent of the female confession as Bell would posit it,

> Since antiquity women have played the role of confessor to male doctors who have provided an audience for their fantasies; the male doctor and female patient often collaborating in the creation of a hysterical female persona. Women, it would seem, have had a long history of understanding the ambiguous creation of first and third person selves of understanding the masks all women wear. Such masks have been used to navigate the social construction of insanity that has historically been employed to subjugate difference and the female body (151).

In confession and in scriptotherapy the autobiographical must merge with fiction to create a text that can hold the 'madness' that an authoress has experienced. This is essentially the process of presenting a third- and first-person self. However, when audiences finish such a text they are unable to distinguish the 'madness' expressed in the text from the newly established 'coherent subject' who is the author/narrator. While writing might create a space where the 'mad' self is confined to the text, audiences appear to reject the notion that the first-person author is now separate from this 'madness'. Thus, rejecting the effects of the negotiation that scriptotherapy allows.

I: The sane and insane selves—dividing the self through writing.

It is in her work *Faces* that Frame rejects the sort of scenario which I have proposed above. I want to argue that *Faces* enacts the 'traumatized self' which Frame rejects when she writes her autobiography but that this 'insane' version of the self cannot be unwritten if the coherent self is to be maintained. The reason for this is not only to compare the texts through 'scriptotherapy' but to reveal how 'madness' links the fictional *Faces* to the 'truthful' autobiography. As I will explain below, Frame must write an autobiography in response to *Faces,* because she wishes

to remove her 'mad' self from her sane first person. Frame wants to assert that, while she has written about 'madness', she has never been 'mad' herself. Further in this chapter, I examine again what it means to use writing as healing when one does not want to appear 'mad' but for now I want to examine how Frame achieves a division between 'madness' and her writing. Much of the problem with 'madness' is that it cannot truly be written about, and Blowers presents the argument as follows: "Foucault describes madness as the other to reason. If madness is not reason it follows there can be no reasonable or readable text which can express madness" (74). It is this inability to write from within 'madness' that Blowers attributes to the difficulty of *Faces,* "This conundrum (how to write madness since by definition madness is outside any language system the sane can recognise) is, I believe, in a complex way related to the ambiguous and debated status of Faces in the Water as case study or fiction" (75). I have already stated above how Frame replaced her title of "schizophrenic" with that of writer. The consequence of this change, I argue, is that it then becomes impossible for Frame the writer to engage in any sort of claim to 'madness' because, as I have shown, madness separates the person enacting it from the "language system the sane can recognise" (Blowers 75).

Frame states on multiple occasions that she is not 'mad', nor has she ever been 'mad', and her autobiography is an almost-successful attempt at asserting this very fact. In an interview with Elizabeth Alley, Frame discusses the difference between autobiography and fiction: "Well, I am always in fictional mode," she says,

> autobiography is found fiction. I look at everything from the point of view of fiction, and so it wasn't a change to be writing autobiography except the autobiography was more restrictive because it was based in fact, and I wanted to make an honest record of my life. But I was still bound by the choice of words and the shaping of the book, and that is similar to when one is writing fiction. I think that in writing there's no feeling of

> returning to or leaving a definite form, it's all in the same country, and within view of one's imaginative home so to speak, or in the same town. They are different and each has its own interest (Alley "Rare Interview With Author Janet Frame")

This desire to make an "honest record" of her life is essential for Frame. In the same interview (Alley "Rare Interview With Author Janet Frame") she states that part of the autobiography does serve "to correct some things which have been taken as fact and are not" but that the autobiography's purpose beyond simply correcting the record was to "make myself a first person".

Focusing on why Frame writes the autobiography is important because its creation serves to separate the events written about in her fiction from those she experiences in her real life. If the facts are incorrect, there is no better vehicle to express things plainly than the autobiography, "I wrote the story of my life. My story, and this is me which comes out. There is pain, things happen, but whatever comes out is ordinary me without fiction or characters" (Alley "Rare Interview With Author Janet Frame"). The real Janet Frame, she is stating in this interview, is found by writing her into existence and writing her through the factual mode that is autobiography. Yet, Frame cannot help but emphasise that it is structure and shaping which creates a novel. In fact, writing is nothing more than "expressing an emerging pattern and shape" to Frame.

It is clear, then, that while Frame wants to emphasise that autobiography is nothing but a simple account, she is also aware that the limits of a text create it as much as the text itself, that it is omissions which can change and create a story. With the notion that writing can create a self, and that writing is as much about that which is omitted as that which is recorded, it can be concluded then that subject(person) that Frame produces in her autobiography is particularly

interesting because it is crafted. In this interview, Frame claims that the autobiography is about truth—mostly— but she also states that she, "wrote the first volume of my autobiography for many reasons, one reason was that I wanted to get rid of the memories of the past up to a certain stage, to the time I was 40. Then I was really freeing myself from memories". It is this "freeing from memories" which I want to emphasise in my reading of the autobiography because it would seem that Frame has admitted to the text's scriptotherapeutic techniques both in this quote and throughout the entire interview. It is this "freeing myself of memories" which accurately encapsulates what 'scriptotherapy' as a mode of writing aims to do.

As both *Faces* and *An Autobiography* attempt to record and free Frame from memories, it is, therefore, possible to label them both as scriptotherapeutic texts. Despite this, it is the autobiography which again asserts *Faces* fictionality. This is shown when Frame writes the following in the autobiography:

> In my book Faces in the Water I have described in detail the surroundings and events in the several mental hospitals I experienced during the eight following years. I have also written factually of my own treatment and my thoughts about it. The fiction of the book lies in the portrayal of the central character, based on my life but given largely fictional thoughts and feelings, to create a picture of the sickness I saw around me (*Auto* 69-70).

The 'fictionality' of the novel is entirely the point, if the novel is 'scriptotherapy' then it can create a 'traumatised self' whom Frame can abandon once the text is over, creating, as she has claimed is her desire with writing the autobiography, a first-person self. Yet, this first-person self is created, I will argue, through scriptotherapy. It is not, therefore, possible to consider *Faces* as purely autobiographical because Frame's first-person self is determined by the novel. That is to say, *Faces* cannot be discounted but is not purely autobiography.

In the autobiography, the coherent Janet Frame (the one who must be free of 'madness') is engaged in creating an authorial self while also creating the third person 'I' who must exist within the text. In the following passage from *An Autobiography,* Frame shifts easily from a coherent subject to third-person object:

> Time confers privileges of arrangement and rearrangement undreamed of until it becomes Time Past. I have been writing of the memory of publication of stories and poems. In actual memory I am sitting talking to two borstal girls, on the way to Seacliff hospital, where I shall be a committed patient (*Auto* 68).

The first person here is both the Frame who is writing the text, narrating the text, and the subject of the text. The interplay between persons is only separated by time, secured in a future where the coherent subject who is the author lives. If a confession is about whom the patient aims to create with the doctor, then one must ask who Frame hopes to create in *An Autobiography* with her ever-shifting narrative voices and subject-positions. The 'I' who belongs to memory, this third person "I am sitting", is not accessible without the translation that the narrating voice provides for memory. The coherent subject is inaccessible to the reader without the 'I' who acts as privileged translator.

An Autobiography produces the knowledge of a privileged text, the speaking Frame who is Frame's true self, and the knowledge that the autobiography is produced by translating that true self onto the page. Whom the text creates then, is not Frame but the version of Frame that is understood in language. As stated in her interview, Frame was well aware of the frustration that autobiography as a genre imposes. These limits not only control what version of a text may be produced but which version of the writer may be produced within those limits. With her history of "mental-illness" Frame would be highly aware of the fact that any version of herself

who speaks of 'madness' would be considered truly 'mad'. For Frame, who her autobiography produced would be a subject who was labelled 'mad' but who never truly understood 'madness'. If, as Henke claims, scriptotherapy aims to portray both a 'coherent self' as well as a 'traumatised self' why does Frame exclude the 'traumatized' version of herself from the autobiography when the topic of 'madness' is considered? My suggestion is that she does not, that she is fully aware of the omission and that it serves a distinct purpose.

What Frame evokes in her autobiography is an author who is outside the realm of 'madness', and this is achieved through referentiality. Simone Oettli-van Delden (2003) believes that it is within these gaps between fiction and autobiography that Frame invites the reader into her experience of 'madness'; she writes "In the autobiography madness is ambivalently evoked by means of these gaps" (93). Here, Oettli-van Delden is referring to all the instances where Frame excludes any true exploration of 'madness' in her autobiography, opting instead to maintain the distance between that 'mad' self and the authorial voice of the text. As I have already stated, little to no genuine explanations of Frame's experiences of 'madness' can be found in *Auto* and Oettli-van Delden supports this reading,

> Janet Frame exploits the reader's inability to examine the relationship between the Implicit Author and the external world by, for instance, leaving the question of what exactly happened to Janet during the crisis period between 1945 and 1954 unanswered. Crucial gaps like this prevent the autobiography from being a self-sufficient, self-authenticating or 'autotelic' text by, at crucial moments, motivating a preoccupation with questions of referentiality (90).

Frame insists on this distance because she does not want to support readings of her life as that of the 'mad' artist. Susan Ash (1993) suggests that Frame's autobiography encourages a "naïve reading" in which the subject (Frame) "knows her object" and reconstitutes this subject in

writing; this reading is entirely dependent on the assumption that "the site of knowledge, Frame herself, is unified and can be known" (25). The implication of an autobiography then, is that an author cannot be 'mad' because they must have total control over their 'self'. Yet, this Frame is dependent on the removal of a 'mad' self from the autobiography for her to take up the role of 'translator' for those 'mad' subjects instead of being a 'mad' subject herself.

Frame understands that a referential autobiography, which can never truly be autobiography because of its omission of her 'true' experience, is preferable to the destabilising that would occur to her authorial voice if the concept of 'madness' is produced within the autobiography. Thus, Frame positions herself fully in the role of translator by introducing referentiality into her autobiography, "In my book *Faces in the Water* I have described in detail the surroundings and events in the several mental hospitals I experienced during the eight following years" (*Auto* 69). Frame rejects in this description of *Faces* the same version of herself who is absent from the autobiography, the traumatized self who must be seen as more than an object and yet, cannot. Reminded here of Blowers' assertion that *Faces* is a combination of lived experience and philosophy about madness, performed by the mad (performer), I want to return to the limitations of autobiography. The voice of Janet Frame must speak with the authority of a person stamped into time, someone who is in the present but discusses the world of memory, the memory of their past self, as separate from themselves. If we are to believe Hannah, that the novel is both fiction and case-history, then one must question why Frame does not choose to include that which would rectify this conflation. If the novel is not autobiographical (in the sense that it is not roman-à-clef as Frame would have us believe) then why has Frame not filled "crucial gaps"? I want to argue that these gaps are essential for Frame to enact 'scriptotherapy' in her text.

Frame's fiction can produce the 'traumatized' self, and, in this way, Frame can produce her coherent self in autobiography through referentiality. Henke has stated that for the three subject positions in 'scriptotherapeutic' writing there are three voices; the first is the voice to recount the tales and episodes in a narrative testimony; the second is the 'fragmented' or 'traumatized" version of the self; and the third is the "coherent subject" who performs the "narrative discourse" (xv). As Oettli-van Delden has pointed out it is impossible to understand the gaps that Frame presents in the autobiography without referentiality. Frame thus produces an autobiography which is wholly focused on producing a "naïve reading" (Ash 25) in which the autobiography only presents the coherent and narrating selves, and the autobiography, therefore, aims to contain the traumatized self in fiction. Partially, this containment occurs because Frame believes that she has written herself free of that 'madness' which she experienced and recounted in *Faces*. More interesting than Frame's belief in her freedom here, though, is the fact that Frame can only produce scriptotherapy through referentiality; it is through the genre of each text that she can assert control over madness. The 'traumatized' I (that forms part of the trinity of 'I's' which Henke proposes) is not lost to the autobiography through neglect or absence, nor is it to be kept solely in hospital records but is, rather, stored in a place Frame herself points to: "In my novel *Faces in the Water*" .With this in mind, it might be wise to consider how 'madness' ,when limited in both its representation and form in the genre of autobiography, will find itself performed in fiction.

II: The mad self and Faces in the Water

As a means of control, genre is employed throughout Frame's attempts to separate her three 'I's' across her texts. In another example, Frame again speaks to the honesty of her fictional account representing a 'madness' she witnessed through her incorrect hospitalisation,

> I have described in Istina Mavet is my sense of hopelessness as the months passed, my fear of having to endure that constant state of physical capture where I was indeed at the mercy of those who made judgments and decisions without even talking at length to me or trying to know me or even submitting me to the standard tests which are available to psychiatrists. The state could be defined as forced submission to custodial capture (*Auto* 221).

While Frame describes Istina Mavet as the vessel through which her "hopelessness" has found expression, she does not allow for the possibility that Mavet might be the truth-bearer of her emotional, traumatized, 'I'. Instead, this 'I' is found in the subtext of the novel, placed in fictional writing but to enact the feelings which must be omitted in autobiographical writing. This can be shown as early as the start of the novel where the "hopelessness" and state of "physical capture" are described through the use of metaphorical language,

> I will write about the season of peril. I was put in hospital because a great gap opened in the ice floe between myself and the other people whom I watched, with their world, drifting away through a violet-coloured sea where hammerhead sharks in tropical ease swam side by side with the seals and the polar bears. I was alone on the ice (*Faces* 4).

The language of this extract clearly divides the autobiography from the novel and also emphasises the division that language creates between the 'sane' and the 'insane'. In this extract Istina is immediately aware that she has become a part of "their world", that world of the madwomen. In her autobiography Frame does not describe her feelings upon entering the psychiatric hospital, the words "capture" and "forced custodial capture" are her replacements for any meaningful description. Through language, therefore, Frame hopes to distance herself from 'madness' as well as through genre, and these extracts reveal the truth of this. Yet, both these extracts reveal Frame's awareness of the importance of institutions in 'madness'. It is in the novel that Frame explores the structural/geographic possibilities of her "capture".

In an attempt to trace the use of geographical spaces throughout the novel to examine the role that space has on the power dynamics of such institutions, Gilbert et al. (1996) determine that, "In both her novels and her autobiographical writings, Frame has developed an opposition between 'that world' of the sane and 'this world' of the insane"; and, that "by contrasting life inside [the asylum] and outside in terms of 'worlds'"(21), she understands the extent to which madness is spatialized. Indeed, Blowers contends that "Frame often uses literal geographic distance and physical exclusion to underline a more profound, social, linguistic and psychological exclusion" (79). While Frame admits to a "state of physical capture" in her autobiography, the emotional impact of the institutionalization is not explored by the autobiographical 'I'.

Frame's autobiography aims to create a first-person self in the face of the third-person status that the asylum affords its patients and this negotiation between its created subject and object positions by the narrator is found in both the novel and autobiography. 'Madness' as an experience can be regarded as the experience of alienation from the "their world" of the sane into a repositioning of the self within the "their world" of the patient. In her autobiography, Frame hints at the involuntary inclusion she feels in the group of the mad: "Now, as a Seacliff patient, I was again part of a group, yet more deeply alone, not even a creviced 'I'. I became 'she', one of 'them'" (*Auto* 70).

Frame's sense of physical capture within this group is clear. Frame does not, however, indulge in descriptions of this group to which she feels she belongs. Shortly after referencing her unwilling inclusion into this group of "them" Frame writes "When I left Seacliff in December 1945" (*Auto* 70), so that these six weeks of institutionalisation are shrunk into a single phrase. Frame leaves her accounts and descriptions of that group of "them" to the novel. Once placed in the new world of the asylum, Mavet must inhabit a new identity in which the 'I' disappears

due to a shift in geographic location and becomes part of a "them" or "we". Istina finds herself thrust into a new mode of watching,

> These excited people in their red ward dressing gowns and long grey ward stockings and bunchy striped bloomers which some took care to display to us, were called by their Christian names or nicknames, Dizzy, Goldie, Dora. Sometimes they approached us and began to confide in us or touch our sleeves, reverently, as if we were indeed what we felt ourselves to be, a race apart from them (*Faces* 12).

The "we" Istina belongs to here is the group of Ward Two patients, those who belong to the institution but are not considered fully 'mad'. As Istina moves throughout the novel her separation into various categories of "we" and 'I' represents how the geography of the institution greatly affects how the patient creates their coherent self. This exploration is not possible in the autobiography because Frame must insist that the novel is a recording of that which she saw around her, that she could never fully recreate a 'madness' that she did not experience. She emphasises the written quality of *Faces* once again in her autobiography,

> I began to write the story of my experiences in hospitals in New Zealand, recording faithfully every happening and the patients and the staff I had known, but borrowing from what I had observed among the patients to build a more credibly 'mad' central character, Istina Mavet, the narrator. Also planning a subdued rather than a sensational record, I omitted much, aiming more for credibility than a challenge to me by those who might disbelieve my record (*Auto* 387).

By placing herself as privileged interpreter for the 'mad', Frame hopes to reveal how she understands the language of the 'mad' but that her own 'madness' is only the result of a geographic capture. Except, with the promise of Frame's feelings of "hopelessness" only being recorded in *Faces,* Frame also shows that both *Faces* and *An Auto* are referentially connected.

*

My 'scriptotherapeutic' reading of these texts relies on reading the 'I' expressed within *Faces* as the same 'I' that Frame excludes from her autobiography. Istina Mavet represents Frame but does so in a way that reveals her as 'credibly' mad. Istina observes, in the novel, that which Frame, as a coherent self who exists in the world of the 'sane', cannot know. Yet, the Frame of the autobiography has 'gaps' in her story which are filled by Istina's fictional narration.

One example of this is the time both Istina and Frame spend up north with family. Outside of the institution for the first time, Frame records the experience in her autobiography as follows:

> It was nearing summer, and the world was filled with blue flowers that attracted the blue of the sky, almost drinking it in until at evening their colour darkened with the excess of blue. I experienced a feeling of nowhereness and nothingness as if I had never existed, or, if I had, I was now erased from the earth. I had somehow fallen into a crevice in time; and many of these feelings were a result of my being "in touch" with no one, and of having no one to talk to from within…I could no longer bear the nothingness. I retreated to an inward state, that is, I put on such a mask, while at the same time totally aware of everything. I, in my nothingness and nowhereness, was asserting the nothingness and nowhereness of everything and everyone around me. Such a condition, of course, led to my removal to the Auckland mental hospital at Avondale; at least it was a 'place' for me where I was believed to be 'at home' (*Auto* 215-6).

