# MYTH CRITICISM AS AN APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF MYTHOLOGY, MYSTICISM AND MADNESS IN THE SELECTED NOVELS OF TONI MORRISON AND BESSIE HEAD

**By**

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**PH.D /ARTS/08151/2006-07**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL, AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA, IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PH.D) IN LITERATURE**

**APRIL 2013**

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation titled: **MYTH CRITICISM AS AN APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF MYTHOLOGY, MYSTICISM AND MADNESS IN THE SELECTED NOVELS OF TONI MORRISON AND BESSIE HEAD** has been written by me and that it is a record of my own research work. It has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree. All quotations are indicated and the sources of information suitably acknowledged by means of references.

_____

**KOFOWOROLA, KAYODE GBOYEGA**

## CERTIFICATION

This dissertation titled Myth Criticism as an Approach to The Study of Mythology, Mysticism and Madness in the Selected Novels of Toni Morrison and Bessie Head by Kayode Gboyega Kofoworola meets the regulation governing the award of Doctor of philosophy in Literature of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation

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**To**

**Ezekiel Oyegbile & Felicia Ibidunni Kofoworola**

**who insisted that darkness will not prevail**

**and**

**Ruth Folasade Kofoworola**

**who brought the sunshine back and gave me a reason to laugh again**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank the Almighty God for is Multiplied Grace and the presence of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ throughout the duration of this work without which the work would have been impossible.

I am intellectually indebted to my supervisors, Prof. Tanimu Abubakar, Prof. Yakubu Nasidi, Prof. Dapo Adelugba and Dr. (Mrs) Sade Omokore . I am particularly grateful to Prof. Abubakar who provided me with a lot of insights for approaching the work through his incisive criticism. I thank him for the inspiration he has continued to be for completing the work and his timely return of my submissions. If there has been any delay concerning the conclusion of this work, the fault is entirely mine not his. Prof. Adelugba has been a father-figure urging me on to finish the work. I thank him for his useful suggestions concerning the direction of the work. I am grateful to Dr. Omokore who made her office available for my use for most of the period I was in Zaria to research and write some of the chapters of this thesis.

My sincere gratitude goes to my parents; Professor and Mrs. Kofoworola whose idea it was before it became mine that I obtained a Ph.D for my future academic career and who provided the initial funding while I was still incarcerated in an hospital. I am also eternally grateful to my wife- Folasade, who joined my life's train while I was well into the programme and has remained my most vociferous cheerleader and help. I very much appreciate the spur for the completion of the Ph.D programme which I received from my siblings and their families namely: Pastor and Mrs. Eseagwu, Dr. & Mrs.

Oyeshola Kofoworola, Dr. & Dr. (Mrs.) Fasanmi; Olukemi Kofoworola , Yinka & Toyin Kofoworola and Toye Kofoworola ,thank you all.

I acknowledge all the staff of the Department of English, Ahmadu Bello University past and present, who through words of encouragement, counsel and guidance have helped to bring this work to its zenith. In particular, I thank Dr. Edward Abah for all those stimulating and enlightening discussion on our mutual subject of interest – Toni Morrison; Dr Abel Joseph who constantly would ask how far; Dr. Keston Odiwo - whose advices and seminar paper became handy in the preparation of mine; Mallam Saminu- whose office became mine, temporarily, anytime I arrived and Prof. Gbenga Ibileye - for encouragement and brotherly counsel. Above all, I'm grateful to Dr. Abu Liman for his constant reminder, that I'm being too slow with the work, and should hurry it through. I appreciate that he matched his concern with practical action, many times being the reason why my work was quickly delivered to my supervisor. I thank Dr. Mrs Shade Frank- Akale for her interest in my work and general wellbeing. I sincerely appreciate the non- academic staff of the English Department especially Hajiya Safiyanu who from time to time permitted the use of the general office space; Mrs. Grace Onichabor ( Omo-Ibadan) ever willing to help me with a cup of tea in those difficult breadless mornings and Mrs. Rhoda Chom for the liberty to spend commensurate time in their office to make jokes and relief the pressure.

I thank my friends then at the School of Basic and Remedial Studies, ABU, Funtua especially Dr Jonah Amodu (now of the Department of English, ABU, Zaria) and Mallam Maude for their friendship and astounding pressure on me to finish. To Tobias Banye, I

express gratitude for all the secretarial work –typesetting, printing etc To my friends in the Dept. of Theatre and Performing Arts, ABU, Zaria; Professor Emmy Idegu and Mr. Bankole Bello , I say thank you for friendship and sacrifice. I acknowledge the friendship of Alhaji Bakare and Godwin Awabil of University of Cape Coast who became my friends during my hostel days and have remained an 'encourager's' per excellence. To my friends in Ondo , Dr. & Mrs. Rowland Arohunmolase, I say thank you for your kind words and prayers. To my mothers in Zaria: Prof. (Mrs) Adegbite, Mrs. Adejoh, and Prof. (Mrs) Gani-Ikilama and my family in Zaria : Prof. Tunji & Dr (Mrs) Kade Ajibola, I appreciate all their prayers and encouragement in cash and kind. I acknowledge my classmate and friend Mike Akubor for his sacrificial love that made him carry out the task of helping me out with my first registration for the programme while I was still bed ridden in the hospital.

I wish to thank my senior colleagues at the University of Lagos especially Professor Karen King - Aribisala during whose headship I was employed; Professor Eruvbetine; who has remained a father figure and whose sometimes unorthodox advises has enabled me focus on what is germane to my academic advancement; Dr.'s Daramola, Adedun, Nweke, Ademola Adeoye and Okoro who always remind me that I should not forget my PhD programme in Zaria and Prof. Duro Oni our faculty dean , who reminds me that the PhD is the starting point for a credible academic career. My special thanks also go to my colleagues Nurayn Alimi and Carolyn Anyagwa whose encouragement and seriousness with their PhD programme challenged me to work harder on mine.

I am grateful to Pastor and Mrs. Femi Ajayi, Mrs. George aka Big Mummy and Mrs. Lokya Yaro for their love, prayers and encouragement towards the completion of this thesis. I am especially thankful for all their assistance to my family during my periodic absences to Zaria in pursuit of the golden fleece. I acknowledge Pastor Segun Ajiboye in Ilorin for all the prayer support. I am also grateful to Prof. and Barr. (Mrs.) Mgbeoji who have been supportive in every way possible. I especially thank Mrs. Mgbeoji for buying me some of Toni Morrison's novels and the film version of Beloved .

My profound gratitude goes to the staff of the Kashim Ibrahim Library ABU Zaria, especially those of the Africana section; Kennedy Library of the University of Ibadan where the idea of a research on mythology first crystallized and Mr. Iyanda of the University of Ilorin Library who gave me access to vital books required for my study.

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study provides a comparative approach to illustrate how two female authors; Bessie Head and Toni Morrison from different literary and historical traditions have appropriated the novel genre as a medium for explicating the issues of mythology, mysticism and madness. In particular, the study unearths their portrayal of the symbiosis between mythology, mysticism and madness to explore human experience in fragmented social contexts. This study establishes the veracity of myth criticism as a tool for excavating certain archetypes that underline the writings of these authors and in the process broaden the understanding of our common humanity and enables us cross the boundaries of time, place, nationalities, languages and cultures. This thesis, which employs myth criticism as a framework for the analysis of mythology, mysticism and madness in the novels of Head and Morrison, is broken into five chapters. This thesis deconstructs Bessie Head's use of mythology and exegetes the depiction of madness in her writings. It establishes that Head utilizes mythology and mysticism as essential ingredients of human existence and foregrounds madness as necessary for humanity to come to a point of self acceptance. It submits therefore, that myth or mythology is essentially the foundation of most thematic and stylistic discourse in the works of Bessie Head. Through various examples it shows that Head's discourse on mythology, mysticism and madness is intertextually woven and thus explores the inter-relatedness of these themes as a synchronization of mythology. In addition, this study argues that nature, nurture and the absence of nativity are crucial to the psychosis, mythopoesis and mysticism of Toni Morrison's early novels. It affirms that Morrison's concern with mythology, mysticism and madness can aptly be excavated by an intense attention to how she balances the contentions between nature, nurture and nativity as key ingredients for the construction and deconstruction of myths which is the structure of her narratology. Finally, the study establishes that areas of divergences and convergences which ultimately bear significance on the presentation of mysticism and madness exist in Morrison and Head's pre-occupation at either constructing or deconstructing myths in their writings. The study submits that mythology mysticism and madness for both authors were not just themes but were also in fact instruments of style in the rigorous exploration of human complexities. The insight which this study provides about how invaluable myth criticism, an otherwise neglected critical tool, is for in-depth comparative analysis of literature by writers from different backgrounds and continents is a boost to existing literature on myth criticism. By providing a basis for further investigation into the impact and significance of myths and mythology as a structural organizing principle in many writers narrative structure today, this study is considered a step further away from previous attempts towards the balkanization of existing writings and writers into rigid*

*categorizations without a firm grasp of the universal corroborations which mythology as a foundation provides.*

# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This research is designed to investigate through the prism of myth criticism and from a comparative perspective, the preoccupation of two writers from two different continents: Bessie Head (Africa) and Toni Morrison (United States of America), with the issues of mythology, mysticism and madness in their novels. In particular, the study seeks to unearth their portrayal of the symbiosis between mythology, mysticism and madness through the novel genre. More importantly, the study excavates how utilizing this genre, these two writers engaged the themes of mythology, mysticism and madness to explore human experience in fragmented social contexts. In order to achieve this objective, this study evaluates the use of myths as a connecting bridge between the three themes. A major plank of the discourse in this study is not simply what Head and Morrison say about mythology, mysticism and madness but also how they utilize myths to fore-ground their creative fervor in the novel genre. This is because mythological criticism as Campbell (1959:31) suggests deals with the relationship of literary art to "some very deep chord," in human nature.

Myth criticism is concerned with seeking out those mysterious elements that inform certain literary works as well as elicit, with almost uncanny force, dramatic and universal human reactions. In this sense, myth criticism discovers how certain works of literature, acknowledged as "classics," picture a kind of reality which elicits a perennial response from readers while other well constructed works, and some forms of reality, leave them cold. Myth criticism, figuratively speaking therefore, studies in-depth the

archetypal patterns upon which a writer has structured his or her masterpieces in such a way that it vibrates and sets off deep within the reader a sympathetic resonance. (Guerin et al: 1992)

The myth criticism approach to this study of the selected Novels of Toni Morrison and Bessie Head provides a significant addition to previous approaches such as, Psychoanalytic Criticism, Post-colonialism, Existentialism, Formalism, Structuralism and Semiotics, Post-Structuralism and Deconstruction, Postmodernism, Reception and Reader-Response Theory, Feminism etc; which have variously been used to interrogate their works, because it combines insights from anthropology, psychology, history, and comparative religion and "explores the artist's common humanity by tracing how the individual imagination uses myths and symbols common to different cultures and epochs. (Guerin: op cit). Examples of previous critical efforts using other approaches aside from myth criticism include Tate Claudia ed, *Black Women Writers at Work*, 1983; Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K. A. Appiah, eds., *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, 1993; Denise Heinze, *The Dilemma of Double-Consciousness Toni Morrison's Novels*, 1993; Patricia McKee, *Producing American Races: Henry James, William Faulkner, Toni Morrison*, 1999; G. Oty Agbajoh-Laoye, *Motherline, Intertext and Mothertext: African Diasporic Linkages in Beloved and the Joys of Motherhood*, 2001; David Buehrer, *American History X, Morrison's Song of Solomon, and the Psychological Intersections of Race, Class, and Place in Contemporary America*.2004; Dayle B. De Lancey, *Sweetness, Madness, and Power: The Confection as Mental Contagion in Toni Morrison's Tar Baby, Song of Solomon, and The Bluest Eye*. 2000; Cecil Abraham, *The Tragic Life: Bessie Head and Literature in Southern Africa* 1999; Craig Mackenzie ed, *Bessie Head, A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings* 1990 ;

Nancy Topping Bazin, *Feminism in the Literature of African Women* 1989; Carol Margaret Davison, *A Method in the Madness* 1990; Ifeyinwa G. Achufusi, *Female African Writers and Social Criticism: A Study of the Works of Bessie Head and Grace Ogot*. Ph.D Dissertation 1991.

While psychological (psychoanalytic) criticism seems to have the closest connection with myth criticism in its concern with the motives that underline human behavior, they still differ in terms of degree and of affinities. Psychology tends to be experimental and diagnostic and is closely related to biological science, Mythology however tends to be speculative and philosophic; its affinities are with religion, anthropology and cultural history. Such generalizations as this, of course, risk oversimplification; for instance, a great psychologist like Sigmund Freud ranged far beyond experimental and clinical study into the realms of myth, and his distinguished sometimes protegé, Carl Gustav Jung, became one of the foremost mythologists of our time. Even so, the two approaches are distinct, and mythology is wider in its scope than psychology. For example, while psychoanalysis attempts to disclose the individual's personality, the study of myths reveals the mind and character of a people; And just as dreams reflect the unconscious desires and anxieties of the individual, so also are, myths the symbolic projections of a people's hopes, values, fears, and aspirations. (Guerin et al: 1992)

As Mark Schorer (1946:29) asserts, "Myth is fundamental, the dramatic representation of our deepest instinctual life, of a primary awareness of man in the universe, capable of many configurations, upon which all particular opinions and attitudes depend". This statement is validated by the manner in which both Morrison

and Head deploy Myths to penetrate and portray human experience and as a means of elucidating mysticism and madness in their novels. Watts (1954:7) stretches this further when he opines that "Myth is to be defined as a complex of stories--some no doubt fact, and some fantasy-which, for various reasons, human beings regard as demonstrations of the inner meaning of the universe and of human life". The relevance of Schorer's assertions to this study is located in Head and Morrison's engagement both with history (fact) and with its manipulation (fantasy) to suit their aesthetic endeavor. Myths are by nature collective and communal; they bind a tribe or a nation together in common psychological and spiritual activities and as Philip Wheelwright (Tate ed.:1960:11) explains, "Myth is the expression of a profound sense of togetherness of feeling and of action and of wholeness of living". Myth is ubiquitous in time as well as place. It is a dynamic factor everywhere in human society; it transcends time, uniting the past (traditional modes of belief) with the present (current values) and reaching toward the future (spiritual and cultural aspirations). How Head and Morrison have captured these profound trans–time essences, in their works, is a major concern of this study.

Since the significance of myth is its relationship to archetypes, archetypal patterns become very important. Although every people have their own distinctive mythology that may be reflected in legend, folklore, and ideology, - although, in other words, myths take their specific shapes from the cultural environments in which they grow- myth is, in the general sense, universal. Furthermore, similar motifs or themes may be found among many different mythologies, and certain images that recur in the myths of people widely separated in time and place tend to have a common meaning or, more accurately, tend to elicit comparable psychological responses and to serve similar cultural functions; such motifs and images are called archetypes.

Archetypes are universal and may manifest as images and symbols such as ; water , sun , colors (e.g Red, Green, Blue, Black, White), as Circle or spheres (which denote wholeness, unity); as serpent (symbol of energy, pure force, evil, corruption, sensuality, destruction etc); as numbers: such as three (spiritual awareness and unity), four (associated with life cycle, four seasons, four elements (earth, air, fire, water) and seven (symbolic number signifying the completion of a cycle, perfect order). Other forms in which archetypes are imaged include the archetypal woman (Great Mother--the mysteries of life, death, transformation; The Good and The Terrible Mother-positive and negative aspects of the Earth Mother and The Soul Mate- the Sophia figure, Holy Mother , the princess —incarnation of inspiration and spiritual fulfillment) ; The Wise Old Man (seen as savior, redeemer, guru); Garden which represents (paradise, innocence, unspoiled beauty, fertility) ; Tree (as symbol denotes the life of the cosmos: its consistence, growth, proliferation, generative and regenerative processes); Desert (denotes spiritual aridity; death; nihilism, hopelessness). These examples are by no means exhaustive, but represent some of the more common archetypal images and symbols in literature. However they must not be interpreted as archetypes in every literary work in which they appear except the total context of the work logically supports an archetypal reading. (Jung: 1968)

There are three fundamental archetypal patterns in literature; these are the creation, the immortality and the hero motif. Creation motifs deal with the origins of man and the universe. The immortality motif takes two basic narrative forms; a) escape from time and b) mystical submersion into cyclical time. Finally the hero motif deals with archetypes of transformation and redemption usually presented in the following three stages or forms : The quest- the hero (savior, deliverer) undertakes some long journey

during which he or she must perform impossible tasks; the Initiation- he undergoes a series of excruciating ordeals in three distinct phases: (1) separation, (2) transformation, and (3) return to attain spiritual adulthood and become the sacrificial scapegoat where the hero dies to atone for the people's sins and restore the land to fruitfulness.

These images and motifs are significant because they all have universal concurrence to a certain degree from one culture to another. These archetypes may be found in even more complex combinations as genres or types of literature that conform with the major phases of the seasonal cycle as enunciated by Frye (1957) who indicates the correspondent genres for the four seasons as follows:

- The mythos of spring: comedy (*Anagnorisis*, or recognition of a newborn society rising in triumph around a still somewhat mysterious hero and bride, is the archetypal theme of comedy)
- The mythos of summer: romance (*Agon* or conflict is the basis or archetypal theme of romance, the radical of romance being a sequence of marvelous adventures.)
- The mythos of fall: tragedy (Pathos or catastrophe, whether in triumph or in defeat, is the archetypal theme of tragedy).
- The mythos of winter: irony (*Soaragmos*, or the sense that heroism and effective action are absent, disorganized, or foredoomed to defeat, and that confusion and anarchy reign over the world, is the archetypal theme of irony and satire).

Through this schema, Frye identifies myth with literature, asserting that myth is a "structural organizing principle of literary form" (34) and that an archetype is essentially an "element of one's literary experience" (365). In *The Stubborn Structure*, Frye (1970: 102) claims that "mythology as a whole provides a kind of diagram or blueprint of what literature as a whole is all about, an imaginative survey of the human situation from the beginning to the end, from the height to the depth, of what is imaginatively conceivable" In mirroring the conflicts that take place between their characters. Morrison and Head use

mythology as a template to present societies newly emerging from the throes of slavery and colonialism. In doing this, through a combination of the use of irony and satire, they make a statement about man's inevitable struggle with, submission to and ultimate defeat by social, economic and political forces amongst others. Ultimately, their approach tallies with Frye's schema of the four seasons. In developing the above schema, Frye borrows Jung's ideas about myths and archetypes and develops a systematic approach to archetypal or mythic criticism. Divorcing a text from its social history, Frye maintains that there exists an overall structure or mythic development that can explain the structure and significance of all texts and believed that all literature comprises one complete and whole story called the monomyth.

Consequently, what is important in using myth criticism as a critical tool is the particular attention to the synoptic patterns in an individual's writings (generally regarded spatially, as though they comprised a single literary work, rather than temporally, as a developing interest); and his structural categories which generally when approached, do illuminate the dominating themes of their writing. What the critic then does, notes Murray Krieger (1994: 35) is to "…. thus project a syntax—a generative grammar—of imagination upon the work which is made to match his structural model."

Roland Barthes (1957) approaches the issue differently in his ground breaking seminal text – Mythologies. In it he provides a semiological explanation of myth asserting that the understanding, deconstruction and critique of myth is an intrinsic part and constructor of (bourgeoise) society and (mass) culture. Consequently, he constructs myth as a type of speech/ system of communication defined by its intention. By speech, he aggregates significant outlets for creativity such as modes of writing , representations ,

photography , cinema , reporting , sport , shows , publicity etc and not just oral speech . His work is important because it suggests that myth is a very important part of how we perceive the world since it pivots our attention to its three key constituents; (1) it's function as a signifier in myth: constant hide and seek between; (2) what Meaning it postulates (3) how it belongs to history, it's engagement with form and whether it is empty, leaves contigency behindor or only 'letter' remains. Barthes suggests that for a myth to be percieved as such, it should not be possible to see neither the empty nor the full signifier, but the inextricable entity constituted of the two. For Barthes, there was a revolutionary, political intention in deconstructing and eliminating myths, because they were signs used to maintan the established order, or bourgeuise society. It can be inferred from his work therefore that a myth is always aimed at somebody (*appropriated*); that being a national or global society, or smaller groupings (target audiences) in those societies, and it seems it would be very useful to understand these audiences and the shaping of those mythical signs by which great parts of their (our) perception is shaped.

By its very nature therefore any study of myth in literature can be done from a comparative perspective since myths occur in all cultures and places and share similarities. The comparative study of the themes of mythology, mysticism and madness in the selected novels of Toni Morrison and Bessie Head therefore offers an intercultural approach to the study of literature, crossing the boundaries of time, place, nationalities, languages, and cultures to elucidate and bring to the fore the links between them.

Myths are and have always held an important place in all cultures from time immemorial. Myth-making is a universal human practice through which man interprets the natural world and the society in which we live. Since myths deal with storytelling, the

novel provides a most suitable platform through which stories can be told. This is because to create a fictional world that seems real to the reader, novelists use five elements; plot, character, conflict, setting and theme. These elements are present in the general structure of myths. Consequently, the similarity between the constituents of the myth and the requirements of the novel form enables the novel to adapt to patterns of mythology and vice-versa, the difference being that the novelist does not simply retell the myth but rather structures the story around the underlying themes of the myth, while featuring unique characters and settings.

Since, little has been done by way of utilizing myth criticism to analyze the novels of Toni Morrison and Bessie Head from a multi-textual comparative standpoint, this study therefore seeks to forge a critical connection between mythology, mysticism and madness through the parameters of myths, thus establishing a basis through which a comparative approach to the use of myths in African and African American Literature could be carried out.

This study asserts that since a mystical experience is predominantly substantiated by the individual, persons, groups or society which experience it, it acquires a mythic dimension in the process of its being substantiated and could trigger off an experience of madness. This basic submission implies that the mythic experience provides the pillars or connection between mysticism and madness. The blend between madness and mysticism thus ensures that the one promotes the other through an exchange of mythic influences. For instance, a person who is experiencing neurosis may be said to be in a mystical state, and a person in a state of extreme mystical inconsolance may be considered a mad person. Consequently, myths provide not just the thread that unites but also the pillar that creates

a balance and this enables the critic to mitigate and litigate its influences on both. This is why the themes of mythology, mysticism and madness are discussed in the subsequent textual analysis of the novels of the two authors selected for this study as axioms that depict a state of flux which itself illustrates the fragmentary nature of the social contexts that generate them.

Concerned with the role of myths and the process of mystification itself in the establishment of the mystique as thematic and aesthetic phenomenon in the novels of Toni Morrison and Bessie Head, the study explores the role of myths in constructing or deconstructing madness; by indicating/identifying what it is, showing how it manifests and how it can either be deepened or dampened. All this has been done with careful consideration to Morrison and Head's deployment of myths to signify social formations structured on otherness, alienation and inequality.

Myth criticism which is the analytical framework of the study originated in Anthropology with the publication of a seminal text *The Golden Bough* by James G. Frazer in 1915. *The Golden Bough* dealt with mythology and archetypes in material terms and was the first influential text on this subject. In *The Golden Bough,* Frazer identified shared practices and mythological beliefs (archetypes) between primitive religions and modern religions. Frazer argued that the death-rebirth myth is present in almost all cultural mythologies, and is acted out in terms of growing seasons and vegetation. The boundary of this field was later stretched by Jung's psychoanalytic study of myths with his focus on the unconscious. Jung's emphasis was on the immaterial or what he called the 'collective unconscious' (largely made up of innate thoughts, feelings, instincts, and memories that reside in the unconsciousness of all people; and are represented through

primordial images, through which universal archetypes are experienced, and more importantly through which the unconscious is revealed. Bodkin's (1974) *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*, the first work on the subject of archetypal literary criticism, also applies Jung's theories about the collective unconscious, archetypes, and primordial images to literature.

Myth criticism emerged fully and was eventually theorized elaborately by the Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). Frye's work breaks from both Frazer and Jung and is distinct from its anthropological and psychoanalytical precursors. For Frye, Frazer's death-rebirth myth that manifests in agriculture and harvest is involuntary and not ritualistic since it had to be done. Frye was also uninterested in Jung's collective unconscious since as he argues the unconscious is unknowable and cannot be studied. What was of concern to Frye was not how archetypes came to be but rather, their function and effect. For Frye literary archetypes:

> Play an essential role in refashioning the material universe into an alternative verbal universe that is humanly intelligible and viable, because it is adapted to essential human needs and concerns (224-225)

Over the years, especially from 1965, myth criticism fell into decline under repeated attack from the formalism, structuralism and the New criticism schools of literary discourse for dealing only with the 'contents' of literary works and ignoring all questions of language and style. With the subsequent decline of structuralism and semiotics however, it has become a subject of revival as more critical writings after then have had recourses to myths criticism to assert and assess present day contemporaneous reality, examples of such works include Annis Pratt (1982), Cathy M. Davidson and E.M.

Broner ed. (1980), Jacqueline De Weever (1992), Jacqueline Tavernier-Courbin (1991), William K. Ferrell (2000) etc . These critics have approached a broad spectrum of literary works; poetry, prose and drama using myth criticism as a tool. Unlike the traditional critic, who relies heavily on history and the biography of the writer, the myth critic is interested more in prehistory and the biographies of the gods. This interest underscores man's common humanity and thus validates a contemporary study such as this one. Since mythology provides the necessary thread that runs through man's search for his origin and a meaning to his life, it lends itself to critical study and provides a platform through which other issues might also be examined in literary discourse. Unlike the formalistic critic, who concentrates on the shape and symmetry of the work itself, the myth critic probes for the inner spirit which gives that form its vitality and its enduring appeal. And, unlike the Freudian critic, who is prone to look on the artifact as the product of some sexual neurosis, the myth critic sees the work holistically, as the manifestation of vitalizing, integrative forces arising from the depths of humankind's collective psyche. In this wise, Eleazar M. Meletinsky's *The Poetics of Myth* ( 2000) merits attention for its claims that myth is always expanding, that stories told may always be retold, that a mythology received may also be renewed, that symbolic world-making is never quite complete.