Despite her state of "capture" Frame reveals her sense of isolation in a world in which she feels she no longer belonged; she must wear the "mask" of the sane person in her daily life. Yet, instead of being able to create this first person for herself Frame instead creates a sense of "nothingness". It is not the 'I' of the autobiography, therefore, who accurately portrays the

landscape of despair that Frame felt in this new world, the one outside of the asylum, and yet, Istina portrays this state well:

> I went up north to a land of palm trees and mangroves like malignant growths in the mud-filled throats of the bays, and orange trees with their leaves accepting darkly and seriously, in their own house as it were, the unwarranted globular outbursts of winter flame; and the sky faultless and remote. This was 'up north'. I stayed for a few weeks with my sister. Have you ever been a spinster living in a small house with your sister and her husband and their new first child? Watching them rub noses and pinch and tickle and in the night, when you lie on the coffin-narrow camp-bed that would not hold two people anyway, listening to them because you cannot help it? I did not know my own identity. I was burgled of body and hung in the sky like a woman of straw. The day seemed palpable about me yet receded when I moved to touch it, for fear that I might contaminate it. I nagged at the sky. It grew a protective porcelain filling of cloud. I was not a mosquito nor a cricket nor a bamboo tree, therefore I found myself, when it was full summer, lying in a gaily quilted bed in a spotless room called an observation dormitory in Ward Seven of Treecroft Mental Hospital, up north (*Faces* 55).

While Frame describes her retreat inward as a response to her search for a "place" it is only in the novel where this sense of placelessness finds its cause. Reading these extracts together one is struck by Frame's inability to exist outside of the hospital and within the domestic sphere, she belongs to neither category. Yet, while Frame seems resigned to her search for belonging and the hospital's ability to provide this, Mavet takes up a position where she is "burgled of body" and therefore finds herself "lying in a gaily quilted bed" in Treecroft hospital (*Faces* 55). Frame achieves with Istina Mavet the creation of an 'I' who is separated from her body.

Mavet fulfils a role in Frame's autobiography, she relates that which Frame cannot, and will not, include in the text.

Frame's experiences in Park House and at Avondale find their honest representation in the novel, and it is the "traumatized" I which is enacted in the novel that allows for such a deliberate omission. Of her admission into Avondale Frame writes:

> I quickly fitted into my adopted country, again speaking the language fluently. The squalor and inhumanity were almost indescribable. I retain many many scenes of the crowded dayroom and exercise yard, and were I to rewrite Faces in the Water, I would include much that I omitted because I did not want a record by a former patient to appear to be overdramatic. The admission ward, Ward Seven (?), is remembered as an oasis with its park and willow tree and its friendly ward sister, and no one would ever have dreamed that beyond it stood the buildings known as Park House, where human beings became or were quickly transformed into living as animals. The years spent there were compressed with tragedy and often with humour, although the prevailing mood was one of a doomed eternity, all hope abandoned (*Auto* 216).

This brief account only hints at confirming that which Istina Mavet portrays in the novel; how people are turned into "animals". Within the autobiography, Frame does not admit any degradation of her person, this process must be found within the new narrative 'I' of Istina Mavet,

> The lolly scramble was a feature of some days and was held both for the amusement of the staff who often described themselves as 'going dippy ourselves, stuck on duty here all day' and for the pleasure of the patients. The paper lollies would be showered into the middle of the dayroom and it would be first come first served with fights developing, people being put in strait jackets, whistles blowing; and the tension which

> mounted and reached its peak at intervals — both in the patients and in the nurses who had long ago had to suppress any desire to 'nurse' and were now overworked degraded, in many cases sadistic, custodians — found its release, for a time. Although I longed to, I never joined the scramble, and viewing it from the outside, was filled with disgust that the staff had so far forgotten that the people in their charge were human beings, as to treat them like animals in a pen at the zoo (*Faces* 84).

This extract is narrated by an Istina who is no longer newly admitted to Lawn Lodge (inspired by Park House) but as a person no longer allowed to sit at the "special table" reserved for new patients within that ward.

This removal creates a version of Istina who is now an individual, one who can simultaneously be "filled with disgust" yet also filled with a longing to join the scramble. This Istina is both the 'I' who writes from the narrative frame as well as the character who is within the hospital but who is also "viewing it from the outside". The Istina within the passage belongs to neither nurses nor patients, yet her 'I' can flit through both these subject positions to account for their feelings. She can do this because her 'I' here is viewing herself as the nurses do: as the 'insane' or incurable object. While this Istina is presented as geographically distanced from the subjects who partake in the scramble, she is only able to achieve this positioning after she has felt herself as part of that group "In the end I did not seem to care; and if I wanted to go to the lavatory from the special table, and I was often wanting to go, and I was refused permission, I would slide from my seat under the table and wet on the floor like an animal"(*Faces* 81).

This Istina, who watched herself slide from the seat and wet the floor like the "animal" in Lawn Lodge (Park House) expresses that which Frame cannot, that geographically she too was viewed as one of these people with a "doomed eternity". I have argued that Mavet is able to take up both the subject and object position within the novel, that she can be both the narrating

voice as well as the narrated subject and do so at the same time. The extract above reveals, in a similar manner to the scene of the lolly scramble, Istina's ability to both exist within her 'mad' narrative and to organise herself against that 'mad' body. In fiction, therefore, both the 'narrated self' and the 'traumatized self' can be produced at the same time by the 'narrating self'. This means, essentially, that in fiction the 'traumatized self' can be expressed without any harm occurring to the coherent self who organises the text, the speaking subject (narrating self) is allowed to be 'mad'. In her autobiography Frame cannot express the scenes she viewed at Park House, but she does refer the reader to them in *Faces.* This is because *Faces* can express Mavet as both the 'traumatized' object and the coherent subject. If Frame were to express the 'traumatized' subject, the one who endured such experiences, in her autobiography then her coherent self would be expressing 'madness'. Yet, Frame has already layered *Faces* with the coherent subject that is essentially herself, and her authorial voice is present in the fiction. Frame's voice, as one might find it in an autobiography, is found in the following example from the novel, "I rely so much on the sun; I think of the sunflowers with their ebony hearts and their searing ragged corona and their heads turned to the sun. I think it is the removal of the sun's influence that has made us mad; the sun is blocked that used years ago to scrape the unreal shadow from our brain" (*Faces* 148).

Here it is unclear whether this Istina is discussing an "us" which belongs to the patients of Ward Four or whether she is the narrator, taking a break from recounting her tale in the past to make an observation of herself in the present, or if this is simply an account of an Istina whose institutionalisation has left her 'mad' and belonging to a group of 'mad' individuals. This part of the novel is nestled within the narrative to elucidate upon the reasons why the Ward Four patients are incomprehensible to the patients of Ward Two. With limited access to the world, it appears that the Ward Four patients are sunflowers, turning their heads towards the sun out of fear that its disappearance will cause them to cease to exist. For these patients, who are

consigned to the grounds of Cliffhaven, the outside world does not exist. These people are turned from full beings into shadows by their dislocation and treatment and are no more than objects. It is their treatment which has caused them to stare so curiously up at the sun. It is through Istina that Frame presents this revelation, but it is not the only aspect of 'madness' that she explores. Beyond this, Mavet has begun to understand that language fails those whom it others:

> There is an aspect of madness which is seldom mentioned in fiction because it would damage the romantic popular idea of the insane as a person whose speech appeals as immediately poetic; but it is seldom the easy Ophelia recited like the pages of a seed catalogue or the outpourings of Crazy Janes who provide, in fiction, an outlet for poetic abandon...They were a nuisance and were treated as such. It was forgotten that they too possessed a prized humanity which needed care and love, that a tiny poetic essence could be distilled from their overflowing squalid truth (*Faces* 96).

This is the same Mavet who, through experience as one of the "others" in the unreal world of the mad, had come to understand those people: "I knew the mad language which created with words, without using reason, has a new shape of reason; as the blind fashion from touch an effective shape of the sight denied them" (*Faces* 91). This 'I' represents a narrative voice which is distanced from her 'mad' self but keenly aware of the experiences she has undergone. In discussing 'fiction' Mavet takes (for the first time) a moment to comment on the general shape of her story. Ever-weary, the text reminds us that it does not wish to act as another form of fiction from which the tortured mind might produce organised poetry, where madness is encompassed in a beautiful work. Instead, the novel, or case-study, aims to show that even the 'sanest' of narrators is not free from the mad language, a language which must possess an inherent value because here, and only here, some "poetic essence" can come from the

circumstances of these forgotten individuals. While this process is essential to Mavet's character and story, the ability to accept the degradation of the self within such institutions is impossible within Frame's autobiography. Despite such moments as these, where 'madness' and 'fiction' are represented by a voice resembling Frame's authorial intent, any authorial influence on the narrative 'I' and the character 'I' must be denied. Mavet is more than a "true-account" of the 'madness' Frame experienced, she is also a representation of the success of 'scriptotherapy', not for Frame but for Mavet's 'I'.

Final comments:

Within her autobiographical account Frame chooses to exclude a clear picture of the later years of her treatment. While she does inform the reader that she was moved from Avondale back to Seacliff and that in this time she "inhabited a territory of loneliness which I think resembles that place where the dying spend their time before death," (*Auto* 214). Yet, Frame does not provide an accurate account of her final year in the hospital. According to King, Frame spent time 'in seclusion' before she was discharged from Seacliff (113). In *Faces*, Istina Mavet spends an equal amount of time in solitary confinement. During this confinement, she is severed from all group identities and the organising role of the institution thus allowing the process whereby she rediscovers herself. Moved out of this confinement, a confinement marked by her recitation and creation of poetry, back to Ward Two; Istina is again placed in the "we" of the "sensibly ill". Luckily, too much has happened for Istina to return to her starting point within the novel, she does not return to the ice-floe on which she was separated from the "real" world. The end of the novel is where the character 'I' joins the narrative 'I' in the inconclusive present. Through the work of fiction, this Istina has occupied both the position of the 'traumatized' individual and the coherent narrator and can enact all three 'I's'. If Frame has consistently denied that any part of her autobiographical 'I' has remained on these pages, then

it is odd that the novel should present a 'traumatized I' which the narrator, who eventually claims the position of the authorial voice, has chosen to remain frozen on the pages of fiction,

> We? I stayed behind. I had full parole. I was going home soon because my people would agree to 'have me'. I stayed for a formal and guilty hello and good-bye to the patients I knew, and went by myself down past the lupins and the wattle and the gorse, and past the dreary ward where, because it was too cold for them to be outside, the men, some still in their pyjama coats, sat in the dining room staring at the wooden tables, not knowing or caring how to use up the hours until teatime and bedtime and tomorrow.
>
> I looked away from them and tried not to think of them and repeated to myself what one of the nurses had told me, 'when you leave hospital you must forget all you have ever seen, put it out of your mind completely as if it never happened, and go and live a normal life in the outside world.' And by what I have written in this document you will see, won't you, that I have obeyed her? (*Faces* 223).

It would appear that Istina Mavet has created a coherent self in spite of her 'traumatized' self but that the final step required for the label of 'autobiographical fiction' is not there; there is no connection between this final 'I' who has full parole and a living subject outside of the text. Yet, I am reminded of that which Frame tells Elizabeth Alley, that one reason for writing her autobiography was the process of "freeing myself from memories" (Alley "Rare Interview With Author Janet Frame"). It appears that, in the fiction, the coherent subject has already been freed of memories. As my comparison across the fiction and autobiography has shown, Frame can place her 'traumatized' self/I in her fiction and therefore avoid any connection between her experiences of 'madness' and her 'sane' author. The novel is, therefore, when read alongside the autobiography, Frame's negotiation of a 'healed' self across various forms of writing. Each text, therefore, represents Frame's employment of 'scriptotherapy'.

Chapter Two: Writing 'madness' from within: healing in Bessie Head's life-writing and novel *A Question of Power.*

Bessie Head's novel and her life-writing both reveal her experience of 'madness' through language. For her novel *A Question of Power (AQP*) (1973/2018) Bessie Head claims the title of 'autobiographical novel' in which she accounts for the 'madness' she experienced while considering the notion of "power" during her political exile in Botswana. She describes the novel as follows:

> It is stark, bleak tragedy from beginning to end. It is written at two levels. The everyday level involves a development project. The people I work with come in and keep moving steadily and sanely through the book, just as beautiful as they are in real life. The second level is a journey inwards into the soul, with three soul characters, who are really disembodied persons, the concentration is on arguments of power, good and evil and it is really in the form of dream sequences which had a thread of logic, the sort of logic of war (Vigne 165).

Head claims that all three of the novels she wrote after her arrival in Botswana find their inspiration located within that landscape:

> It was almost as though the books wrote themselves, propelled into existence by the need to create a reverence for human life in an environment and historical circumstances that seem to me a howling inferno (Head 'Woman Alone' 77 qtd. in Gagiano 199952).

Two key elements of the novel present themselves in these quotes from her life-writings. The first is the "howling inferno" which describes the 'madness' or everyday circumstances that Head had to endure. The second key element to Head's writing is a "journey inwards into the soul" in which she is presented with "three soul characters" who form embodiments of power.

In truth, *AQP* traces Elizabeth's descent into madness through the arrival of three "soul characters" who torture Elizabeth until she becomes 'mad'. In her biography *Thunder Behind Her Ears* (2001), Gillian Eilersen discusses the function of these "soul characters" and their relation to the theme of the novel,

> Much of the novel takes place in a realm where souls move freely, temporally and spatially, and where they are measured in moral terms, though not on the usual scale with good at one end and evil at the other. It transpires that, in return for an acceptance of her scenario, or at least some degree of suspension of disbelief, the reader is to accompany Bessie Head as she explores a nervous breakdown from within, an entirely different undertaking from analysing or discussing one (169).

Eilersen correctly determines that each level of the novel must be granted the same amount of acceptance if the novel is to be read as an "exploration of a nervous breakdown from within". Viewing the novel in this way, as something constructed along two levels, seemingly belies the statement about the novels being "propelled into existence". Believing in Head's claim of spontaneous creation has created a tradition amongst critics in which the validity of Head's soul characters is ignored.

One way to address both the constructed aspects of the novel, as well as its supposed self-propelled existence, is through the theory of 'scriptotherapy'. This theory accommodates for the possibility that Head's characters can be both a product of 'madness', and therefore spontaneous, as well as constructions created by Head and whose function is to maintain the conventions needed for a novel. To prove the constructionist aspect of the novel, one must first show that the characters are not merely projections from Elizabeth's (Head's) subconscious but that they are imago's of the real people that Head encountered while living in Botswana,

fictionalised by Head as part of the process of creating a novel which detailed her minds descent into 'madness'. In this manner, the act of fictionalisation struggles against the notion of self-propagation through 'madness'. I gain part of my support for this reading of the novel's characters (in which they are constructed from personal inspiration) by reading Head's life-writings where the 'real' double of these soul-characters can be found in the people Head encountered while in Botswana. While Medusa has her origins in an overzealous American volunteer, Dan and Sello stem from one man: Sereste Khama. Through these characters and their 'real' doubles, Head reveals the editing that happens when life-writing and 'madness' meet within the mode of 'fiction'. Tracing the process of writing and construction in this manner is only possible when the genre boundaries between 'life-writing' and 'fiction' are blurred. I am less interested in this "howling inferno" (self-propelled writing) than I am in the ability that Head shows when she attempts 'scriptotherapy' to represent that inferno (a breakdown) from within.

AQP is, at its most simple, the fictionalised account of Head's latter years in Botswana, supported by a brief description of her early years in, as well as before her arrival to, that country. All of which are fictionalised in the novel form. I have already stated that *AQP* represents the "howling inferno" that Head experienced while in Botswana but this novel moves beyond using these years of 'madness' in Head's life for inspiration. As the novel is, up to a point, autobiographical, Head uses events from her own life to inspire the broader structure of the novel, using her life-story as the scaffold for Elizabeth's narrative journey within the novel. *A Question of Power* is an account of the 'madness' experienced in Botswana and caused by loneliness and trauma. In the novel, Elizabeth flees both South Africa and her womanizing gangster husband and settles as a refugee in Botswana. After many months in the country, she begins to experience bouts of instability, marked by the arrival of "intangible forms", the first

of which is Sello (*AQP* 17). The novel follows Elizabeth's external journey, in which she loses her job as a teacher, joins a garden co-operative, is hospitalised, and returns to the garden venture. Mirroring this external journey is an internal struggle in which Elizabeth must face a series of anthropomorphic hallucinations, which are her "soul characters" or "demons" of which three form the central force of her torture: Sello, Dan and Medusa. Elizabeth's eventual return to the garden cooperative mirrors her internal soul journey's end, in which she conquers these "demons" by finding peace in her mind. The novel not only mirrors Head's period of mental instability, as well as her institutionalisation as a result of this 'madness', but it also uses the conditions of her birth and schooling to inform Elizabeth's identity. It is this background, the one of a mixed-race child raised by a coloured family, which is popular amongst critics who read for the 'autobiographical' elements of the novel. By reading both Head's novel and her life-writings as 'scriptotherapy' I aim to examine this claim of autobiography. I aim to show that it is through enacting 'scriptotherapy' that Head achieves a re-integrated ego. My argument settles on the fact that Head's attempt to re-integrate her ego fails and that this is largely because her fiction fails to produce a coherent referent (a written self) and therefore does not enact 'scriptotherapy' in a truly autobiographical mode. Her fiction, therefore, does not confess honestly enough to enable healing.

Head's struggles to articulate the achievements of her text represent an overall difficulty with both the writing and function of the fictional work. On the 15th of February 1972 Bessie Head shared with Randolph Vigne some of her hesitation about the novel, the difficulty of the subject matter and how she might desire to shape the novel differently, stating that it ought to be re-shaped. She writes: "The real truth is a conflict of mind/ feeling. There is on the one hand an experience of catatonic shock, the extreme state where the ego has been violently destroyed. No one can live without an ego. So, what I really lived through was death in life" (Vigne 160).

This disruption of the ego is described by Head as a "torrent of hatred" made up of repeating phrases such as, "die, die, die, die, you dog, oh you dog, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you" (Vigne, 160). Following this she writes in her letter about how the "busting up" she experienced materialised in her lived reality: "Illogically I ran out of the house shouting at people, shouting at anyone who approached me. That's why I was locked up. I had no way of breaking the storm of evil, it had totally overwhelmed me after four years of silent endurance" (Vigne 161). Head establishes that her period of "endurance" or mental instability lasted for four years and reveals that her hospitalisation came at the end of her prolonged period of "torture", *AQP* covers these four years, but its writing only occurred once Head had begun to understand what it was that haunted her. From this account, her writing's sole purpose was to recount this conflict, this death, but that would be too simple a characterisation for a novel such as *AQP*.