## 1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The novel form provides a more liberal platform for story telling than other literary mediums such as the novella, poetry or play for instance. The novel form is predicated on the belief that reality could be discovered by the individual through the senses. Thus, the novel emphasizes specific, observed details. It individualizes its characters by locating

them precisely in time and space, and its subjects reflect modern day concern with the social structures of everyday life. Consequently, it is this adoptive nature of the novel that accounts for its suitability in prognosticating mythology, mysticism and madness in the novels of Toni Morrison and Bessie Head for instance. This is not surprising since their works are of a sufficient breadth, length and depth to withstand such critical assessments. More significant for this study is the argument that themes of mythology, mysticism and madness in the novel also bring in other such fields of study such as anthropology, sociology, political science etc in their critical elucidation. Consequently, this study adopts myth criticism because it is wide and free- ranging in its relationship with other fields of study. This approach emphasizes "the recurrent universal patterns underlying most literary works." Combining insights from anthropology, psychology, and history, and comparative religion, mythological criticism "explores the artist's common humanity by tracing how the individual imagination uses myths and symbols common to different cultures and epochs." (Kennedy and Gioia's (ed) 1995). By being founded on the concept of the archetype, this approach tend to view literary works in the broader context of works sharing a similar pattern, thus it is suitable for a comparative study of Bessie Head and Toni Morrison because it enables us cross the boundaries of culture, time, place and religious orientations that their novels engender. The myth criticism approach would thus serve to further highlight the effectiveness of Morrison and Head in their deployment of common archetypes to successfully make a prognosis for a failing humanity.

As Eric J. Ziolkowski (1998) asserts in his discussion of the alliance between literature and religion, "no areas of study become more challenging than those whose parameters encompass two or more different disciplines" This is the challenge which the study of mythology, mysticism and madness in the novels of Morrison and Head pose.

Many critics of their novels such as Henry Louis Gates Jr., Dayle De Lancey and Cecil *Abraham*, in recognition of the need to form such an alliance as explicated by Ziolkowski's have utilized several different critical approaches. More challenging is the fact that most critical assaults on the works of these two writers with such exceptions as Osagie's *"Technologies of Myth and the Inscription of Subjectivity: Reading Bessie Head's 'A Question of Power' and Toni Morrison's 'Beloved'* (1992) and Abah's *The Narrativization of the African –American Experience in the Novels of Toni Morrison* (2009) have utilized critical perspectives such as psychoanalysis, feminism, structuralism, post-structuralism , biographical, archetypal and anthropological to the neglect of myth criticism. This appraisal of the novels of Toni Morrison and Bessie Head contributes to the existing repertoire of knowledge on their works by approaching them from a myth critical angle. It argues that the dividing line between mysticism, madness and mythology as presented in the works of Morrison and Head are very thin and sometimes indistinguishable, and that myths provide the link through which their interrelationship is established. It argues that in looking at how the two writers utilize myths as a vehicle in tying up issues of mythology, mysticism and madness a common paradigm that defines the universality of their experience as blacks; Africans and Americans of African descent, across two continents logically emerges.

This study is also premised on the view that the experience of madness as well as the enunciations of mystical activities in the novels of both Head and Morrison is clothed in myth. It asserts that the eight texts selected for this study in their use of myth have served to deepen the reader's experience of the ethereal. It argues that through the instrumentality of myth, the past is replayed in the present and either affirmed or denounced with consequences that could lead to either insanity, attainment of unity with

the divine or the creation of mythical figures that show elements of insanity and unity with the divine. By employing a comparative perspective within a single work using myth criticism, this study excavates universal archetypes that underlay the writings of these authors and thus enables us cross the boundaries of culture, time, place and religious orientations that their novels engender.

## 1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In the words of Adogbo and Ojo (2003:16), the aim of comparative study is to help people "achieve an accurate and deep understanding of one another and … find the terms and concepts by means of which they could explain themselves to one another and understand one another" This study undertakes a comparative study of the use of mythology, mysticism and madness in the novels of Bessie Head and Toni Morrison through a textual analysis of four texts from each author and it's objectives are:

- To show that a close relationship exists between the African – American novel and the African novel in the appropriation of mythology, mysticism and madness as thematic and stylistic concepts which demonstrate that myths or mythology provides the essential thread that binds the literature of all humanity.

- To illustrate how Morrison and Head employ the instrumentality of myths to provide a thematic and stylistic connection between mythology, mysticism and madness and to show that myths form the foundation stone of the elucidation of other themes.

- To establish areas of convergence and divergence between the novels of Toni Morrison and Bessie Head with regards to their use of myths to elucidate individuals actions and reactions within the milieu of fragmentation.

- To show that the novel form has been appropriated by both Morrison and Head as a platform for rigorous experimentation in order to signify the complexity of fragmentation.

## 1.4 JUSTIFICATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The justification for this study revolves around the basic connectedness of Toni Morrison and Bessie Head. Firstly, both have been exposed to varying forms of alienation as a result of such historical antecedents; as being black and secondly of being women. These have ultimately been a factor in their choice of the novel as the medium in which they wrote, the themes they wrote about and the materials they relied upon in the course of their writing. In addition, both writers universalize their themes even though they wrote from different historical dimensions, and this justifies the study of their works as axioms of the convergence and divergence of human experience.

However, despite the proximity between Morrison and Head in the usage of mythology, mysticism and the differential effectiveness in their use of madness as themes within their works, little or no comparative study has been done with regards to the interrelationship between these themes as reflected in their writings, thus necessitating this comparative endeavor. In addition, both Bessie Head and Toni Morrison's works have generated controversies on the African and North American continents. These controversies have bordered on their themes and the style they have chosen to elucidate them. Several years after her death, Bessie Head, , is still regarded in literary circles as one of Africa's best writers while Toni Morrison on the other hand remains the first and the only black woman to win the Nobel Prize for literature. Consequently, these two novelists occupy a central place in the discourse of mythology, mysticism and madness in African and African –American literature and the eight novels selected for a comparative over-view of their creativity attests to this.

The choice of the novels of these two authors for analysis is predicated on the nature of the novel genre itself vis-a-vis other genres. The novel form is very flexible and accommodates a far larger amount of details. Moreover, it offers in many significant ways, greater opportunities than verse or drama for a comprehensive study of man, his myths and his society. In addition, it lends itself easily to manipulations of elements such as plot, characterization, setting, point of view etc to achieve required thematic and aesthetic demands in terms of presentation techniques and enhancing or destroying credibility as the writers vision might require. Consequently, the novel form enables us excavate interactions perceived or real in the approach of these two writers to some of the elements above.

## 1.5 SCOPE AND DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study is based on selected novels by Bessie Head and Toni Morrison who have been preferred for this study because they both epitomize a continuous engagement with the issues of man's humanity and inhumanity as appropriated in his myths, mysticism and madness . The four novels each selected from the huge repertoire of each authors writing reflect this engagement and have met the criteria of relevance since they best signify these writers propensity towards the themes of this thesis. In addition, utilizing four novels each bringing the total number of texts to eight allows for a rather fairly extensive overview of their efforts. However, since no selection process is perfect, materials that might be of some interest have been omitted due to the exigencies of scope and constraints of time and space. This study as a result focuses on the following selected novels –*A Question of Power* (1974), *A Bewitched Crossroads* (1984 ), *Maru* (1972),

*When Rain Clouds Gather* ( 1972) by Bessie Head and *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Beloved* (1988) by Toni Morrison.

The texts selected are significant for the understanding of the themes of mythology, mysticism and madness for which a comparative study has been carried out and are important for re-imagining national and familial ties as well as the roles of the individual in them. While the novels of Toni Morrison and Bessie Head form the core of the materials used in carrying out this research, the study leverages the benefits and insights available in other fields of study such as history, anthropology, geography and religion. A corpus of other literary materials which includes materials from the fields of literary criticism, cultural anthropology, factual textual literature, and psychology has been utilized to propagate the aims and objectives of this research;.

In addition, while scholarly articles written by and on Toni Morrison as well as interviews with Toni Morrison are so readily available and were utilized for the analysis in this study, interviews with and scholarly articles by Bessie Head are not so generously available. This however did not serve as a strong limitation to the intentions of this work. *Thunder Behind Her Ears* by Gillian Stead Eilersen which serves like an autobiography of the life of Bessie Head will also assist us in discussing her work. All the texts selected are significant to the understanding of the themes of mythology, mysticism and madness for which a comparative study is being carried out.

## 1.7 METHODOLOGY

This work highlights Toni Morrison and Bessie Head's use of myths in the portrayal and presentation of the issues of mythology, mysticism and madness in their novels. The study argues that madness and mysticism are variant manifestations of a

mythic predisposition. It is research oriented and adopts a library –based approach by which sources such as books, journals, and web – based materials, published and unpublished dissertations etc from a wide range of intellectual field have been incorporated into the research.

While the core materials for this study are the novels of Morrison and Head, this study has been approached from a flexible and interdisciplinary angle that combines insights from anthropology, psychology, and history, and comparative religion in order to trace how the individual imagination uses myths and symbols common to their different cultures and epochs in elucidating mythology, mysticism and madness.

## 1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The study has been undertaken in five chapters. Chapter one introduces the subject, explains the key terms and shows why a study of this nature is important. It fully justifies what new contributions this study makes to the already available resources on this discourse through the provision of a detailed review of literatures as well as a conceptual, theoretical and polemical background for the study. Chapter two examines Bessie Head's use of mythology, mysticism and madness in her novels and shows through a textual analysis of her novels, the dynamism she employs in linking these subjects. In chapter three, Toni Morrison's hidden discourse of madness and how this hidden dimension of madness affects her placements and discussion of mysticism and mythology in her novels is excavated and examined. Chapter four delineates the points of convergence and divergence between the novels of Toni Morrison and Bessie Head in their perception of the relationship between mythology, mysticism and madness in their works. The concluding chapter, which is the fifth, summarizes the major arguments of this thesis. It

submits that though the social, historical and literary landscape and context in which Toni Morrison and Bessie Head wrote were quite different in their particulars, however within a universal scheme, in their approach to the issues of mythology, mysticism and madness they had more similarities than differences.

## 1.8 AUTHORS BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

### 1.8.1 TONI MORRISON

Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wofford, on February 18, 1931, in Lorain, Ohio, where her father worked as a ship welder. She was very close in age to her sister, with whom she formed a strong bond that has continued throughout her life. Morrison was encouraged by her family to read, and spent much of her childhood at the local library. She graduated with a B.A. from Howard University in 1953, and went on to complete an M.A. in English literature at Cornell University in 1955. She was married in 1958 and had two sons, but divorced in 1964, and became a single mother. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, she worked as an instructor at Texas Southern University in Houston and at Howard University in Washington, D.C. She served as an editor for Random House publishers from 1965 to 1983. Her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), was expanded from a short story she had written while still in college. Although *The Bluest Eye* received scant notice at first, Morrison's career as a nationally recognized author was launched with the success of *Sula* (1973), her second novel, after which *The Bluest Eye* was retrospectively given renewed consideration as an important work of fiction. While continuing to write novels and children's books, as well as editing several essay collections on issues of race in America, Morrison has taught as a guest professor in English and humanities at a

number of colleges and universities, including the State University of New York at Albany and at Purchase, Yale University, Bard College, Harvard University, and Trinity College at Cambridge University in England. Since 1989, she has maintained a post as professor of humanities at Princeton University.

Morrison was awarded the 1993 Nobel Prize in Literature, making her the first African American to win this honor. Morrison's novels explore issues of African-American female identity in stories that integrate elements of the oral tradition, postmodern literary techniques, and magical realism to give voice to the experiences of women living on the margins of white American society. As a best-selling African-American female author, Morrison represented a breakthrough for other black women novelists to succeed in the mainstream publishing industry. She received the National Book Critics Circle Award and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award for *Song of Solomon* (1977), the Pulitzer Prize in fiction for *Beloved* (1987), and the 1996 National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters. Four of her novels were chosen for the Oprah Winfrey national book club, and *Beloved* was adapted to film as a major motion picture produced by and starring Winfrey.

Morrison's overarching thematic concern throughout her oeuvre is with issues of African-American female identity in the contemporary world. Her novels offer complex examinations of problems within the African-American community, power dynamics between men and women, and issues of racism in relations between black and white America. Morrison's primary interest lies with the experiences of African-American women, whose quests for individual identity are integrally intertwined with their community and their cultural history. Her fictions are self-consciously concerned with

myth, legend, storytelling, and the oral tradition, as well as with memory, history, and historiography, and have thus been recognized as postmodern meta-narratives. Morrison's stories are conscious of African cultural heritage as well as African-American history, thus demonstrating the importance of the past to the struggles of contemporary African Americans. She employs strong elements of Black English in her dialogue and narration to express the importance of language in the formation of identity.

### 1.8.2 BESSIE HEAD

Bessie Head was born on July 6, 1937, in Pietermaritzburg, Natal. Her mother, Bessie Amelia Emery (nicknamed 'Toby'), was a patient at the Fort Napier Mental Hospital in that city. Toby insisted that her daughter should be given the same full name as herself. So the baby became Bessie Amelia Emery The child of an "illicit" union between a Scottish woman and a black man, Head was taken from her mother at birth and raised in a foster home until the age of thirteen. Head then attended missionary school and eventually became a teacher. Abandoning teaching after only a few years, Head began writing for the Golden City Post. In 1964, personal problems led her to take up a teaching post in Botswana, where Head remained in "refugee" status for fifteen years before gaining citizenship. All three of her major novels -- *When Rain Clouds Gather, Maru, and A Question of Power* -- along with other works were written in Botswana during this period. In January 1969, Head became the subject of gossip when She refused to move out when the owner of her rented house asked her to, and she was taken to court. Fortunately she received timely assistance from Lenyeletse Seretse, the Council Secretary and future Vice-President. As before, she felt victimised. A mental breakdown ensued and she was briefly hospitalised.

Surprisingly, this setback had two helpful outcomes. First, the villagers who had resented her now accepted her as crazy and left her alone. Their gossip subsided. Second, Bessie's anger against the village disappeared. She became calm and creative once again. The Boiteko project, a self-help scheme started by Patrick van Rensburg, brought new activities into Bessie's life during 1970. She became an instructor of the gardening group. In the garden she established a long and unique friendship with Bosele Sianana. Bosele was her confidant, interpreter, and the friend who taught her many old Tswana traditions. Sadly, she became involved in personal disputes again, and after 9 months she was asked to leave the garden. It was her pattern. Bessie entered a period of depression; she also became overweight. Her spiritual visions and hallucinations became more frequent and more extreme. She spent Christmas Day in bed. Nonetheless, throughout 1970 she was able to write and to make final corrections to *Maru*.

When *Maru* was published in February 1971, Bessie was seriously ill with depression and delusions. In the end she snapped. She punched a neighbour woman in the face, drafted a hysterical letter to Vigne, and wrote a wild denunciation of the President. The next day she pasted up her accusations at the post office. The authorities, including the President, were gentle with her. After a court hearing she was sent to the mental hospital in Lobatse. Howard stayed with neighbours. In the hospital she was left alone. Bit by bit her delusions faded away. Toward the end of June, Bessie was well enough to leave the hospital and return home. Once on the road to recovery, she started her most difficult book, *A Question of Power*. It is an autobiographical novel, using incidents from her early life as well as her recent nightmares. She wrote rapidly, finishing the book in April 1972. But several publishers thought it needed rewriting. She had 8 months of nervous worry before it finally accepted for publication. During this time she resumed her friendship, by

mail, with Robert Sobukwe, who had recently been released after many years of solitary confinement in prison. *A Question of Power* appeared in October 1973 to immediate praise and acclaim. None of Bessie's other books received so much attention. She was soon known to readers and writers in many countries.

The writings of Head cover many aspects of her personal experiences as a racially mixed person, growing up without a family in South Africa. Her works deal with issues of discrimination, refugees, racialism, African history, poverty, and interpersonal relationships. A hint of autobiography is present in much of Head's writing, which often deals with poor and emotionally abused black women dealing with both racist and sexist discrimination. Head's variety of characters are both young and old, male and female: this variety allows her to approach the same themes from different perspectives, but the focus is always on the struggles and hardships of life in postcolonial Africa.

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# CHAPTER TWO

## 2.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 CONCEPTUALIZING MYTHOLOGY, MYSTICISM AND MADNESS

Myths (mythology), mysticism and madness provide the esoteric foreground for man's existence on earth because of the assumption that life is a mystery that only can be truly grasped when approached from the angle of that which is abstract. Myths are human creations by which man comes to terms not only with the truth and reality of his existence but also excavates truth about his origin and destination after life on earth. Mysticism provides the very cloak that myths wear. It guarantees that man understands that there are powers that control and superintend the universe and that without reaching a harmony with these powers it becomes impossible to survive on the earth. On the other hand, madness provides us with the understanding that the real reasons why man can mythologize and believe in supra-powers is because there is an irrational part of man that seeks to contradict the norm and manifests itself in " abnormal behavior". This abnormal behavior could be physical or mental; it may be due to human activity or to nature. Throughout this study myths and mythology, madness and mental illness or insanity, mysticism and mystic are used sometimes interchangeably to mean the same thing.

The triple themes of mythology, mysticism and madness as ingrained into life and defined in death are very crucial issues for study in literature. William Styron suggests that "A great book should leave you with many experiences, and slightly exhausted at the end. You live several lives while reading it." (George Plimpton 85) In the themes being studied is encompassed the whole spectra of the process of capturing reality especially as the novel is wont to do. Literature is concerned with characters performing certain actions and these actions are often reactions both to practical as well as ethereal situations and

conditions with which they have been assuaged. The study of mythology, mysticism and madness in literature thus provides the umbrella for a consideration of these reactions which the novel form captures. Mythology, mysticism and madness encapsulate in literature the three key areas through which myths, religion, dreams, and private fantasies are expressed. In addition, these three themes move the interested reader in and out of fields such as philosophy, history, and journalism, sociology, anthropology, political science, theology etc and back to Literature. C.A Burland (1974) captures why a comparative work of this nature is necessary when he writes:

> The myths of mankind all come from one source, the flow of consciousness which is in all of us, and which in some mysterious way links us all at the level of what Professor Jung called common unconsciousness. (4)

It is this uncommon unconsciousness that unites the mythology, mysticism of all men across ages, cultures and climes. It is also the source of the experience of madness in Toni Morrison and Bessie Head's narratives. This string of unity is strengthened by the antecedents of their race, common historical origin as well as the disconnect that the experience of slavery and the longing for home and essence engender.

### 2.1.1 MYTHS AND MYTHOLOGY

Mythology as it existed in the ancient literatures of Rome, Greece and Egypt had as its main focus the provisions of answers to the many multi-layered questions about the origin of these societies. The word 'mythos' is a Greek word that denotes implausible story. C.A Burland defines myth as:

> A myth is a truth in an irrational form. It tells a story, using pictures and thoughts in its own context; encapsulated truths, all the more

> palatable because of their disguises so it is useless to seek a scientific aspect of their unreality. They are apparently factual, but when approached closely they turn into butterfly-fairies. Yet they remain obstinately alive in a most unsympathetic environment. (ibid 15)

Myths are universal, occurring in almost all cultures. They typically date from a time before the introduction of writing, when they were passed orally from one generation to the next. Myths deal with basic questions about the nature of the world and human experience, and because of their all-encompassing nature, myths can illuminate many aspects of a culture. Myths are tales told in the form of sagas, legends, and folktales or a mixture of one or more types. Regardless of the form it takes, what makes one of these tales a myth is its serious purpose and its importance to the culture. Myths are stories that have compelling drama and deal with basic elements and assumptions of a culture. Myths explain, for example, how the world began; how humans and animals came into being; how certain customs, gestures, or forms of human activity originated; and how the divine and human worlds interact. Many myths take place at a time before the world as human beings know it came into being. Because myth-making often involves gods, other supernatural beings, and processes beyond human understanding, some scholars have viewed it as a dimension of religion. Herein lay its close proximity to mysticism which is discussed further down in this work. However, many myths address topics that are not typically considered religious—for example, why features of the landscape take a certain shape.

African myths also and by extension African – American myths express values, identify moral standards, and embody profound philosophical reflections. In Africa, knowledge and culture have traditionally been transmitted orally from one generation to the next. The mythology of these oral cultures is embedded within their ritual practices.

For example, a myth that recounts a sacrifice as the act that established order at the beginning of time can provide the model for a ritual sacrifice that aims at restoring social harmony.

The attempts to collate, collect, classify and interpret the different myths that originate from a particular culture is referred to as mythology. Others have defined mythology as the study of myths. The most important binding tie to all the definitions is that myths are at the center of mythology and mythology is at the center of all explanations about the origin of man, life and nature. While it is virtually impossible to achieve a classification of all myths in a manner that would be satisfactory to all mythologians , it is quite valuable to utilize a classification formula that is broad enough to accommodate most other types of classifications that scholars might want to proffer. In this regard this study agrees with Lansford, Tyler (2007). Whose Classification concentrates on three major categories: cosmic myths, myths of gods, and hero myths.

- Cosmic myths seek to explain the origin of the world, universal catastrophes such as fire or flood, and the afterlife.

- Myths of gods focus on the activities of gods in what is referred to in many mythologies as the pantheon of the gods. A ready example in Yoruba Mythology is the god Eshu, who tricked Olodumare the supreme god into abandoning the earth to dwell in heaven.

- Hero myths; Nearly all cultures have produced myths about heroes. Some heroes, such as the Greek Achilles, have one mortal and one divine parent. Others are fully human but are blessed with godlike strength or beauty; for example, the Hebrew prophet Moses. Many myths about heroes concern significant phases of the hero's career, such as the circumstances of the hero's birth, a journey or quest, and the return home.

What makes myths significant in the study of literature is its interpretation and it's deployment as both a stylistic and thematic tool to elucidate and appraise the contents of

literature. From antiquity till now, how mythologians and even ordinary people, who in any case are the end recipients and sometimes the creators of these myths, have interpreted it, has tended to differ from age to age. During the Age of Enlightenment (17th and 18th centuries), the emphasis on rationality, meant that the allegorical interpretation of myths fell into disfavor. There was hostility toward all forms of religion by intellectuals who regarded myths as absurd and superstitious fabrications. Scholars such as the French writer Pierre Bayle (1697) in a debate; the so-called Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns, ridiculed the absurdity of ancient Greek and Roman myths and sought to devalue them (. The study of mythology in Europe developed into a science in the 19th century as more and more materials became available from other cultures. Scholars began to see and recognize the complexity of the mythological traditions that exist from place to place. One of the most significant studies of this period was by German-born British scholar Max Müller who attempted to tie various myths of the world together in some way (Jon R. Stone 2002).

In the middle and later parts of the 19th century, Charles Darwin theory of evolution heavily influenced the study of myths. This influence is seen in Edward Burnett Tylor's *Primitive Culture* and James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough* which proposed a three-stage evolutionary scheme where human beings first attributed natural phenomena to arbitrary supernatural forces (magic), later explaining them as the will of the gods (religion), and finally subjecting them to rational investigation (science). In the 20th century three scholars; Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and Claude Lévi-Strauss amongst others made significant contributions to the study of myths, mysticism and madness. Freud held that myths—like dreams—condense the material of experience and represent it in symbols. Carl Jung argued that people across all cultures share a collective

unconscious—a common set of feelings, thoughts, and memories expressed through images which he referred to as archetypes. Claude Lévi-Strauss on the other hand, argued that the primary function of myths is to resolve contradictions between such basic sets of opposites such as life and death, nature and culture, and self and society. These differences indicate that myth-making is an extremely varied and complex human activity where an enormous number of social, environmental, and personal factors at play make it difficult to explain myth-making from a single perspective. While every theory offers something illuminating and useful to the understanding of some myths or mythological traditions, it seems unlikely that anyone will ever devise a theory that accounts for neither every type of tale that is classified as myth nor the experience of mysticism or madness. In spite of these shortcomings, myths have provided a wealth of material for the writer and artist since the beginning of recorded history.

### 2.1.2 MYSTICISM

Mysticism in general, is a spiritual quest for hidden truth or wisdom, the goal of which is union with the divine or sacred (the transcendent realm). In all major world religions; Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism etc, mystic traditions often form a sub-current, within the main traditions , examples are Kabbalah within Judaism, Sufism within Islam, Vedanta within Hinduism and Christian mysticism within Christianity. Forms of mysticism are found also in the shamanic and other ecstatic practices of non-literate cultures, and in secular experience. One can receive these very subjective experiences as visions, miracles, dreams, revelations, or prophecies, for example. The definitions of mysticism are as varied as the number of humans that know and practice it.

The Greek Church leader and martyr, Dionysius the Areopagite (who lived in the 1st century) had this to say concerning it :

> We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it, for it is both beyond every assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all things, and, by virtue of its preeminently simple and absolute nature, free of every limitation, beyond every limitation; it is also beyond every denial. (Bosley et al 342)

The statement above suggests that mysticism carries with it a mythic dimension; beliefs and faiths considered by one group as factual and germane for attaining unity with the divine could in fact be considered by another group as unfactual and a myth meant to give validity to such faith or belief. Friedrich von Schiller (1759 - 1805) German poet, playwright and historian, in his *Tenth Letter* asserts "He who never ventures beyond actuality will never win the prize of truth" (115) That the search and hunger for truth, is behind the need to desire the mystical experience is not without doubt. What is doubtful in the long run is whether or not truth is ever attained through the mystical experience of one individual and whether such truth when found can obtain universal approval and acceptance. This is one question that remains unanswered till now.

Mystics hold that there is a deeper, more fundamental state of existence hidden beneath the appearances of day–to–day living (which may become, to the mystic, superficial or epiphenomenal). For the authentic mystic, unity is both the internal and external focus as one seeks the truth about oneself, one's relationship to others and reality (both the world at large and the unseen realm). A mystical experience displays the world through a different lens than ordinary experience. The experience could be "ineffable" and "noetic"; placed beyond the descriptive abilities of language. It could transcend the

phenomenal or material world of ordinary perception, or it could transcend the capacities of ordinary perception to bring the phenomenal and material world into full view.

Mysticism must be approached with a consciousness that ambiguities of meanings exist and indeed is inevitable. For instance this statement credited to the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu ($6^{th}$ century BC) in his Famous Tao Te Ching (www.taoism.net) is instructive in this regards, he says "My words are very easy to know,and very easy to practice but there is no one in the world who is able to know and able to practice them"or another credited to Schopenhauer (1958) , who asserts that mystics arrive at a condition in which there is no knowing subject and known object:

> We see all religions at their highest point end in mysticism and mysteries, that is to say, in darkness and veiled obscurity. These really indicate merely a blank spot for knowledge, the point where all knowledge necessarily ceases…. In the widest sense, mysticism is every guidance to the immediate awareness of that which is not reached by either perception or conception, or generally by any knowledge. (115)

Mystics of different traditions report similar experiences of a world or of reality outside conventional perception, although this does not infer an abandonment of knowledge understood through normal means. Mystics describe the same unity of experience across history, culture and religion - despite the extreme individuality of the experience.

### 2.1.3 MADNESS

Encarta dictionary defines Madness as an offensive term for a psychiatric disorder, rash or thoughtless behavior, great anger or fury, great enthusiasm or excitement. Mental illness or madness can manifest as Anxiety disorders ( excessive

worry and fear.); mood disorders (disturbances in a person's emotional life such as depression ); mania (exaggerated self-importance, irritability, reckless sexual behavior , agitation); Personality Disorders ( poor perceptions of self or others, leading to low self-esteem, troubled social relationships, and inappropriate emotional responses); Cognitive disorders (delirium and dementia, involve a significant loss of mental functioning), Dissociative disorders (disturbances in a person's consciousness, memories, identity, and perception of the environment in which a person has two or more distinct personalities that alternate in their control of the person's behavior, it could be experienced as states of "possession" by a god or ghost). However in many societies, trance and possession states are normal parts of cultural and religious practices and are not considered dissociative disorders. Impulse-Control Disorders (inability to control an impulse resulting in harmful behaviors) such as explosive anger, stealing (kleptomania), are also known to have been reflected to a lesser extent in literature and literary studies. All these disorders individually or in concert with each other could lead to an attendant loss of contact with reality, and affect daily life functions.

Mental illness affects people of all ages, races, cultures, and socio-economic classes. However, experiences of mental illness often differ greatly depending on one's culture or social group. In most societies, mental illness carries a substantial stigma, or mark of shame. The mentally ill are often blamed for bringing on their own illnesses, and others may see them as victims of bad fate, religious and moral transgression, or witchcraft. The variation in behavioral norms does not mean, however, that definitions of mental illness are necessarily incompatible across cultures. Many behaviors are recognized throughout the world as being indicative of mental illness.

The debate about what causes madness has continued from time immemorial into the late 20th and 21st centuries. Before this time the cause of mental illness was believed to be either biological; a perspective which views mental illness in terms of bodily processes and psychological; or humanistic and existential, a perspective which includes behavioral, cognitive and socio-cultural dimensions and emphasizes the roles of a person's upbringing and environment. These two perspectives are exemplified in the work of German psychiatrist Emil Kraepelin and Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud.

Greek mythology and words of famous authors, apart from science, provide us with four leeways' by which the issue of madness was viewed. Among the ancient Greeks, madness could be as a result of any of the following; an act of divine intervention; a punishment from the gods; a momentary loss of the capacity to reason; or of pretence. Some of the early authors have sought to explain what they considered madness as a result of an attempt to either situate or defend their own creative enterprise and its source. The statement "Whom God wishes to destroy, he first makes mad" attributed to Euripides, a Greek Playwright who lived around 480?-406 BC, sets the tone amongst authors about what madness is. Madness he suggests is a product of the activity of the gods. This was typical of the perception generally among Greeks that madness is from a source outside of the self. John Dryden English poet, playwright, and literary critic in *The Spanish Friar* emphasizes that "There is a pleasure sure in being mad That none but madmen know" (Scott 307) while Italian Dramatist and poet Ugo Betti argues that pleasure is indeed available to all when he writes in *The Fugitive* "All of us are mad. If it weren't for the fact every one of us is slightly abnormal, there wouldn't be any point in giving each person a separate name".

The French poet Charles Baudelaire in Journaux *intimes, "Fusées* writes "I cultivate my hysteria with joy and terror. Now I am always dizzy, and today, January 23, 1862, I experienced a singular premonition, I felt pass over me a breath of wind from the wings of madness" With this statement, he situates the creative impulse in a muse he called madness. Baudelaire's concern was with the source of madness rather than the act of madness itself. George Santayana was more apt in placing well Baudelaire's ideas when he declares "A body seriously out of equilibrium, either with itself or with its environment, perishes outright. Not so a mind. Madness and suffering can set themselves no limit" (33) American novelist Don DeLillo in his own contribution to the debate about what madness is or is not asserts that "Madness is a final distillation of self, a final editing down. It's the drowning out of false voices" (Hal Crowther 97 ) this is what Robert M. Pirsig meant when He says "The insane person is running a private unapproved film which he happens to like better than the current cultural one". (36)Their assertion seems to have been supported by Antoni Tapies who sought to relate to the hidden potentials of the mad state, when he says "Madness isn't just an illness: it can also uncover areas of thinking which are normally shrouded in darkness". Saul Bellow's emphasis is on who can or cannot be mad in what he calls "an age madness". He writes "Of course, in an age of madness, to expect to be untouched by madness is a form of madness. But the pursuit of sanity can be a form of madness, too". (Crunden 289)

French philosopher Michel Foucault in his epoch making book on the subject titled *Madness and Civilization* attempts to look at the place and role of religion in producing or engendering madness. He writes "A source of strong emotions and terrifying images which it arouses through fears of the Beyond, Catholicism frequently provokes madness; it generates delirious beliefs, entertains hallucinations, and leads men to despair". This

introduction provides an overview of these concepts and prepares the ground for an examination of the criticisms of their place in literature, in relation to the novels of Toni Morrison and Bessie Head.

## 2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The use of mythology, mysticism and madness in literature, and especially in the production and the writing of the novel have collectively been sometimes referred to as the literary fantastic. There is no general agreement about what exactly the definition of literary fantastic is or should be and indeed what elements it should contain. What has been established however is that myths, the mysterious and a measure of insanity are textual indicators for a work belonging to the literary fantastic genre. It is in reference to this controversy and the absence of concord on what constitutes the literary fantastic that Neil Cornwell (1990: ppxiii) argues that even though Borges claim that the basic devices of all fantastic literature are four in number: the work within work, the contamination of reality by dream, the voyage in time and the double, is very useful, his categorization is grossly inadequate to address the various contentions about what the literary fantastic is or is not.

For Neil Cornwell (1990), one could very well equate the literary fantastic to or describe it as mysticism. However, Cornwell's assertion creates a challenge on where mythology and madness is placed within the context of this thematic discourse as well as within the context of the genre (the novel). Cornwell in an attempt to buttress his arguments makes many references: one of such was to the essay by Scott (1827), in which he defended the use of the supernatural in fiction, so long as it remained "rare, brief, indistinct' but objected to what he described as 'the fantastic mode of writing 'or 'style of

composition'. Kayser's reference to 'that mysterious and terrifying connection between the fantastic and the real world which is so essential for the grotesque, also served Cornwell's discourse when he says of the writer, Hoffman's, another of his examples:

> He usually employs 'a whole arsenal of devices and means with the help of which he lays bare and surmounts the mystical enigma of his horrific scenes; particularly important is the use of irony, which distances the author from his protagonist, who are subject to an unhealthy fear and faith in everything supernatural. 54

For the critic Pierre Macherey (1978:147), the power of illusion is the main issue with which the literary fantastic is concerned. He quotes Nietzsche- 'the artist drapes the veil of uncertainty over things. The imaginary narrative is a specific mode of expression in which the "imaginary is the real just as the future is the present. It is a genre that for Macherey, allows for an interaction of form and content corresponding to natural theme and the operations of the "fantastic" (ibid: 172-3), in its representations of such elements as adventure, mystery and mystification. According to Todorov, the fantastic as a genre requires an interaction between characters and the reader, he argues that when an event occurs defying explanation by the laws of the familiar world, the period of indecision and uncertainty for the person who experiences the event is occupied by the fantastic. The conditions for this interaction are;

i. The reader must be obliged to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of events described.

ii. The hesitation may also be experienced by a character … and at the same time be represented, thus become one of the themes of the work.

iii. Reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text rejecting

> allegorical and poetic interpretations… the first and third actually constitute the genre; the second may not be fulfilled.

C.N Marlove (1975:10-11) again provides a similar definition or the somewhat broad category of fantasy literature when he describes literary fantastic as "A fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantiated and irreducible element of supernatural or impossible worlds, beings or objects with which the reader or the characters within the story become on at least partly familiar terms". Hesitation, ambiguity and the supernatural are therefore key elements of literary fantastic; the poetics of the fantastic must be stretched into one aware of the politics of forms, consequently the fantastic as a model is truncated and then assumes generic forms. In a rare departure from Todorovian hesitation and apprehension theory, T. E. Little (1984) develops and presents an interesting formula (an essentially generic scheme, based on the concept of worlds) which is a departure from the Tolkien approach when he asserts that:

> All writers of creative fiction are sub creators of secondary worlds. The secondary world of a non fantastic writer will be as close to the primary world as his talents and needs of his art will allow… a license is granted to writers of 'normal ' creative fiction to change the primary world for the purpose of their art. Fantasy begins when an author's secondary world goes beyond that license and becomes 'other'… such a sub creation should be called a tertiary world. (9-10)

The social dimension of the fantastic is best revealed by Siebers (1984:45), anthropological approach which insists that the literary critic needs to clarify the anthropology of fantastic literature and not its metaphysics (p.45.). A key element in this clarification process is the concept of superstition. Romantic and fantastic literatures both thematize the relation between literature and superstition as well as demonstrate an extra-ordinary awareness of social violence (ibid p13). Kathryn Hume, (1984:14) dissatisfied

with earlier definitions on fantasy tries to identify it as a genre or mode, She offers an alternative in which she suggests isolating "fantasy from the rest of literature" insisting that in literary practice "fantasy is not a separate or indeed separable strain, but rather an impulse as significant as the mimetic impulse". She concludes by suggesting that both must be recognized as both are involved in the creation of most literature (ibid p.xii). Literature therefore, Hume submits is the product of two impulses: mimesis and fantasy (imitation of reality – alteration of reality). Her 'working definition of fantasy aimed to be as inclusive and as flexible as possible (ibid p.20) and is codified thus:

> Fantasy is any departure from consensus reality, which can be manifested in innumerable variations, from monster to metaphor '. It includes (p.21) transgressions of what one generally takes to be physical facts (human immortality, travel faster than light , telekinesis , telepathy), technical or social innovations which have not yet taken place ( human cloning, utopian societies ), alternate worlds and universes and those stories marvel is considered "real " (miracles and monsters that may once have been believed in ).

Hume's definition is however not all-inclusive since she excludes 'the realistic novel and occasional earlier picaresque and satiric tales; 'escapist literature which is unrealistic but not a departure from what could physically happen in this world , such as many women's magazine stories); and ' simply what we normally call fiction' historical novels and the like, 'which use invented characters in real or imagined situations; but which are trying to depart from consensus reality , for all that they describe, something which did not actually happen' (22) 'Raw daydream content' (ibid 23 ) is therefore excluded . Despite these qualifications, Hume's explanations, is applicable to a pretty broad spectrum of literary texts but certainly will not suffice as a tool for analyzing the works of both Toni Morrison and Bessie Head.

Ferrell (2000 : vii ) argues in *Literature and Film as Modern Mythology* that "primitive people plotted and celebrated their hopes and fears in their oral stories, pictures, and symbols, what to today's critic might simply be denoted as "the fantastic". He submits that at some point between 30,000 and 3000 B.C., humans, in response to their spiritual nature, added a metaphysical dimension to the stories they created. It is at that point that narrative became meaningful in an abstract sense- an attempt to unite the spiritual dimension with the physical. He argues that myths are evidenced in literature and film through a strategic modelling function. That is myths serve to throw positive as well as negative models. The positive, to show what needs to be emulated and the negative what society expects us to detest. He state's further:

> We have never solved the problem of evil nor are we able to define clearly those values" we all should possess. Modern writers may approach the problem romantically, realistically, or naturalistically, but they do approach it, time and time again, and just like those ancient stories, the ones we find most enlightening become a part of our lore, our mythology. Others fall by the wayside and are never heard from again. What remains will be "discovered" by future generations and will be the means by which our society is historically evaluated. (vii)

Giving a little background on myths, He asserts that "in each myth, form and content coexist. The form or plot will follow to a varying degree the same form the ancients used" According to him this trends can be seen from the ancient to the modern in Hesiod's epic poetic narratives of Hercules and Prometheus which tell about the values of the Greek culture in the Hellenic period to Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck's stories which tell us about life's values and what it takes to be a hero in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. He concludes by asserting that "During this generation, it falls to authors such as Stephen

King, Joseph Heller, Toni Morrison, and John Grisham to create the narratives that follow the mythological form and convey the values this generation considers important."

Every culture has its heroes and its villains. The heroes become the living model for the myths the culture will inevitably produce, while its villains will tell us what that society sees as evil. Because mythology is built around the issue of survival, these archetypes occupy a strategic place in the mythology of all races and cultures. One of the earliest and most significant studies on the subject of myths and mysticism is The *Golden Bough* by Sir James George Frazer, a British classicist. His overall thesis was to show the natural evolution of myths within a culture and how similar myths were developed within cultures that presumably were beyond direct contact. Frazer's work opened a dialogue that was developed through the works of America's Joseph Campbell (1904-87), a pure mythologist; Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908), a French anthropologist and linguist; Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), a Polish-English anthropologist noted for his field studies with a Polynesian group; Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945), German philosopher and historian and Swiss psychologist Carl Jung (1885-1961), who is credited with establishing the archetype theory emanating from our collective unconscious. Each of these men approached the study of myth from a slightly different perspective. Their importance as a group comes from the impact they had in demonstrating the scope to which the study of mythology can be applied. Mythology is no longer a study of children's literature. It is now a viable means to understand human consciousness and the development of human culture. Hence mythology locks in mysticism as well as madness in its enterprise. Sarah Lowson (2001:77-87) in her analysis of Madness in Medieval Arthurian Literature brings to the fore many salient points germane to our review of literature with regards to this trans-thematic comparative discourse. She asserts that the:

> The label 'mad' is one which has since time immemorial been ascribed to those who do not conform to the current norms of a society; who display abnormal'behaviour. Its scope goes far beyond the realm of the affliction of mental illness implied to embrace a range of characteristics which we today would probably no longer label 'mad'; subnormal intelligence, post-traumatic stress disorder, manic depression, self- imposed hermitic lifestyle, eccentric personalities, all involve behaviour likely to have been perceived as mad. Arthurian literature of the Middle Ages is indeed not unfamiliar with the depiction of characters answering this description. Obvious examples include Chrétien de Troyes' Yvain, the Knight with the Lion, whose episode roaming the woods as a madman is precipitated by rejection by his wife Lunete upon his failure to return to her from his knightly adventures within the agreed time limit. (77)

She goes further by attempting to show the various circumstances that in literature may be seen to have precipitated madness and the varying types of madness that can be identified. For Lowson, madness in some measure is a myth that requires deconstruction. Lowson asserts that there are different sources of madness. There is what she calls " love-madness; simply put, a man falls in love, is rejected by his lady and thus loses his reason." or a man who loses his sanity as a result of his experiences in battle, and subsequently retreats to a life segregated from civilization. However the relevance of her overall submission is general and does not serve in advancing the direction of discussion in this study since it focuses mainly on madness in Irish, Welsh and Scottish literatures and some characters such as Merlin, Lailoken's and Daguenet Le Fol (three prominent characters featured in these literatures) that have gained significance and relevance to the study of madness in literatures of these places over time. The significance of Lowson's work to our study lies in the interest over why Madness often carries mystical dimensions and the extent to which it is actually a mystical experience that disconnects a madman from other men but

connect him to another world where he attains a measure of unity with the divine. Ernest E. Larkin, (2008: 23) seeks to unravel this relationship when he identifies that:

> Mysticism in literature poses some initial difficulties in the matter of definition. It should therefore be these qualities that imbue works which can properly be called both literary and mystical. The habit is quite current, unfortunately, for any literary work to be called "mystical" as long as it manifests a deep religious attitude or experience, deals with the supernatural or even the preternatural, or sees nature as a veil that at once conceals and reveals the Absolute. In the strictest sense, mysticism is the direct, intuitional experience of God through unifying love.

Utilizing the mystical quality without prejudging the mystical quality in this strict sense in the writings of Blake, Huysmans, Emerson, or Goethe (to take these as representatives of different literatures),as background, it seems possible and even necessary to distinguish their vague and often pantheistic-tinged absorption from the more effective union with a personal God that gives depth and fire to the writings of such mystics as St. John of the Cross, St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Catherine of Siena. One of the seminal literary achievements of the mystics was in developing and deepening (if not in originating) various symbolical "frames" for the account of their experiences. Such, for example, are the symbols of the ladder, the pilgrimage, and, with particular influence, the bold symbols of earthly wooing, love, and marriage as analogues of the divine union. Knight Dunlap (1920) attempts to deepen our understanding of the roles Freudianism and scientific psychology to the study of mysticism and its mythic diversions when he states:

> …The simultaneous developments in the hoary cult of philosophical mysticism and the newer cult of Freudianism nevertheless indicate that the movements have derived their impetus only in small part from the events of the last few years, but are the expressions of forces which have been much longer in their releasing, and depend on deeply implanted principles of human nature. (25)

In fiction, there were two basic trends in the way madness was represented: authors strove either for psychological realism, or they sensationalized madness, using it as a tool to bring about a certain effect on characterization or plot. In 1866, an anonymous critic in *The Spectator* chastised this latter trend, arguing that madness was used to disguise the lack of art in such novels. Sally Shuttleworth (1993) examined the same trend, maintaining that sensation novels used madness to challenge the male-controlled society of Victorian England by celebrating female "sensation," often wrongly diagnosed by males in the novels as insane. Several critics have analyzed the representation of madness in the works of prominent nineteenth-century writers, among them Barbara Hill Rigney (1978) who suggests that in *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Bronte correlates chastity with sanity. Rigney argues that Bronte continually associates sexuality with death throughout the novel, emphasizing the message that a woman will lose her identity and therefore her sanity by engaging in sexual activity. Edgar Allan Poe's depictions of madness are well known, yet the means by which Poe brings forth the almost tactile quality in his work are less frequently studied. Leonard W. Engel looked closely at *The Fall of the House of Usher* focusing in particular on the way in which Poe uses the language and imagery of enclosure to follow the narrator on his journey from reason to insanity (23-31).

On the other hand, Donald A. Ringe (125-40) traces Nathaniel Hawthorne's portrayal of insanity in his short stories and in novels. He demonstrates that Hawthorne's desire for an accurate portrayal of the abnormal psychology of certain characters is supported by contemporary psychological studies. In examining the function of madness in Hawthorne's work, specifically *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), Ringe indicates that Hawthorne associates madness in this world with damnation after death, and that the author similarly links sanity and salvation. Like Bronte and Hawthorne, Herman Melville

attempted realistic psychological portrayals in the characters of his novels. Paul McCarthy studies Melville's achievement in this area in *Moby-Dick*, or, *The Whale* (1851). McCarthy finds madness everywhere in this novel—in animals, in humans, and in the universe itself. Examining in particular the forms of madness of the characters aboard the ship, McCarthy studies the way mental aberration is revealed through characters' speeches and traces the development of Ahab's madness. Gemma Wiseman in *Reflections on Madness, Literature and History*, claims that History and literature are riddled with examples of madness. From leaders to the "little people", from writers to personas in their writing, there are those who dare to be "madly" different. She observes:

> Madness is that jagged, ragged grey space between the perceived, level plain of reason and what could be asylum bound insanity. It is a social perception, measured by socially "healthy" norms. To blur the boundaries further, there are levels of madness, ranging from amusing, harmless eccentricities and oddities to disturbing, manic, ego and passion driven behaviour patterns. (8)

However, levels and forms of madness are not exclusive to the realms of history, it also existed among literary writers, included among "the mad ones" within the literary commune is the flamboyant 19th century playwright, Oscar Wilde who starred in the social set, was imprisoned and is recorded as "exploding" when his beloved china blue tea set went missing from his university room. Others like Coleridge, in a moment of self-induced madness (opium), created the well-known, poetic masterpiece "Xanadu". But the greatest evidence of "madness" must be Jonathan Swift's satire, "Modest Proposal" (1789), when the narrator recommends that the Irish can breed their children as food for the rich; the rich implied here being English landlords that held fort at that time, as a solution to poverty.

Flora Veit-Wild's (2006) in *Writing Madness Borderlines of the Body in African Literature* follows in her study the transformation from colonial narratives projecting settlers' horror of the 'heart of darkness' onto the African body and mind, to African writers' interaction with these narratives and their own projections of what constitutes madness in a colonial and postcolonial world. She adopted a unique perspective, or series of perspectives, based on the notion of 'madness' – perceived madness, madness as device, actual madness, and the world as mad. She examines madness as exemplified in the writings of Dambudzo Marachera, Sony Labou Tansi, Bessie Head, Rebeka Njau and Tsitsi Dangarembga; however her work falls short as she goes no further to providing parameters for comparing these African writers with those of any other continent.

In the same vein, Lillian Feder (1980) probes the literary representation of the alienated mind. Feder examined mad protagonists of literature and the work of writers for whom madness is a vehicle of self-revelation. Ranging from ancient Greek myth and tragedy to contemporary poetry, fiction, and drama, Feder shows how literary interpretations of madness, as well as madness itself, reflect the very cultural assumptions, values, and prohibitions they challenge. The drawback of her work to this study lies in it's conception of contemporary poetry, fiction and drama which excludes African – American or African literary representations in her analysis.

Jeffrey B. Leak (2005) identified some of the long-held myths and stereotypes that persist in the work of black writers from the nineteenth century to the present-intellectual inferiority, criminality, sexual prowess, homosexual emasculation, and cultural deprivation. Utilizing Robert B. Stepto's call-and-response theory, Leak studied four pairs of novels within the context of certain myths, identifying the literary tandems

between them and seeking to discover the source of the culture's psychological preoccupation with black men. Calling upon interdisciplinary fields of study such as literary theory, psychoanalysis, gender studies, legal theory, and queer theory, Leak offers groundbreaking analysis of both canonical texts (representing the "call" ) and texts by emerging writers (representing the "response"), including Frederick Douglass and Charles Johnson; Ralph Ellison and Brent Wade; Richard Wright and Ernest J. Gaines; and Toni Morrison and David Bradley. Though Leak does not claim that the "response" texts are superior to the "call" texts, he does argue that, in some cases, the newer works such as Charles Johnson's *Oxherding Tale*-can address a theme or offer a narrative innovation not found in preceding texts, such as *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass.* In these instances, Leak argues, the newer texts constitute not only a response to the call text, but a substantial revision. Whether Toni Morrison's later texts is a response to Bessie Head's is an issue that will receive attention in this study. Leak offers the first in-depth criticism of black masculinity in a range of literary texts and explores the ways in which African American novelists from the 19th century to the present explore black masculinity through certain longstanding myths associated with black male identity, among them inferiority, sexual prowess, criminality, cultural depravity, and homosexual emasculation. He establishes call-and-response relationships between generations of writers.

Clara Escoda Agustí (2005) *Strategies of Subversion: The Deconstruction Of Madness in Eva's Man, Corregidora, and Beloved* argues that in a number of contemporary African American novels written by women, like Gayl Jones' *Corregidora* and *Eva's Man*, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, we encounter persistent images of female madness in the form of hysteria, violence or silence. His main thesis is that madness works in these texts to reveal the oppressive control that the ideologies of racism and

sexism have on black women. This use of madness transforms the negative construct of female insanity into a necessary affirmation of the female self. However, as Agusti shows not all the works are equally successful in achieving this deconstruction of insanity. While the protagonist in *Beloved* claims maternal agency on the same terms of possession and ownership as the white patriarchal ideology, and *Eva's Man* still contemplates violence, not language, as the only possible response to sexism and racism, it is only *Corregidora* that actually uncovers the lost ground of female desire. Yet in their exploration of tenable, black female identities beyond the limits of white patriarchal structures, the novels put forth an alternative to both the black and white male constructions of identity and difference, thus plunging into crisis the patriarchal ideology that allows for gender and racial exploitation.

Agusti posits that these three African American novels subvert the patriarchal idea of female madness and asserts that the patriarchal male identity defines itself in oppositional terms to difference, particularly to the racial and gender difference posed by the black woman. Thus, white male identity is identified as the inherent opposite of its negative "other," that which does not exist in its own terms but only in a relationship of inferiority to the white male. *Beloved, Eva's Man* and *Corregidora* dramatize how these structures of domination distort the black female's expression to the point of becoming violent and irrational. From this premise, the works set out to deconstruct the concept of madness by revealing it as yet another societal construct, and a product of society's own binary system of thought.