Head seems to have a clearer idea about her novel when she writes to Wendy and Patrick Cullinan about the text in 1973. I have already mentioned Eilersen's claim that Head has tried in this novel to write "a nervous breakdown from within" (169) and this idea is hinted at by Head here, in a letter she writes to the Cullinans about the genesis of the novel:

> I thought I'd send you very urgently a copy of A Question of Power which has just arrived. It is autobiographical and explains the peculiar state of torment I have lived in in Botswana, right up till this day. It is more or less written in the middle of the story, when I had tended to get to grips with the confused horror recorded in Power. I wrote the book in an appeal for help, thinking help would turn up - I don't know in what form, but that someone would see the evil the way I see it and lift the burden off me. It is like a desperate attempt to put the cards on the table. For years I said my life was upside down here, but I could never say why and in many ways Power is one of the craziest books ever written. It isn't an everyday experience, but it is excruciatingly pointless in

> its extreme cruelty, its brutal cruelty. Read it and see what you make of it (Cullinan and Cullinan 133).

While Head restates here that the novel is autobiographical, she is also imploring that the Cullinans read it as an "appeal for help" through which she could express "evil the way I see it". Some elements of the novel's synthesis remain in this letter, the grappling with cruelty of extreme proportions and the breaking away from such evil. Yet, Head inserts a new idea in the "appeal for help", as if the novel is itself an attempt to break away from evil instead of simply recording it.

AQP, or *Power* as Head refers to the work, is an experiment in plotting that which Head experienced, turning madness and a breakdown into a workable text, but once again she belittles this view in favour of one which focuses on power and the powers of evil in particular. While these two accounts of the novel seem fairly similar it is another letter that Head sends to Vigne in 1972 which further layers what Head hopes to achieve with her novel, Head explains:

> There is no titillating gossip in the book. It is stark, bleak tragedy from beginning to end. It is written at two levels. The everyday level involves a development project. The people I work with come in and keep moving steadily and sanely through the book, just as beautiful as they are in real life. The second level is a journey inwards into the soul, with three soul characters, who are really disembodied persons, the concentration is on arguments of power, good and evil and it is really in the form of dream sequences which had a thread of logic, the sort of logic of war. This section is so terrible that indeed it would be impossible for living human beings to carry on like that, except in Hitler's Germany, where they did indulge in horrific cruelties and perversions (Vigne 165).

The "titillating gossip" referred to here is the novel's connection to Seretse Khama who, as I will argue later in the chapter, is represented by the character of Sello in the novel. In this letter

Head identifies two major concerns for the novel that are established while it is still being circulated before its publication. The first is a desire on the reader's part to link the novel to Head's life and the perceived "gossip" related to her life. The second is that it is difficult to indulge a reading of the novel on both levels, that of the everyday and then of the soul, at the same time. In fact, the everyday is almost abandoned in most critical receptions of the novel and reduced to a convenient metaphor. An example of this can be seen as early as 1974 when Head writes to Vigne:

> Yes most reviews were like his, they were forced to say the book – *A Question of Power* is "magnificent", but they all took a dodge behind this "mentally sick" business. It often gives the effect that they have mis-read the book mainly because the language is too embarrassing to handle, it hardly sounds normal or human; it's not easy to shuttle or argue with, so they tried to re-set the book in South Africa because this sort of thing... "there's strange under-currents and events here ..." could not apply to Botswana. They dare not examine such language as... "I thought too much of myself. I am the root cause of human suffering ..." (187).

The emphasis Head places on reading the novel beyond South Africa, and instead reading it along the multiple levels which she proposes it is to be read on, is again supported in some of her later correspondence. Writing to Patrick Cullinan in 1975 she tries again to reiterate that the novel functions on two levels, each of which is essential to her project:

> Thank you for the review of *A Question of Power* by your partner, Lionel Abrahams. It is good except for the lines... She merely suffers a kind of Karma, a purgation that has some bearing on the strains and traumas of her life and especially the problem of the insidious racial attitudes she discovers in herself..." He obviously accepts the book as a record, totally, of insanity. But that's not altogether true. The insidious hiss in the

> background came from a source other than myself and was meant to degrade me. My claim there was that possibly all people who express racial hatred and superior attitudes to their fellow men might unconsciously be in the grip of a force of evil, like Dan -that there may be a source of evil that afflicts man. Most reviewers side-stepped the validity of 'Sello' and 'Dan' in the first place. They were not real, so they did not have to be examined. They examined Elizabeth and found her insane-so there was nothing to bother about. Unfortunately for me, I grasped an accurate view of a source of evil but could see nothing of a definite source of goodness to counter it. I was forced to give the only data I had up to date and the circumstances were so terrible I was forced to relate it accurately with no shamming. When they use the word 'insane' they dismiss the book. All the reviews did that, but it is not entirely the truth because I remembered everything right up to the point where I did experience mental confusion and therefore ran the whole thing out exactly as it happened (Cullinan and Cullinan 175).

In this letter, Head is again restating (in her particular way) how she would like her novel to be read. She places the reading which foregrounds Elizabeth's "insidious racial attitudes" against the possibility that her novel does more than this, that it is a critique once again of the "grip of a force of evil" which is the "racial hatred and superior attitudes" men have over each other. Beyond the racial attitudes that focus on the external factors of power, Head wants to refocus the reading of the novel on the internal struggle—a struggle which contains questions about power and the power of men over each other—when seen through this internal struggle of good and evil. This dual journey seems to be what Head is most interested in, that some sort of study on power is achieved in the novel. Unlike me, Head seems unconcerned with how the novel deals with madness, focusing rather on how 'madness' might produce a discussion about power.

Neither Head nor the reviewers at the time of its publication viewed the novel as anything but 'autobiographical' but Head changes its function over the years. Where it had once served to address questions of power and represent internal as well as external modes of control, its purpose changes later on in Head's life. Head proclaims it "verbatim reportage", and "a kind of...autobiography book" to Susan Gardner in 1983. To Gardner, she describes it as follows:

> 'I told someone once,' she [Head] replied, giggling girlishly, 'that I decided to write A Question of Power when I got my sense of humour back. My demons were too funny, so I was going to present them doing all these funny things. I used to sit down, and write A Question of Power and laugh after I had completed each chapter'.

In discussing her work here Head now makes some new claims. One is that she wrote the novel at a time when she had "got her sense of humour back", a claim that dictates that Head was on solid mental ground during its composition. Despite this view, Head's apprehension about the novel while she was both writing and publishing it, and her frustration with its reception, reveal that this simplified view is untrue, at least for the Head of the seventies.

What Head does reveal is her ability to alter the text to fit a new purpose, what she has said to Gardner about the soul characters here removes their "validity" and turns them into "demons". In this comment, Head belies the importance she has placed on her soul characters by now claiming that writing her novel was an exercise in laughing at them. In the six years between these discussions, Head no longer worried about whether the exploration of good/evil and its relationship with power was received. Instead, she refocuses—she had written the novel and laughed at her demons. Despite what Head says or writes about the text, it is not, however, up to her to decide how her novel functions, or if she has achieved any of her goals. I would argue that Head's chief achievement within the novel was her almost successful recounting of her

‘madness’; her other goals appear to have failed and this is revealed by the critical reception of the novel.

The “openness” of Head’s novel has resulted in various critical readings since its publication. Eilersen reads the novel, not as an exercise in freeing one of demons, but as a failed attempt at ego-reintegration:

> The novel has shown an apparent coming to terms with the racist and sexist implications of Elizabeth's state as a victimised half-caste female outsider. In real life, however, Bessie, who ‘is’ Elizabeth, has apparently been unable to reach the new level of awareness of the strength to be found in these despised roles which would have given therapeutic value to the writing process. In the novel this process occurs: Elizabeth is reminded that in the individuality of the outsider and victim lies her god-like quality; she rises above references to her colour by remaining uncowed: ‘Too many people the world over were becoming mixed breeds and shading themselves down to browns and yellows and creams’ (63). Bessie on the other hand confirms in these discussions with Jane Clegg what her life had already shown: the healing process implied in the final sentence of the novel - Elizabeth's placing of a hand on her land in ‘a gesture of belonging’ - was at best only temporary, a mere literary expedient. In Bessie’s terminology, the evil had not been exorcised after all (260).

The ending of the novel implies that Head has achieved her goal of an integration of the ego. As the mentions of Elizabeth’s return to the garden above indicate, the novel ends on a note whereby the reader can believe that Elizabeth has achieved some sort of integrated identity.

Neither Gohrbandt (2007) nor Eilersen feels that they can deny the novel's fictionality, nor can they deny the fact of its construction and its ability to reject that which does not enact healing.

What Gohrbandt has called an "externalising and distancing" (112-3), an act achieved through writing, is possibly the reason for the novel's eventual failure to exorcise the demons Head mentions. Yet, this view of the novel as an exercise in healing is not supported by a larger area of criticism. My reading follows the one established by Eilersen and Gohrbandt here and will be expanded on throughout this chapter. I wish to reveal how Head's soul characters represent her inability to produce a purely autobiographical text, instead revealing her ability to produce a narrative which exposes that which it has unwittingly concealed, ultimately showing how 'madness' evades easy representation in fiction alone and is, inevitably, enriched through a cross-examination with the life-writings that discuss this same 'madness'. This sort of reading stands in contrast to the accepted field of reading.

Readings of Head's novel tend to cover several areas in their analysis. The first is the belief that the novel is addressing Elizabeth's experiences under the apartheid system (Gagiano 1999; Manus 2001; Barrera 2005). Borzaga (2010) makes this point by stating that "Head makes the crucial point that the brutal, spectacular, exhibitionist display of power that was typical of the apartheid system is still deeply rooted in the recesses of Elizabeth's mind and it keeps re-surfacing regularly in its full force" and that the soul characters in the novel "Dan and his women, Sello in the brown suit, Medusa are all replications of that grotesque deployment of power so intrinsic to the apartheid system" (31-32). Therefore, for these critics there is a clear equivocation of the "soul characters" as subconscious projections, culminating in a novel that speaks to the grotesque power of the apartheid system.

While the second dominant reading focuses less on the characters as projections, it also views the "soul journey" as one which is allegorical. This second reading posits that the novel's focal point is Head's discomfort with her mixed-race identity, and her search for belonging in Africa

(Moosavinia and Hosseini 2018; Lillian 2002; Barrera 2005), in which the main character undergoes "a double journey in the course of the story: a physical journey that is a movement from South Africa to Botswana, and a spiritual one which is a movement from oppressive colonialism and prejudicial nationalism to liberating hybridity as her destination" (Moosavinia and Hosseini 334). The goal of this journey "is a transnational, multicultural as well as post-ethnicity destination" in which her race must be central, "As a coloured, she must go on a quest to find the true concept of humanity, based on universal love and equality through negating fixed inculcations and even her earlier convictions" (Moosavinia and Hosseini, 334). A similar reading to this is brought forward by Kim (2008) who claims that the novel functions as Head's search to conceptualise her body in terms of morality, a morality which has been sold to her in a particular guise and ultimately leads to the outcome where "Elizabeth wants to be identified with the bourgeois white man to constitute herself as a moral subject" (41).

The third dominant reading focuses on the novel as a critique of Black Consciousness movements (Gagiano 2006; Young 2010), "Her international anti-racist - as opposed to specifically anti-apartheid - focus is not upon Afrikaner suprematism, but upon two black African monoliths, grotesque embodiments of Black Consciousness movements. Medusa and Dan, who crush Elizabeth's mind with the rhetoric of racial oppression in *A Question of Power*, are portrayed as fanatical, sexually excessive and divisive Black nationalists" (Newell 1995 68). In this way, Head's characters are allegorical again, with the focus turned towards a different version of power in Africa.

The fourth approach regards the novel as an autobiographical and psychological account of Head's experiences in Botswana (Hogan 1994; Evasdaughter 1989). Evasdaughter reads the novel as an account of schizophrenic paranoia with Head's ultimate achievement being an accurate recording and healing process from her torments, she writes: "It seems to me that Head should be credited with an autobiography that is as analytic as it is symbolic, that

successfully uses the resources of fiction to construct a persuasive interpretation of paranoia as a reaction to power and of its cure as among the powers of goodness" (81). Again, the novel cannot be representative of a real "soul journey", instead that journey is seen as symbolic. Head's novel must always be representative of her real experiences, and in this case, she has interpreted her madness into fiction.

I have presented Head's arguments and concerns regarding readings similar to these. I will not state that Head is the best critic to provide a lens through which her work must be read because, as Eilersen states, she has failed in her project for the novel. Keeping Head's ideas in mind offers my reading the ability to include Head in the list of critics who have overlooked certain aspects of her novel. My employment of 'scriptotherapy' in reading her letters and novel together allows for this unearthing or discovery. Before my cross-examination of the novel and Head's life-writings can begin I want to establish an appropriate lens through which to view each of these texts. I want to read Head's novel, *AQP* as a form of 'scriptotherapy' in which she aims to understand that which tortured her for four years in Botswana and lead to her eventual hospitalisation. Such a reading can be achieved through Suzette A Henke's term 'scriptotherapy'. In her work *Shattered Subjects* Henke begins with a question: can the psychoanalyst be replaced by life-writing? She defines life-writing as being comprised of an array of writing, "confessional forms, autofictions, diaries, journals, and the bildungsroman, as well as autobiography and biomythography" (Henke, xvi). Scriptotherapy, which is Henke's term, is "the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic reenactment" (Henke, xii). Life-writing, which functions as scriptotherapy, uses narrative testimony to address the trauma experienced by the author; the ultimate goal of such testimony being the ability "to evoke both the recovery of past experience through narrative articulation and the psychological reintegration of a traumatically shattered subject" (Henke

xxii). In the case of Head, this might be the reintegration of her destroyed ego through the writing of *AQP*.

As Henke writes in *Shattered Subjects,* scriptotherapeutic accounts are an attempt to reintegrate the fragmented self, and Head's novel fulfils this expectation in its search to represent a complete ego. Head's period of 'madness' is marked by her "violently destroyed ego" and the novels being "propelled into existence" provide ample support for a claim to 'scriptotherapy'. The trouble is that the *AQP* does not only serve as a search for the whole self/ego, but it is also, as Head explains, a novel functioning on multiple levels, where the internal soul world is as important as the external world of the novel. Head produces in the novel a series of poles and the novels fluctuations between them are its greatest strength and weakness. The genre of the novel ensures that it cannot be read as a simple autobiography but is complicated by 'madness'. If Head were presenting a novel that was just a search for the integrated ego then there would be no need for the figurative aspects of the novel. As Lejeune has argued, one of the key formal aspects of autobiography is that the character's name in the novel matches that of the author.

I want to turn to the full Eilersen quote here about what Head's novel achieves:

> This is the scenario Bessie Head presents with such apparent simplicity in A Question of Power. Much of the novel takes place in a realm where souls move freely, temporally and spatially, and where they are measured in moral terms, though not on the usual scale with good at one end and evil at the other. It transpires that, in return for an acceptance of her scenario, or at least some degree of suspension of disbelief, the reader is to accompany Bessie Head as she explores a nervous breakdown from within, an entirely different undertaking from analysing or discussing one (169).

If Head's novel was interested in the process of integrating her ego only, then she would not need to do more than discuss the events of this period of her life through the perspective of the autobiographical 'I'. Instead, by ensuring that the novel is "almost autobiographical", and acts as an account "from within", Head reveals that the novel is one which is marked with traces of reworking. This means that Head can choose, as both analyst and analysand, which elements of her life she reveals to the analyst and so, *AQP* must be read as a malleable account with regards to its autobiographical honesty.

An example of this can be found in Head's letters. According to Head the writer Noami Mitchison, who was familiar with the details of Head's life, details which she recounts in *AQP*, wanted her to write the novel with "Seretse *real*" (Vigne 165). This link to Seretse is denied by Head when she declares: "There is no titillating gossip in the book. It is stark, bleak tragedy from beginning to end" (Vigne 165). Later on, I will show that Head is incorrect in her assertion that the novel is without "gossip" but one benefit of reading the novels through the 'scriptotherapy' lens is that Head's assertion of a gossip-free novel can be maintained, and her authorial intent can be considered, while also maintaining the idea that Head must repress or rewrite traumatic incidents in a way which establishes her as a 'healed' or 'coherent' subject.

However, beyond gossip, another area of reading Head wanted to stress was the 'realness' of her internal characters. I turn again to Head's letter to Vigne here, noting the separation between the development project and the soul journey. Not only is the external world seen as the 'real' events in the novel, while also being dismissed as nothing more than a place to hold Elizabeth's body while her mind undergoes its internal journey, but that internal journey is completely ignored as something real which is happening to Elizabeth because it is internal. 'Scriptotherapy' solves this problem, in part, by listening to Head's assertion that the novel is

'real' in the sense of both journeys. When Head claims that her "ego" was attacked, 'scriptotherapy' reads the novel as the journey to overcoming those evil forces acting against her and therefore producing a coherent self. In this way readings which assume 'autobiography' alone are complicated by the text's ability to act as a cure for 'madness'.

Separating that which is autobiographical and that which is fictional is essential in the novel, and the comparison with life-writing ensures this. If one believes the novel to be only a fictional tale that traces a character's battle against powerful internal forces then the "everyday" level of the novel, the external journey, is reduced to a functional frame (scaffold) that holds this internal word. Indeed, this "everyday" external journey in the novel is read as an extension of the "internal" metaphor, that Elizabeth's physical displacement in Botswana is a stage for the real displacement in the novel: either the trauma she experienced in South Africa or her experiences as a "coloured" woman in Botswana. This approach is limited because autobiographical elements shift the genre of a novel, as does the inclusion of 'madness'. Both autobiography and madness link Elizabeth and Head through more than structural arrangements in the text, there are moments where the two become (at least in language) interchangeable. These moments of 'bleeding' as I have phrased them are important to the narrative, not only do they result in the two instances of hospitalisation in the novel, but they also show subterfuge on Head's part. A strange subterfuge has occurred with the external framework for the novel, despite claiming that there is no gossip in the novel, she has not stated why these external events and people have been altered in her novel so that the "external world" of the novel is only "almost autobiographical" and not fully inspired by the external events which occurred in her life at this time.

While this might be because such comments do not serve Head's purpose (a discussion of power), Gohrbandt presents some interesting arguments on this point, arguments with a

specific focus on Head's ability to use real people as inspiration for her characters. He argues that, if Head's characters are indeed based on real people, then it can be established that her writing process is predicated on her ability to externalise that which she describes as her "inner turmoil", he writes that:

> [i]t is not surprising that she adopted this outside view of herself as dangerously divided and possibly on the way to madness. As she began to project her self-analysis onto the alter egos whose voices may be heard in her letters and autobiographical writings, and then in a still more objectified form onto the fictional characters of her novels and tales, she gradually learned to leave the conventional beliefs behind her and to adopt the more complex positions described. In 'Some Notes on Novel Writing' she explains how she needs to 'concentrate directly on people' who are visible and external rather than on 'some hidden, unknown God or devil' (1990 63), invisible and possibly internal, in order to be able to express her deeply experienced truths. In so doing she learns to understand herself, to bring 'the problem of evil closer to my own life', as she puts it (1990 63). In other words, by externalising and distancing her insights in narrative she can bring them back to bear directly on herself, but now without putting herself so immediately at risk (Gohrbandt 112-3).