Collins (2000) explains this phenomenon further in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, "whites and blacks, males

and females, thought and feeling are not complementary counterparts-they are fundamentally different entities related only through their definition as opposites" Indeed ,as Foucault (1979:199) explains in *Discipline and Punish*, the authorities exercising individual control also function according to this double mode, "that of binary division and branding (mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal, etc.)". Thus branding the black woman as mad and "offering" her psychologic treatment is society's contemporary mode for containing her difference and providing her with a new identity which is a product of a process of comparing, differentiating, hierarchizing, homogenizing and excluding. Society's array of medical, scientific, and legal discourses become in Foucault's view (1979:183), a means through which the dominant order's creates a repressive defense against individuals whose behaviour exposes, subverts or turn upside down- these rigid polarities. Behaviors of transgression, excess, strength and passion all go against what Ann Goldberg (1999: 100) argues, in *Sex, Religion, and the Making of Modern Madness,* are our contemporary society's dominant model of identity (inherited from the values of the "Enlightenment man"): "the unitary, rational, free, self-controlled individual". Indeed, an extreme power differential between the doctor and the female patient (which may be exacerbated by class, gender, educational and occupational differences) assigns the female patient a minority status. In this sense, the mechanism of labeling a woman mad and enclosing her as such under the control of a hierarchy of policemen, psychologists and doctors, therefore, mirrors and radicalizes the liminal position that the black female already occupies in patriarchy's dichotomous systems of discourse.

A preponderance of criticisms of female characters from a phallocentric dimensional approach exists in a lot of literary criticism related to mythology, mysticism

and madness in the novel. However, very few of these exist on male characters. Leak's work however serves as a critical departure. Femi Ojo-Ade (1979:134) observes that: the African novel in dealing with the question of alienation has depicted two types of alienated heroes: the one who has managed, in spite of overwhelming pressure of his situation, to stay on what he termed "the right side of the fence"; that is, he does not belong to the mainstream of the social order, he is a stranger, albeit a "sane stranger. On other hand, there is the hero who goes overboard, so to speak finding it totally impossible to adjust to the inhuman situation existing in his society, not satisfied with mere utterances of protest or with a fairly 'sane' life on the fringe of society, he pushes himself mentally to the limit, and even beyond it, and finally reaches a point where society ostracizes him and deems it fit to put him away in a madhouse.

Adopting Femi Ojo- Ade second type of heroine, the one branded mad or insane by society as the basis for discussion, Lillian Te Osaki (2002) argues that patriarchy (as a social institution which functions according to the principal that "man shall dominate female) and migrations to new societies are the primary causes of madness in African women who otherwise would have been powerful figures in society. She asserts that this is why madness is a recurring theme in African women writing. In choosing her authors for comparison she includes an African American Author Alice Walker and excludes Gayl Jones *Eva Man* (1976:260) off course there is no mention of Toni Morrison as likely candidate for the discourse of the subject of madness. She insists that her inclusion of Alice Walker stems from the fact that her presentation of madness is precipitated by the African Tradition of female circumcision.

Joan Bush field (1994) in her attempt to define madness argues that it is an

evaluative concept. It is a concept which categorizes some aspect of mental functioning – some thought action or behavior as abnormal, defective or disordered—that is as undesirable.) The invention of madness as a disease Michel Foucault (1965: Viii) argues, is in fact nothing less than a peculiar manifestation of western civilization. He asks "If madness is a disease of western civilization, what is it in non-western societies? Is it a disease caused by witchcraft, as it is sometimes believed in African societies?". Foucault's work , however makes no attempt to address these issues.

However, Shosana Felman (1985:13) detours arguing that "madness usually occupies a position of exclusion; it is the outside of a culture, but madness that is a commonplace occupies a position of inclusion and becomes the inside of a culture". Nancy Bazin (1995:139) agrees with Felman in some respects; however, she differs when she argues that ironically the madness of inclusion (in which madness is the norm) can coexist with the madness of exclusion (in which the social madness creates the mad outsider). Bazin Cites Helen Cixious and Catherine Clement as examples of critics who have shown ways in which women have been repressed and forced into outburst of hysteria and madness simply by living in a patriarchal environment. Cixious and Clement (1986) observe that societies do not succeed in offering everyone the same way of fitting into the symbolic order; those who are , if one may say, between symbolic systems , in the interstices, offside , are the ones who are afflicted with what is called madness.

This study agrees with Lillian Feder (1980), who contends that there is no one description that evokes all the varieties of aberrant or bizarre thought and conduct that have been regarded as insane throughout human existence. she defines madness as "a state in which unconscious processes predominate over conscious ones to the extent that

they control them and determine perceptions of and responses to experience that judged by prevailing standards of logical thought and relevant emotion, are confused and inappropriate "Feder further argues that 'the varieties of madness created in Literature are in most respects no different from those to be discovered throughout human society"

Throughout this study therefore literary representations of madness, mysticism and mythology are analyzed as they appear in the selected texts. Aware of the differences between actual insanity, mystical and mythical experiences and their portrayal in literature, the study will proceed by underscoring the fact that though the mad, mystical or myth man of literature is to some extent, modeled on the actual one, his difference from such a model are at least as important as his resemblance to it. This is because as Feder contends, the mad character in literature is "rooted in a mythic or literary tradition in which distortion is a generally accepted mode of expression; furthermore the inherent aesthetic order by which his existence is limited also gives his madness intrinsic value and meaning."(59)

In this study the mad literary character is approached and assessed purely on his literary terms; this will be done through an examination of the combination of verbal, narrative and dramatic symbols that convey the unconscious processes which the character portrays and reveals. It is important to note that this will be the yardstick in all cases especially with the novelist Bessie Head who as a writer draws on her own experience of insanity as the subject or emotional source of her work.

## 2.3 CONCLUSION

This study unearths the portrayal of the symbiosis between mythology, mysticism and madness in the selected novels of Bessie Head and Toni Morrison through the lens of myth criticism. It shows that myths are the fundamental links through which a relationship between individual themes is established. This study mitigates the gap that exists in understanding that the experience of madness as well as the enunciations of mystical activities in the novels of both Head and Morrison is clothed in myth. It asserts that the eight texts selected for this study have deepened the reader's experience of mysticism and madness through their use of myths. It submits that through the instrumentality of myth, the past is replayed in the present and either affirmed or denounced with consequences that could lead to either insanity, attainment of unity with the divine or the creation of mythical figures that show elements of insanity and unity with the divine.

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## CHAPTER THREE

## 3.0 MYTHOLOGY AND MADNESS IN THE NOVELS OF BESSIE HEAD

In her creative writing, Head utilizes mythology and mysticism as essential ingredients of human existence and foregrounds madness as necessary for humanity to come to a point of self acceptance. Essentially therefore, myth or mythology is the foundation of most thematic and stylistic discourse in the works of Bessie Head. It therefore follows that Head's discourse on mythology, mysticism and madness is intertextually woven. This chapter explores the inter-relatedness of these themes on the basis of Head's synchronization of mythology. This is because essentially, myth is the foundation on which the discussion of each theme is fore-grounded.

The key myths that Head is concerned about include but are not limited to the myth of racial superiority (racism and racialism), the myth of male superiority and dominance, the myth of female inferiority and weakness, the myth of the leader , and the myth of good and evil . Head focuses on these within the matrix of her works. On occasions these myths intersect with each other sometimes blurring the lines between one and the other. This chapter therefore delineates and discusses the use of these myths in *A Question of Power* (1974), *A Bewitched Crossroads* (1984), *Maru* (1972), and *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1972).

By utilizing myths and mythologies as a foreground, Head's novels are unique in their emphasis on the value of humble people and ordinary life. Head's novels depict ordinary people such as Makhaya and Paulina Sebeso in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, Elizabeth and Kenosi in *A Question of Power*, Margaret Cadmore and Dikeledi in *Maru* and through their eyes she "raises propositions and questions of philosophy related to

race, class, heterosexuality and God amongst others. She comes to the conclusion that the 'truth' claims which are implied in and suggested by these notions do not obtain in real life" (Kalua 2001).

Aside from sharing a common setting (Botswana and specifically the village of Serowe in the first three novels), Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather, Maru, A Question of Power* and to a lesser degree the fourth text; *A Bewitched Crossroads,* elucidate the triple themes of mythology, mysticism and madness. Head's makes an effort at unraveling the 'truth. Ultimately, this becomes the raison d'être for her use of mythology, mysticism and madness as thematic foreground and an instruments of style. Head's setting for her stories is Africa but her mythological frame of reference is the entire world. Consequently, she makes allusions to several mythological figures from other climes, thus ensuring that the issues she discusses attain a universal status and receive attention as issues that affect all women and men. This study asserts that the cultivation of the mythological space truncates individuals into a mystical search for their own reality, which ultimately runs them into madness. Ogunyemi (1996) comments on Head's incorporation of African and non-African myths into her corpus supports the above assertion. She cites Head's concern:

> …with the primitive tendencies of these people that constitute the hidden dimensions of their lives marked as it were by an overpoweringly pervasive presence of the supernatural, the mystical, the mythical, the mysterious, the magical, witchcraft and fantasy. ( 34)

In the passage above, Ogunyemi integrates myth with mysticism but leaves out it's relation to the issue of madness. Her assertion that Head is concerned with the primitive tendencies of 'these people' is an understatement because in reality what she calls

primitive are the realities of modern man. This study contends that the canonization of primitivity is not what Head sought to achieve. The soul is one of the evidences of man's primtivity. No wonder therefore that the character Sello, asks for instance the question "How often was a learner dependent on his society for his soul evolution?" The evolution of the soul is a first-step in the attainment of unity within whatever is or considered the object of the divine. It is this very sense of mystical awareness that Head introduces in the first paragraph of *A Question of Power* when she says:

> It wasn't as though his society were not evil too, but nowhere else could he have acquired the kind of humility which made him feel , within, totally unimportant , totally free from his own personal poisons- pride and arrogance and egoism of the soul. It had always been like this, for him- a hunger after the things of the soul. (50)

In a similar way, Head in *Maru* virtually exegesis the blurred lines between mysticism and madness when the she says of the character Maru:

> Only Maru knew the answers. He paused awhile and looked towards the low horizon where the storm brooded. The thorn trees turned black in the darkening light and a sudden breeze stirred the parched, white grass. There was so little to disturb his heart in his immediate environment. It was here where he could communicate freely with all the magic and beauty inside him…. People were horrible to him because they imagined that their thoughts and deeds were concealed when he could see and hear everything, even their bloodstreams and the beating of their hearts. If they knew all that he knew, would they not have torn him to shreds sometime ago, to keep the world the way it was where secrets and evil bore the same names? (45)

Maru's sense of the cyclical nature of things conforms to his mystical awareness of the self as inordinate and bound to the environment in which it is found. Head's projection of a synergy between a meaningful life and the environment is thus an insightful discourse on man's rootedness in nature. For example Tumbale in *A Bewitched*

*Crossroad* and Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* respectively are believed to have madness that is genetic and hereditary. This is a myth which modern science is yet to prove as either right or wrong but which some mystics believe to be true. "Then something happened to Mambo that caused rumours of doom and impending disaster to spread throughout the land. He appeared to have produced a son and heir who was insane Vanambo Tumbale" (115).Vanambo's insanity is perceived as inherited and thus ascribed genetic tangibility – the phrase "a son and heir who was insane" rather than "a son and heir who became insane" is indicative of this. Head ventilates her direction further through this statement by the un-named principal in *Maru* who tells Margaret:

> We have a full docket on you. You must be very careful. Your mother was insane. If you're not careful you'll get insane just like your mother. Your mother was a white woman. They had to lock her up, as she was having a child by the stable boy, who was a native. (65)

The underlying import of this statement is that Margaret had a high chance of becoming insane because her mother was insane. Thus, madness enveloped in a myth is presented as hereditary by the principal. Head, in a similar way, uses materials from "the current or recent history and their links with patterns in the past" to explore in *A Bewitched Crossroad* the uniqueness of each character's experiences and how it detracts from or contributes to social harmony along the lines of the society's own mythological base and mystical beliefs. Head in the above quotation links insanity to race or color, in doing this she raises questions that border on whether or not the myth of racial superiority; white as superior to black, as in the case of Elizabeth's mother in *A Question of Power* or black against black as in the case of Margaret Cadmore in *Maru* is tenable. Head shows that Elizabeth's mother's insanity is a function of her daring to cross the

frontiers of her race to embrace another thus breaching laid down societal guidelines for relationships and thereby incurring sanctions. The perfect culmination of myth, madness and mysticism is found in this statement in *A Question of Power* "I might have died before I found this freedom of heart. ... to him –love was freedom of heart"(66)

From the fore-going, this study establishes that Head's discourse of mysticism, madness and mythology are intertextually woven together. In the reminder of this chapter, this study presents examples of how Head utilizes myths to exegete madness and mysticism within the corpus of her writing.

There can be little debate that literally, everything in South Africa revolves around the subject of race. This idea of racial ideology for more than 350 years remains the most emotive and salient tension in contemporary South African culture and society, and has been a dominate force in Southern African life in general. In this study, the words racism and racialism are used slightly different from its western dictated meaning. For the purpose of this study, racism will mean a belief in the superiority of one's own race, while racialism is used to mean an implied belief in the superiority of one's own group within a race. Another word that is used in this section interchangeably with racialism is tribalism; this is because tribalism is the inherent cause of racial differentiation among groups within a race.

However, rather than getting lost in the ideological debate of which race is superior to the other, Head utilizes this tension as a tool through which she propounds her universal thesis of oppression. She is able to show that the idea of inferiority or superiority is an entrenched myth. This way, she deconstructs in her the characters the type of oppression that they experience in their societies and consequently in their mind.

Racialism and or racism are an ideology that is oiled by oppression. Consequently, Head questions distinctions made on the basis of a person's skin colour or origin; a distinction which determines either the privileges or subjugation which the individual would receive. Head's characters; Margaret Cadmore in *Maru*, Elizabeth in *A Question of Power*, Makhaya in *When Rain Clouds Gather* and Shaka in *A Bewitched Crossroads* experience 'first conquest, then abhorrence at the looks of the conquered and, from there onwards, all forms of horror and evil practices.' (77)

> How universal was the language of oppression! They had said of the Marsawa what every white man had said of the black man: they can't think for themselves. They don't know anything.' The matter never rested there . The stronger man caught hold of the weaker man and made a circus animal out of him, reducing him to the state of misery and subjection and non- humanity. (88)

In the above passage, Head's shows that oppression is colour blind. She questions the rationale behind a black man discriminating against another black man, when they both experience the same oppression from the white man who considers himself superior to them. Through this kind of headlong confrontation with the myth of racial superiority, Head provides a foundation for the prognosis that leads to the emancipation of Margaret in *Maru,* the madness of Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* and the eventual self-discovery of Paulina in *When Rain Clouds Gather*. Head shows in the passage below that classes are socially rather than racially constructed. She says:

> And if the Whiteman thought that Asians were a low, filthy nation, Asians could still smile with relief –at least, they were not Africans. And if the white man thought African s were a low , filthy nation, Africans in Southern Africa could still smile – at least , they were not Bushmen. (11)

The insinuation, by other ethnic Botswanians that the Marsawas were an inferior race, dictated their actions towards them. The violence on the psyche of the Marsawa people from the psychological to the physical continuum," is exemplified in the experiences of Margaret. The state of alienation that violence tends to create also inadvertently lead to self-withdrawal as evidenced in Margaret. Consequently, Head introspects into her characters to reveal the veins of madness that result from outright racial violence. Racism and tribalism, Head shows is a great hindrance to socio- economic development and social integration in any society – Gilbert understands this much as he pondered over Makhaya's statements on their first meeting in *When Rain Clouds Gather*:

> ..he needed more than anything someone with the necessary mental and emotional alienation from tribalism to help him accomplish what he had in mind... (89)

subsequently, the attempt of the local chiefs, in the poverty- stricken village of Golema Mmidi, to deter Gilbert (the English agricultural expert) and the villagers from upgrading their traditional farming methods with modern techniques is due to this affinity to tribalism. In Dilepe village, where wealth is hoarded and resources distributed inefficiently, racialism thus creates a subordinate caste, a situation which gravely affects agriculture and its output.

Through the activity that goes on in Maru's mind, Head presents the difficulty that a royalty regarded as a totem by his people face as he picks a wife from the lower class and the fear which his choice foists on him. The totemic relationships in *Maru* and *A Bewitched Crossroad* thus, become instruments of class differentiation where individuals regarded as totems in the society were also the clan elders responsible for upholding the

ethos of the clan; examples include Pete, Morafi, Seth, Maru, Moleka, and Dikeledi in *Maru*. Totems in many African and Asian, Native American, and Aboriginal Australian cultures were often seen as a companion and helper with supernatural powers. Thus totemism ascribes divinity to things, to persons and places and consequently shrouds them with mystical powers, graces and clothes. In Head's discourse, in *A Question of Power, Maru , When Rain Clouds Gather and A Bewitched Crossroads*, the issue of race and the caste system occupies a central place. Elizabeth is subjected to all forms of sexual cannibalization by Sello and Dan in *A Question of Power,* simply because she is considered an inferior- by reason of her sex and mixed parentage "He, the king of women had condescended to associate with low trash – and how subtly he always conveyed her inferiority to her in ways like this" (51) she was thus expected to consider her relationship with them as a favour.

Head shows that racial superiority or inferiority is mythic in many dimensions and attempts to enforce it, either at an individual level as in *A Question of Power* and *Maru* or on a communal level as in *When Rain Cloud Gather* and *A Bewitched Crossroads* would result in madness. That a divinity was associated with Maru and that a divine source preserved his life in the midst of foes and thick treachery is a mystical dimension which Head adds to her narrative in *Maru* to draw a line between ordinary men and those men (totems) to whose destinies the tribes was tied.

In positioning Maru for a predilection towards Margaret (the Marwasa), Head sought to achieve a prejudice free world. Thus, her novels hold significance for Africa and the entire world because it x-rays the man-made division of man into higher and lower classes. Head asserts that man can only attain a measure of unity through

acceptance of one another and on the basis of equality of races and peoples. In Head's perception, what differentiates one man from another are what we know, what we choose to do, what we do and how and if we are allowed so to do. The passage below supports the assertions above:

> That very afternoon people were looking at each other with shock. They said: 'did you hear? The new mistress says she is a Masarwa.' By evening they began to laugh: 'the eye is a deceitful thing.' They said. 'If a Marsawa combs his hair and wears modern dress, he looks just like a Coloured. There is no difference.' Those with children at Leseding School debated the matter. They were trying to accustom their hearts to their children being taught by a Marsawa. They said: prejudice is like the old skin of a snake. It has to be removed bit by bit. (62)

Man's oneness across race, religion, colour or nationality is luxuriantly explained in this simple statement:

> She pointed to Elizabeth's right hand. 'What's that?' in it was a pale blue rosette. It was made of warm satin material and had two streamers. Elizabeth said: 'it's the prize I have to earn in this life . It is symbolic of the brotherhood of man. (82)

In the above passages from *A Question of Power, Head asserts that* people are first humans before they are races or males or females. In taking this position, she alienates herself from South African literatures' obsession with colour but rather concentrates says Ogungbesan (1979) on the sufferings caused by alienation and the impulses that make it difficult for the exile to settle unnoticed. Men often withdraw into their shell of loneliness and become alienated from general society not only when they fight a losing battle with nature, poverty and oppression but also when they seem to be winning. Rural Africa inspite of its communal identity - still has individuals within it who are intensely

alienated. This general pre-occupation with alienation runs through the works of Bessie Head.

Consequently opinions about race and class especially in *Maru* and *A Question of Power,* where the issues of colour and identity are prominent, is subsumed to this very myth of racism and racialism. Head questions the notion that an individual's skin colour is germane for determining their humanity. The disclosure to Elizabeth's of her racial identity "Your mother was a white woman. They had to lock her up, as she was having a child by the stable boy, who was a native" (51), at the beginning of the novel, was meant Head implies to serve two purposes; the first is to dampen Elizabeth's confidence that her ability was race-defined and the second was to deepen the myth that white was superior to black and that being an in-between was worse because such an in-between (mixed raced) receive neither solidarity nor help from either the white or black race. Thus, in *A Question of Power,* we have two powerful blocks of races; the white race (as the oppressor race in the position of power) and the black race (as the oppressed race in a state of subjugation). The third type of race, the mixed race is a hybrid race which is in a completely ambivalent position of nil acceptances by both powerful blocks but which the white race often try to categorize as belonging to the black race. While the relationship between black and white groups can properly be referred to as racism within the context of the novel, the relationship between the two races to the mixed race here within the same context can succinctly be referred to as racialism. *A Question of Power, c*onsequently is concerned more with racism than it is with racialism, because within it's matrix racism is precisely what gives room for racialism. The tenors of this exchange however differ slightly in *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *Maru* where racialism is a much more highlighted subject than racism. In *When Rain Clouds Gather* all the major characters with the exception of

Gilbert and George Appleby-Smith are black; Makhaya, Dinorego, Pauline , Maria , Matenge , Chief Sekoto, and Mma – Millipede. The race differential (white –black divide) which Makhaya experiences in South Africa before his eventual escape to Botswana is highly blurred in his new home as he gets along quiet easily with both Gilbert as well as George Appleby-Smith who are both whites. In addition, it is evident that the greatest hindrance to development in *When Rain Clouds Gather* is not the white man but the black man who considers other blackmen as inferior. It was a situation where the "Sons of chiefs" ruled the "sons of slaves".

In creating a character like Matenge in *When Rain Clouds Gather,* Head sought to squarely blame the underdevelopment of Africa on myths that have designated certain peoples within the same race as inferior and therefore only worthy to be slaves to those considered superior within that same race. This designation is then often ascribed to a pre-existing divine order which must not be controverted, diluted or overthrown and which has direct mystical consequences for anyone attempting to do otherwise. Perhaps, it is this directional endeavour that found the title *When Rain Clouds Gather* for Head's narrative in this case. By bringing together, in *When Rain Clouds Gather,* Makhaya, Gilbert, Dinorego , Pauline and Mma – Millipede to work in the agricultural project , and at the other Spectrum have Matenge and his like oppose every of their move for emancipation and liberation, Head sought to crack the myth behind the existing social order. Matenge's eventual death is symbolic of the crack Head seeks in the racial myth which signals the beginning of a societal re-ordering in line with the reality of the people's lives. That the collective mystical choice of the majority of the people to break ranks with the past and chart a new course for the future, could not be subverted by the mystical will of an individual or a small group of spoiled and exploitative people is significant to Head's

endeavour to re-order the myth foisted on the people with a new one that provides ample room and opportunity for societal growth and advancement. The suicide of Matenge is a product of the madness that certain individuals suffer when they seek to preserve myths against the onslaught of the wheels of progress advancing against it. The answer to where the people of Golema Mmidi found the courage to confront without speaking a word the wheels of retrogression with the wheels of progress is the hope of emancipation that the agricultural practices introduced by Gilbert provided for them. In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, Head shows that myths rather than being a prison- house to hold large segments of the society captive, can actually if confronted become an instrument for societal progression, for the demise of one myth would naturally lead to the emergence of another.

In *Maru*, *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *A Bewitched Crossroad,* Head further articulates her concern with the attitudes of blacks to blacks especially as it relates to the idea of superior and inferior races within the black race by mirroring relationshps within the texts. She shows that while the confrontation in *When Rain Clouds Gather* happens as a group or class action by the oppressed group against the oppressor, emancipation in *Maru* for Margaret (the Marsawa) is individual and is a combination of three factors ; her refusal from the beginning to subscribe to the idea that she was inferior to anyone else and thus, hide her identity, the friendship that Dikeledi offered her and Maru's unheard of decision to subvert the myth of the superior race and commit class suicide by eventually falling in love with and marrying Margaret against the dictates of his totemic position.

Head manipulates her narrative to ensure that Maru eventually is the person who gets to tie the nuptial knot with Margaret for two basic reasons; the first is that Dikeledi was Maru's sister and off-course taboos and tradition forbids that they have any form of

sexual relations, the other is that Maru was not only more subtle about his intentions towards Margaret but that he also possessed mystical powers which Moleka did not have. The context of the relationships in *When Rain Clouds Gather* therefore would yield an incontrovertible conclusion; that to love the unlovable requires an individual to go beyond the myth that created the divide between him and the object of his love through an act of tangible sacrifice like that of Maru's class suicide which within the context of Head's creative purview is simply madness.

Closely related to the myth of race and racism is the theme of love which Head largely subsumes. Two types of love can be said to be at play here: one is a mystical kind of love, which involves a fusion of souls like the type between Maru and Margaret, Makhaya and Paulina and Gilbert and Maria. The other is a type of physical love that is defined by sex, sexuality and sensuality like that between Moleka and Dikeledi and that between Elizabeth and Sello / Dan. In the first type of love there is mutuality between the individuals involved while in the second type of love there is an exploitation of one party by the other. For example Dan's sex maniacness is portrayed in "his pants down as usual, flaying his powerful penis in the air", sex for Dan is thus an adventure in madness purgation. Consequently, the need to deepen relationships in the first type of love creates a mystical consciousness of the same and enhances the capacity of the individuals to make their relationships work inspite of differences in race or class or origin. In the second type of love, the need to be free from the oppression of one party by the other is a strong and prevailing desire which actualized lead to the liberation of the soul or to madness if actualization fails. In *A Bewitched Crossroad* , many of the characters were brought up unloved and this conditioned their life's view and attitude to others, a character like Shaka for instance saw the exhibition of love as a weakness. So while

Shaka was the incarnation of hatred, Khamma III is counterpoised with him as an epitome of love. Through this narrative pattern, Head affirms her belief that where there is hate, there could also be love.

The theme of love is very germane to issues of mythology, mysticism and madness in Head's novels. The desire to love and be loved whether by other persons or divine entities such as Buddha or even the Christian 'God' is often truncated by individual and group resort to myths and mystical pasts that asserts their superiority over their victims. The attempt to assert this "God" and history given right over others, of a necessity pushes them or their victims into the cauldron of madness; this is evident in Elizabeth in *A Question of Power*, in Shaka in *A Bewitched Crossroad,* in Margaret in *Maru* and in Paulina and Maria in *When Rain Clouds Gather*. In an attempt to equate Head's novels to that of female European novelists Rigney (1980) argues that:

> Head accomplishes these by throwing her characters down into the purgative cauldron of madness. Psychic conflict resolution is a violently maddening process. The approaches to it are varied. Head's female characters; Elizabeth, Margaret, Paulina, Maria and others, contrast favorably to those in the novel of Atwood, Eyre, Woolf or Bronte. The characters in the writings of these European novelists are psychologically crippled, disinherited and culturally bereft because they have been denied the love of strong figures of their own sex and "tribe". What each of the protagonist discover is that they must find a mother figure, within the self, and so begin the return from psychosis. Heads characters on the other hand are already aligned with strong mother figure influences that contribute to their psychosis and whose influence must be purged to return from psychosis (11-12).

However, Rigneys thesis is wrong in the assumption that Head's female characters search for love was contingent on finding a mother figure. The fact remains that their desire for love was largely heterosexual and their truncation into lesbianism or homosexuality is

due to their failure to find suitable partners from the opposite sex. In traditional African societies, those who practice same-sex relationships are considered mad. Nevertheless these acts are still being practiced by certain individuals or groups who view it as a mystical route to attaining certain spiritual powers. Love is a mystical experience, just like trance or astral travel and this is well elucidated by Sello in *A Question of Power* when he says that "love is two people mutually feeding each other, not one living on the soul of the other, like a ghoul". Head in *Maru* extrapolates her discourse on love through a presentation of Maru's contemplative mood when she says:

> He brooded over this. Perhaps he had seriously miscalculated Moleka's power, that Moleka possessed some superior quality over which he had little control.. Was it a superior kind of love? Or was it a superior kind of power? He'd trust the love but not the power because power could parade as anything. He'd weep too, if he really believed that Moleka had a greater love than his own. what his heart said was that Moleka had a greater power than he had , and he felt no remorse at what he had done to the only person he loved as he loved his wife.(10)

That the search for love as shown above is behind the patriarchal oppression of women by men is as significant for this study as the fact that the women also seek for love and thus submit largely to the oppressor (or oppression). However, Head submits that realizing how ephemeral and intangible love and its practices are is crucial to understanding why individuals are truncated into isolation, alienation and eventually madness when they do not find it.

> - 'perhaps I shall knock at the door and introduce myself formally: ' I have just come to see if you are comfortable . If you have not enough money to purchase a bed , I can always arrange a loan.'Then I shall walk away,' he thought. But then the thought of even talking to her created such a turmoil in his mind, such roar in his heart that he stopped for a while and stared at the pitch dark night to regain his composure. (77)

Head excuses male sexual bestiality in *Maru* and *A Question of Power*, as well as in *A Bewitched Crossroads* and *When Rain Clouds Gather* by providing their acts with a mystical cover. In *Maru*, this cover is visibly countenanced by Head in this comment:

> Moleka and Women were like a volcano explosion in a dark tunnel. Moleka was the only one to emerge, on each occasion, unhurt, smiling. It was different with Maru at the end of a love affair; a deep sorrow would fill his eyes. he often took to his bed with some indefinable ailment. (35)

The above passage indicates that Moleka never falls in love with his women and his relationship is therefore one-sided. Maru on the other hand usually hands out a part of his soul in a relationship. What differentiates these two men is not the sexual fun and sordid acts which they both engage in to satisfy their individual sexual urge but rather their "after-attitude", when they have humbled their victims. It is this "after-attitude" that eventually determines the state of their victims whom Head described as displaying "alarming symptoms". Moleka's after attitude was that of a victor while for Maru, it was a sense of self defeat that follows the satisfaction of his sexual incontinence. The reasons for the differences in "after- attitudes" lie in the nature of these two individuals. While moleka seems to be inherently evil with personal designs to achieve his aims, Maru on the other hand is a battle ground for the forces of good and evil.

> He associated these things with the beauty in his own heart, only to find that a tender smile and a scheming mind went hand in hand, a beautiful voice turned into a dominating viper who confused the inner maru, who was a king of heaven, with the outer maru and his earthly position of a future paramount chief of a tribe.(49)

In the above statement, Maru is torn between who he is, whom he loves and who the society expects him to be and love. This contradiction between the self and the other makes the nature of man unpredictable. It is this inherent continuum of battle in the mind of Maru which modulates his predisposition to love and canonizes him as one with mystic capacities. Head shows that everyone responds positively to love "The women whom Maru made love to were highly envied" and negatively when rejected "People said:" oh and when is the marriage to take place? A month or so later the girl would flee the village or become insane" (45)

Whether it is true that Maru possessed mystical powers or it is the myth built around Maru that seems to imbue his personality with mystical powers and definitely mandates that events around him be interpreted as such is debatable. However, If this is so, it would then follow that the insanity of the girls he slept with were not necessarily a result of sleeping with Maru but rather the result of a felt mental and physical sense of rejection after being used as it were by Maru. Head shows that because Maru's lovers on rejection become insane, his prowess gradually becomes protected and enhanced by the attachment of a myth label to it. Maru's women go insane because "Maru always fell in love with his women – he'd choose them with great care and patience …." Not so with Moleka –no wonder to Moleka's "nothing will ever separate us my friend, we shall love each other" Maru replies "one day we will part, over a woman". (78) Love , Head implies is everything. Every woman strives to be loved. Indeed, it is also the vehicle through which many of the women experience their bouts of madness. In shedding light on how Mma –Millipede apprehends love relationships, Head says:

> Over the years, Mma- Millipede had traced two distinct relationships women had with men in her country. The one was a purely

> physical relationship. It caused no mental breakdown and was free and casual, each woman having six seven lovers, including a husband as well. ... it could lead to mental breakdown and suicide on the part of the woman, because , on the one hand , it assumed that the man was worthy of adoration, while in reality he was full of shocks and disappointment …. (100)

Mma –Millipede, in this passage categorizes the "relationship women had with men" into two; physical and mystical. It is the latter which pushes the women into madness. Moleka's relationship with women epitomized Mma – Millipede's first type of love. Dikeledi's initially unrequited love for Moleka epitomized the "more serious and rare" type of love. Through an exegesis of the love dimension in Head's novels, the reader receives a mystical flight because as this study asserts myth provides the wings for "who else made a god overnight but a goddess?" Head in the statement above shows that love is powerful because it transcends human hatreds, social codes and values etc and must never be narrowed to the satisfaction of self alone.

> - He kept silent a while. He was almost tempted to expose Moleka and the real cause of his sudden suicide from Moleka the savage to Moleka the god. Who else made a god overnight but a goddess? If there was one thing that would kill Dikeledi, it would be to know who had found the heart of Moleka and that she had had no key to open the steel doors of his kingdom. There was a world apart from petty human hatreds and petty human social codes and values where the human soul roamed free in all it's splendor and glory. No barriers of race or creed or tribe hindered its activity. He had seen majestic kings of the soul, walking in the ragged clothes of filthy beggars. He could bring this home forcefully to her but the truth would destroy her and he needed her alive and stupid for his future plans. He hesitated, with pain in his eyes. Always , at a push , he told a half truth , or an outright lie .perhaps Moleka would give her the kind of shaking up to make her rise beyond a narrow view of love.(67)

The third category of love which Head highlights is the love of man for God or god-beings or any entity that holds supernatural or divine powers. This type of love is

manifest in religion(s) and in the adherence of individuals to the teaching it offers as a token of their love. These religious experiences while intangible to the non- believer in the sense that a physical dimension cannot be attached to it is in other respects quite tangible to those who practice them.. Consequently, in discussing this type of love in her works, Head punctures the myth that individuals can only attain unity in their minds if they subject themselves to an external god being or figure. Querying the western concept of God, a Head question it's perception of what it implies to achieve unity with the divine and she suggests that the western God is alien to the African mind which therefore cannot gauge him. She insists that Africa with its multiplicity of God's cannot be shoved into a forceful and undignified acceptance of a single God as divine and thereby required to seek to attain unity with it. Religion "for that is how Elizabeth's Christianity in *A Question of Power* is seen, is a killing business. Head puts it this way:

> it was an expression of a people who had been killed and killed and killed again in one cause after another for the liberation of mankind. She thought at that time: why, an absolute title has been shared. There are several thousand people who are God's ( 31)

On the other hand, Hinduism held some attraction for Bessie Head, Eilersen (1995) comments on this thus:

> Several aspects of the Gandhi story inspired Bessie…. Ghandi himself was both of the world, an astute political bargainer, yet not of it. But what amazed her most was the realization that this great Hindu also believed in Allah and Christ and was admired by both Muslims and Christians for his teachings. This illustrates the inclusive nature of Hinduism as opposed to Christianity's exclusiveness. (34)

Eilersen (op cit) in approximating Head's relationship with Hinduism Vis a Vis Christianity uses the word inclusive and exclusive as though they are terms in a state of

permanent opposition to one another. Her use of these words thus raises questions about whether Head believed that there is one way to God even if that one way was Hinduism. The answer clearly would be a resounding no. This then produces a fault line in Eilersen's portrayal of Head, because if the answer to the earlier question above were to be yes, Hinduism would then become an exclusive religion itself just like Christianity. That Head is unable to find attractive enough a divine being that commands her absolute loyalty – a fact clearly brought out in her characterization, tallies with this study's earlier assertion in chapter one that Head was more concerned about the individuals potential to attain divinity, a potential which is latent in every man but which only few ever actualize. It is this potential that this thesis believes provokes Head's affinity for Gandhi as well as the Hindi religion.

By approaching the subject of mysticism this way in A *Question of Power* and *Maru,* Head redefines the concept as the capacity to achieve unity within without any conjunction with forces outside of the person. However in the long run individuals who achieve unity within can then achieve unity without with those of like experience. Through this kind of redefinition Head transposes the suffering of an individual as symptomatic of the suffering of a community and its peoples:

> The poor of India had seen that Sello was also their Krishna and Rama, would they have told him to take off his vesture garments and become the same as everyone else? (71)

The passage above asserts the Buddhist belief that primarily at the soul level all men are equal, an idea that resonates with Head. Subscribing to several aspect of Buddhist philosophy and yet diverging from it at very crucial points of final affirmation. Head makes a commentary that can be simply put in this way; men make gods, gods don't make

men, for gods are men; live like men, can fall and do die. Head's success in redefining mysticism is made possible simply because in the mad state boundaries disappear and myths become exposed, emphasized, deepened or debunked depending on the mystic quality of what is beheld and how it is beheld. Head believes Christian mysticism robs a man of his personality. In giving vent to her apprehension, Head approaches and discusses mythology, mysticism and madness through a systematic use of the metaphor of sex and religion as a killing business, a business thriving more on evil than good.

Madness in *A Question of Power* is manifest in Elizabeth's mental breakdown for which she's placed on prescriptions. However, the cure for her madness is not the drugs but a discovery of a different paradigm of experience as symbolized in Sello; the dimension of love. In *A Bewitched Crossroad,* Hepburn's mental breakdown though attributed to "bouts of malaria fever which unknown to him had affected his brain" is another instance of Head's portrayal of insanity. However, Hepburn's madness is a result of his poor response to societal realignment and the social stress it often produces. Head shows that the manner of Hepburn's mental breakdown points to this:

> Hepburn became ill but in a complicated way. The nights were torture for him with a pain in the head and ugly fever dreams; by day he was irritable, short tempered and quarrelsome. Strangely, his illness vented itself against Khama with whom he had a close friendly relationship for twenty years. Hepburn making irrational demands and behaving in an irrational way.(177)

Madness, the above passage shows manifest in a person's incapacity to keep and nurture friendships as much as it does in producing physical symptoms of illness. When religion for Hepburn became an obsession it also turned to insanity. The climate of madness is so prevalent in *A Bewitched Crossroad* that many characters are caught in its web. Cecil Rhodes' response to black rebellion for instance, is filled only with a

pathological hatred of blacks and a deep sadistic disposition towards them. "You should kill all you can", he advised the officers, and “it serves as a lesson to them when they talk things over at night". (117) Rhodes' madness is traceable to an indiscreet racism, which despises blacks, their culture, beliefs, dignity and land, and sees them as mere objects for use by the white man. When this conception is ‘pretendedly’ punctured by other white men not necessarily because they thought otherwise from Rhodes but rather out of other amalgamated and superior interest, Rhodes becomes berserk and loses all sensibility, he is drawn and transported into his final abode, the sea of madness. In *A Bewitched Crossroad,* Head’s main thesis is that an imposition by one race of their god’s and concepts of worship on another was nothing more than an extension of racism built on the mythic foundation that whites were superior to blacks and she insists that this mythic foundation had a capacity to truncate individuals into either madness or other variants of mystical experiences or journey’s.

Madness in *A Bewitched Crossroad* and *When Rain Clouds Gather is* presented as a response to social disjointedness. In *Maru* and *A Question of Power* on the other hand, Madness is a response to individual disjointedness due to unrelenting social pressures, religion inclusive. Remarkably, however the characters of madness in Bessie Head’s novels are united by their condition which allows room for social, societal and individual regeneration. Madness as clearly designed by Head therefore must lead to social rebirth, whether for the individual or society. In Heads writings, madness thus plays out at two levels; the individual levels and at the societal level. Kofoworola (1998) categorizes *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *A Bewitched Crossroad: An African Saga as* belonging to the social level of Head's concern with madness while *Maru* and *A Question of Power* belong to the individual level. However this study of Bessie Head’s novels emphasises that

understanding the mythology that underline her works can be the lead to understanding essential strands that holds the manifestations of madness together; it suggests that the way a particular culture has developed a history of what constitutes madness can define actions of individuals and societies thousands of years after.

In a world where sanity is society-defined, Elizabeth's adventure in "testing her sanity against theirs" (15) is an attempt to question the sanity of society itself. In direct references to Hindu mysticism, Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* queries the very idea of the concept of God, as the being, the entity to which unity must be attained in a divine sense

> Of-course you can, he'd said. He was a young IVS volunteer from England. He was not African, but an argument had been worked out in Elizabeth's mind, in an entirely African way. Perhaps in India they would have started the argument from superman and his accompaniment of prophecies. Nothing else need be said. In fact, they might even be hostile to any criticisms of their Gods or supermen. If there had been a Sello in India, would the poor of India have the courage to challenge him? Types of Sello were always Brahmans or Rama there.(91)

Head shows in the above passage, that the thought process as well as origin of an individual can affect the individual's perception of God. Head's restlessness of mind and spirit is immediately a raison de 'etre for her involvement in religion and philosophy. The search for something to fill an obviously apparent emotional vacuum, naturally result in deep mystical longings. The interesting thing is that religion and philosophies know neither boundaries nor limitations. And it is this strivings for unity with a divine, which provide the platform for the relationship that Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* has with Sello:

> She married a gangster just out of jail. He said he had thought deeply about life while in prison. What really made her talk to him was that he said he interested in Buddhism and she knew a little about it from her friendship with Asian people. It seemed perfectly all right, a week later, to marry someone interested in philosophies, especially those of India (63)

Head suggests in the above passage, that people can be drawn to each other inspite of differences in social backgrounds when they have religious affinity. However, the "madness" of this impulsive act of marriage to a stranger is brought out succinctly by a "next-door neighbor" with this comment:

> You have a strange husband. Susie was standing outside the door and called out to him. He walked straight in and they went to bed. He's been doing this nearly every day now with Susie (19)

Religion alone, the statement above indicates is not enough to embrace a stranger in marriage because what some people do rarely matches up with the philosophies of the religion to which they subscribe. This is similar to what happens in *Maru* where the eventual marriage of Maru to Elizabeth Cadmore is considered a form of madness by his people. Thus for the ordinary man in *Maru* madness is simply the crossing of seemingly established intractable social barriers.

Furthermore, the myth that a man is superior to a woman and thus, entitled to dominate her remains largely unchallenged. It remains subdued because the myth of female inferiority and weakness has accommodated the male myth over time. This is why in Africa; a male child is more regarded than a female child. Head contributes to this discourse by favoring her female characters to be main characters, especially in *A Question of Power, when Rain Clouds Gather* and *Maru*, and thus builds her stories largely around them. Her female characters feeling of loneliness, frustration and helplessness serves as their response to the perversity of this male myth as well as provide

an existential insight into their lives of torture and torment, and why ultimately they become mad or engage in mysticism. As a counterpoise to all the destructive energies of male power seen in her novels, Head in *Maru* according to Goddard (2000) depicts " Margaret's movement from the 'non-human' to the supernal in her ultimate goddess-like stature balances Maru's god –like powers".(73)

In her attempt to straddle and then distinguish the boundary between male superiority and female inferiority, Bessie Head engages the concept of the mythopoetic sex, that is, sex as an end in itself. Devoid of any form of mutuality in the act itself, mythopoetic sex is a form of exploitation where the strong took advantage of the weak and coerced them into sordid sex acts. "They all know what he's really after .it's got nothing to do with prophecies it's just sex. They all know him. They all know what he's like"(130) In *A Question of Power* characters such as Miss Sewing Machine , Madame Make-Love-On-The-Floor, The Sugar Plum Fairy , Madame Squelch-Squelch, Madame Loose- Bottom etc, are symbolic of this kind of sexual activity. Since mythopoetic sex takes place principally in the mind men who in the real physical world would not even look at her – had sex with her in her dreams. Consequently, Head presents sex as an instrument of male dominance. Head describes a scene where a male character in A *Question of Power* engages in "a demonstration of sexual stamina with five local women, this time with lights on…" (148). The sexual act thus becomes for the female a sordid act, carried out with lesser than life personalities and a means for the male character to avail himself of purgation from his own mental troubles while inflicting same on the women. The myth of male superiority manifest in different forms- one of it is in the way and manner women were perceived as sex objects by the men and as instruments' of sexual gratification.

Head portrays the women – Miss Pelican Beak, Miss Chopper, Miss Pink Sugar – Icing, Madame Make-Love-On-The-Floor, The Sugar Plum Fairy, Madame Squelch-Squelch and Madame Loose- Bottom as both victims and facilitator's of their own sexual oppression, an action which is tantamount to madness. Thus, sex remains a veritable means of maintaining sanity. Maru's women go insane because "Maru always fell in love with his women – he'd choose them with great care and patience …." (27) Not so with Moleka – and so to Moleka,s "nothing will ever separate us my friend we shall love each other" Maru replies "one day we will part, over a woman" (37) Head asserts throughout her works especially in *A Question of Power* and *Maru* that Africa suffers from two defects ; the African man's loose, carefree sexuality predicated on having sex with reckless abandon and witchcraft practices. This combination she argues can result in madness at both individual and societal levels. The first social defect accounts for both heterosexuality and homosexuality. It creates an atmosphere where individuals' propensity and burning desire for sex crosses within and without genders. The second social defect accounts for the atmosphere of oppressive fear that puts individuals under "sustained pressure of mental torture and reduces its victim to a state of permanent terror" (137). Built in to the second defect is a desire to build a mystical defense shield around the self which complicates the mad state of the individual and assures that a mythological conveyance belt is provided to sustain both the first and second defects and provides a mythological balance anchored on the proposition that a sexual man has a god- given right to sex. Thus she insinuates that most men are:

> The sort of man who, in buses and cinema queues, pressed himself against a woman, and when a woman turned around and said: "you shouldn't do that , an uncomprehending smirk that said : 'But don't you like it? That's all I do. That's all I know. My whole life is a pissing vehicle. You're like that too. You're just pretending.(44)

For both Dan and Sello, Elizabeth is thus an object of sexual satisfaction; her usefulness', ends when she's no longer required for her sexual activity. In *A Question of Power*, *Maru* and *When Rain Clouds Gather,* this plays to the myth that women are subject to men and men have the authority over women, their sexuality inclusive. It is the grandiose acceptance of this myth that creates a mystic cloud around the powers of the male sexuality and it's exertion against the female characters that are seemingly defenseless against these "thunderbolts".(140) The eminence of the myth of male superiority and dominance vis-a-vis that of female inferiority and weakness is easily supported by Makhaya's assertion in *When Rain Clouds Gather* that ancestral tribal belief is "that a man was nothing more than a groveling sex organ, … that no ordinary man would hesitate to jump on a mere child". (33) His statement is supported by the old woman hag when she says "I have not yet known a man who did not regard a woman as a gift from God! He must be mad!" (Op-cit) The assumptions of male superiority, by the men and the acceptance of female inferiority by the women thus have consequences not just for the characters and their development but for their society as well.

Also, very significant especially in *Maru* and *When Rain Clouds Gather* is the totems of the ruling group within the race. In the totems, male superiority and race coalesce into pushing the female characters to madness and mysticism. The conversation between Paulina and her unnamed daughter in *When Rain Clouds Gather* is similar to that between the old woman hag and her ward in the same text and subscribes to Eko Ebele's (1986) argument that the myth of black mother-daughter confrontations camouflages deep-seated frustrations associated with racial and sexual oppression. But much more than that, Head in her novels sets out to puncture the myth of male superiority of which she is critical by portraying her men as profane; examples include Sello and Dan in *A Question*

*of Power;* Maru and Moleka in *Maru;* Matenge and Gilbert in *When Rain Clouds Gather;* Shaka and Cecil Rhodes in *A Bewitched Crossroad.* Head's headlong confrontation with this myth provides the foundation for the prognosis that leads to the emancipation of Margaret in *Maru* and the madness of Elizabeth in *A Question of Power.* It is also responsible for the eventual self-discovery of Paulina in *When Rain Clouds Gather.* Makhaya's experience at the border during his flight from South Africa exposes him to the perception of women about themselves. In addition, the old woman hag's surprise that Makhaya gives her grand-daughter a gift without demanding for sex for it, helps us understand how the women perceive themselves. She says.

> You mean he gave you the money for nothing?" she said beside herself with excitement. "This is a miracle! I have not yet known a man who did not regard a woman as a gift from God! He must be mad! I knew it all along in my heart that he was mad let us lock the door to protect ourselves from the madman! (35)

The above passage fits into Head's relentless thesis that women were not entirely innocent in engendering situations or circumstances that led to their treatment as sex objects. Makhaya's comment on the belief that men were superior to women is debunked in a deft stylistic move by Head when she uses Makhaya, a male to query "why … men be brought up with a false sense of superiority over women?" Makhaya concludes by suggesting that any man or woman should be respected "only if I earn it" rather than on account of gender. (16). Makhaya's question above is significant in several respect; firstly it shows that the patriarchal systems was based purely on a myth , secondly by using a male character to make this statement Head simply can no longer be categorized as a feminist.

In portraying Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* and Margaret in *Maru* as the character before whom lies the choice between one (Sello/Maru) and the other (Dan/Moleka), Head sufficiently captures the inner conflict that characterize these women when over powered by dominant powerful personalities. The end result of the catharsis of the inner conflict Elizabeth and Margaret experience enable them to delineate between evil and good and then make choices. Through Elizabeth's interaction with Kenosi, the reader experiences the camaraderie of suffering that women go through; both had no husbands and were lonely and each had a child to provide for, yet they worked on a volunteer job basis that offered no remunerations. It is not quite surprising therefore that the instability and attendant poverty in the lives of the mothers plays out in the lives of their children. In Paulina's case in *When Rain Cloud Gather*, it led to the loss of her only son. In *A Question of Power* both Medusa and Madonna are females but are defined first and foremost by their sexual status and orientations, while Medusa was completely deflowered and a cesspit of sex, Madonna was the symbol of sexual purity. While one had inordinate sexual drives, the other had no drives sexually at all.

> And even this mockery. It was abnormally constructed , like seven thousand vagina's in one , turned on and operating at white heat , and an atmosphere of brutal desire pervaded everything , stagnated everything , and the wrenching , miserable …." (59)

In the above passage, the preponderant use of sexual images indicates that sex is a veritable vehicle to prove masculinity " Sello said some strange things about women " He said he 'killed' them was it sheer coincidence" (28) . A description of Sello's sexual escapade with one of his victims indicates to us how Head views man as a partner in sexual fulfillment

> Sello referred to the matter himself: it's quite true he found me in bed with his wife. I felt sorry for the man but I had to kill his wife. She was like a raging beast. She's quite harmless now. (64)

Male masculinity advances that until a man has sexually conquered a woman, she remains a concern. Thus the sexual activity of Sello is so sordid that emotional attachment is not required to have sex. Indeed having sex was a matter of simply an urge requiring satisfaction. "Sello was never explicit about this 'killing' business. He said he had 'killed' several women he said it in an aloof, detached way as though it were simply part of a job he was on". (28) Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* in accusing Dan that "He'd pick on people she met in daily life, always introducing a vivid, indelible fact about their sex lives, so abruptly, so unexpectedly that her daily contacts were reduced to that one fact." (160) , actually ends up accusing herself, for Dan is a product of her mental activity and creativity. Head's attitude towards homosexuality is that of understanding rather than condemnation. Her questions to Tom with regards to his sexual orientation and their discussion speak volumes about his attitude:

> What would you do if a gay approached you?'He turned and looked at her seriously: 'I'd be offended,' he said'Tom', she persisted. 'What would you do if you were both God and Satan at the same time?'…(161)

The subject of homosexuality is as much a concern of Bessie Head as the issue of heterosexuality, Sello's green truck symbolizes fertility , freshness , luxuriantriess etc. and Sello practiced both; he was transsexual. Tom's reaction to the issue of homosexuality when questioned by Elizabeth creates a suspicion in the readers mind as to what his sexual orientation is. In *A Question of Power*, she suggests that homosexuality is the product of a society which induces a warped mental state and deprives a man of the dignity that gives him confidence to approach and maintain a relationship with those of

the opposite sex. She makes this assertion poignantly clear when she says through an "African man" 'how can a man be man when he is called a boy? I can barely retain my own manhood ..." (45)

Outwardly, Elizabeth was a normal woman and her participation in the garden project probably emphasized this fact, however this outward serenity was rarely ever matched by her internal turmoil which itself is a product of a disturbed thought process system, that draws her imaginations away from living day realities and opens up her mind to invasion by thought figures such as Dan and Sello. In other words the Sello and Dan that twist Elizabeth's sexuality into perversion are a creation of Elizabeth's own mind, even though both had real living counterparts with whom Elizabeth in reality has little or no contacts. It is her fantasizing with the idea of contact with them in a particularly sexual way that leaves her vulnerable to experiences of mental disorganization which resulting in depression makes her a candidate for mental treatment. "It was the last coherent conversation she had with him, because when he returned in November she was stark, raving mad" (162) .This conversation is very important because it preludes Elizabeth's descent into actual madness.