Gohrbandt chooses to include letters and autobiographical writings in his description of Head's writing process here. As I have argued above, the novel is 'scriptotherapeutic' in that it aims to account for Head's period of madness, while also being something which is "almost autobiographical." Gohrbandt phrases this process as one in which she can avoid putting herself so immediately at risk. The novel's ability to act as 'scriptotherapy' therefore requires its shifting state between subterfuge and autobiographical elements, so that it must be read alongside life-writings and the "real" world of the novel if it is to be fully understood.

It is through the soul characters that the elements of autobiography, life-writing, madness and scriptotherapy are best understood and explored. To read the autobiography and life-writings comparatively is to establish the manner in which Head employs scriptotherapy to cure 'madness'. When we consider that Head has had to remind her critics of the validity of her soul characters, and her critics desire to do just that, as well as her clear blind-spot in terms of these characters function as a scriptotherapeutic reworking of her period of instability, we have a lens through which to read her novel and life writing. In her letter to Patrick Cullinan in 1975 Head establishes that her novel recounts everything that she could remember until the point of her second hospitalisation where she was placed in the Lobatse Mental Hospital. She also makes it clear that "what most reviewers side-stepped was the validity of 'Sello' and 'Dan' in the first place" (Cullinan and Cullinan 175); thus, placing a sense of the "real" onto these characters despite their existence in the "internal" world of the novel. Like the character Medusa, Dan and Sello are reduced to projections of Elizabeth's unconscious by critics. Yet, Elizabeth travels across both of these planes of existence in the novel, both as real to her as the other. These "soul characters", are not only projections from the subconscious mind of a traumatised individual, as some critics would have readers believe, but are, rather, autobiographically inspired vessels through which Head can first contain, and then examine, the 'madness' she encountered while she was in Botswana. One way to read the novel which allows for a reading of the reintegration of the ego is through 'scriptotherapy'. The remainder of this chapter will therefore focus on the three soul characters: Sello, Dan and Medusa.

The first area that allows for the possibility of oversight is the notion of Head suffering from a 'missing father' in her psyche. I turn to Hogan (1994) here because he answers, in part, what Head has chosen to conceal in the text regarding her father and her relationship with Seretse Khama. Hogan reads *AQP* through a psychoanalytic lens, one which states that the novel is

essentially engaging in oedipal fantasies where either one of Elizabeth's parents is split into the "fantasy" image or the "chaste" imago (102-3). He also reads the novel through a Lacanian lens, where her black "stable boy" father is "nameless and outside of, excluded by, the Symbolic Order and its Law", while her white mother is punished for violating the law and is "therefore excluded from the Symbolic Order herself, in this case by being incarcerated in an asylum" (Hogan 103).

While Hogan connects the promiscuous imago of the mother to Medusa, his preoccupation lies with Sello and Dan. This is because Elizabeth's father was more absent than her mother. It is this connection between Sello and Dan and the missing father"' that I am interested in. Hogan's view of Sello is shown here:

> First of all, the Symbolic Order defined him as a "boy," not a man. He was excluded from power, authority, the Law--but also from adult sexuality, paternity. This lack of masculinity underlies Elizabeth's delusions about the effeminacy of Sello and the masses of homosexual men (108).

and his view of Dan here:

> At the same time, however, this "boy" was indeed her father--a virile African man who impregnated a white woman. This second, diametrically opposed sense of her father's sexuality--manifest in the figure of Dan--develops the standard oedipal fantasy of parental lasciviousness (109).

These are both useful observations because they highlight that a key element in Elizabeth's journey is the resolution of her missing father. The proposed idea that this unconscious conflict is a driving force in Head's autobiographical novel is therefore something worthy of examination.

I: Paternal Hauntings: Sello/Dan

With this 'missing father' in mind, it is now time to turn to Sir Seretse Khama [2]and his possible role in the shaping of *AQP* as a novel. As shown in Hogan's (1994) arguments, this 'missing father' is worthy of examination. Meanwhile, Kim (2008) argues that "Elizabeth wants to be identified with the bourgeois white man to constitute herself as a moral subject" (41) and states that this identification is the source of Elizabeth's tension with Dan and Sello. If the men in Head's novel serve as a means of achieving some moral identification, as Kim has pointed out, then this is likely the result of Head's frequent negotiation of the missing father in her own life and in her novels. As Eilersen posits, "The Sello-Dan theme is recognisably an extension of the Maru-Moleka one though less pronounced, the tainted, ambiguous quality of goodness is also present in the earlier work" (176).

If we are to believe Head's assertion that this novel is "almost autobiographical" and if we consider it a "nervous breakdown from within" (Eilersen 169), then I would argue that something more than a moral negotiation is taking place here, Head is coming to terms with a common theme present in her subconscious. In her life-writings Head presents a preoccupation with doubled masculine characters, a number of whom begin as father figures in her texts. This is why my reading of the Sello-Dan relationship is one of mourning, in which Elizabeth creates and then projects the missing father for Head. Importantly, Head's relationship with Seretse Khama adds to this reading. Such a reading is not supported without the evidence found in Head's letters. Her letters illuminate two areas where she has concealed that which occurred in her "real" world from those events which occurred in *AQP.* The first, and most important of these, is Head's concealment of the nature of her relationship with Sir Seretse Khama and its

[2] Sir Seretse Khama was the first elected president of Botswana. He married a white woman and was the father to mixed-race children (Eilersen).

implications for her work. The second is the political tension that Head felt as a "half-caste" woman living in Botswana at the time, this is the "insidious hiss" that she refers to in her letters. While it is Seretse Khama who forms the chief focus of my inquiry here, the notion of race cannot be separated from discussions of Head's relationship with her father.

The first clue about Head's complicated relationship with Khama is the pattern of behaviour that it represents, repeating behaviours found in Head's relationship with PAC leader Robert Sobukwe. Head, taken with Robert Sobukwe's ideals and strength of character, lent her support to the PAC in search of a connection with him. Ultimately, her desire for some form of intimacy with Sobukwe resulted in her political exile, an exile preceded by her turning state witness for the apartheid regime. Head excludes this exile from her mirror journey and biographic background at the start of *AQP.* Not only is Sobukwe excluded, replaced by a false story of a gangster husband, but he represents a concealment on Head's part. A similar concealment happens with the issue of race. It is in Botswana that Head discovers she is closer to her 'white' self than her paternal 'black' self. Much of Head's interaction with Sello and Dan in the novel is therefore an act of balancing the "insidious hiss" of race in Botswana with the "missing father". It is in 1968 that Bessie Head writes about the racial prejudice she has been experiencing in Botswana, she writes about pulling her son Howard out of school in October because "Eventually he got assaulted by children twice his age, apparently on the grounds that he is a usurper into the race of Motswana, or some filthy specimen" (Vigne 65).

It is two weeks after this event that Head brings up a favourite subject, Sir Seretse Khama,

> For all the apparent ambivalence of politics in Botswana and the deportation of refugees, Seretse is really a towering personality here. He is equally loved and hated. Everything else, like the colour of his children takes second place to his personality.

> Someone once told me in Serowe that he swore very badly when someone referred to his children as being coloured. In this respect he showed a typical African reaction (Vigne 67-8).

Here, Head contrasts her and her son's persecution as fatherless "half-caste" members of society against the protection that Seretse offers his own mixed-race children. If we keep in mind that Head has a reverential view of political Black men and that Seretse Khama distinguishes himself again as a good father, then it is not enough to state that he might be the scaffold for the character of Sello in *AQP*. I want to argue that Seretse is more than the inspiration for some of Head's main characters, as seen in the character of Maru (Eilersen 139), but also comes to represent the missing father in Head's psyche.

Seretse Khama is at the start of some of Head's stranger imaginings as early as 1969. In the following extract, Eilersen (122) discerns that the "God" Head writes about, who is 47 years old, is likely Seretse Khama, a reading I agree with,

> It has taken me thirty-one years to know who I am. It has taken my God 47 years The two of us finally knew each other in these past four or five weeks though when he was born in Botswana a number of prophecies were made about him. I was included in them because the two of us have always been a team together. That is, when he was Jesus, I was Paul. When he was Ramakrishna, I was Vivekananda (Head qtd. in Eilersen 122).

This image of Seretse does not last forever, 1968 Head penned, "Patterns, Pictures, Impressions", a story which has her as the character of King David, in which "the three of them—Dan, Bessie and Deep Ridge – were "reliving a strange, complicated drama" (Eilersen 152). The similarity to the general structure of *AQP* is worth noting here, where the relationship between Bessie and Deep Ridge is a romantic one, and much like Elizabeth must kill Medusa

in *AQP*, Bessie must kill the husband of Deep Ridge. In the second iteration of this soul drama, this Deep Ridge/ Bothwell character becomes a character named "S", described here:

> For two years he beamed a straight hell at me: 'You are the dog of the Africans. You are filth.' ... I was allowed no rest night or day to live with my mixed breed appearance ... I could not bear to look at myself in the mirror for real terror that I was some unnameable horror (Eilersen 153).

Head's Bothwell has changed in this romantic drama and is now corrupted. She contrasts the purity of the love she had for Bothwell against this new "S" with his "dolls and prostitutes", and the others who love "only with their sex organs" (Eilersen 154). That this version of Seretse in her 1970 drama so closely resembles Dan of *AQP,* with his gyrating penis and nice-time-girls, is likely no coincidence. It is important that this devil image is connected to Seretse, the sentiment is confirmed in a letter Head writes to Paddy, in which she says: "Sorry, a running battle is going on here with the devil. His name is S....." to which Eilersen adds "(with six dots to indicate the number of letters in the word) followed by 'Satan' in parenthesis. But of course, 'Satan' is only a five-letter word" (Eilersen 154). It is only by reading the letters and novel together that the rewriting of Seretse into the text can be shown.

Head's life-writings reveal her preoccupation with the father figure and this preoccupation's role in her experience of 'madness'. The corruption of Seretse in Head's drama represents the process of identification and rejection that she experienced with the father figure during her 'madness' along with her racial preoccupations at the time. The process outlined above is one in which Seretse goes from being a father to a man who has prostitutes and is sex-obsessed. Who Seretse represents in the novel is Dan and Sello, but these characters are imagos of the father. They are also how Head has attempted to split and understand her period of instability in writing:

> Hell is like this. I have power and exquisite sensations. I'll give you a little to eat you dog. I'll put my mouth on the spring of your life and suck it dry because I am really the most important person around here. Now dog, get down to the level I dictate to you. You are inferior. You are filth. I hate you, but ah, I need a dog to lap up a little bit of the exquisite sensation I dish out now and then. I only need dogs around here and you are my chief dog. Crawl, bitch! (Vigne 162).

These words belong to Bessie Head at the time of her 'madness'. Yet, when they are placed in the novel, they become an aspect of one of the soul characters. Elizabeth hears the start of that record which so closely mirrors the one Head hears in 1972, "Someone had turned on a record inside her head. It went on and on in the same, stuck groove: 'Dog, filth, the Africans will eat you to death. Dog, filth, the Africans will eat you to death'" (*AQP* 42). Combined with this record are Medusa's taunts that "You'll only drown here. You're not linked up to the people. You don't know any African languages" (*AQP* 40-1). This record carries through the first part of the novel, in one place the narrator confirms that "Dan later admitted that he had turned on the record" (*AQP* 42). What Head has achieved here is turning her preoccupations into the taunts of soul characters. This record of "Dog, filth, the Africans will eat you to death" is supposed to invoke a series of themes within the novel, showing Head's process of writing through her preoccupations.

This record reveals her turning into fiction that which she endured in real life. Without the elements of Head's 'life-writing', in which she reveals the racial prejudices she endured in Botswana, the record acts separately from an honest autobiographical representation. Instead, in the novel the record functions as a recurrent and paranoiac concern and forms the basis for one of the symptoms which leads Elizabeth further and further into the terrorised internal "night

world" that cannot be supported in the real world of the village. The use of the word "filth" is indicative of the types of images which soon fill Elizabeth's mind. It is Sello who leads Elizabeth into a pit of excrement during one of her night visions. If these "soul characters" and tormentors are "replications of that grotesque deployment of power so intrinsic to the apartheid system" (Borzaga 32), then them being cast in the bodies of African people is an incongruous replication. Furthermore, this reading of replication does not take into account the value of the record which centres on African people, "the Africans will eat you to death" (*AQP* 42). Following Borzaga's notion of recasting, each character ought to represent some repressed aspect of Elizabeth's torment in South Africa; yet Elizabeth's tormentors all arrive with the faces of African people.

In response, I want to leave this idea of 'recasting' South African terror in the form of African people aside. While this line of argument is a strong one, it encourages a reading of the novel which focuses heavily on the time Elizabeth spent in South Africa, a reading which I believe excludes too much of the major setting of the novel. Much of my reading of the novel focuses on the external geography that is Botswana. It is for this reason that, instead of examining the novel for Elizabeth's past, we should have a look at the notion that the soul characters are an extension of herself and represent that which she has worked against in her subconscious:

> So many people ran away from South Africa to forget it or throw it off. It seemed impossible then, the recurring, monotonous song in her head: 'Dog, filth, the Africans will eat you to death …' It broke her instantly. She could not help but identify with the weak, homosexual Coloured men who were dying before her eyes. One day of it set her nervous system screaming. A week of it reduced her to a total wreck. She lay on the bed trapped in misery. There was nothing she could think of to counter it: 'I'm not like that. I've never been a racialist. Of course, I admit I'm a Coloured. I'm not denying

anything. Maybe people who are Coloureds are quite nice too, just like Africans …' (*AQP* 43).

Two things are happening in this extract, Elizabeth finds her identity shredded because she cannot reconcile her South African experiences with those of existing in Africa as a coloured woman. This supports the dominant reading that the novel is about reconciling racism, and this is the claim Head makes for one level of reading of the novel.

The second interesting element of the extract is Elizabeth's identification with the castrated coloured men. In her madness, Elizabeth acknowledges that she is separate from the Africans who torment her but that there is a weakness in her coloured identity which makes her (mind) easily invaded. The soul journey Elizabeth endures is the result of the failure of this identification to create a coherent self for Elizabeth. Despite her desire to create a fictional text, Head cannot completely ignore the 'autobiographical' elements in her novel if she wishes to produce this coherent identity. The extract above therefore also reveals Head's reworking of her lived experience into the novel. Those word choices, "dog" and "filth" in the Head extract above are reminiscent of the first time Elizabeth hears that record begin to play in her head. It is clear in this text that Head is hoping to recapture and rework some of what she experienced during her stay in Botswana, but that there is more division amongst her soul players in the novel than she experienced in her own journey.

While I have noted that the "S" of Head's writings during this period is a complicated and doubled image for her, Sello who seems to be his (S's) literary product, functions in *AQP* as the prophet for the soul world. He is not without his parallel though, where Sello is God, Dan must be Satan. The entire novel functions as the movement between opposing ideas (Moosavinia and Hosseini), Sello the white-robed monk who is God cannot be the same as Dan, the African male with his enormous penis and nice time girls. "S" has therefore been split

in the novel. The changing of "S" into two characters who work as oppositional forces represents Head's ability to rework the thoughts which lead to her hospitalisation into a clearer journey, one which would hopefully offer some explanation for her 'madness'.

In her real-life Head undergoes a 'madness' which she hopes to contain within the fiction of her text. Head experiences two moments of 'madness' where she is eventually hospitalised. If the novel were truly autobiographical, and not an attempt at creating a coherent scriptotherapeutic self in the form of Elizabeth, then these instances would face little alteration in their recounting. Yet, in the ways Head chooses to edit these instances, we see how the novel is constructed to present a coherent self for Elizabeth. I have already stated that Head is using her soul characters to reconstruct the 'madness' she experienced in Botswana and that a part of that is locating insidious racial attitudes (not within the external world of the novel where Head felt it most potently) but internally, as a concern of her character's identity.

Eilersen provides an account of the circumstances which, in 1969, lead to Head's first hospitalisation:

> Her head ached. Words like 'Dog, filth, Bushman dog' churned round in it, like some gramophone record stuck in a groove. And more than this self-hatred, a violent dislike for all black people filled her. 'I sometimes can't look at the face of a black man or woman without at the same time thinking that they are the epitome of all that is grasping, greedy, cruel, back-stabbing and a betrayal of all that is good in mankind. 'A whirring and hissing noise accompanied all her confused thoughts. In late March, when the Easter holidays had just begun, she took Howard with her and went shopping. Her night had been plagued by nightmares. She was confused and hysterical. After buying a transistor radio for which she had little use, she had to go into the office at the back

> of the shop to have it registered for a licence. As she looked at the three men in the office she could only think how much she disliked them, how much she disliked all Africans. their hair, their noses... Suddenly she began trembling and broke out in a cold sweat. 'You bloody bastards', she shouted (Eilersen 129).

Elizabeth's first hospitalisation in the novel follows a very similar pattern to what has been described by Eilersen above. Elizabeth describes the start of a record in her head as she visits the post office, "You see his face? It's vacant and stupid. He's slow moving. It takes him ages to figure out the brand name of the radio. You never really liked Africans. You only pretended to. You have no place here. Why don't you go away…?" (*AQP* 48*).* This is one of the first instances where Elizabeth is no longer able to contain her hauntings to the "night world" of her dreams. Elizabeth's response to this final bleeding together of both her external and internal world is that "She sprang to her feet, slamming the chair back against the wall and shouted: 'Oh, you are bloody bastard Batswana! Oh, you bloody bastard Batswana!' Then she simply opened her mouth in one long, high, piercing scream" (*AQP* 48*)*. While this scene is very similar to Head's own it does not include the "hissing noise" that Head experienced. Nor does it claim that this record came from Elizabeth, instead, it is Dan who turned such a record on in Elizabeth's mind. The introduction of Dan to the novel represents a shift in the novel but also represents Head's ability to contain and rework her 'madness' in this literary form.

Much of Head's paranoia is subverted into the literary creation of Dan. It is Dan who is the source of Elizabeth's racial paranoia in the novel, who is the source of a majority of her "evil" or "filthy" thoughts. While writing this scene Head chose to include the term "Batswana" in Elizabeth's indictment of the shopkeeper. The violence here, towards a black man who does nothing but insist upon helping Elizabeth, supposedly belongs to Dan, inspired by the record he turns on when she first encounters Sello and eventually when she moves about the village

in the day while Sello is silenced due to Dan's presence. What is separate from Elizabeth in these scenes, what she holds on to with her confession that she is "not a racialist", is that this hatred must come from the imbalance in her internal world, it is not a part of her soul but from the man who believes in power over others, an external influence causing such an unbalance. Dan has a "leprosy like fear of Coloureds or half-breeds" (*AQP* 134) and is not only the vessel for Elizabeth's racialism but for her feelings of sexual inferiority.