In Elizabeth's descent she encounters the nice –time girls. Through a presentation of the sexual activities of some of the more bold seventy-one nice- time girls Head attempts to de-mythologize sex and sexual activities especially as a silent secretive act to which most African men commit. She unravels the unparalleled powers that women have over men through their sexualities for example "Madame Loose-Bottom had a sexual potency on a scale ten times greater than Dan's. Also women were more sexually potent than he were incredibly 'dirty' (169) What exactly this means is not clear however it may

mean that some women are as sexually insatiable as the men. Within this presumption therefore is the possibility that Head was also grieved by the subject of lesbianism as much as that of homosexuality. Head presented these women who using what they had, their bodies and sexual prowesses 'were able to stand up to the men'. (166). some of the girls who defeated Dan are symbolic of prostitutes and each prostitute represents a different category of women who had to contend with vissicitudes of life and overcome them.

Head's concern with the issues of good and evil runs across and through all her novels. Head shows that evil and good are not exclusive of each other in their manifestation in ordinary men and in life. Consequently, she indicates that this type of portrayal of exclusivity in relating to good and evil in literature and life is a myth. The old man Dinorego in *When Rain Clouds Gather* refers to this relentless concern by Head when he says :

> …in this world are born both evil and good men . Both have to do justice to their cause. In this country there is a great tolerance of evil. It is because of death that we tolerate evil. All meet death in the end, and because of death we make allowance for evil though we do not like it…(81)

All of life, all of Good, all of evil, all of the past and of the future, Head suggests above begin in mythology and would end in mythology. This is a circle made more unfathomable by the mysticism that surrounds the entire process, shuts men in and ties them to an unwilling and unquestioning acceptance of what is , even in the absence of believe . It is the struggle to grapple with disbelieve in belief that truncates entire societies and individuals into madness. The experience of mythology, mysticism and

madness transcends all ages and times and it is as ancient as it is modern- this accounts for Head's heavy reliance on the use of allusions.

Makhaya and Mma – Millipede interacts about good and evil, god and gut and the goodness of heart, soul and mind. In all this a mystical quality emerges that is completely incontrovertible. In dealing with the issue of ignorance , Head's work show that people would more often than not ascribe mystical qualities to people , events , things or places they do not understand or comprehend. This serves in many cases to perpetuate the evil(s) or overemphasize the good that an individual has done, or that are associciated with certain places or events thereby obligating the receivers of such good to their benefactors on a semi-permanent or even permanent basis; Head illustrates this in *When Rain Cloud Gather* with the experiences of Mma Baloi, who is said to be "suffering from the derangement of the brain" and the chiefs in *When Rain Cloud Gather* who were a cross of good and evil all in one:

> Most chiefs were half- Matenge and half of the casual charm of his brother and they lived on their own weird tightrope as fathers of the people. Half the time they turned on the charm, just in the nick of time to save themselves from damnation. But they were all an evil cruel crowd. Only Matenge had not known how to turn on the charm to save him. (63)

The passage shows that the chiefs generally in *When Rain Clouds Gather* had dual personalities that enabled them navigate the anger of the people for whom they provided leadership and thus survived. Matenge who was simply intensely evil is an exception in this regard. The gathering of the people of the village of Golema Mmidi to attend the trial of Paulina Sebeso one of their own, and the subsequent suicide of Matenge as a result is a mystical dimension to a seeming quiet revolution of the poor against the excesses of the rich and powerful. Even though it involved no physical violence, it nevertheless generated

a lot of mystical energy that made the people of Golema Mmidi feel “they had really killed Matenge, in a strange gathering-together of all their wills”. (177). The strange mental dissociation that followed was an attitude necessary to preserve the sanity of the individuals who had been involved in the tragic events of the day by dousing any sense or feeling of guilt that their participation in the protest might have engendered.

Makhaya, Matenge, Gilbert in *When Rain Clouds Gather*; Elizabeth and Kenosi in *A Question of Power*; Maru and Margaret Cadmore in a *Maru*; Khama III, Maruapula, the son of Dalaunda and Maroka in *A Bewitched Crossroad* all experience various degrees of madness. Through them Head shows that madness can either be constructive or destructive. For Elizabeth and Maragaret, for instance, madness provides the avenue for self realization, for others such as Matenge, madness is a destructive cauldron.

The interaction between mythology, mysticism and madness is fully manifest in both *A Question of Power* as well as *A Bewitched Crossroad*. The struggle for place and position in the world as succinctly presented in *A Bewitched Crossroad* is often occasioned by the experience of insanity. Here rituals and mythic practices are employed to cling to power. Witchcraft and ancestor worship are also given prominence in the bid to violate human dignity and psyche defenses. Treachery, greed and avarice lead to great betrayals in the process of empire building. Murder is also wantonly carried out with survival as an excuse - Maroka is a ready example of this in *A Bewitched Crossroad.* The ensuing madness which attends the scramble for position and power, Head portrays as symptomatic of an illness and dominance of evil in the soul of numerous characters in her texts, for instance, what justification can anyone adduce for Shaka's "policy of total war in Nguru land" ?

> Campaigns in which whole villages of men, women, and children were wiped off the face of the earth. Dungiswayo intention was kindly and paternal. (2l)

A direct correlation to Shaka in *When Rain Clouds Gather* is Matenge's attempt to put his subjects in perpetual servitude and deny them any chance of self – actualization by his vocal and vehement opposition to the agricultural project which threatened the status quo and the bastion of corrupted power. As a result of his stand "Matenge could not see this... he found himself involved... in the cauldron of hatred...that reflected his traditional values" (45) Matenge's degeneration from one level of hatred (first for his brother Chief Sekoto) to another (his subjects) fills his heart with paranoia. This also invariably depicts his descent into a state of madness from which he never recovers and in which he eventually commits suicide. For Head, Matenge is a waste. His insanity never leads to his cleansing nor did it bring about a desire to love and to do good as it did in Maru and Moleka in *Maru.*

Head in her novels utilizes mythology as a unifying force to emphasize the common humanity of all men, the infallibility of all men and the capacity of all men to do both good and carry out evil. The quest for attainment of equanimity of the soul through a mystical dialogue either with the self or the other thus become a crucial plank for the exegesis of madness in the given texts. Head's thematic discourse of mythology, mysticism and madness may be summed up in this statement:

> They had stumbled upon her as a creative force, as a power outside themselves that could invade and destroy them. They had performed delicate mental disciplines about an evil never personified, but they had vividly personified God. He had become more real, and satan a shadowy indistinct blur of bad things. And yet at one time now lost in myth, satanic powers had been vividly a part of social orders. Something was eluding her – the mystic

> Madonna…. She reflected on those times, also lost in myth, where vague memories had lingered of the wars of the God's (33)

In the above passage, Head suggests that Good and evil are not absolutes. There is in every human being a streak of both. Elizabeth's nightmare (92) made her carry out activities that had all the capacity to put her in danger. Sello and Dan are representative of the contending battle between evil and good in Elizabeth's subconscious, a battle which ends up making Elizabeth their victim and leaving her defenseless against 'demonic activity'. Some evidence of emerging neurosis is found in this statement "She half muttered aloud to herself 'is this the last medusa?' From behind her Sello said: 'yes! 'What are you saying the small boy asked?' (30)

Elizabeth's son above assumes his mother is talking to him when in actual fact she was talking to herself; to Sello the figure, who has invaded her soul. Elizabeth's mental sickness and incapacitation which made her unable to provide proper parentage to her son parallels the same experience in Head's own life. (Eilersen: 94). Head's attempt in *A Question of Power* to balance the good of the mystical Madonna and the evil of the Medusa is aptly captured in this single sentence "let me take a potion of darkness and a portion of the light and combine it into the form of a woman I might love …."(63)

In the novels under discussion, Head embarks on an exercise in literary comparison when she compares one country to another and counterpoises the urban with the rural; for example the culture of greeting in Botswana is described as warm and inviting in contrast to that of South Africa which is "cold and discriminatory". Also she contrasts the city "with street light shining outside the window "(21) and the village Motabeng with "the pitch – black darkness of the Motabeng night terrifying" (21) In a major twist and seeming concordance with Freudian principles, Head through Elizabeth in

*A Question of Power* asserts that witchcraft is actually "master of psychology" (21) The importance of "inner hells meant to end all hells forever" (12) seem to be what binds Sello, Elizabeth and even Dan. The aridness, barrenness of the soul of one character parallels that in the others and truncates them into the same sense of emptiness and striving to attain to the divine. The search for the freedom of the self and soul in the novels of Head also involves therefore, journeying through a mythic maze of madness and mysticism; characters within this maze are dressed down to evil or dressed up to good. In *A Bewitched Crossroads* for instance, Shaka is dressed down to evil while Khama III is dressed up to good. Similarly in *When Rain Clouds Gather,* while Matenge is dressed down to evil, Gilbert is dressed up to good. However, at the end of this spectrum are other characters such as Chief Sekoto who is an ambivalence of 'good and evil'.

In an attempt to straddle the divide between good and evil, Head utilizes the metaphor of light 'and darkness. In the light " she was not given to 'seeing' things the world had always been two – dimensional, flat and straight with things she could see and feel" (22) in the darkness she had "a strange feeling of things being there right inside her and yet projected at the same distance away from her. She was not sure if she were awake or asleep" (op-cit), and often after that the dividing line between dream perceptions and waking reality becomes confused. Head's division of *A Question of Power* and *Maru* into parts one and two is very significant. One part symbolizes good, the other evil. Her refusal to use a chapter by chapter division epitomizes her running concern with madness as an unpunctuated experience.

While it seemed that the myth dark provides the most congenial environment for mystical journeys, it also is a great stimulator of the methods and symptoms of madness.

In the dark there is a blurring of the boundaries between reality and unreality. Likewise in the dream state course, recurring nightmares are gradual passages to eventual madness. The transposition of activities from the dream state to actual reality thus becomes a matter of time. This also accounts for Head's attempts to unveil and unravel the mystery behind witchcraft. which she's described as "terrortactics people used against each other" Flat and straight with things she could see and feel" (21).

The absence of boundaries accounts for why Head shows Sello the monk, paralleled by a living Sello. The Sello monk is actually the alter-ego of the living Sello and this alter –ego operates basically in the night within Elizabeth's consciousness. So in Head's apprehension of the condition of her characters especially that of Elizabeth in *A Question of Power,* madness and mysticism begin when the "dividing line between dream perceptions and waking reality was to become confused" (22) And it is within this blurred boundary of daily existence that mysticism finds expressions for growth in a multi-faceted dimension. Head brings to the fore the aridity of this dimension when she compares "the soft, white flowing robes of a monk" to a "prison garment".(op cit) In doing so, she presents celibacy, a practical giving up of sexual rights in order to serve and attain a mystical unity with the divine, as a prison because it denies a fundamental natural human function. She shows that though celibacy was intended to serve good purposes it engenders and truncates individuals into evil.Thus Head asserts that the idea that complete holiness is attainable only through celibacy is a myth.

The subject of leadership in Africa is vital for development of the continent. Head in delving into the subject unearths not just why Africa is in a leadership throe but also proffers solutions to the problem. She attributes, Africa's leadership problem to the myth

that certain categories of people only are qualified to provide leadership on the continent. Examples of this type of African leaders, like Morafi in *Maru,* who inspite of being corrupt and wicked are made to look invincible and untouchable because they are believed to have derived their authority from a divine source, abound in her work. The belief that leaders are also totems ascribes spiritual authority to individuals who already had physical authority and thus makes them unchallengeable by their subjects. As a result whoever dares to challenge them becomes insane; an example is Pete, the principal who as a result of conspiring with Seth and Morafi to question Maru's authority is visited by Tladi (the evil spirit of a dead witch doctor believed to have reincarnated in Maru), loses his mind and is eventually made mad by this same spirit which drives them away from Dilepe.

Bessie Head's characterization of the African leader as a goat represented by 'Queen of Sheba' is a metaphor that expresses the nature of these leaders as stubborn, greedy, impetuous and importunate. In comparing the African leader to a goat through the use of this imagery , Head alludes to the Satyrs in Greek mythology; part human and part horse (or part goat), who led lives dominated by wine and lust. She say's of Sheba "she behaves just like a beggar who is also a blackmailer"(18). The slaughter of the 'Queen of Sheba' is prophetic in many respects; it suggests that Africa would only make progress when the present crops of leaders who have soiled their integrity are eliminated. Another animal imagery used to describe the African leader is that of a swine. The very arrogance of the African Leader is symbolized by the character of Moleka whom in comparison to Maru, Dikeledi describes as "…almost a God in his kindness towards people, not like that swine." (23)

The root of this arrogance is a great fear that their powers derive not from the will of their people and thus their rabid struggle for self- entrenchment to maintain that hold on power. The same word, swine, which Dikeledi uses to describe Moleka in Maru, is also used by Matenge to qualify Makhaya. Intentionally, Matenge resorts to calling Makhaya what he is (a swine) in order to prevent Makhaya from identifying him as such. The fact that Head uses the word swine in at least two of the novels under discussion is therefore very significant. In Africa, the leadership refers to the followers as swine in order to hinder the followership from naming them as swine and thus create a counter mental force that blocks their annihilation. In analyzing the failure of leadership in Africa, Bessie Head spares no one, not even America of whom she say's 'wherever America goes she only hands the poor coca-cola and chewing gum..." (132). She accuses America of being unable to fulfil the role of a partner needed to help Africa fashion out a democratic path that is unique to it and thus becomes a contributor to leadership failure in Africa through an extreme form of cultural colonialism.

In *Maru*, Bessie Head submits that among the so-called ruling elites, there is discrimination based on tribal affinity "Joas Tsepe came from a certain tribe of the Kalahari desert who were still regarded as slaves" . So the leadership in Botswana is competed for by the "sons of chiefs" and "the sons of slaves" each trying to outsmart the other (63). This indescribable sense of racial and political superiority is what probably motivates Matenge to say to Makhaya "you know what a South African swine is …. He is a man like you" (p67) but the truth of the situation Head puts this way:

> Should he bother to explain to her the language of the voices of the gods who spoke of tomorrow? That they were opening doors on all sides, for every living thing on earth, that there would be a day when every-one would be free and no one the slave of another?

> People no longer needed chiefs and kings and figureheads who wore dazzling garments and ruled with the philosophy that there was never enough , so those who had had to put their foot down on those who had not. (68-69)

Head was also concerned as indicated above, about politics in Africa, the politicians who played it and the political system that would most serve the purpose of uplifting from the social and economic poverty, the ordinary citizen on the continent. The discussion between Gilbert and Makhaya about democracy and dictatorship and which one would best serve to enhance development clearly illustrates this when Gilbert says:

> Where's all this talk of democracy going to get us, Mack?" he said one day, glumly. "Only a reasonably developed country can afford the time to debate these pros and cons. What we need here is a dictatorship that will feed, clothe and educate a people. I could work well with a dictatorship which says: Look here, Gilbert, fill in this poverty program."(83)

Makhaya's response is no less telling and profound as he replies Gilbert thus:

> Why not leave this country, even Africa, to trial and error?" he Said; slowly, uncomfortably. : This is only my opinion. I don't think I approve of dictatorships in any form, whether for the good of mankind or not. Even if it is painstakingly slow, I prefer democracy for Africa, come what may. (84)

The above conversation emphasis Head's concern with the issue of which system of government would best suit a continent like Africa and be most beneficial to her people; democracy or dictatorship. Makhaya's viewpoint serves as Head's conclusion on the issue.

Head's concern about the quality and type of leaders that Africa produced after independence also receives significant attention in *Maru, A Question of Power* and *When Rain Clouds Gather.* In her narrative *A Bewitched Crossroads* however, Head traces the

origins of the leadership problems from pre-colonial times as highlighted in her earlier three novels as well as in some of her early short stories. It is mind-boggling that these leaders derive power not from the people but through other arrangements. To Head they were simply usurpers, who sought to upstage the will of the people for their own selfish ends.

> There were four or five such liberation parties with little or no membership among the people but many undersecretary generals …. They also spent some time blowing hot air about the stupid Botswana people who had voted for chiefs and then, to their amazement, found that they had a government of the sons of chiefs with an anti-chief policy …. If they have any power at all it is the power to plunge the African continent into an era of chaos and bloody murder. (47)

Head questions, in the above passage, the very foundations of the liberation struggles and movements describing it as dubious. The leadership problems that Africa experiences she argues is attributable to the level of education of those that led these struggles (especially in Southern Africa) and were groomed to provide leadership for the peoples of the continent. In expropriating the character of Medusa from ancient mythology, she makes her a symbol of the African leader who seeks to exercise some mystical control over their followership asserting that "when someone says "my people" with a specific stress on the blackness of those people, they are after kingdoms and permanently child-like slaves" (63)

Without a doubt, Head's use of myth as an instrument of style in order to find and present the link between mythology, mysticism and madness is to say the least intriguing and in every respect elevated art. Head sought for and carefully selected the allusions she utilized to give her work universal colour and application. Gillian Stead Eillersen (1995: 33) explains that Head acquired these attitudes reflected in *A Question of Power* after she

began to use the Ml Sultan Library in furtherance of her reading adventure which began when she became a teacher. Bessie Head utilized materials from a host of sources such as ancient mythology, the works of 19th century writers, The Holy Bible, Asian and oriental religion, traditional African mythology and religion etc in order to establish a basis for giving her writings a universal foundation which seeks to show that certain myths are not only transgenerational, transnational, trans –color but also trans cultural.

Head's constant allusions to mythology from distant places (e.g Greece and Rome) and cultures is an attempt to unite man's failed endeavor to ascribe divinity to any single 'God' and hence pass a vote of no confidence on attempts to encourage, assent or enforce Christian mysticism over the African soul complex. In Head's *A Question of Power*, the mind is an important factor, both stylistically and thematically in the disposition of the intentions of the author. The mind as the seat of intellect is thus also a cauldron of activity. It is the quality and quantity of the activity which takes place in the mind that to a large extent determine the quality of life. The means through which these take place is called thoughts.

The mind is the seat of intellect. It is the place where thoughts and imaginations are fabricated and established to form habits or thoughts patterns, which are also referred to as a mind-set. It is a place of great fervor and creativity where images are constructed and deconstructed at the same time. Head suggests that people die in people's mind also "the innocent, kindly boring old woman died a dramatic death before Elizabeth's eyes" (171), they also live in peoples mind. Through her mind Elizabeth re-creates individuals into what she thinks they are rather than view them as they are before her eyes. The reason for this may not really be far-fetched.

> She reached out one hand and touched Elizabeth, brought her face quite close, and said I a confidential whisper: 'I'm going pray for you.' 'it depends on which God you're praying to ,' Elizabeth said violently and slammed the door. ( 172)

In the above passage Elizabeth indicates that evil acts are always committed in the name of God, consequently, she struggles with the evil Sello in part one of *A Question of Power*. In part two, she embraces Dan who was meant to be a symbol of good and found out he had an evil side that competed with the evil Sello to inflict pain upon her. In between these two is Medusa, utilized by both whenever, they each decided to cultivate and deepen her pain:

> She could not get beyond that. Logically, a story had a beginning. She was being killed by Dan, but Sello started it. The story had begun with Sello and Medusa. She had no clear idea of what she was saying. She was struggling to recapture the image of Medusa and what Medusa and Sello had done to her, but she couldn't get it straight.(99)

Dan and Sello in the quote above can be likened to two different thought strains competing in Elizabeth's mind for a form of supremacy but both urging her towards self-harm:

> The two men were conducting, in different ways, a fierce struggle over her nearly dead body. 'I've resolved nothing,' she said, miserably. Things I'd never have thought of get to dominate, my mind and create neurotic fears I'd never have thought twice of what Jesus said . He said the soul was really open territory easily invaded by devils. They just move in, carry on, mess around , and when a man has cleared up his house, ten thousand more move in . if I had to take up residence in some body's house. I'd be polite and enquire after their health. Devils don't do that. They just walk in smash everything up and then they grin…'(187)

The above passage records the attempts by Sello and Dan to violate Elizabeth's reception, perception and then resistance of their onslaught. Head therefore in dividing *A*

*Question of Power* into two parts, makes a statement about diametrically opposing views or perspective about life; good and evil, love and hate, black and white, man and God. Indeed, whatever was in the first part found a diametric opposite in the second part and whatever was not in the first was in the second part.

Myths or mythic or mystic dimensions were often attached to everything within African Culture. This is succinctly brought by Dikeledi's in her comments on Sheba –the goat:

> I have a funny feeling about Sheba… "I think she is a human being in disguise. Have you heard about the witches in this country? They can turn themselves into lions and buffalo. Sheba was once a witch who was starving and turned herself into a goat. (112)

Okonkwo (1981) in his study describes Soyinka's portrayals of creation as fitting into a "chthonic realm, a storehouse for creative and destructive energies" which according to him Soyinka deepens through a series of allusions in his works; each thematic strand being constantly reiterated within new and larger themes to achieve a well – integrated and comprehensive whole. This is an assertion which holds relevance and centrality here to the discussion of the creation myth in Head's novels as it does in Soyinka's narrative in *The Interpreters* and *A Season of Anomy*.

A particular stylistic feature which distinguishes Head's works especially in *A Question of Power* and *Maru* is refusal to divide her novels into chapters as in most conventional novels. Some critics like Wisker (2000) and Johnson (2008) might say that Head seems to have borrowed this style from James Joyce *Ulysses* or have been rigorously influenced by it. However, whether she invented or borrowed is beside the point. What is supremely important is that this style provides for her the needed structure to write stories that epitomize and reflect the very nature of writing mythology, mysticism

and madness into literature. These three themes usually run in a continuum and side by side either in or at the individual and societal levels.

The basic division of *A Question of Power* for instance into two parts and sub – titled with the name of characters, indicate firstly that the text is not about an event but about persons and the events that generally truncates them into mysticism, and ultimately madness and which gives to their experience a mythological cover and substance, so that as a palliative measure it becomes acceptable to society that which ordinarily should be entirely unacceptable. Secondly this division speaks to her thesis that man is either good or bad/evil. Bad/evil as symbolized by Sello and good as symbolized by Dan. Also she indicates through this two part structure the counterpoise battle between reality and unreality, between fact and fiction and between truth and lies/falsehood. An indication is clearly provided that the same type of conflict that plays out in real life conditions ultimately plays out in the mind and souls of the individual also. Each part in *A Question of Power* is roughly a hundred pages a piece. Head in this manner indicates that the seasons of good and evil are virtually of the same length and what matters is which of the two has a dominant acceptance by the individual.

Crucial to our discourse is the significance of the use of biblical allusions which resonate throughout Head's major works. In *A Question of Power* phrases such as "you still topple giants with a stone sling" (199) and "someone who produced the wine from water" (200) are clear examples; the first being a reference to the David and Goliath saga and the other a reference to Jesus's first recorded miracle of turning water to wine at the marriage of the Canna at Galilee. Another allusion Head makes is to Bathsheba Uriah's

wife and David's concubine or mistress "whose soul he joined with that of Buddha's wife to pull him out of his withdrawn meditations or oblivion and eternity. (43)

Allusions to Greek mythology such as the story of Osiris and Isis, as well as to Medusa among others also abound in Head's work. Osiris, one of the principal deities of Egyptian mythology, originally the local god of Abydos and Busiris, represents the male productive force in nature and is identified with the setting sun. Osiris was thus regarded as the ruler of the realm of the dead in the mysterious region below the western horizon; Isis on the other hand, his sister/wife, represented the female productive force in nature and was goddess of the earth and moon, fertility and motherhood and was identified as a light force. When Osiris is murdered by his evil brother, Set, who tore the body to pieces and scattered the fragments. Isis found and buried his scattered remains, however, and each burial place was thereafter revered as sacred ground. Their son Horus, sired by a temporarily regenerated Osiris, avenged his father's death by killing Set and then ascended the throne. Osiris lived on in the underworld as the ruler of the dead, but he was also, through Horus, regarded as the source of renewed life. The actual significance of the use of this god deity to the work of Bessie Head, is that it seem to have influenced a lot of the imageries of sex and sexual activity in *A Question of Power* and underlines the reasons why her male characters remained only relevant as long as they are involved in a struggle for female attention. In espousing the Egyptian myth of Osiris and Isis, Head takes us through the common thread that link myths from one generation, society, race or civilization to another. References to Medusa, a mortal woman in Greek mythology, who was once a lovely maiden, and who according to myth was transformed into a Gorgon, a dragon-like creature with snakes for hair when she dared compete with Athena (either by taking too much pride in her hair or by having a love affair with the god Poseidon) the

vengeful goddess who turned Medusa into a monster. Medusa's head was then so hideous that anyone who looked at it was turned to stone. (Encarta: 2010). Head introduces Medusa at intervals within her narration in *A Question of Power* to point at the dangerous dual nature of the human as half –beast and half – man with equal potential for and capacity to love and hate, give and take, praise and scorn.