Yet, Head's feelings of inadequacy around being a husbandless and fatherless woman in Africa have already been established through the writing about Sereste. Dan's fluctuation towards Elizabeth, which is based on her race, is then the externalisation of her feelings of inadequacy as she struggles to identify with her paternal identity. Yet, Dan is the vessel for one-half of Elizabeth's presentation of madness. Dan symbolises the heightened sexual nature of the African man, as such Elizabeth claims he cannot be a racialist because he will go with anyone really. Hogan has already claimed that Dan represents "the standard oedipal fantasy of parental lasciviousness" (109). That Elizabeth is not one of these women shows an absolute lack in her sexuality and this has been referenced in the text as her masculine nature, her wombless nature. These instances of 'madness' are all placed outside of Elizabeth through the character of Dan, who is their originator and who attacks Elizabeth so that she cannot control her thoughts. Yet, each represents Head's difficulty in establishing her sexuality with both a missing and a lascivious father to contend with. Who Head creates in her text in relation to this missing sexuality is influenced heavily by her autobiographical experiences and intentions.

Head's clear synthesis of two male leads is incongruous chronologically within the tale if it is meant to represent her real life and her second hospitalisation reveals this. I have already shown above how Head split her disordered thinking about Seretse Khama into the two male leads. However, this process had not yet occurred in 1971 when Head became fixated on the Seretse who was Satan, accompanied by a new obsession in which she believed that his deputy

president Quett Masire had been murdered by a peace corps volunteer and that Khama was keeping this assassination a secret. She walked into town and placed a notice outside the Post Office "saying that Seretse Khama had committed incest with his daughter and suppressed the news of the assassination of his Vice President. This libel was fully signed: 'Bessie Head'" (Eilersen 161). These events lead to her three-month stay at Lobatse Mental Hospital. These are altered in the novel where, in Head's first draft of the note in the novel, she redacts the mention of Quett Masire and leaves behind only the image which Dan has placed in Elizabeth's mind: "She had a scrawled note in her pocket: 'SELLO IS A FILTHY PERVERT WHO SLEEPS WITH HIS DAUGHTER.' She signed her name and surname under it and stuck it up on the wall of Motabeng post office" (*AQP* 188).

Unlike Head, who is responsible for the paranoia which fuels her accusations, in the novel these accusations come to Elizabeth not of her own accord but from Dan, offering to her strange mentality a cohesive source: that of another character's influence. Remembering what Head wrote to Vigne in 1972, "the arguments are about the soul and again I split myself into the male lead" (159), offers an interesting angle from which to view this note. Head has shifted her accusations of Khama away from herself, and in the novel it is Dan who has placed these thoughts in her (Elizabeth's) mind—just like it was Dan who started the record of her hatred of African people. While Sello may have his origins in Head's adoration and eventual rejection of Seretse Khama, Dan as the sexually active subject, introduces Head's thoughts for Elizabeth as an external force. As a sort of vessel of truth for Head, Dan is able to subvert her autobiographical experiences and thoughts into the text. Through Dan, the "externalising and distancing" that Gohrbandt mentions is enacted in the novel (112-3).

By placing these thoughts in the soul characters Head enacts a therapy for Elizabeth where the soul characters are real and influential and not projections from Elizabeth's subconscious. This

enacts a distance for Head where Elizabeth's 'madness' is not her own. This rewriting is reminiscent of the scriptotherapeutic technique. Eilersen claims that Head was unable to exorcise her demons through the novel. Gohrbandt also hints that she has used her characters as a means of externalising her thoughts/feelings at the time. In many ways, the scriptotherapeutic reading of Dan and Sello is dependent on Head's ability to use those characters to contain the mental torment she experienced at the time. Her ability to ultimately reject these characters in the novel is therefore how this process of reintegration occurs for Elizabeth. The novel parallels this idea, that when she is physically separated from Dan and Sello and "not anything was alive in her, except her body" (*AQP* 192), then she is finally able to make some progress towards inner reconciliation. The theme of power as it relates to race is again brought up while Elizabeth is in the hospital; she describes it as living in a place which does not suit her, one in which you are given a brown dress and no underwear, a place for "poor, illiterate Batswana who were treated like animals" (*AQP* 194). It is partially the environment which causes Elizabeth to fully accept that she believes herself to be different from, perhaps above, those African people who are reduced to nothing more than animals in the hospital.

Elizabeth's progress through the hospital marks Head's desire to rewrite her own story and this is achieved through her rejection of Sello/ Dan. There is something tentatively growing in Elizabeth when she asks the nurse, "'You know Sello?'" to which the nurse replies "'The doctor told us not to allow you to talk about Sello.'" (*AQP* 196-7). Elizabeth is not free of her internal torture, but she is able to accept that it is not Sello whom she hates, so she begins to separate Sello and whom Dan has made Sello out to be in the novel:

> She'd rly[sic] into a rage and start shouting about not being an African. Dan won her liberation from the loony bin. She meant him. She meant she hated those black hands

> that were bashing her head to pieces. She meant that if she could get hold him she'd gouge out his eyes, she'd tear him to pieces. She expressed this to innocent people (*AQP* 197).

While Elizabeth might still feel that she is tortured by her internal warring, it is not at her own hands that she feels her hatred for black people comes from; Dan has planted these ideas in her mind. Elizabeth has turned the hatred she has towards her soul characters outwards, towards a world which did not immediately accept her.

If Bessie Head is claiming that each of these male leads is an extension of herself, and if we understand Sello and Dan to be rewrites of that "S" character, the character who plagued Head into the hospital, then it is reasonable to read Elizabeth's rejection of Dan and her rejection of Sello as her coming to grips with the male aspects of her identity, an identity she could not access through her history because her father was never a towering figure, but a boy. If the novel bases its momentum on Elizabeth's reconciling with her areas of liminality, then a major part of her revival to the normal or ordinary comes from her ability to hate Dan. When the doctor assumes that Elizabeth is a fellow racialist, she has this response: "The shock of being thought of as a comrade racialist had abruptly restored a portion of her sanity. But she made no effort to convince him they were not on the same track" (*AQP* 198); Elizabeth enacts her whiteness, or proximity to whiteness, to leave the hospital. In a space away from Sello she is perceived as someone without an identity by the nurses: "'Yo!' she said. 'You are mad. Aren't you? You hate black people; you hate white people. You hate everyone'" (*AQP* 196). This notion that she hates everyone is understood by the doctor as a hatred of all black people, to which Elizabeth realises she actually only hates one man, a man inspired by a black father who fiercely protects his coloured children and lays claim to them.

Understandably, Elizabeth is a re-enactment of Head, where Elizabeth's racial insecurities are solved by her acceptance of her place among black people, a place which has not been carved out for Elizabeth by that society but which she creates through the soul journey and rejection of Dan. Her rejection of Dan leads to her eventual freedom from Sello. For Head, this means that her mind is no longer haunted by that which is missing from her. She is not obsessed with her race, which is symbolic of her trying to understand the missing father, because she has rejected that father in his physical form (Sereste) and renegotiated a new identity for herself. She is allowed to merely exist. Here she creates for herself a new ego.

II: Female sexual inferiority of the role of Medusa

Another of the "soul characters" who renegotiates Head's experiences in Botswana into something she can reject is Medusa. I have argued for a reading of this novel as 'scriptotherapy' on the basis that Head has altered her 'autobiography', so that it is "almost autobiographical", through her use of "soul characters". Why that novel cannot be an 'autobiography' is due to her ability to ignore her moments of concealment or dishonesty not only from the reader but possibly from herself. Gohrbandt has argued that the novel functions "by externalising and distancing her insights in narrative she can bring them back to bear directly on herself, but now without putting herself so immediately at risk" (112-3). It is not that Head chooses to be dishonest but that the novel's ability to function as a coherent work of fiction on its own depends on the reader not being privy to certain aspects of Head's life. It is only once we compare this novel to her other writing at the time, in which all the work acts as a form of scriptotherapy, that we can see how Head has constructed her text. It is the readings of Medusa, and Head's reading of Medusa, which reveal how Head has gone about writing a new self as a mode of therapy.

I will start my examination of the role of Medusa in the novel by using an analysis of the following quote:

> Medusa said: 'Africa is troubled waters, you know. I'm a powerful swimmer in troubled waters. You'll only drown here. You're not linked up to the people. You don't know any African languages' (*AQP* 40-1).

Medusa presents as a hostile figure to Elizabeth, claiming she will "drown" due to her lack of a "link" to the people. The fact that Elizabeth does not know any African languages is metonymic for the fact that, despite her rejection from South Africa, Elizabeth is not linked up to an African identity. This scene, in which Elizabeth is rejected by Medusa, is a good point from which to examine how critics view the character of Medusa in the novel. As discussed above, the first dominant reading of the novel views the sexual nature of the characters in the novel as an allegory for the oppression which Elizabeth (Bessie Head) ultimately experienced in South Africa. Borzaga is of the opinion that "Dan and his women, Sello in the brown suit, Medusa are all replications of that grotesque deployment of power so intrinsic to the apartheid system" (32). Indeed, other critics (Gagiano 1999; Manus; Barrera) agree with this inversion, in which case Medusa is the subconscious embodiment of Elizabeth's sexual and racial humiliation under the apartheid system. One critic, Kim (2008), reads the character of Medusa as Elizabeth's rejection of female sexuality, a process in which Elizabeth ultimately identifies with a white-male identity. The critics who read Medusa as symbolic or as a subconscious projection of Elizabeth miss the importance of her localisation, a reading supported by the critics who read the character of Medusa as an indictment of the Black Nationalists that Head had encountered in Botswana. In the words of Newell, "Medusa and Dan, who crushes Elizabeth's mind with the rhetoric of racial oppression in *A Question of Power*, are portrayed as fanatical, sexually excessive and divisive Black nationalists" (68).

That Medusa should claim that Elizabeth will "only drown here" reveals that the character is projecting the idea that Elizabeth is not truly African, that her African identity is not legitimate enough to guarantee her safety. The novel is dependent on the portrayals of Dan and Medusa as purposefully evil because their characteristics and employment within the novel form the basis of Head's critique of the members of the Black Consciousness movement (Gagiano2006; Young). While Medusa's purpose in the novel is contested, her eventual downfall is read similarly by many of the critics; she is cured when Elizabeth is cured. Hogan (1994) is an interesting critic to consider because he views Medusa as a projection from Dan's subconscious. Despite this, he still follows the trend which has been asserted here: Medusa is a projection of Elizabeth's mind and not a character on her own. Her role therefore is the expression of the subconscious desires/thoughts of Elizabeth.

Head's reshuffling of her autobiographical material for fictional creation is clear in Medusa's introduction to the text. Medusa is introduced to the text through the character of Sello. At first Sello introduces a woman who seems meek and is clothed in the same spiritual manner as himself, "She had the same simple dress, a loosely-flowing white cloth draped over her shoulders and form" (*AQP* 32) with hair so long "it was almost the extreme of spirituality" (*AQP* 32). Yet, once Sello cuts this female imagos hair she begins to dissipate and from her Head introduces the image of Medusa, "Out of the fainting-away woman stepped a powerfully built woman", a woman who seems to ooze a casual sensuality, "She had an exciting way of walking. Her thighs rubbed against each other like the rustle of silk against silk" (*AQP,* 32). It is from this sensuality that she seems to gain her power, brushing past Elizabeth "like a wild-eyed Medusa" (*AQP,* 33). This character is meant to be Elizabeth's antithesis in the novel, a black woman who is in absolute command of, and fully formed in, her sexuality and power.

Medusa functions similarly to Dan in the novel, she represents subconscious repressions and confusion on Elizabeth's part. In the novel it is for this reason, purportedly, that Sello has brought Medusa to Elizabeth because Sello's greatest weakness is that he could not kill Medusa or Dan, he needed Elizabeth to access both of them. This notion of power and "killing" can quite easily be transferred to Head's desire to externalise the sexual inferiority she felt at the time, Medusa being another "real" character in this search for understanding. Medusa's name comes from Elizabeth's (the mirrored version of Head's) Eurocentric education. The name "Medusa" implies a powerful figure, one brought to Elizabeth's psyche from the remnants of her early education. Medusa's function in this text is to act as the perpetrator of evil against Elizabeth, she is a black woman who is one of the monsters in Elizabeth's tale. Descriptively at least, this is how Head would have us see her in Medusa's introduction to the novel. That this is possibly not the case, and that Medusa is another example of construction and 'scriptotherapy' in the novel, will be examined from here.

Medusa's "real" double in Jane Kerina:

The process of creation that I have ascribed to Head's character in the form of Dan and Sello, in which a real-world person becomes an imago who is a real character in the soul journey Elizabeth endures, is repeated in Medusa. This process of creation that Head ascribes to the emergence of "soul characters" is reflected in the writing of her friend, Jane Kerina, into the role of Medusa. In a packet of stories Head sent to Vigne in 1966 she lists this item:

> 6. "The Woman from America", about a Negro woman who married a man of Africa. From her I learnt this lovely swear word – goddam!! (23).

This woman was Bessie Head's friend at the time, a woman named Jane Kerina. It is this woman who, from a comparative reading of Head's life-writing, is the likely double and

eventual inspiration for Medusa. The friendship between these two women, as Eilersen points out, was not without its political tensions:

> as Bessie portrays her, Jane Kerina was a woman of unsettling individuality, much more politically enlightened than Bessie" the result of this difference being political discussions with Kerina throwing such accusatory epithets as 'You're full of contrived confusion! You're an escapist! You're an exhibitionist!' at Head (85-6).

The ferocity and hurtling quality of such jibes is reminiscent of the ease at which Medusa hurls insults and bolts of lightning at Elizabeth such as "You'll only drown here. You're not linked up to the people. You don't know any African languages" (*AQP* 41).

That Medusa should impose a physical divide between Elizabeth and Africa is not dissimilar to the sort of divide Head felt that Jane Karina implied with her political declarations. While it was Head, not Kerina, who was the Pan-Africanist at the time of their acquaintance, the fact remains that, as Eilersen states, "In her friend's view she needed to be more politically committed to the struggle for Africa. However, Bessie did feel herself an African in Africa and felt deeply hurt when it was implied that she was not" (86). By casting Medusa as a black woman in Africa who reduces Elizabeth to a sexless organism, Head uses the sexual elements of the novel to present arguments about race. Head identifies in Kerina the aspects of herself which feel inferior, and in this manner she captures an 'Africanness' in Kerina she does not feel in herself. Beyond this, she also captures Karina as having a disregard for authority, with a clear physical vitality and spontaneity, and through this description she also reveals Kerina as truly feminine, "'as women the world over about things women always entangle themselves in - a man, children, a home'", ultimately recognising her as a "'new kind of American or even maybe... a new kind of African'" (Head qtd. in Eilersen 86).

Head's relationship with Kerina demonstrates Head's ability to write real-world people into narratives, and to do so in a manner which best serves her purpose. That Head required a character to represent her insecurities about her Africanness and femininity is correctly argued for by critics in their reading of Medusa. It is quite possible then, that in writing one version of Kerina, Head has found her inspiration for Medusa. While Jane Kerina is not the Pan-Africanist vision that Head writes for her Medusa, two aspects of her personality reflect deeply with that character. The first is that she is the wife of an African man while also being an interloper, an American woman hoping to teach Bessie Head, an African, how to be a better African. The irony in the Eurocentric name offered to "Medusa" is that she is inspired by this Jane Kerina, a woman who was able to achieve what Head could not, an ease in the continent she (Head) rightfully belonged to. Yet, Kerina also has that which Medusa does not, she is described as that paragon of femininity who belies the type of political vitality needed from a woman of her sort, one who is entangled in "a man, children, a home."

The version of Medusa I present here speaks to Bessie Head's feelings of inferiority caused by a person in her real life and is the externalised form of these insecurities in her real life, only heightened by the process of projection onto the created character. Just as Head has constructed Medusa from both her South African education and her interpolation of the real person she met in her life, the same can be said of her characters Dan and Sello. Medusa is, therefore, another example of how Head constructs fictional characters to provide structure to her experiences of 'madness' within Botswana and therefore enact the scriptotherapeutic technique.

Final comments:

Through the use of "soul characters", I have hoped to complicate readings which place the novel as a representation of South Africa or ignore its autobiographical elements. Instead,

through identifying the construction of the novel from life-writing, I have hoped to reveal the ways in which the novel functions as a scriptotherapeutic text. Head has asserted that the novel was a process of understanding the hell she experienced and demonstrating how she could eventually laugh at her demons. While my analysis places some scepticism on that claim, it is, without doubt, the end of Head's novel presents her hope for the future. Elizabeth's healing comes into force when Tom acknowledges that her garden shows her love of all people, and that she has love for people and vegetables too. This is why critics view the garden as representative of Elizabeth's ultimate journey in the novel, one in which she achieves an acceptance of her half-caste status in the novel, "Elizabeth's universality is something 'in-between' incarnated in her garden where people gather from different parts of the world without being homogenised and 'civilised'" (Moosavinia and Hosseini 342), which is the destination of liberated hybridity. Those ruptures which seem to begin Elizabeth's inward journey, her rejection by both nation and family, no longer matter. She has a space in which she is allowed to exist, a space free of people who supposedly use their power over others. If the novel is about racialism, then it is ultimately about how Elizabeth comes to reject the parts of her that are harmful in their view of African people. Dan functions as a soul-object, Sello does as well, and Elizabeth mourns the loss of her father through them, while also reworking the difficult strands of herself which caused strain on her ego. Her destruction of Medusa is a less potent, but equally constructed, attempt at reintegrating her ego. Yet, what I have argued for, is that this process ultimately fails to achieve Head's goal of creating a text in which she heals from her experience of 'madness' because she is unable to present herself, and her inner turmoil, without a sense of construction or re-construction.

A Question of Power and Head's life-writing reveal how the novel is created to represent a "breakdown from within". When read as 'scriptotherapy', I cannot disagree with Eilersen's

claim that ultimately the novel ends with nothing more than a “literary expedient” in the garden project and the sense of liminality, that “the evil had not been exorcised after all” (260). An interesting aspect of claim is that it does show that Head’s novel is a good representation of ‘madness’. Head has perfectly demonstrated her point of creating a novel from within a breakdown, a position which would deny any true self-analysis. Yet, Head had not finished her goal of creating something truly autobiographical. It is fitting then that she aimed to write a full autobiography before her death, unfortunate that she died before completing it.

Chapter Three: Reading Janet Frame and Bessie Head Comparatively: 'madness' and discussions across fiction and life-writing.

Both Janet Frame and Bessie Head prove that writing about 'madness' autobiographically can never be entirely truthful to the 'text' that is the author. While Bessie Head fails to write about her experience of 'madness' in a manner that is truly healing, Janet Frame is able to present an autobiography which frees her from the effects of 'madness'. Each writer presents in these texts a version of the self who she has negotiated, a self who is an attempt to understand 'madness'. In this manner genre allows for an 'intertextual' self to be created, one who is created in discourse but varies due to the confines of genre, therefore creating a self that is blurred for the reader because of the demands of genre. Yet, how each text functions beyond the author, to reveal something of the society against which this madness is performed, has not been a major concern in my work so far.

As I have stated, there is little to suggest that Janet Frame and Bessie Head ought to be read comparatively. Some attempt at a comparative reading is hinted at in Susan J Hubert's work *Questions of Power: The Politics Of Women's Madness Narratives* (2002) where she discusses both Janet Frame and Bessie Head in her Chapter "Seasons of Peril: The Madness Narratives of Janet Frame and Bessie Head". In her, Chapter Hubert discusses both *Faces* and *AQP* as narratives which "articulate fundamental questions of power that must be asked about ideologies of madness" and that both authors "use their madness narratives to address intersecting questions of power" (111). She writes that Head's work discusses colonial powers through the 'madness' it explores. Similarly, Frame's novel addresses the power dynamics within mental institutions because of her own experience within such institutions. For Hubert, both autobiographical works place the terrifying aspect of madness within the "oppressive

social structures (including institutional psychiatry), distorted relationships between people, and the suppression of the imagination through social and ideological conformity" (136). Hubert proposes an interesting field of intertextuality, that of "social and ideological conformity" brought about by "oppressive social structures". How each text discusses an author's conformity, her 'performativity' within social structures, is worth investigating.

Like Hubert, I want to argue that the writings of Head and Frame (both their life-writing and fictional works) contribute to a discussion about the heterotopia that is 'madness'. Importantly, though, I want to do this by focusing on the authors as texts, looking at how they are forced to perform gender and sexuality and how this 'performativity' affects them during their lives. My focus on performativity will fall into three broad categories: gender/sexuality, social structures, and liminality. I will not investigate each category individually but will aim to point out where each of these markers of identity engages in discussions across the authors and their texts. In this way, a comparative reading across both authors and their social structures will emerge.

Considering the role that institutions play in shaping identity and social structures, it is no surprise that Jane Hamlett incorporates Foucault's theories of social control into her work on institutional control in the Victorian era,

> Foucault wrote of the collective social role of institutions in Discipline and Punish, suggesting that they emerged as part of a wider societal shift in attitudes towards punishment. The workhouse, the asylum and the school were part of a new means of establishing control through confinement, discipline and moral management (11).

These places of confinement directly benefitted from the cultural hegemony and self-governance arising alongside an increased bourgeois state. Yet, such institutions were not developed with specific considerations for their confined, such as 1) how might a woman react

to such institutions in which she has/exerts no real power? and 2) how does a post-colonial woman interact with such institutions? Janet Frame and Bessie Head find themselves confined to three major social structures: the school, the asylum and the home. Repeatedly, both Janet Frame and Bessie Head find themselves confined within, and seeking escape from, the constraints outlined above. Yet, such institutions are designed so that this escape is only granted by enacting the behaviours which caused the sense of confinement they wish to escape. In this manner, the solution/treatment, as will be examined below, is simply more of the same until the women take their recovery into their own hands.

I: Madness and the school.

For both Janet Frame and Bessie Head, 'madness' acts as a refuge for the patriarchal influences of "the school". Both Janet Frame and Bessie Head finished High School during a time when little opportunity for women writers was given. Furthermore, if an intelligent woman wished to remain unmarried, and engage in a career suitable to her intellect, she had little choice but to become a teacher. To submit to the institution of the school was to nestle in a place that reintegrated the 'otherness' of a woman having a career within the acceptable hierarchical institution of the school. The displacement from such an institution leads to a shared sense of destabilisation for each author, yielding similar results in each case.

Janet Frame longed to be a writer (poet) from girlhood and the denial of this true path created a constraining existence from which 'madness' seemed the only resolution. Teaching was a fraught business for both Head and Frame. In Frame's case, her rotting teeth and her nervousness at interacting with the other teachers made her a recluse, King explains her state of mind around teaching quite well in this passage:

> The effort required daily to resist contact with other staff was considerable and one major source of stress in her life. The other, growing larger by the day was her old fear of being judged and found wanting. She did develop a technique to keep the headmaster, Mr C.D. Gilling, at bay. She invented 'a serial story which I could continue whenever I heard the steps of authority approaching along the corridor, so that a visit by the headmaster to a class sitting rapt with attention...might "prove" my ability as a teacher'. It was her hope that she could contrive a similar ploy when the dreaded inspector arrived. But as the year advanced she doubted her capacity to sustain this kind of pretence. She became progressively more apprehensive and depressed. 'I felt completed isolated,' she would write subsequently. 'I knew no one to confide in, to get advice from; and there was nowhere I could go'. If she 'failed' her inspection, as she was sure she would, what would become of her? 'What, in all the world, could I do to earn my living and still live as myself, as I knew myself to be. Temporary masks, I knew, had their place; everyone was wearing them, they were the human race; but not masks cemented in place until the wearer could not breathe and was eventually suffocated' (63).

Frame felt she could not sustain the 'mask' of the teacher under the scrutiny of the organising force that was the male influence within the school. To be judged, and found wanting, would solidify Frame's perceived position as an 'other'. The autobiography exposes how Frame has already experienced feelings of inadequacy within a classroom setting when she is punished by her teacher in front of the whole class for stealing money from her father. As the teacher, Frame can stand in front of the class and conquer the feelings of inadequacy and torture she felt as a girl, yet she is unable to negotiate this new position of authority (teacher) when the paternal influence of "the dreaded inspector" arrives. Frame is evasive of male judgement within an institution where she is meant to enact the mothering role for her students, but this is

complicated again by another superior power within the school system, one who will confine her, forever, to a position that she does not want to fill. Frame seems to reject the acceptable path of the intelligent woman by rejecting the performance of a teacher. Her rejection of such a social position is found in her autobiographical account of this dreaded day of inspection,

> And now the year was passing quickly with the school inspector's crucial final visit soon to be faced. Inevitably, one bright morning of daffodils and flowering currant and a shine on the leaves of the bush along Queen's Drive, where I walked to school each morning, of a hint of warm gold in the sharp lemon-coloured sunlight, I arrived at school to find that it was the Day of Inspection, and at midmorning the inspector and the head master came to my classroom. I greeted them amiably in my practised teacherly fashion, standing at the side of the room near the display of paintings while the inspector talked to the class before he settled down to watch my performance as a teacher. I waited. Then I said to the inspector, 'Will you excuse me a moment please?' 'Certainly, Miss Frame.' I walked out of the room and out of the school, knowing I would never return (Frame 187).

Following this rejection of the teaching position Frame attempts suicide.

The feelings Frame expresses here in her autobiography as well as in the account shared with King in his biography, find their expression in *Faces* as well. The headmaster is a spectral haunting for Istina Mavet when she declares "I was a teacher. The headmaster followed me home, he divided his face and body into three to threaten me with triple peril, so that three headmasters followed me, one on each side and one at my heels" (Frame, 5). Frame's fear of the staff room is reflected again in the lines from the novel "a charm against the three headmasters who made me drink tea in sociability every morning in the staff room" (Frame 5). These lines present an abridged version of the sort of terror Frame felt while undergoing her

teaching certification. While Istina Mavet does not refer to intimidating inspectors and leaving classrooms, Frame does choose to end Mavet's interactions with this three-headed headmaster in the same way that she too did, Mavet "swallowed a stream of stars" and "slept a good sleep" (*Faces* 5). The claustrophobia, then, of continued performance for the headmaster and the school system as a whole, produces a sense of terror in Istina which matches that of Frame. Their solution, that of a death invoked by a temporary 'madness', is the same. Unlike in Frame's autobiography, Mavet finds herself institutionalised moments after this fleeing from the inspector; in either case, otherness is achieved by the rejection of the teacher title or role.

Bessie Head's experiences with teaching are divided by national borders but both end with similar results. Head's teaching experience within the schools of South Africa was marked by her inability to both engage and inspire students within the broader social context which offered them very little hope in response to her attempts to lift them out of poverty through education Head "felt that they did not appreciate what she was trying to do for them" (Eilersen 38). Initially, she aimed to participate fully in the authoritarian position that the institution of the school deemed she fill, but a softness to her character meant that "she found it very hard to make her pupils sit, stand and keep silent at her commands", and her other attempts, to treat and be treated as equals, also failed, "When she showed them friendship, they responded by becoming settled and unruly" (Eilersen 38).

With the headmaster looming at her door, Head also found the school environment one that was inhospitable to her, despite its status as a refuge for intelligent women, and so in 1958 she resigned from her teaching post in South Africa. Following this career path was a brief stint as a writer. While she enjoyed that work there was no possibility of existing as a single mother on a writer's salary, she could not, therefore, support her existence as an independent woman

outside the security of acceptable female employment. Head's second experience as a teacher was born from the need to get away from her promiscuous husband and the untenable situation and living conditions in South Africa. In her letter to Patrick Cullinan, she lays out these conditions,

> My main reason for wanting to leave was that my marriage was an extremely unhappy one. The other reason is that I hoped to be in a free Africa and that it would be an impetus and inspiration to my writing. Now that I have been refused a passport I am willing to defer that dream for at least five years until my little boy is a bit more grown up to stand the strains and hazards of travel (Cullinan and Cullinan 11).

Shortly after this Cullinan arranged for Bessie Head to leave South Africa on a one-way exit permit to Botswana where she took up a teaching post at the Tshekedi Memorial School in Serowe. While Head found performing her role as a teacher difficult before, the conditions she experienced were far from those of six years prior.

Despite her efforts to "brighten up the bleakness of their learning with imaginative touches" the student at Tshekedi Memorial School, whose "desire to learn something, anything, was intense", still suffered, and the effects of droughts and starvation were never far from their existence, "Many came to school without breakfast and by midday their mouths were white and pinched with starvation" (Eilersen 82). Head could not meaningfully impact her students despite their willingness to learn due to conditions beyond her control. Above this, while Janet Frame was only responding to the claustrophobic pressure of authorial control within her school and the perceived threat of the inspector, Head's experiences were coloured with physical acts of control and assault. She writes to Randolph Vigne about her time teaching at the school:

> There is a man here, the principal of our school--he sort of thought he could get started to sleep with me frenzied itch but as a woman I mean nothing when he couldn't get rid of the itch he just turned on me--right to the point of manhandling me in front of the kids and twisting my arm. I had to bite his hand to let him let go. This happened Monday 25/10/65. I fled away from the school, screaming. He went and called the police-- that I had gone out of my mind. They came to my home and took me to the charge office (10).

Head, like Frame, sees only one option for herself once she has experienced these conditions. For each woman escape is the only option, and where they have yet to learn of the emancipatory powers of 'madness' to accommodate the placeless woman, they are aware of death's ability to do such a thing.

Without the 'mask' of teaching, neither woman has a clear structure through which to define themselves. While the threat of the male to destroy their sense of self always exists, both find themselves unable to venture into the 'otherness' that not performing their intelligence in acceptable ways allows. The solution to this dislocation from any identifiable world forces them into a state of non-being, one where they are not forced to become the 'other'. In her 1997 work *Women and Madness* Phyllis Chesler writes of suicide that "Men commit actions; women commit gestures" (86). Well before either Bessie Head or Janet Frame find themselves committed to a mental institution they each experience committing the gestures of placelessness and relocation. In her novel *Faces* Frame incorporates the remnants of this act in the first chapter of the novel, "I swallowed a stream of stars; it was easy; I slept a sleep of good work and conduct excellent" (6). While there is no talk of stars Frame recounts this same experience in her autobiography,

> On Saturday evening I tidied my room, arranged my possessions, and swallowing a packet of Aspros, I lay down in bed to die, certain that I would die. My desperation was extreme. The next morning, near noon, I woke with a roaring in my ears and my nose bleeding. My first thought was not even a thought, it was a feeling of wonder and delight and thankfulness that I was alive (*Auto* 188).

King uses his biography of Frame to highlight the methodical manner in which Frame went about this act. According to King, Frame waited until "Money was absent from the laboratory, her landlady was away for the weekend" and before swallowing the aspirin she "tidied her room, organised her possessions" (64). This act, one borne of a desperate loneliness that Frame had undergone during her teaching training, was likely meant to elicit some sympathy and attention from Money who was her misguided love interest at the time being, as he was, a handsome lecturer at her university. Head seeks to elicit no similar interest, is genuine in her sense of displacement and, although it does not appear in her work *A Question of Power,* she does recall her similar incident to a friend, as recorded by Eilersen,

> It was at the end of April that Bessie seems to have been desperate enough to try to take her own life: 'I one morning swallowed 50 sleeping tablets and was forcefully brought back to life by doctors. The process was so painful that nothing ever broke me again because there is nothing so awful as being pulled back to life with stomach pumps and drips,' she admitted to a friend eleven years later. Her name disappeared from the teenage column quite abruptly (54-5).

According to Eilersen, and later restated by Cullinan and Cullinan (2005), this suicide attempt came at a time in Head's life when she was "overwhelmed" and very vulnerable. Having just quit her first teaching position, she was working as a reporter when she experienced her "first sexual encounter, a violent and unwelcome one forced upon her by someone she had admired

but for whom she entertained an inexplicably violent dislike much later in her life" (Eilersen, 54; Cullinan and Cullinan 6).

Both suicide attempts occurred when the writers no longer face the various pressure of their teaching positions, yet this freedom appears to have acted as a double-edged sword. Despite their freedom from the position offered to them by the patriarchal facsimile of the family unit (that of the mother in the school), that same freedom presented a position of placelessness which caused severe strain as well. This placelessness was a position both hoped to remove themselves from through suicide. Beyond the school, both women are abused by men who ought to offer them solidity and a sense of place in their femininity but instead offer neglect and abuse. Without the solidity that the role of 'teacher' offers each of these women, and the surety that it provides their sense of self, they fluster at their position of 'otherness', an 'otherness' often accompanied by hopelessness or failure. In October 1945 Frame begins to express signs of distress and suicidal ideations. She is initially admitted for a period of rest at the Dunedin Public Hospital, but Dr Malcolm Brown moves her to Seacliff after an initial period of observation (King). This transfer is described by Frame, "I was taken (third-person people are also thrust into the passive mood) to Seacliff in a car that held two girls from borstal and the police matron, Miss Churchill" (*Auto* 191).

While Frame only spends a few weeks in Seacliff after being admitted on the 3rd of November 1945, she has already experienced enough of the hospital system to form the basis of her novel *Faces* (King 73). Her new position of 'otherness' is solidified despite the intervention against such a position that suicide hoped to bring. Once freed from the school in Botswana, Head found herself isolated in a strange country and without the 'self' who was supported by her

identity as a teacher. Head is hospitalised after causing a scene at the post office in Serowe, and in May 1969 she writes to Randolph Vigne:

> The thing is they really believed it, those things they confronted me with. Eventually I cornered three of the buggers in a room and started screaming: 'You bloody bastards.' They had to call the police, who at first wanted to take me to jail but since I was shaking from head to foot they took me to hospital instead (88).

Head is more concerned about her social standing in Serowe, something she already found to be tenuous after her return and the rumours that plagued her at the time. To behave in such a manner, therefore, and increase her sense of ostracization, would cause her an immense amount of distress. Yet, to explain such events fully one must look beyond her letters, and so Eilersen's biography needs to be consulted,

> Bessie was admitted to hospital in a serious state. She was drugged and slept for fifteen hours. The screaming, the hospitalisation, the chance to sleep, but most of all the verbalising of her forbidden inmost thoughts had had a cathartic effect on her. She overcame her hatred. 'Once I said I hate the black man, it just passed from my mind the same as it is difficult, after writing all those blood curdling items on the white man, to remember what it is I hate him for. It gets lost once you spit it out.' Thus it was that she made a surprising recovery and, with the hospital staff still fearing that she was close to death, she woke up bright and cheerful and determined to go home (130).

While these details are not reflected in her letters they are present in the novel *AQP* which is the closest to an honest autobiographical representation that Bessie Head would allow at the time.

Using the character of Elizabeth, Head finally writes about that first hospitalisation,

> She opened her eyes in a bed of the private ward of the Motabeng hospital. A doctor stood nearby… A nurse walked in with a tray and set it down on a table near the bed. She smiled in a pretty, kind way and said: 'Turn over, I'm going to give you a shot to put you to sleep.'… Someone was touching her arm. It was the night-duty nurse. 'I've brought you some tea,' she said, smiling. 'You must be hungry. You've been sleeping for fifteen hours.' Elizabeth sat up abruptly, flung off the bedclothes and swung her legs off the bed. Her head was clear and sparkling. The nurse started back in surprise: 'Yo!' she said in Setswana. 'And where do you think you're going now?' she pointed to a card at the top of the bed: Patient very ill. Do not disturb. 'I'm quite better,' Elizabeth said. 'I want to go home.' (*AQP* 48-50).

Head achieves in her fiction, as I have laid out in the previous chapter, the ability to constrain any abhorrent behaviour to the confines of an 'internal' journey which influences Elizabeth's 'external' reality. This extract reveals Elizabeth's sense of entrapment within the hospital and Serowe, but Head does not connect herself to such an experience in her letters. That Head would not even mention this experience to her close friend in Vigne underscores both a desire to protect her pride and an inability to accurately recount such an experience. Not mentioning her mental state and choosing to see the entire experience as a hospital visit, allows Head the freedom to remove herself from the institution. Frame has no such autonomy under the organized state of New Zealand. What Frame does leave the hospital with, unlike Head, is a label and medical record. Her subsequent hospitalisations and her treatment within these hospitals are all based on her being diagnosed as 'schizophrenic'. For both women, the solution to an identity which is free of the role of 'teacher' is a path that leads them to another institution—the mental asylum.

II: The post-colonial mental asylum.

Adherence to the performative aspects of womanhood is both the means of treatment within, and the exit strategy from, the mental asylum. While both Frame and Head received their treatments in the middle of the 20th century, these treatments were wholly reminiscent of the Victorian asylum, modified with some current technologies. Frame writes that, "in spite of the gradual adoption of the 'new' attitude, the idea still prevailed that mental illness was a form of childish naughtiness which might be cured in a Victorian environment with the persuasion of stern speech and edifying literature" (*Faces* 210). Important to note here is the connection between "childish naughtiness" and the "Victorian environment". Women who could not fulfil the role of wife within the domestic sphere were no better than children. This desexing, of which the only salvation can be one's appeal to male authority, is continuous within both authors writings. Essential to the freedom from 'madness' is an adherence to the correct gender performativity and controlled sexuality.