Furthermore, there are also echoes of other writers such as Robert Louis Stevenson's whose characters, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, foreshadow Head's in *A Question of Power* with a story that suggests that a dual personality exists in every human being. Dr Hyde being an educated upper –class snob learns to his horror that he has shameful base drives like anyone else. There is no hint that the child trampled by Hyde, or witness to the murder Hyde commits, are anything but our fellow humans, worthy of respect though they are female, lower class and poor. In alluding to this novel, Head taps into our common humanity to make a statement that mythologizing, engagement in mystical affinities or activities as well as the descent into madness is not an exclusive preserve of one social class, race or nationality: all men can be victims of it and victors from experiencing it. Also Head made references to great philosophers and leaders, like Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King whose works essentially helped her achieve her aim of universalizing her themes and showing that all men are bound by a common humanity:

> there's something disturbing me ; a part of my present evolution is African, and I hear the beginnings of a great symphony, a complete statement for the future about the dignity of man , where none is high and none is low but all are equal (62)

The above quotation echoes the speeches of both Martin Luther King and Mahatma Ghandi carefully selected and then married. As a result Head creates a thesis about the universal equality of all men through these apparent allusions and challenges the notion that some individuals or nations are superior to others. Instead she asserts that it is the neglect of Africa that has enveloped her in evil; she describes Africa as a "people who have been despised for so long know evil at its roots" (63)

Head in bringing together the thread that binds the myths of the world, what she called philosophies, comments through Elizabeth thus:

> The philosophies were spun around the everyday events of people's lives and included the animals, the flowers and the occupations of mankind. Then mankind said: 'we like it ', they remembered and kept records of philosophies so tentative and flexible that people could speculate on them endlessly, and add to them. They forgot the terrible monstrosities of the past they had called ' the God's', who had hurled thunderbolts around with so little regard for the welfare of others , for anything …. (41)

Perhaps what makes Head's use of allusion very significant is that she rarely utilizes a reference wholesale rather she develops a method through which she dissects a particular source and then ultimately merges that dissected part with other dissected parts to create a tapestry that is unique to her alone, as she did in *A Question of Power* for instance.

In a large portion of the novels under discussion, Head shows the thought system and processes in the mind of her characters through an attempt to appropriate the thoughts and mind processes of the figures to which she makes allusions. The reason does not seem to be farfetched, an understanding of what they think and why they think what they think would ultimately help us understand their depth of emotional turmoil and why at various points in the narrative, characters resort either to madness or mysticism or both to bring a

resolution to their turmoil. For example in *Maru*, Moleka the conqueror of women suddenly feels conquered himself and yet is unable to accept that he is in love because of his status. This puts him at crossroads with his feelings and almost drives him into a neurotic state that manifests in talking to himself and subsequently alienation from the totemic clan.

The movement motive and motif in *A Question of Power, Maru, When Rain Clouds Gather and A Bewitched Crossroads* is very central to the issue of place and sanity or place as sanity. Whether movements improve sanity or debases it is a contentious issue. Makhaya in *When Rain Clouds Gather* is able to retain his sanity by going into exile in Botswana for instance.

Obviously, Bessie Head's purpose for using mythology as the foundational vehicle for the explication of her thematic concerns and the creation of style has nothing to do with creating a cognition grid that thrives on Afro- or Black centrism as is the case with Wole Soyinka for example. Rather Head's use of mythology fits in grandly with her design to universalize her themes in order to produce a thesis on human nature which to all intents and purposes can or is indeed applicable to all the peoples of the world. Okonkwo (1981) makes an assertion about Wole Soyinka's use of myth which applies as well to the writings of Bessie Head:

> To understand this novel (and Soyinka's works generally) requires three things: some knowledge of myth he employs; an insight into his intentions and the shaping spirit behind the novel, and a discarding of ideological prejudices and rigid pre-conceptions. Most Soyinka readers and critics clearly possess little knowledge of the myth and therefore miss the condensed allusions to it in the novel. (49)

Head's views God as ordinary people and not one hidden invisible power to which the entire universe is subject or subjects itself. (197) In provoking contentions with regards to the existence of 'God' as a single divine unit, Head sought to do two things, query the assertion that there is one God, secondly, she sought to stress that there are several 'Gods each with its own divinity and thirdly, that men are gods themselves and if only they know they would not be seeking gods to worship'. She brings this out pointedly in her characterization. Bessie Head in *A Question of Power* questions the accepted definition of mysticism by first asking the question "to which God was she praying? Indeed she asks "who is God and can anyone or anything be divine, seen as divine and accepted by an individual as divine without that individual incurring the wrath of the society as having gone mad?" The second mythological plank hinges on the belief in ritual killings as mean's of appeasing the spirits and attaining powers that could assist the individual climb up the mystical plane to attain unity with the divine.

Head's confused spiritual identity is brought to the fore in *A Question of Power.* At some point she's Christian in her perspectives, even though she claims to have fully jettisoned the Christian concept of being. Then, at other points, she's clearly hinduistic with all the beliefs about karma and reincarnation which concurs to the suggestion that the present – life is a product of the past life "god, what is happening to me. What have I done in the past to suffer so much? I haven't had time in the present to commit great evils". (149). This struggle to attain unity –mystical unity with the divine is thus a recurring factor. Yet not fully conceptualizing which or what the divine is , is a sticking point in Head' creative endeavor not just in *A Question of Power* but in *Maru* and *When Rain Clouds Gather* as well.

> The Monday evening she turned on the radio, as she always did, for general news. a small boy had been found dead in the bush. He had been alone herding goats. People always died in the bush at the rate of two or three month. (39)

Elizabeth the character and Head the author, concord that madness is a product of an internalized external activity that holds its victim to a standard for measuring unity with the divine. In some cases madness assumes for itself a divinity and holds its victim accountable to its own standard. It does this to emphasize, discover and unearth the mythological dimension to the madness and mysticism which the character's in Elizabeth's mind in *A Question of Power* experience when she says:

> Sello had admitted to a thousand evils, but in a dim past, in civilizations of which there were no records left, because the order of that day had been a state where power of the spirit had been openly used and misused and everything had ended in explosion. (144)

Head's perception about God in all her texts is based on her assertion that human's are actually god and that when people give to one another honour due go one another as gods regardless of race , culture , tribe , religion etc the world will be a better place to live in. Head describes Christianity and God as "courteous formalities" (p66) and as "mystical flights of the soul" (66). In the same vein in *When Rain Clouds Gather,* Dinorego senses a mystical bond to Makhaya and compares it to "the way God usually feels toward the outcast beggar rolling in the dust" (99). This is a veiled reference to the myth of the earth and sky "… he would know he was as powerful and continuous as the earth and sky (101). The import of Head's views about God is that she contest the existence of God ' and believes rather that the single God is a creation of man's mythology or myth making but that in reality there are several gods.

> It was different if his motivation was entirely selfish, self-centered, but the motivation came from the gods who spoke to him in his heart. They had said: take that road. Then they had said: take that companion. He believed his heart and the things in it. They were his only criteria for goodness. In the end, nothing was personal to him. In the end, the subjection of his whole life to his inner goods was an intellectual process. Very little feeling was involved. His methods were cold, calculating and ruthless. (73)

Maru believes that he could not be wrong because he had attained a measure of unity with a god head. That unity ensures that he hears the gods and that whatever he does is simply seen as carrying an instruction from the gods. Through this mystic means, Maru exerts an unquestionable hold on his subjects and influence on friends and foes alike.

There is no doubt that there is a direct correlation between creation mythology and the myth of 'God' or 'gods'. Creation itself being a highly mystical process is also an experience in engendering and purging the madness that creates an exterior of disorder. Creation myths, just like the myth of the God's thus have mysticism and madness as pillars as reflected in Head's novels. Creation myths indicates that "Gods" like everything else are created and then imbued with powers that make them unchallengeable. This explanation makes it lucidly clear:

> Creation mythologies explain the actual formation of the world by a variety of processes. These processes include the sacrifice of a primal being (for example, a giant or serpent); a struggle between supernatural powers; the blending or coalescing of elements, particularly water and earth; the incubation of a cosmic egg; and the uttering of a divine word. In myths that credit primary creation to gods, such as the Greek deities Uranus (sky god) and Gaea (earth goddess), these deities often become hazy, remote figures in later mythology, and stories often recount their overthrow by their own offspring. For example, in the Greek tradition, Zeus succeeded his father Cronus and grandfather Uranus to become ruler of the gods (see Greek Mythology). (Encarta:2008)

Consequently, an understanding of creation mythology is essential for a realization by all men "… that no one was the be-all and end –all of creation, that no one had the power of assertion and dominance to the exclusion of other life." (p35) This creation principle provides the basis for the insecurity of many peoples and probably accounts for why certain individuals are eventually truncated into a mad state. In an attempt to help us understand what mad people exhibit and how we possibly can identify them she says:

> People function well when their inner lives are secure and peaceful. She was like a person driven out of her own house while demons rampaged within, turning everything upside down. (50)

And since formal religious worship constrains the individual from accepting responsibility for their soul, Head attempts to debunk the mysticism of formal religion by asserting

> They pray so falsely: from the heart of God let love enter the hearts of men thus removing the things of the soul to some impossibly unseen mystical heavens oh no ….(54)

Head insists in this passage that people take responsibilities for their souls rather than shift such responsibilities to an unseen being in order to have a mystical cover for their actions which they would have been otherwise unable to explain. That Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* experiences varying forms of mental delusions is without doubt, what is doubtful however is the intention and impact of the mystical madness on Elizabeth's overall outlook on life. The pivotal role that women play in the universal manifestation of mythology mysticism and madness is brought to the fore in the way and manner Head deploys her female characters. The stories in her novels are all centered on women. In *A Question of Power* the story is woven around Elizabeth and her final catharsis; in *Maru*

around Margaret Cadmore, and in *When Rain Clouds Gather* around Pauline. With the women in the center of the debacle, Head utilizes a duo of men each in the texts; Moleka and Maru in *Maru*; Dan and Sello in *A Question of Power;* Makhaya and Gilbert in *When Rain Clouds Gather,* to produce a counterpoint for their sexuality and emphasis her thesis about the myth of good and evil.

Head's narrative form allows the reader entrance into the spiritual states of the individuals and the communities that the author x-rays and thus through this form of narrative, we are able to align or identify with differing form of spiritual exiles and alienations that individuals experience in their relationship with one another as well as with their communities. Head's assertion in her texts is simply that there are many routes to attain unity with the divine. To insist that individuals can only attain the divine through a particular religion or religious experience is to say the least unacceptable to Head. She indicates that it is failure to accept others as they are which truncates the attainment of unity with the divine and pushes individuals into madness. Accepting others on the basis of universal equality is a prominent subject in *Maru* where Margaret Cadmore is referred to as a Marsawa; an inferior and in *A Question of Power* where Dan and Sello violently violate Elizabeth's sub-conscious and truncate her into madness on account of thier false sense of superiority.

Head's works especially *A Question of Power* and *A Bewitched Crossroads*, *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *Maru* can also be subjected to a form of religious interpretation. For instance in *A Question of Power* the author attempts to debunk the existence of God from the Christian perspective, while in *A Bewitched Crossroads* she examines the preponderant use of witchcraft…which in C.O. Ogunyemi's words create "… an overpoweringly pervasive presence of the supernatural, the mystical, the mythical, the

mysterious, the magical, witchcraft and fantasy".(23). It is these metaphysical dimensions of African life, Ogunyemi asserts that Head explores. These dimensions Ogunyemi suggests are mostly visible in Head's incorporation of African and non- African myths into her corpus. The aim of doing this is largely to explain and unearth the root causes of madness in her characters being examined in this thesis. In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, men withdraw into a shell of loneliness and become alienated from general society not only when they fight a losing battle with nature, poverty and oppression but also when they seem to be winning. Rural Africa in spite of its communal identity - still has individuals within it who are intensely alienated. This general pre-occupation with alienation runs through the works of Head. Ogungbesan (1979), however, falls short of showing that the alienated disjointed psyche which he so poignantly describes in "the cape Gooseberry also grows in Botswana" is a product of Madness and violence. In *Maru*, Heads panacea to the problem of evil in the human soul has great psychological and social implications for the societies she captures.

*A Bewitched Crossroads,* a novel with great historical foregrounding, shows individuals who through diverse levels of spiritual prowess are able to attain to the fullness of their potential in terms of realizing and aligning the powers of their soul. This soul power puts them in touch with divine powers and gives them spiritual authority over others. The manifestation of this authority is found at different levels. Take Shaka, Matenge and Khama III as examples and this assertion is immediately validated. In *When Rain Clouds Gather,* a highly prophetic text, the weather is used as a symbol of what could happen when individuals harness their soul energies.

In *A Question of Power, e*ven though Dan was symptomatic of good , he still had evil tendencies , Head's argument is that life has no exclusives; no exclusively good or evil peoples, rather what emerges to define a personality is which part ; good or evil of a person's soul is nurtured and given room for free expression. Elizabeth's real gold is her sexual organs; her most prized possessions , where all the encounter between her and Sello/Dan takes place at two levels; at the dream-state level and at the physical state level. Head's Elizabeth is moved gradually into a cataclysmic experience of mental breakdown as she partakes in sexual shuttles between these two states. While Christian mysticism is about unity with a divine, Elizabeth's mysticism is about unity with the self which she considers as "God is people. There is nothing up there. It's all down here" (109). Her madness provides the avenue for her to find a semblance of this inspiringly strange kind of unity which she seeks.

Goddard (2000) has suggested that Margaret's marriage to Maru points to an idyllic world where equality and harmony exist. This world view also presents a political shift in the attitude of the majority to the outcast minority, the Masarwa. In *A Question of Power*, despite her insanity, Elizabeth manages to harness the energies of the Motabeng women in a way that creates a sense of pride and industry in them. Of the three main female characters, It is Elizabeth's life that demonstrates more fully the contrary' states that form the nexus of this study. In *Maru*, Margaret Cadmore suffers discrimination because of her assigned status as a Masarwa an outcast among the Botswanains. Her 'inferiority' by birth and the fact that she is a female, make her an easy target for oppression in a society that treats her people as sub-human. Her life begins with uncertainty and ends with a degree of certainty. She is born beside a roadside where her mother dies in childbirth with an expression of a goddess" on her face. The image of the

goddess is metaphorically significant, for it implicitly encompasses the notion of some sort of saving grace. Carol P. Christ (1979) reinforces this line of thinking when she explains that the symbol of the goddess represents "life and death powers and waxing and waning energies in the universe". (56.)

However this idyllic world exists only in the mythic imagination of the author indeed some critics have suggested that Head was probably at a loss about how to end her story. While this may seem to have some element of merit in it, this study would not subscribe to it for the mere reason that in the mythic imagination any ending is possible as long as it fulfills the purpose of delivering the authors important thought on the subject.

Similarly, major female characters in Bessie Head's novels such as Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* and Margaret in Maru have their social standings determined by the incidence or accidents of their birth. The myth of social classes insists that the social classes are rigidly defined and that the crossing of classes is rare and far in – between if not completely impossible; that there are boundaries that are immoveable and insurmountable. It is these very mythic barriers that Head designed her female characters to shatter by making them reach deep down within their own souls to resolve their very deep crisis of identity. This direction of her narration does not then make Head a feminist because she also produces a character like Maru who sacrifices his prescribed identity to reclaim his real identity. This point is made succinctly clear by Head in *Maru* when she says of the women who take –pleasure in sleeping with Maru;

> … they only saw the social gains that would accrue to them and it made their behavior despicable to his all-seeing eye….None of the victims could ever explain the process of her destruction, nor its cause. Everyone took it for granted that there was something called social position and you had to scheme and fight for it , tooth and nail….(35-36)

This is why in *A Question of Power*, Elizabeth's madness is triggered by not just the male forces: Sello and Dan that vitiates her soul but also by women oppressors such as Camilla who by their participation in orgies within her mind with either Sello or Dan contribute to her vitiation and violation. Perhaps this is why Goddard (2000) concurs that "Indeed in her world both males and females contribute to her sense of that 'dividing line between good and evil"

At the end of *Maru* and *A Question of Power* there is a glimmer of hope, but there is no compelling social action which would lead us to believe that African males will relinquish any power. or that rigid attitudes of "false social systems of class and caste", will discontinue. Both female characters move into the world of men with some sort of accommodation only. In fact, Elizabeth's integrated personality is an indication that she realizes that good triumph's over evil and that men will be forced to accept women as equals eventually. Goddard (op cit) notes that "Elizabeth's final state of complete integration synthesizes an internal and external labour. Her successful vegetable garden is the external symbol of her creative act of regaining a foothold on life. Through this external labour, she takes her claim as an active inhabitant of Motabeng, and decisively throws off her marginalized status".(5). Elizabeth's madness therefore acts as a metamorphic period from which she emerges changed. Head's final statement may well be that the brotherhood of man can only be attained through women.

One theory which has been bandied about is that Heads sole purpose of writing is to create room for a "compelling social action which would lead us to believe that African males will relinquish any power or that rigid attitude of "false social systems of class and caste", will discontinue." This might have been one of her reasons but perhaps the

weakest reason if indeed it is one. Rather, this study submits that Head simply needed to present the situation and leave her readers to determine the course of change or social action themselves. The use of myths as a linking instrument played a crucial role in achieving this; for few writers on the African continent seem to have recognized as Bessie Head has done, the great potentials of myth as a mode of cognition and consequently a basis of social organization.

This chapter has established that Head uses mythology to exegete madness in *Maru*, A *Question of Power, When Rain Clouds Gather* and *A Bewitched Crossroads*. In taking this stand this chapter examined the various major myths which Head employs to advance her thematic preoccupations , which include the role of color in the present world, man's search for spiritual fulfillment, the oppression of women, etc and the stylistic instruments which she deploys to achieve a holistic narrative that shows that men from all races, creeds and religion are united by the correlations of myths in their differing cultures and in suffering the measure of madness which alienation and exploitation is capable of bringing to the fore. In addition, she indicates that man experiences, is what causes his desire for a divine being and creates the mysticism that ensures that man's inability to explain all things act as a check to his latent destructive tendencies.

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# CHAPTER FOUR

## 4.0 PSYCHOSIS, MYTHOPOESIS AND MYSTICISM IN TONI MORRISON'S EARLY NOVELS

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter apprehends how Toni Morrison portrays nature, nurture and nativity as integral ingredients in the psychosis, mythopoesis and mysticism of the African American individual and the community in which they live in. Without doubt the Toni Morrison's novels which form the core of the analysis in this chapter reflect a deep concern with these issues and how myths or mythology provide a much needed foundation for her creative ourve. It excavates shows and examines how this preoccupation establishes Morrison foregrounds of these issues deep within the mythological structure of African – American culture. A cursory synopsis of these texts provides an exhilarating background to discussion of these novels vis a –vis the themes of this study in this chapter. Morrison's *Sula (*1973) *is* the story of the bond between two black women growing up in Medallion, Ohio. It was closely followed in 1977 with the publication of the critically acclaimed and best-selling novel *Song of Solomon which* follows the life of Macon "Milkman" Dead III, an African American male living in Michigan from birth to adulthood. *In Tar Baby* (1981), a complicated love story set in the West Indies, Morrison examines the subject of diaspora and what it means for intra black relationships. This was followed by *Beloved* (1987), a powerful story of a former slave who kills her daughter rather than allow the child to experience slavery, and is then haunted by the child's spirit. In analysing Toni Morrison's novels in this chapter, the texts are not discussed in the chronological order in which they were published rather they are

deployed on the basis of how they allow us trace a line of continuity of ascending complexity in Morrison's representation of the past in her exploration of race and identity, memory and history.

## 4.2 MORRISON AND HER MYTHIC CONSTRUCTS

Ingrained in the narrative structure of the Toni Morrison novels is the use of myths to deconstruct and reconstruct the African- American experience. In the process she finds cover for her endeavour in the use of mysticism and madness. In *Song of Solomon*, the character Robert Smith draws a crowd as he positions himself to and eventually "flys" from "…Mercy to the other side of Lake Superior at three o'clock" (1). The note he wrote prior to the event reads:

> At 3:00 p.m on Wednesday the 18th February, 1931, I will take off from Mercy and fly away on my own wings. Please forgive me. I loved you all.
>
> (Signed) Robert Smith,
> Ins. Agent (9)

This attempt by Robert Smith "The north Carolina mutual life insurance agent to fly …"(op cit) in *Song of Solomon* even though literally an act of suicide has a mystical foundation and the act itself signals the descent of the "flyer" into madness – a complete loss of the proper reasoning capacity. Indeed, it is the act of or desire to commit suicide that releases the spirit of the individual for a mystical flight of return to roots away from slavery and bondage. Morrison begins the *Song of Solomon* on a mythical but also a mystical note – "Downtown the firemen pulled on their great coats, but when they aimed at mercy, Mr. Smith had seen the rose petals, heard the music, and leaped on into the air…"(15) Morrison in utilizing these as a foreground to begin her story sought to establish a connection to and discern the

divide between the ephemerality of man and the ethereal. The synthesis between a man jumping to his death and a woman giving birth to a child -a boy- moments later (15) speak to the authors concern about the interconnectedness as well as the cyclical nature of life and death, in both its temporal as well as eternal dimensions. It also speaks to the importance of ancestral connections accessible in the present through mythology.

Kirk (2003) suggests that Morrison's mystical advance and intervention in this story takes a cue from an ancient myth:-the ancient Greek myth of Icarus. The idea that men could fly is also grounded in ancient African myths as for example in the myth of Solomon/ Sugarman a flying African (Lester 1969; Hamilton 1993; Nerad 2003). By appropriating this myth, Morrison alters its meaning and reconstructs it to indicate that flying need not be an escapist strategy but could be a strategy of soaring above an issue to confront it. An interesting aspect of the fly- away scene is that though it leads to the death of one person, it is an act of sacrifice because this same act leads to the birth of one and the dignifying of another; as a child is born this time within the dignifying confines of the hospital. The fly-away act in all its simplicity engendered change by creating an opportunity for those left behind.

In *Beloved*, a different kind of flight takes place, each with varying degrees of consequences. First, Sethe attempts to fly away (escape) with her children from her slave masters and when it is aborted, she takes the life of one of her daughters called Beloved. Later on Morrison chronicles the factors which activated Howard and Buglar to flight. She suggests that both were pushed to leave home in search of their own identity, out of a sense of hopelessness about what the future might hold for them. The search for identity itself outside of the self is consequently construed by Morrison as a futile exercise since it only drives away individuals so disposed from others and the reality which stares them in the face.

The flight by Buglar and his brother Howard as a further deepening of the ancestral myth of flying derives from the mystical undertones which the actions of the characters themselves produce that makes it compelling for them to do what they did. In producing this picture, Morrison interrogates the origins of male absence Vis a Vis female presence within the black psyche. Invariably in using this method in her narration, Morrison seeks to establish a connection between the dead and the living, between the experiences of the past in the slavery era as epitomized in the *Beloved* and that of the present discourse during the post slavery era as symptomatic of *Song of Solomon*.

Morrison asserts in *Tar Baby* that dying or living is "a difference without a distinction" (92) she suggests that life and death is a myth; since either on one side of the divide think those on the other side are not. For instance, the dead think the living are dead and the living believe that the dead are living. Thus she embraces the questions at the very core of mysticism regarding divinity, life and death and where we go when we die when she says:

> In a way she was jealous of death. Inside all that grief she felt when the doctor died, there had been a bit of piqué too as though he had chosen a more interesting subject than life-a more provocative companion than she was and had deliberately followed death when it beckoned. She was fierce in the presence of death, heroic even, as she was at no other time it's threat gave her direction, clarity, audacity. (64)

So death is not Morrison argues to be feared but rather embraced and consummated with. Death and its threat is the reality which make life worth living and provides a platform through which access to the divine is given or denied, accentuated or deemphasized. In *Sula,* Morrison uses death as a recurring theme, she shows that death is not just physical (physiological) but emotional (psychological) as well. However, what makes *Sula* unique is

Morrison's take that people could choose death instead of life and vice-versa thus blurring the boundary between both. Chosen or rejected, death thus becomes a denominator of all basis for life. For instance Plum a former soldier returning from war, turns to drugs to escape his trauma and keep himself from going insane. It is ironic that it is his mother Eva that kills him by burning him to death rather than the war or the drugs. Eva's odd and extreme decision to terminate her son's 'suffering' and free him from his present condition is premised on her belief that anything, even death, will suit him better than his life. Eva had suffered emotional death due to the constant sight of the deteriorating Plum. Eva's action suggest that sometimes death is better than living; in this case it hurts those who care most about the person less to just not have to deal with them anymore

Therefore, Death whether through, suicide (Robert Smith in *Song of Solo*mon) , Murder (Plum in *Sula* , baby Beloved in *Beloved*) or accident ( Little Chicken in *Sula)* is a mystic issue that reverberates through the novels of Morrison. In *Sula* for instance there is the mention of the National suicide day which had only a single celebrant in the person of Shadrack, its founder. In allowing Shadrack to narrate his role and the involvement of Medallion (his 'home'town) in World War 1, when he ran in 1917 with his comrades across a field in France, Morrison attempts to rewrite and put in correct perspective an aspect of American history that has been hugely distorted and calcified into a myth; that blacks contributed nothing, socially, politically, or militarily to the growth of America. It is this perception by the white race which has created in most people of colour the liability mentality, that suggests that African – American's were , are and have always been liabilities. Morrison debunks this by showing that blacks like Shadrack were also veterans of the war. The war did not only have physical consequences as evidenced in the injury to

the body of black fighters, it also had mental consequences "laced and silent in his small bed, he tried to the loose cords in his mind" (10).