This treatment plan is highly Victorian despite its location within two post-colonial settings. The beliefs that underscored the treatment of patients within these asylums were those of Victorian domesticity—where the homelike feel of the asylums could not only "house feminine irrationality" but also provide its cure "through paternalistic therapeutic and administrative techniques" (Showalter 17-8). This is supported by Hamlett, who traces the change in treatment regimens due to the ideals of the Victorian era,

> Historians have debated the meaning of these changes in treatment, and their relationship to domesticity. It has been argued that the creation of a domestic regime, modelled on the family, in the asylum, was a means of exerting control. Michel Foucault argues that institutional organisation could draw on the power structures of the family, and authorities might take on something of the parental role. For Andrew

> Scull, the entire project of asylum building was one of domestication, of 'attempts to transform the company of the deranged into at least a facsimile of bourgeois family life' (17).

Within this "moral architecture" and "domestic regime" of the Victorian asylum there is a replication of the same environment which is the likely cause of, or predominant factor in, women's madness (Showalter 29).

R. D Laing presents schizophrenia as the consequence of a woman's repression and oppression within the family; it is a strategy in which women respond to the contradictory demands of femininity within a patriarchal society, and is, ultimately, a protest against the female role (Showalter; Laing). With both Frame and Head's rejection of their teaching roles and their desire to write, it is no surprise that they would find themselves enacting a strategy of freedom that resembles a rejection of domesticity. Likewise, both Elizabeth and Istina present as "schizophrenic" through their rejection of the domestic organising principles of the asylum. Here, we have a shared external influence which can be found in both Head and Frame's lives and work. On the topic of institutions and their found freedom from them, each author is brought into a comparative framework which yields an interesting discussion.

i) *Desexing and an induction into the institution*:

Unlike schools, but equally like the patriarchally encoded prison, the mental hospital must first desex and objectify its inmates. Like prison, the first act of control asserted by the mental hospital is the repossession of all personal belongings. Clothes are not only possessions but signifiers of a unique identity. To remove a patient's clothes is to remove their subjectivity, ensuring the objectification essential to the 'other' who is 'mad'. When Istina Mavet is moved

to the Brick Building, the ward for long-term patients, she is treated as if she is no better than an animal and stripped of her clothes. Frame writes of the morning dress routine as follows:

> We stood there naked, packed tightly like cattle at the saleyards, and awaiting the random distribution of our clothes which usually arrived with one or two articles missing. I was shocked once to find myself without pants. I made a fuss. I was becoming adept at making a fuss, at arguing and trying to stand up for my rights and the rights of the other patients whom I felt the responsibility of protecting. I complained loudly, 'I've got no pants.' … 'Pants? exclaimed Sister Wolf who was small lithe and sharp tongued, with an exposed rock-like face covered daily with heavy make-up which served, I suppose, the same purpose as lichen. 'What do you want with pants! There are no men around.' (*Faces* 80-1).

That a pair of pants is a right is easily dismissed by Sister Wolf here. Modesty is not called for without the presence of a man. The significance of pants as an enacting of masculinity, and masculinities easy access to personhood, is denied here. Frame writes that the cost of the "linguistic exclusiveness" of this mad community was that they had "no legal or personal external identity-no clothes of their own…no possessions" (*Auto* 193). The lack of an external identity is linked here to the lack of a defined relationship with a male force, not teachers or wives, these women have no identity beyond that of patient.

Additionally, the acceptance of this position is shown when Istina Mavet records the following statement:

> So I went without pants and sometimes without stockings, and I dreaded every month when I would have to ask for sanitary napkins which were supplied by the hospital, for once or twice I was refused them, and told by the over-worked besieged staff, 'Use your arse hole.' In the end I did not seem to care; and if I wanted to go to the lavatory from

> the special table, and I was often wanting to go, and I was refused permission, I would slide from my seat under the table and wet on the floor like an animal (*Faces* 81).

That these women's menstruation cycles have not been accounted for within the Brick Building reflects the Victorian mode of the institution. Women without husbands become sexless objects or, as Frame highlights with her repeated use of the word, children. Under the watch of the nurses, they become something more still, animals.

On a different continent, Head writes of Elizabeth's entrance into the "loony bin" in much the same way. The nurses immediately assert the loss of personhood when Elizabeth enters the hospital, "It was a Saturday morning when she arrived at the loony bin. The attendants there greeted lunatics with laughter. She was a bit surprised. It was strictly for poor, illiterate Batswana who were treated like animals" (*AQP* 194). As Elizabeth is neither Batswana nor illiterate the entire experience is marked by her 'otherness' from the patients she encounters. Elizabeth should have no reason to be in the mental hospital apart from her rejection of her domestic role. She rejects again, as well, the aspects of 'performativity' which she feels would threaten the subjectivity she is searching for within the novel; her refusal to fulfil the role of the "lunatic", much like Istina's protest in the quote above, fails to assert the subjectivity she wishes to claim as her own despite the institution,

> The attendants took away her clothes and handed her a brown cotton dress. She had no underwear. She stood for a moment gazing dismally around the stinking hospital ward, then turned and lay down on a bed. One of the nurses approached her, grinning.
>
> I hear you have a child,' she said. Elizabeth flew into a violent rage: 'Do you care a damn?' she shouted. 'Leave me alone.' … The nurse grinned. Loony bin case confirmed (*AQP* 194).

It is interesting to note that Elizabeth's uniform also lacks a pair of pants and, while the climate in Botswana does not demand pants like that of New Zealand, the feminising effect is still the same. Yet, the dress code was not the only aspect of "moral management" that these institutions hoped to enact. As if enacting the role of housewife in the institution, the patients were expected to fulfil a series of chores.

Eilersen notes how Head refused to accommodate these domestic demands while she was hospitalised:

> The staff were surprised to have someone like Bessie there. She was aggressive and swore constantly. She refused to cooperate and showered scorn on the Italian doctor, the only psychiatrist in the country. Conditions were stark. Bessie was supposed to help clean the ward and do the hospital laundry, but she refused. After that, she was given a sedative three times a day and left very much to herself (162).

Istina, who lacks this defiance that marks Elizabeth's existence within the ward, also notes the ways in which nurses demand that the patients "fit in":

> You learned with earnest dedication to 'fit in'; you learned not to cry in company but to smile and pronounce yourself pleased, and to ask from time to time if you could go home, as proof that you were getting better and therefore in no need of being smuggled in the night to Ward Two. You learned the chores, to make your bed with the government motto facing the correct way and the corners of the counterpane neatly angled (*Faces* 32).

Access to chores is part of the treatment plan within Victorian asylums where domestic work is taken as a therapeutic technique. It is only once Istina is thought beyond saving that she no longer has access to this gendered performance. Head has had no interest in performing herself

as a gendered subject. Essential to such performance was the authority of the nurses within these institutions.

Nurses, and not doctors, ensure the domesticity of the patients but they cannot offer freedom from 'madness'. Frame writes in her autobiography that if she were to rewrite *Faces* she would include much of that which she omitted (that which would have appeared like the over-dramatic account of a former patient). What she has included in the novel, however, reveals that personhood was not something which could be sustained within these institutions. Her account of the "lolly scramble", an event in which lollies were placed in the centre of the room for patients to fight over, reveals how tenuous the hierarchy in such institutions was. Istina Mavet places her knowledge that Sister Bridge does care for her patients, and sees them as people and not only lunatics, at the centre of Sister Bridge's animosity to her, "By an unintentional glance I had surprised her into surprising herself into an uncomfortable consciousness that seemed to amount to fear" (*Faces* 122). This same fear is cause for the "lolly scramble" where the nurses acknowledge that they too are trapped within the institution and their role of taking care of their patients. In either case, violence is enacted to reassert the hierarchy. Elizabeth's induction by laughing from the nurses is reminiscent of this disregard for personhood.

Unlike Istina, who is all but abandoned in the hospital, Elizabeth does not spend enough time institutionalised to be confined to the role of an animal, but she has little to no role within the institution, "apart from giving her sedatives three times a day, everyone ignored her" (*AQP* 195). It is only when Elizabeth is visited by a white man that she seems brought into the realm of personhood. The nurses conspiratorially whisper into Elizabeth's ear about Tom, and their suggestion that he is perhaps her boyfriend is met with Elizabeth's response of "'I'm as old as his mother. He's my son. He hates me to say that, because he's the manly type. They don't

have mothers'", to which the nurse then responds, "'Yo!' she said, laughing too. 'So you're a human being? We are calling you wild animal because you're always so angry'" (*AQP* 196). The introduction of a man outside of the hospital asserts Elizabeth's personhood for the nurses. It would appear that the status of "animal" is reserved for women who are without a husband. Unlike Istina, Elizabeth has a son to assert her existence outside of the hospital, a guaranteed position within accepted modes of female existence. Yet, both Janet Frame and Bessie Head are aware that it is only through their doctor that they might be granted 'personhood' outside of the institution, and consequently, that their characters must act out this relationship as well.

ii) Doctors and wives

Interestingly, neither Janet Frame nor Bessie Head credit their doctors for their release from hospital but their characters express this process on their behalf. Both lay claim to their freedom beyond the doctor's influence. Frame attributes her removal from the leucotomy operation list to her writing. The reality is more whimsical and distressing. Reading in his newspaper that Frame had received the Hubert Church memorial award, Dr Palmer decided he did not want Frame changed by her operation, and so assigned her physical therapy instead, which included making cups of tea and weaving French lace. Not placing any emphasis on his decisions, Frame chooses to place the emphasis on her writing's saving qualities in the autobiography, "I repeat that my writing saved me" (*Auto* 222). Yet, despite this subterfuge, it is through Istina that Frame expresses the doctor's power within the institution to free patients from the objectivity that they experience within such institutions. Istina recounts how Dr Portman was doing his rounds when she asks him "What is your opinion?" to which "he stopped in astonishment" at having a patient break routine by speaking to him (*Faces* 194). When he asks her what she means by her question she simply says, "The leucotomy" to which he instantly replies, "I say no" and "I don't want you changed. I want you to stay as you are" (*Faces* 194). While this line

is delivered by Dr Portman and not Dr Trace it still bears a startling resemblance to Frame's wording of Dr Palmer's response to her question "I said urgently, 'Dr Blake Palmer, what do you think?'" to which he replies "'I've decided that you should stay as you are. I don't want you changed'" (*Auto* 222).

While Dr Trace is the *Faces* equivalent of Dr Palmer, Frame separates Palmer's intervention across three male doctors within the hospital. While Istina does not weave any French lace she does receive the same sort of feminine therapy from Dr Steward:

> [O]ne morning Dr Steward asked to see me.
>
> 'I wonder if you would make morning and afternoon tea for the doctors?'
>
> 'Oh' I said. 'Oh.'
>
> 'I've given you full parole, and I want you to come tomorrow morning to the room off the dispensary where we have our tea. The occupational therapist will show you what to do. Get away from the ward for a change, eh?'
>
> Then looking about, him and speaking distinctly as if to make sure that any witnesses could repeat his words at a future trial, he added, disclaiming responsibility, his pale face grave, 'This is Dr Trace's idea. He trusts you.'
>
> There was always talk of trust, with the doctor inquiring as if his life depended upon it, 'Do you trust me, will you trust me,' and expecting you to say eagerly and without reservation,
>
> 'Yes, yes,' when you knew, privately, that he scarcely had time to trust himself in the confusion and tiredness that accompanied the day-and-night attempt to solve the human division sum (*Faces* 205).

It is by fulfilling this role of tea lady, performing so well the role of 'wife' in the institution, that Istina is finally allowed to go home. By emphasising the doctors organising power here,

Frame reveals the significance of the patient-doctor relationship. She is allowed back into the external world only once the doctor has confirmed her identity, once she has performed her domestic role so well that she is no longer 'patient' in his eyes.

Unlike Frame, Head does not use her life-writings to represent her time in hospital, but she does represent a similar relationship in her novel to the one which has just been examined in *Faces.* Head summarises her hospital stay in a letter to Cullinan 14th of October 1973,

> In 1971 from March to June I was in a mental hospital here in Botswana and the book explains what took me there, a kind of horror behind the scenes. I was so scared at that time I confused myself. Later when I came out of that loony bin, I overcame that fear but I never got rid of the evil (Cullinan and Cullinan 132).

A similarly vague recounting of the "loony bin" appears in her letter to Vigne on the 29th of June 1971 (142), "I've just got home. I was locked up in a loony bin for nearly 3 months. Howard is alright" and in again July 1971 when she writes, "The loony bin freed me for a brief while from a deep over- hanging sense of evil, as though I had abruptly shaken off the devil, but I am lost in a sorrow too deep for words" (Vigne 144). In all of these correspondences, Head points to a failure of the mental institution to heal her. This is because she can keep her true self, much like Frame, separate from her performing self within the institution. Her identity as an author is free from her hospitalisation, at least in the written self, but Eilersen provides an account of Head's hospitalisation which matches what is found in *AQP*:

> After a period of total apathy during which she lay on her bed all day, she realised vaguely that she had to get out of Lobatse. She forced herself to get up; she became helpful and friendly, flattering the psychiatrist by showing an interest in his children and swallowing his racial views without a protest; she did some careful reading of Darwin's Origin of Species; and while her friends were trying to adjust themselves to

> the possibility of her being confined there for several years, the news suddenly came through that she had been released and was now perfectly well. She was sent home with the strict injunction that if she mentioned 'so-and-so's name again' the police would take her back to ‘the loony bin’ (Eilersen 162-3).

Interestingly, Head does not acknowledge her reading list as part of her therapy within the hospital. While Eilersen states that Head read Darwin to win over the Italian psychiatrist who was the only psychiatrist for the entire country, Head instead says in her letter to Vigne, “I read a bit of Darwin, mostly because in my next incarnation I hope to be a biologist” (154). Here, Head does not allow for the fact that it was her desire to be free of the hospital, and her eventual performance for the doctor, which lead to her reading of Darwin. Not only is this an example of how Head wishes to erase/alter this period of her life, but it also examines how writing has the ability to (seemingly) alter fact.

Much like Head, Elizabeth must create herself as an acceptable subject for her doctor to appeal to the doctor and gain her freedom. Elizabeth must do two things, first, she must portray herself (like Head does) as agreeing with her doctor’s feelings of racial superiority,

> The shock of being thought of as a comrade racialist had abruptly restored a portion of her sanity. But she made no effort to convince him they were not on the same track. ‘Ah, said the doctor. ‘You are better already. You are helping. You set the table for lunch. You will soon go home. You are cured. You have a little boy? How old is he?’ (*AQP* 198).

Here, Elizabeth not only agrees with the false notion of racial superiority but agrees to perform her domestic and gendered roles despite her rejection of such simple categories outside of the mental hospital. Her ability to act as a woman who knows her place within the doctor’s

framework, despite her ability to also deny this position internally ("the shock" of even being placed in such a position), allows the doctor to think she has recovered.

Elizabeth's treatment almost entirely rests on the doctor's love for children and her role as a mother in the world outside of the hospital,

> The doctor told her that he had eight children. In case she did not believe him, he brought them all to the hospital one Saturday morning and introduced them to her. The eldest girl had long brown hair that went way down her back. He was so proud of the children, he beamed expansively and said: 'You see Elizabeth. You'll soon be seeing your own son.' Apart from the sedatives and conversations about her son, he never bothered to probe about the causes of her breakdown. He might have been a quack doctor and a racialist but he was also a magnificent human being with a kind heart. A few weeks after Shorty's birthday, she returned home (*AQP* 198).

Much as Head is allowed out of the hospital on the condition that she not discuss or think about Seretse, Elizabeth is allowed to leave the hospital on the condition that she no longer think about Sello. Much like Frame, Head has found no cure within the hospital but has, instead, performed her way out of it.

III: A Liminal identity

Once they are free of the hospital and the school it is up to each author to establish a new subjectivity for herself, one that is free of 'madness' and 'otherness'. In previous chapters, I have shown that neither Frame nor Head can free themselves from the category of 'madness' despite the organising power over the self that 'scriptotherapeutic' writing allows for. Instead, each author is read as moving between 'insanity' and 'reality', acting as a trusted interpreter. Both authors struggle to find spaces where their identity as 'sane' writers can be accepted, and

Head fails in her search to understand her 'madness'. Yet, both writers turn to the natural world, and its easy acceptance of difference, to hold their hard-won subjectivity. If 'madness' produces a liminal identity, then it is no wonder that in both fiction and life-writing, nature seems the only place that can hold both the 'mad' character and the 'sane' author at once.

Nature seems to be to blame for Head's 'madness', as much as it works to counteract her feelings of 'madness'. When she arrives in Botswana, it is winter and the absolute darkness seems to weigh heavily on her, she leaves a candle burning at her bedside to counteract the overwhelming wholeness of this version of night, she calls the stars "large, low and glowing in a deathly silence" (Eilersen 82-83). In this new country, she found none of the familiar English landscapes she had encountered in Natal, landscapes which matched those written about by English authors with, in her words, the "delicate, detailed descriptions" that the English reserve for their landscapes, instead she found something harsh and unforgiving (Cullinan and Cullinan 70). Noting that the land is too "vast and monumental" for what she had already experienced, Head found that calling it "Egypt's land" provided her the mental landscapes appropriate for these experiences (Cullinan and Cullinan 70; Eilersen 83). This biblical land is the only preparation Head has for the Botswanan landscape and its people. Through her gardening project, Head is eventually able to reach both social acceptance and some sense of belonging within such a landscape, but this does not come easily. Her novel reflects the struggle with belonging she writes about in her letters. The gardening project represents a turning point in both Bessie Head's stay in Botswana and her character Elizabeth's development within the novel. Head had an intense interest in farming and found herself building a home near the Swaneng development project. She takes full responsibility for the success of the garden in her letters to both the Cullinans and Vigne. She writes to Vigne in 1969:

> Pat asked me if I would organise the garden project. They have a garden going at Swaneng which supplies the hospital and a school with vegetables. I have been working in this garden for three weeks now, to duplicate the plan and methods of water conservation in the garden to be started by the villagers. I hope to mmove[sic] over to my new house in November (101).

A similar sense of possessiveness is exhibited in her 1974 letter to the Cullinans:

> If you had to come you would see all we have done here. I made my own employment, not only for myself but for a few other people too and that applies to all the work done at Swaneng (136-7).

Head's connection to the land, and her decision to love a country which had made it so difficult for her to survive, shows here in her possessiveness over the gardening project. It is through the gardening project that Head feels her sense of belonging within the community. Eilersen comments that people passing by Head's home would refer to her as "Cape gooseberry", an acknowledgement of her efforts to sell the gooseberry jam that she had produced with the crops from her garden and that of the gardening project (Eilersen 165). This journey, from the frightening vastness of the land to a sense of community, is utilised by Head in the novel to explain and contain the 'madness' that she experienced and intended to contain within the novel.

Head uses the gardening project to contain the "evil" she experienced while in Botswana, using the autobiographical mode to express that which is unavailable to the 'sane' authority she must express as a writer. The division of the "nightworld" (with terror and threat, haunted by chimaeras) and "dayworld" (memories of her life in South Africa, her unhappy marriage, her passage to Botswana, and now the daily experience of mothering her young son and working in Motabeng village") to explain the internal journey and external journey that Elizabeth

experiences highlights the role that nature plays in the text (Hogan "'Bessie Head's" A Question of Power": A Lacanian Psychosis'"). It is only once the power of the sun fails, and when her gardening project is not enough to stop the visitations of her "soul characters" upon her during the day, that Elizabeth is truly at her most liminal. Liminality in this case is her descent into 'madness' while her desire to function within the village unimpeded by such madness continues. Her removal to the mental hospital reveals her failure to contain her hybridity, and her removal from nature reveals the way in which 'madness' has dominated. Her return to her garden is essential in establishing her subjectivity as a newly created hybrid body:

> Elizabeth's position as 'neither white nor black enough,' to her life 'on the edge of Kalahari Desert,' to her Edenic garden, her body, and even to her identification with the entire universe. This in-between location becomes a space for the protagonist to overcome her traumatic experiences and schizoid self as Fanon informs and to recollect her sanity (Moosavinia and Hosseini 338).

In the novel, Elizabeth is only able to rid herself of these hauntings once she begins to work on the gardening project again.

Much of the novel is spent on Elizabeth reconciling her relationships with others when she has felt so much rejection and lack of community, yet the answer to whether it is love or hate that drives this uncertainty is answered in the following conversation with her friend Tom,

> 'Lucrezia Borgia,' he said tenderly. 'Don't you love everyone? Remember what you said to me that day we first met in the vegetable garden? You said that if the garden had a big street down the middle with lots of side streets people could come and look around at everything. You said you thought the vegetables would like it too. And I thought to myself: 'What do we have here – fish or fowl? This is one hell of a girl. Ha, ha, ha, how

> does she know what vegetables like? Isn't that love, not only for people but vegetables too? (*AQP* 202).

This acknowledgement of her connection to the land, and therefore her connection with the people that she shares the land with, and her love of them, is re-enforced by previous interactions in the novel:

> The village women always passed by Elizabeth's house to collect firewood in the bush. If they saw her in the yard, they stopped, laughed and said: 'Cape gooseberry', to show how well they had picked up the propaganda. They did it so often that eventually Elizabeth became known as 'Cape Gooseberry' (*AQP* 163).

Talahite (2005) makes an interesting observation about the symbolism of the Cape Gooseberry within the novel; not only does the success of the Cape Gooseberry represent Elizabeth's transplantation from South Africa in Botswana, but it also shows the ability for hybridity within the gardening project. In the novel, the gardening project is a place for cross-cultural involvement. It exists beyond those social structures which aim to constrain people and it is free of racial divides and social hierarchies. The gardening project, nature, allows for a space in which Elizabeth's liminal identity, one which she has been driven into 'madness' trying to understand, can simply exist. It is no wonder then that the novel concludes with Elizabeth at peace and recovered from her treacherous soul journey, existing only in her "dayworld", "As she fell asleep, she placed one soft hand over her land. It was a gesture of belonging" (*AQP* 223).

Head must write such a symbolic ending to her novel when she had yet to resolve the "evil" which forced her own liminal identity between the 'mad' subject and the 'sane' author. My opinion is that it is nature's separation from social structures, its ability to allow for liminality, which does not cure 'madness' but allows for it to simply exist, therefore freeing 'madness' or

"mad symptoms" from the need for a cure. In her autobiographical novel then, unlike in her life-writing, Head is simply allowed to exist. A similar process is not allowed for Frame. While Frame reveals in Istina the same process she has undergone to reject 'madness' she does not allow for a liminal identity for herself. Instead, nature in the novel works to show Istina's liminality as the 'insane subject' and 'sane writer'. The text which Frame's novel might be read against, Frame herself, is devoid of discussions of 'madness'. Frame uses fiction, and the role of nature within fiction, to act as a metaphor for the controlling aspects of society and how separation from such society creates a sense of 'madness'.

Among other constraints, access to the outdoors or sunlight performs a hierarchical categorising function within the various institutions in *Faces*. Frame begins the novel with images of winter. Istina is on an "ice-floe" that separates her from others. This notion of winter is again associated with the ECT treatment and electricity in general, "And it is still winter. Why is it winter when the cherry blossom is in flower? I have been here in Cliffhaven for years now" (*Faces* 13). When Istina first arrives at Cliffhaven she is a Ward Four patient and has all the access to the outdoors that someone in a mental hospital is allowed. This freedom is, however, limited to the gardens so that the world beyond Cliffhaven is forgotten or foreign to the patients, "We stood at the gate, considering the marvel of the World where people, such is the deception of memory, did as they pleased, owned furniture, dressing tables with doilies on them and wardrobes with mirrors" (*Faces* 43). Such trips to the edge of the property, beyond the sunny dayroom and the gardens, cause a sense of disbelief for the more permanent residents, "The people in the dayroom seemed to look at us accusingly as if we had wasted our time by wandering in the grounds. They had no need to go for walks; they knew without seeing it the magnolia in bloom" (*Faces* 44). The Istina who is aware that cherry blossoms still bloom, despite the winter she experiences, is like these patients. It appears that nature, and a desire to

be amongst it, is reserved for those who are still aware of the world beyond the institution. For the more long-term patients this access to the external world, to something beyond the hospital, exists but is not indulged. Resignation to such a fate is the hallmark of a longer period of hospitalisation.

The contrast between Lawn Lodge and Ward Two reveals the various attitudes of the hospitals to such long-term patients. The patients in Lawn Lodge are allowed to wander in the yard but such wandering is never without the coldness that Istina associates with her confinement, "Down in the yard we sniffed the air and stamped in the old puddles and watched the wet corners and the shaded places becoming dry again; and we looked over at the slate-cold sea with its scratches and patterns of depth. The sun shone" (*Faces,* 97). Istina does not know why she is freed from the indeterminacy and constancy of her stay at Lawn Lodge (where the incurable patients stay) but the result is her arrival in Ward Seven. It is obvious that the "new attitude"—an approach that would have the most incurable patients treated are not infantilised but treated with care, perhaps with the hope of an eventual recovery or with the knowledge that, if they are not curable, they should be comfortable—has not reached Treecroft:

> Whereas in Treecroft the best-cooked meals (and the most plentiful), the gayest pictures, the brightest bedspreads were to be found in Ward Seven where the so-called 'sensible' patients lived, in Cliffhaven the brightest ward was Ward Two — that is, in terms of purely chromatic dispersion! And let no one imagine that the framed and glassed landscapes on the walls suffered from the attacks of the disturbed patients (*Faces* 120).

The further that Istina gets from recovering the less she seems to understand the sunlight that invades the wards. The static quality of the nature that the patients are exposed to in these images is not meant to act as a reminder, as it does in Ward Seven, but as a substitute for nature.

How real nature is for the patients is a privilege that is earned the closer a patient is to being allowed to go home. Nature is transgressive in the novel; it contains freedoms that are not suitable for patients who already have too much mental freedom in the realm of 'madness.'

In both *An Autobiography* and *Faces* Frame relates "home" to flowers. Frame writes of her return to Willowglen,

> If I talked of my time in hospital, I described only the amusing incidents and the stereotypes of patients - the Jesus Christ, the Queen, the Empress.
>
> And although Dad treasured his flowers the asters and dahlias and carnations staked in the small garden outside my window he restrained his anger each time Siggy scratched among the dahlias or leapt from my bedroom window upon the frail stalks of the carnations (*Auto* 218).

A very similar description of the return home is found a few decades earlier in her novel,

> I described myself as if by misfortune I had been put among people who, unlike myself, were truly ill…My room at home, looking out on the holly tree and the lilac bush and the fuchsia, had a sour stale smell as if it had been prised open, like a sealed box, after many years (*Faces* 111).

The image of looking out to nature has carried over from the hospital into these descriptions of a return home. If the institution is marked by its lack of access to the sun then this sudden freedom must be overwhelming. In either case, the truth of her experiences (Istina or Frame's) is something that is negotiated for her audience. Just as nature is kept separate from the viewer through the window, filtered through the domestic sphere, her place amongst others must be filtered through a negotiation of that which is appropriate for her new position. Both Frame and Istina must return to the hospital after this because they have not yet found a sense of belonging (a new subjectivity) outside of the institution.

How Istina negotiates the power of the "sun" is indicative of her recovery from the imposed self that the institution provides her. In a moment of contemplation that is unique for the narrative voice, she says: "I think it is the removal of the sun's influence that has made us mad; the sun is blocked that used years ago to scrape the unreal shadow from our brain" (*Faces* 148). I would argue that what Istina is saying here is that the loss of belonging, a belonging guaranteed under the freedom of nature, and the confinement of the institution, aid to 'madness'. She confirms this by showing how her thoughts have changed with the change in her Ward and treatment:

> Now that I belonged to Ward Two I also gaped amazedly at the spectacle of the powerful sun policing the earth, Move On There No Loitering, while the arrested darkness lay dungeoned, awaiting trial. The sun seemed closer, more threatening, with warrants of execution slipped between the shafts of light and placed strategically, like shadows, so that we could read them and take warning, perhaps adopt emergency measures. When I walked with Ward Two it was not the Ward Four sun that stood in the sky, nor the Ward Four flowers that puppeted brightly in the light wind. We saw the sinister collisions of colour and heard the explosions along the garden border. We looked with gratitude on the poplar trees and the fear that predisposed them to sudden shiverings reached us through secret channels, causing us to shiver as well (*Faces* 163-4).

The winter that Istina has come to know within the institution has caused distrust for real sunlight and real forms of nature. Here, Frame shows how even the limited access to nature that these patients have becomes overwhelming once they have accepted that they are part of those people who will not leave the institution.

The only solace is found in "shiverings", the desolate isolation that has become a communal language amongst these patients. Yet, again, the knowledge that Istina gains from such experiences, her deep sense of understanding, is hidden when she is moved to Ward Four again. She observes the Ward Two patients on the bowling green with the same pretences of "sanity", "We patients from Ward Four looked horrified" (*Faces,* 223). There is, however, a clear defiance in Istina Mavet once she finds herself beyond the institution and decides to record that experience exactly from beyond the walls of the hospitals,

> I looked away from them [the ward two patients] and tried not to think of them and repeated to myself what one of the nurses had told me, 'when you leave hospital you must forget all you have ever seen, put it out of your mind completely as if it never happened, and go and live a normal life in the outside world.' And by what I have written in this document you will see, won't you, that I have obeyed her? (*Faces* 223).

A similar sense of freedom can be found once Frame is freed from the hospital and decides to spend her time sleeping in a tent, "I pitched the tent under the pine trees, so great was my need to be among the trees and under the sky, and at night I slept in the tent and during the day I sat writing in the railway notebook" (*Auto* 225). Frame also lives in an Army Hut while she writes her first novel, and this happens shortly after a failed stint working in various part-time positions. Writing and a sense of belonging in nature appear to be the response that both Frame and Istina have when they are finally free. This is because nature, true nature, allows them to contain both the self who experienced the hospital and the one who has moved beyond such an experience. With both women basking in the sun, it is clear that nature is essential to understanding 'madness' for both these characters.

Final Comments:

Beyond the author, both fiction and life-writing reveal an intertextuality to 'madness' that is beyond their control. In their roles as teachers, patients, and writers, they have shown that 'madness' is a consequence of the rejection of 'performativity'. Yet, across genre, the subject must engage in 'performativity' if she is to be freed from the physical(societal) constraints inflicted by those who deviate and are therefore considered 'mad'.

In this chapter I have shown each of the ways in which Janet Frame and Bessie Head act against a performative subjectivity and how their desire to do so has resulted in the label of 'madness'. Both Head and Frame are initially denied the opportunity to become writers based on their gender and so their only acceptable place in society is that of the teacher. The result of being forced into this position (an attempted suicide) is written about in each writers' life-writings and fiction. While death is the resolution to the placelessness that their rejection of the role of teacher causes, they do not die, and they are therefore consigned to a new realm—that of the 'mad' woman.

Both writers spend extended periods of time in various mental hospitals and their fiction reveals that freedom from such institutions is dependent upon performing the subjectivity which they have rejected. Frame does not admit to the role that such an experience has on her as a subject, she refuses to acknowledge that the hospital has any organising power over her identity at all and she claims that it is her writing which freed her of the experiences of those institutions. Yet, in her fiction, Frame reveals the role of gendered performance and appealing to masculine authority to achieve freedom from such institutions. Her own life reflects these facts. Similarly, Head avoids any acknowledgement of her gendered performance within the hospital in her life-writing and its role in ensuring her freedom, not from 'madness' but from the structures of the hospital. Like Frame's novel then, Head's fiction depicts her performance of the gendered roles expected of the sane and their impact on the doctor who ensured her release from such institutions. Despite their desire to do so, neither writer can remove

performativity from their experience or ‘cure’ of ‘madness’ yet they attempt to do so in their life-writing.

However, each writer uses this ‘madness’ to explore nature and their new subject position as someone who has endured ‘madness’ as an institution. Nature allows for a space in which each fictional character in the novel can be ‘mad’ while also being controlled by a narrator who inhabits the position of the formerly ‘mad’. In this way, nature holds both the subject who was never truly ‘mad’ as well as the subject who understands the world of the ‘mad’ as a result of her performance of that ‘madness’. By writing nature in their fiction in such a way each author can delineate the ‘real’ or healed self who exists in the “real world” from a version of the self who existed in the world of the ‘mad’. They do this in the same manner in which they attempt to use genre to separate the ‘traumatized’ self from the coherent first-person self. Writing, like nature, can therefore contain both the ‘mad’ self of the past as well as the coherent self of the present.

These areas of ‘performativity’ therefore provide areas of comparison that show the possible ways Frame and Head are in discussion with one another. Both achieve an identity as ‘author’, but neither are truly free of the title of ‘mad’. How they negotiate such constraints within their fiction and life-writing therefore shows the ability of ‘madness’ to link even seemingly intractable differences in authors.

Conclusion

This project began with the term ‘madness account’. I had hoped, when I began, to produce a label which could be applied to any text written by an author who had experienced ‘madness’ and whose writing, no matter the genre, discussed ‘madness’. My hunch was that whatever text a writer produced about ‘madness’, this text would always reflect their thoughts and experiences of ‘madness’. I learned, however, once I concluded my research, that ‘madness’ itself was a space, not just an experience, and so the term ‘madness account’ would have to be abandoned. Instead, I decided to undertake an examination of works written about ‘madness’ through the lens of ‘scriptotherapy’. The works and authors I chose to examine were of course Janet Frame’s *Faces in the Water* and *An Autobiography* as well as Bessie Head’s *A Question of Power* and her various published letters.

In the Introduction I aimed to define several terms to provide the framework for my examination. The terms ‘autobiography’ and ‘life-writing’ were broadly defined as texts which produce the first person (who is the author) through the act of writing. The term ‘madness’ is a label which is applied to any person who enacts a subjectivity which is rejected by social expectations and who is consequently excluded from such a society. Talk therapy is revealed to be the process of containing the ‘mad’ performer within the doctor and, through the role of language, producing a subjectivity that is free of this ‘madness’ and can once again exist within society. Henke’s term ‘scriptotherapy’ combines the roles of life-writing and therapy, claiming that writing through ‘madness’ should allow one to be cured of it. This theory allowed me to consider ‘madness’ as a heterotopia; since heterotopias are spaces that relate areas which seem unrelated, they create new opportunities to define and examine those areas. My introduction introduced the possibility of ‘madness’ as a site which connects the linguistic power associated

with the creation of the self to the various physical/societal aspects of performativity which control the outward expression of that self. Through 'scriptotherapy' then, who an author produces when they write about 'madness' can be examined despite genre boundaries. This is why I could undertake both an internal comparison within the authors' works in Chapters 1 and 2, and a larger comparison across both writer's lives and works in Chapter 3.

Chapter One reveals that Frame has used language and genre to produce a first-person subject who is free of 'madness'. Using 'scriptotherapy' as a lens of reading I have presented a reading of her novel *Faces* as an almost-autobiographic account which uses the mode of fiction to contain and control her traumatised self. Reading *An Autobiography* reveals how Frame has all but removed her experiences of 'madness' from her autobiographical representation of the self. If 'scriptotherapy' is correct then this means that Frame has removed 'madness' from her first-person performed self. Yet, this is only achieved because that 'madness' can be read in her fiction. Frame does not engage in 'madness' beyond her attempts to use genre and language to define it. In this way, reading both life-writing and fiction together through 'madness' reveals how Frame has created a healed self through the act of writing.

In Chapter Two, I examine why Bessie Head was unable to create a healed first-person self through her novel and life-writing. In both her life-writing and fiction Bessie Head records her experiences of 'madness' in Botswana, but it is only in her fiction that Head hopes to turn 'madness' into a reflection of the notion of power. Through the construction of the novel Head enacts the role of writer but does not do so in a manner which enacts 'scriptotherapy'. Through my examination of her "soul characters" I have hoped to reveal all the areas where Head has attempted to exert control over her 'madness' through her control of language. In both her desire for control and her attempt to discuss power, Head fails to write about her traumatised

self in the novel. By reading both her life-writing (letters) and her novel together, I have shown how Head fails to accurately represent and therefore contain the 'madness' she experiences within the novel. Head fails to produce a healed version of the self through her writing on 'madness'.

In Chapter Three, I explore the idea that 'madness' is not only an individual experience but a space in which difference can be contained. Both Janet Frame and Bessie Head fail to perform their selves in the manner which is expected of them. The result for each is the label of, and relegation to the space of, 'madness'. In this chapter I have examined three spaces which contain both Janet Frame and Bessie Head as well as 'madness' and these are gender/sexuality, institutions, and liminality. My comparison here is not limited to the writing of each author but includes their lived experiences so that 'madness' cannot be recorded by either author through language alone but through the societal spaces they experience, and I have listed above. This comparison reveals, therefore, that to be released from the space of 'madness' and to be considered 'cured', each author must perform her subjectivity in socially acceptable ways. My comparison across both authors demonstrates that 'madness' is not only cured through the act of 'scriptotherapy' but through performativity.

In conclusion, 'madness' is not only a topic which connects life-writing and fiction, but it is also a space which can connect authors and their subjective experiences. To claim that 'madness' is only created through writing, as would be the claim of the 'madness account' is not a broad enough approach. Instead, how an author produces a self through both her writing and her experiences needs to be considered when examining how she produces 'madness'. As this thesis has shown, 'madness' cannot be cured through the act of writing alone. It is,

however, an intriguing space from which to undergo various intertextual comparisons, and these comparisons have been the major achievement of this thesis.

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