Consequently as a result of the war, Shadrack suffers emotional death, which makes him consider physical death as an option. Death by suicide thus develops into a mythic option. As a recurrent theme in the novels of Morrison, it provides a mythic strategy for her characters to cope with the tragedies of daily living to which ordinary black folks had to come to terms. In approaching her narrative generally this way Morrison establishes the trajectoral connection between myth and madness "Shadrack was crazy – but once the people understood the boundaries and nature of his madness, they could fit him, so to speak, into the scheme of things." (15)

Madness, Morrison submits does not necessarily have to be violent as in Shadrack's case. However once a behavior or lifestyle does not tally with that expected by society from its members, then it could be regarded as madness – Shadrack's madness which made him institute the National Suicide Day is a product of his confrontation with death at the war front and the need to come to terms with the reality of the unexpectedness of death and dying. In doing this Morrison uses Shadrack to deconstruct the myth of death as an escapist route that immobilises black people from taking destiny changing decisions concerning their lives. While Shadrack in *Song of Solomon* dies emotionally, Hannah in *Sula* attempts to commit suicide and indeed dies physically as a result. What makes Hannah's action less intrepid is that what she did to herself was caused by some influence outside of herself. The storyline points to Sula as that influence. Sula watches Hannah die, "She rolled up to the window and it was then she saw Hannah burning. The flames from the yard fire were licking the blue cotton dress making her dance" (75), and seemed to

derive some satisfaction from doing so which leads us to believe that she was responsible for her mother's death. Sula's tale is similar to that of the myth of the Dracula (Hughes 2008; Bisang & Miller 2008) , the difference being that in Sula's case she does not directly set out to get people killed, but manipulates them clairvoyantly to kill themselves and "renews" herself when they die. No wonder Eva is "…convinced that Sula had watched Hannah burn not because she was paralyzed, but because she was interested." (78)

In an attempt at unraveling, death and life, Morrison carefully weaves into her entire narratives the significance of ancestors and origins to understanding the mystical interest in nation, individual or family. More important than the myth and mysticism that surround death is the fact of the myth and mysticism that surround the question of origin for nations, Individuals and families. This is why Morrison often introduced her characters as types; an everybody if you like, before they are then gradually unveiled as individuals. In *Song of Solomon* Morrison introduces a black doctor without name whose great influence within his community is unmitigated by his color. As the narrative progresses she particularizes the character to his personal rather than professional role as a father and a husband.(110) Morrison shows in *Song of Solomon* that the question who we are and where we come from has no definite answer and is a myth which no one will ever be able to fully unearth. Milkman discovers this much in the volte-face he found as he approached Susan Bryd a second time with questions concerning his genealogy. Since the subject of origins is often shrouded in great controversies as well as disputes, myths develop based on which narrative lineage or tradition an individual belongs. This in turn is closely a function of, from whom the story was received and to whom or through whom it was passed on; factors which determine its embellishment as it passes on.

In Morrison's novels, the issue of the origin of her characters who were largely black received a lot of attention. Images of the voyage from Africa to the New world is told Sethe by the "General Nanny Nan" (74) who claimed to have been a co-traveller with Sethe's mother. Sethe learns she had siblings who did not make it to the New world ; America and the incongruities of the tales of their demise and her own survival produce images that mythicise the whole experience of the free slaves and those who would later be regarded as their descendants. The inability of these tales to bring a closure to the questions in the characters mind creates a desire to "fly away" as earlier mentioned in this study which predilineates them to madness, withdrawals and suicide. The burden of the absence of rootedness generates much disturbing emotional paradigms especially paranoia that is gender indifferent in black communities. McNeal (2010) constructs this indifference quite succinctly when she asserts that:

> Toni Morrison exhibits the thematic occurrence of female madness in several of her works and draws a distinct link between the onset of mental instability in several of her female characters and the unforeseen absence of a male. While this male is typically an object of the women's romantic affection, Morrison's female characters also display insanity at the loss or lack of male family members—normally a father figure. The absence of a male loved one is not only that of a physical nature such as death or abandonment; instances also occur of the male being physically present while the female feels ignored or denied affection by the male, or worse, becomes the victim of sexual, physical, or mental abuse at his hands.(2)

Since origins usually have to do with the past of an individual or nation they tend to become mythic. Despite the maze which myths create for the search for origins, every individual, tribe, nation or society is still forced to acknowledge and grapple with it , at one time or the other as evidenced in Toni Morrison's narrative in *Sula* for instance . *Sula* is set in the period of slavery where the distinction between white and black was

gratuitous. The Blackman was usually a slave and the Whiteman a master over the Blackman and the Blackman as it were had to "buy" his freedom and be settled or provided for by his white master if he (the slave) was good and the master was good too. In *Sula*, the slave's white master employs deception as an instrument to deprive the ignorant slave what he really wanted "bottomland, rich and fertile". (5) This tale is the myth which accounts for why "white people lived on the rich valley floor in that little river town in Ohio, and the blacks populated the hills above it" (*Sula* 5). The tale tells how the town got its name – Bottom. The name Bottom is very significant because it serves as a metaphor of where blacks were, are and may yet be spiritually, emotionally, financially and otherwise in America for a long time. Bergenholtz (1996) citing Deborah E. McDowell to support her own arguments about *Sula* being a satire on binary thinking puts the matter into proper perspective thus:

> The narrative [Sula] insistently blurs and confuses…binary oppositions. It glories in paradox and ambiguity beginning with the prologue that describes the setting, the Bottom, situated spatially in the top. We enter a new world here, a world where we never get to the "bottom" of things, a world that demands a shift from an either/or orientation to one that is both/and, full of shifts and contradictions. (80)

This binary thinking dimension also accounts for why a woman (Sethe) would choose to kill her own children in order to spare them the pains and inhumanity of slave treatment in *Beloved.* Thus the struggle for discovering an identity in the absence of information which could make such discovery possible often leads to a mythicization of the process in order to confer validity to it and to the individual seeker.

Indeed much of the mythology in *Song of Solomon* revolves around flights by blacks to the places of their origin in Africa. In *Tar Baby* on the other hand, Morrison deepens this mythic mode by her use of a fictional setting; the Isle des Chevaliers a

Caribbean island where the individual characters stories convey a larger symbolic resonance about the dichotomy between the self and the other in the search for identity. The use of an island outside of the United states is significant because it espouses the concern of Toni Morrison with the idea of the diaspora in attempting to create a connect between the African- Americans in the United States and blacks in Africa. Toni Morrison deconstructs the mindset that the origin of her characters is an El Dorado to which they can return. Consequently, she debunks the myth that a unified black diasporic identity exists or could be created to counter the modernity that alienates and fragments existing social strictures. In *Sula* the mystery of the strange things happening in and to Sula covers the entire narrative with a mystical cloud that is quite difficult to ignore. The influence of the unseen hand which is evident in Morrison's discourse about origin in *Tar Baby* and *Song of Solomon* is seen at work in Sula's person and story, ordering of events, situations or incidences and eventually the development of a myth around her; entirely based on the palpable mystery that surrounds her. Consequently as characters around her; Hannah and Little Chicken, for instance die, her mystical powers deepens the myth around her person and Sula's image is enlarged and reinforced. Coded into Morrison's reconstruction of patterns for self discovery in her novels, consequently, is the construction of new paradigms through which her characters would come to terms with their past in the light of their present to embrace their future. Her use of the flash back technique aids this effort greatly and is in tandem with the idea that there is no present without the past and the past is the compass that set the present – a concern that has its very root in any attempt to discuss issues of myths and mythology.

Morrison shows that tracing one's origin is a mystical experience which apart from being important has its own trauma because you suddenly find yourself walking

through a mythic maze, where stories you've heard that seem to provide a lead, eventually do not add up as you begin the journey to trace where you came from. In addition, the benefit (gold) that ought to produce a fortune from such an effort becomes a mirage (230). A real counter poise to the experience of Sethe in *Beloved* is the experience of Milkman in the *Song of Sol*omon. Milkman's decision to journey back to the place where his father had been born and his grandfather murdered; to leave the city for the country; to humble himself to come down, was also a decision for self-discovery, an attempt to uncover his own identity and the root of all the feelings and sentiments that seem to be in contention with themselves within him.

The title of the novel *Beloved* is an allusion to a passage in Song *of Solomon* 6:3 in the *Holy Bible*, aside from serving as the name of the main character in the novel, it also serves a symbolic purpose as an epitaph which celebrates all those who had died unjustly in the cruel era of slave trade and who had no tombstones marking that show they ever existed.

> But what she got, settled for, was the one word that mattered. She thought it would be enough, noting among the headstones with the engraver, his young son looking on, the anger in his face so old; the appetite in it quite new. That should certainly be enough. Enough to answer one more preacher, one more abolitionist and a town full of disgust (5)

The epitaph "Beloved" is significant especially as it serves as an exorcism of the ghost of several black slaves who suffered severe physical abuse from the slavery system. One of these type of abuse was whipping. The cane used for whippings were made from the branches of trees and other plants. Fulton's (2011) assertion in her very inspiring paper on the significance of trees in *Beloved* has relevance to all of Morrison's novels being

considered in this thesis work. She submits in her focus on the flora, especially the trees in Morrison's stories, that:

> In Beloved, Morrison frequently uses the natural image of the tree to "hook" her readers. The centrality of trees to the novel seems evident in that virtually every critic who has put pen to paper concerning Beloved offers some interpretation of the scar on Sethe's back, usually in connection with Paul D's favorite tree, Brother. (8)

While it is true like Fulton readily suggest that different kinds of tree images such as daisy trees , deciduous trees, and avocado trees in *Tar Baby*; aspen, chokecherry tree and sycamore trees in *Beloved*; apple trees , maple trees, in *Song of Solomon* and beeches, oaks, chestnuts, pear trees in *Sula*, populate Morrison's flora. It is also incontrovertibly true that one of the most prominent and significant of these trees is the chokecherry tree. The experience of slaves dictated Toni Morrison's use of the image of the chokecherry tree in *Beloved*. This image is derived from the marks which whips and strokes made on the backs of their victims. By showing the back of Sethe serenaded and designed thus (82), Morrison captures in the present, the pain and anguish of ex-slaves and their fore-bears during the period of slavery in the past. The fruit of the chokecherry; a dark red or black bitter fruit of a wild cherry symbolizes the memory of trans-generational bitterness which slavery engendered. Also the chokecherry tree is used also in making musical instruments. It also evokes a memory of sounds domiciled in the swish of the lash which made music. The significance of the trees that populate Morrison's novels is their conveyance of pure images of the countryside; of the wild where things were ordered by nature rather than by men and men obeyed nature in its orderings. In this cast of events man was dependent on nature, yet took advantage of her to his own detriment.

Hahn (2009) insist that the significance of the tree imagery is that “Trees sink thematic roots and weave intertwined branch-motifs throughout African-American author Toni Morrison's slavery-era novel, *Beloved*.”. However, this is not peculiar to *Beloved* alone and brings us to familiar terrain in other texts as well. Slaves like Sethe and Paul D in *Beloved* were beaten by whips made from the branches of trees, some were burnt in wood pyres, sometimes hanged on trees. Indeed *Beloved* is a novel that abounds in black bodies - headless, hanging from trees, ...“Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, brought up...” ( 52) Thus trees as products of nature were configured by Morrison not just as instruments of oppression but also as a sympathetic presence which provided the needed shade and or comfort for the slaves when they were tired and frustrated ; an avenue for spiritual rejuvenation , as the clearing clearly became for them (259). Bonnet (2011) puts it succinctly this way:

> The clearing's regenerating energy is perhaps even plainer in one of the last scenes of the novel when the women of the community gather in front of 124 to exorcize the spirit that has driven Sethe to the verge of death: "For Sethe it was as though the Clearing had come to her with all its heat and simmering leaves, where the voices of women searched for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words.... It broke over Sethe and she trembled like the baptized in its wash" (261).

In addition the trees also provide a cover for slaves when they chose to escape and leads them to freedom. For instance Paul D after he had escaped from Alfred, Georgia finds his way north to freedom by taking the advice of the Cherokees (who had greeted runaway convicts for many years) to follow the trail of the blossoming trees :

> That way.... Follow the tree flowers.... Only the tree flowers. As they go, you go, You will be where you want to be when they are

> gone." So he raced from dogwood to blossoming peach. When they thinned out he headed for the cherry blossoms, then magnolia, chinaberry, pecan, walnut and prickly pear.... He merely followed in their wake, a dark ragged figure guided by the blossoming plums. (112-13)

Morrison approach to this type of imagery is fairly different in *Song of Solomon* where the most conspicuous tree imagery is that of the dying maple tree which Magdalena and Corinthians had planted outside their bedroom and on which Milkman Peed. (98) Milkman comes home one night slightly drunk, Magdelena calls him to her room. He reluctantly follows her eager to finish with her and go to bed. She tells him to look out the window at a maple tree outside. It's dying and she wants him to see how important that fact is. She tells him she planted that maple tree years ago on the Sunday that he urinated on her. She tells him the story of the Sunday drive when she had been chosen to take him up the hill on the roadside to urinate. She had picked flowers and when she got to him, he had urinated on her. She had hated him for that and wished him dead, but she had also planted the flowers in the yard. They hadn't lived, but the maple tree had sprouted there and grew. Now it was dying. Magdelena says, aand using this metaphor, she tells Milkman that he had been urinating on the three women of the house as long as he has been alive and she will not stand for it any more. The dying maple tree thus mirrors and represents the life of Ruth Forster and her daughters; Lena and Corinthians. Ruth's description of herself as a "small" woman captures the essence of her character. Ruth is "Stunned into silence" and her growth like that of her "half-grown" daughters and the dying maple tree in the side yard has been stunted psychologically by her abusive husband. Here Morrison's concern is with the nature of an unrefined black patriarchy that seeks recognition as the superior gender through self assertion that manifests in aggression transfer to the female folk. These attitudes manifest in the attitudes of the males to sex, money, and power

(authority) which as seen in *Sula*, Sula sets out to lampoon by her own outlandish and care-free lifestyle. In *Sula*, the opening paragraph is instructive about the symbolic significance of trees to Morrison's overall narrative structure:

> In that place, where they tore the nightshade and black berry patches from their roots to make room for the medallion city golf course, there was once a a neighborhood . It stood in the hills above the valley town of medallion and spread all the way to the river. It is called the surburbs now, but when black people lived there it was called the bottom. One road, shaded by beeches, oaks, maples and chestnuts, connected to the valley. The beeches are gone now, and so are the pear trees where children sat and yelled down through the blossoms to passersby... (1)

Morrison's concern in the above passage is about nature in the pristine state and it's destruction. The Blackman though not responsible for this destructive acts Morrison suggests suffers the most due to his reliance on and closeness to nature. Consequently, the loss of these trees meant a significant disruption of the social and economic life of the black man. This trend, also significant in the *Tar Baby* where the etymology of the word tar suggests that the word takes it's meaning from a viscous liquid derived primarily from the wood and roots of pine by destructive distillation through a process called pyrolysis. In earlier times it was often used as a water repellent coating for boats, ships, and roofs. The phrase Tar baby is from an 1881 "Uncle Remus" story told by Joel Chandler Harris a North Carolina (the Tarheel state) resident which was first recorded 1864.... (etymonline 2010)

In *Tar Baby*, *Morrison* examines and reconstructs the myth of the tar baby in order to rescue it from its western colourations. In doing this she relates to the tree imagery by imbuing them with a mythic capacity in a mythic world which she created where even trees could talk (77). Through this technique, she presents a highly naturalistic

environment for her stories; an environment that is conscious, aware of itself and of the characters. In approaching this subject this way, Morrison succeeds in showing the connection between man and nature and in suggesting that the same measure of reactions to circumstances that man experiences in terms of his moods; happiness, sadness, death, life, birth and rebirth are all paralleled in nature and more evident in the manners of the trees reactions to the seasons. Trees thus become symbolic of nature and freedom, and ultimately a role model to which humans aspire and seek to attain. Michele Bonnet, (op cit) makes a lucid assertion that is central to our conception of myth and mysticsm in the novels of Toni Morrison in relation to her use of the tree imagery, as he sought to establish a connection between the significance of trees and life itself, and the antecedents for his assumptions when he says:

> The most salient feature of the tree is that it is identified with Life--a sign of the influence of African religion, which holds that trees concentrate within themselves the vital force that flows through and animates the universe (Thomas 110). Sixo, the only truly flawless character in the novel, the African hero and role model, provides the first example of their beneficent, life-giving virtue. He "went among trees at night. For dancing, he said, to keep his bloodlines open ..." (25). The trees whip up the flow of the blood that animates his body; they infuse him with some vital energy that feeds and multiplies his own; they are revivifying. Denver's bower is similarly endowed with a nurturing, healing, rejuvenating power. It is made of "five boxwood bushes, planted in a ring" (28), where she regularly seeks refuge to relieve her aching solitude. It provides Denver with the company she so painfully craves; it soothes and revitalizes her: "Veiled and protected by the live green walls, she felt ripe and clear, and salvation was as easy as a wish" (29). The juxtaposition of the two adjectives green and live suggests a semantic equivalence between the two terms, which is made quite explicit in a later reference to the bower when the narrator speaks of "the before-Beloved hunger that drove her into boxwood and cologne for just a taste of life" (120). The vibrant depth of the green leaves, which irradiate "an emerald light," also connotes vitality. (112)

In utilizing imageries such as those presented in the above passage Morrison embraces mysticism and engages ultimately in mythopoesis. And since myths are located in the past, Morrison's vivid and elucidative recall of the experiences of her slave characters through the use of flash backs attenuates and validates the historical veracity of her narration. The flash back technique is widely used in the novels of Toni Morrison and this is quite understandable when related to the issue of myths and mythology. There is no present without the past and the past is the compass that set the present (Campbell 1972). Memory is recollecting the past in the present. Memory is in the past but as it is remembered and celebrated in the present, it develops airs and wisdom, and directions of its own, becoming a myth in the future as eventually deified. Memory is a very vital ingredient of the myth-making process. Thus Morrison engages in reconstructing and deconstructing memory, all at once depending on the temperament of the character involved in the action. For instance The desire of the present circumstance as epitomized in Baby Suggs, to kill the memory of the past "My firstborn. All I can remember of her is how she loved the burned bottom of bread. Can you beat that? Eight children and that's all I remember" (6) litigates the ephemerality of memory, which is eventually mitigated by the desperacy of Sethe to keep her own memory alive, complete, full and intact. In this regard, Sethe talks down Suggs by suggesting that her memory failure is her fault when she says "that's all you let yourself remember".(6)

Central to Morrison's de-mythologizing, is the myth that the black community, post-slavery is homogenous and united. Morrison also engages this myth through the concept of the diaspora and what it means to blacks in America. Morrison shows that among the blacks themselves (for instance between Son and Jadine in *Sula)* , there were petty jealousies, angers and unresolved conflicts that would in later years play into the

hands of the white supremacist as seen in *Song of Solomon*. Fellows Blacks in *Beloved* for example criticized Baby Suggs for attracting so much attention or so it seems to herself. In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison suggests through Milkman as the novel closes, that truth must confront myth for any measure of healing to take place. This passage succinctly makes this point:

> "Pilate," said Milkman, softly now, "that's not what he meant. I know what he meant. Come, let me tell you. And Pilate, those bones. They're not that white man's bones. He probably didn't even die. I went there. I saw. He wasn't there and the gold wasn't there either. Somebody found it and found him too. They must have, Pilate. Long before you got there.…" (358)

Morrison also shows that individuals like Guitar who belong to Cultic groups like the Seven Days which predispose members to suicide, an act not seen by members of the group as such but rather as an act of self-sacrifice are simply unable to come to terms with the truth of their own past experience and hence discover themselves and their innate abilities which has the capacity to put them above their social environment. In presenting Guitar, side by side with his friend Milkman, Morrison tried to show how differently individuals and segments of the black community handled their identity and social crisis experience. While guitar is consumed by his own experience, Milkman passes the same route regaining his life and sense of identity. In the same vein, through Robert Smith, who is used to begin the story in *Song of Solomon* and whose name is mentioned in concluding it, Morrison indicates that it is quite possible for individuals to process themselves to regain a measure of their identity.

In the death of Pilate, whose tragic end is brought about when she pulls the trigger on herself (361), Morrison suggests that for some, the realization of the search for identity could be the termination of a physical life to obtain an eternal life. Pilate's entire life was a

mystery and her death too followed the same pattern thus projecting Morrison's concern with the interface between life, identity and death. In addition, she explores the relationship between the dead and the living which manifests largely in the presence of ghosts in her narration. While, the belief in ghosts and the concept of life and death, past and present are antithetical entities, they have convergences which make them difficult to separate entirely and treat, as different, one from the other. This more so has made necessary, the search for these convergences which occupy their own central place in American literary discourse.

Brogan (2007) argues that modern ghost stories offer a way for minority authors to come to terms with their lost cultural identities. She contends that the experience of mourning as that form of memory determined by an awareness of a break with the past is at the heart of this process. She asserts that these authors seek to re-create ethnic identity by imaginatively recovering a collective history that in many cases has been fragmented or erased. Creating ghost's thus help to fill in these crevices and rewrite whole pages of lost stories. The belief in ghosts around which Toni Morrison builds the story in *Beloved*, also finds a comfortable place in her narrative in *Song of Solomon*. The passage below is a succinct example of this perception:

> Our papa was dead, you see. They blew him five feet up into the air. He was sitting on his fence waiting for 'em, and they sneak up from behind and blew him five feet in the air… but papa came back one day. We didn't know it was him at first cause we both saw him blowed five feet into the air we were lost then… (49)

In *Beloved*, Sethe and then Denver's life revolves around the myth of the ghost, having developed a mystical connection to it. However, Paul D (the hazelnut man), whom the ghost detests, exorcises it's presence, when he returns to kick start a relationship with

Sethe, thus disconnecting Denver from its lavish attention which she so enjoyed. Denver laments thus:

> Whatever they were or might have been, Paul D messed them up for good. With a table and a loud male voice he had rid 124 of its claim to local fame. Denver had taught herself to take pride in the condemnation Negroes heaped on them; the assumption that the haunting was done by an evil thing looking for more. None of them knew the downright pleasure of….But it was gone now. Whooshed away in the blast of a hazelnut man's shout, leaving Denver's world flat, mostly with the exception of an emerald closet standing seven feet high in the woods. Her mother had secrets – things she wouldn't tell mother had secrets- things she halfway fold. Well, Denver had' them too. And hers were sweet as lily-of-the-valley colleague. (45)

In the same manner that the ghost of Beloved hindered Denver and her mother- Sethe from any meaningful relationship , so did the ghosts of the past hinder Baby Suggs from connecting to her present and she dies unable to forge a symbolic bond between herself and her daughter-in-law. However inspite of their differences, Sethe learns from Baby Suggs that religion was the means' through which she could cope with "misery, regret, gall and hurt; so she lays down her "sword and shield"(123), to find unity with a divine. Several years - nine years precisely – after Mama Suggs death, the tiny ghost in the '124' filled the vacuum and became a destructive essence which Sethe chooses to accommodate. Sethe's choice is tantamount to insanity which even she realizes would need amelioration. Consequently, in *Beloved*, Sethe's regular return to the clearing thus provided her an opportunity to reconnect to the spirit of Mama Suggs who had in her life time propounded her own concept of Christian holiness:

> She did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin no more. She did not tell them they were the blessed of the earth, it is inheriting meek or it's glory bound pure". …"she told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they would not have it.(103)

The death of Baby Suggs was thus a mystical loss with inherent mystical return value as she also returned to the clearing as a spirit or spiritual force and creates an atmosphere, where Sethe goes to seek comfort for her pains. In producing this paradigm, Morrison's entrenches in her narrative the link between the world of the dead – (Baby suggs) and that of the living (Sethe). She shows that the relationship between here and there is complimentary, continuous and contiguous. She suggests that the divide between the living and the dead is a mental one which Sethe bridges by simulating Baby Suggs presence to massage her neck (121) in order to soothe her tension and take control of her own life. The "clearing" a supposedly holy ground where Sethe, Denver and Beloved experience a sense of liberation, conscientization and release, is the same place where Sethe almost had herself strangulated. The clearing just like the 124 residence of Sethe has mystical presences that are insistent and overpowering. It is ironic that wherever these presences' are, the prognosis for those within such environment is rarely good. This perhaps underlines Paul D counsel to Sethe to move from "a haunted house" to another "May be you all ought to move" he said but Sethe giving him "a look of snow", declares "No moving, No leaving. It's all right the way it is." Paul D. retorts" you going to tell me it's all right with this child half out of her mind? (17-18)

Clearly the presence of a ghosts at 124 and and in the Clearing truncates Denver into boots of delirium and her mother into other forms of insanity as they develop a connection to the "spirits or ghosts whose presence rather than detest they seems all too content with. In *Song of Solomon*, Morrison accentuates her concern with the subject of ghosts in her work as part of a larger exploration of the mysterious and the mystical nature of life. This is clear from this exchange between Milkman and Freddie below:

"I didn't know you were an orphan."
"Well, not a regular orphan. I had people and all, but my mama
died and nobody would take me in. it was on account
of the way she died that nobody would take me."
"how'd she die ?"
"Ghosts."
"Ghosts?"
"You don't believe in ghosts?"
"Well" – Milkman smiled - "I'm willing to , I guess."
"You better believe, boy . They're here." (122)

Later on Freddie claims assertively that his mother died as a result of being killed by Ghost's "Plenty. Plenty. Ghosts killed my mother…" (122) Pilate and Macon Dead think they are visited by their father's ghost (42) from the moment they cut out of Circe's house and were alone to roam free. The belief in ghosts is an attempt to show that there is life beyond the present physical life. Indeed, it might be evidence that life is eternal and that people really don't die in the actual sense of the word, they just move on unto another life from where they can interfere or intervene in this life. In essence Toni Morrison insinuates that the dead are as or even much more interested in the affairs of the living than even the living care to believe. In addition, dead people like the baby Beloved (represented by their ghosts) are able to express all the varying emotions of anger, hate, bitterness, sadness, remorsefulness e.t.c. just like their living counterparts. And those on the other side-the mercy who are sensitive are able to understand what these feelings are about and propitiate them.

This study asserts that the belief in the existence of ghosts itself is mythical. That people believe they exist, does not necessary mean they do. Morrison introduces a mystical dimension to the relationship between Sethe and Beloved to create a sensory

decoy that shows Sethe interacting with a rather more subdued ghost of Beloved. This forces Paul D to engage on a forceful exorcism of the ghost of the violent Beloved.

> That her plan was always that they would all be together on the other side. Beloved wasn't interested. She said when she cued there was no one. That dead men lay on top of her. That she had nothing to eat. Ghosts without skin/stock their fingers in her and said beloved in the dark and bitch in the light. (105)

Morrison in describing the psychological and emotional interaction that takes place between a child and mother as presented in the love of Sethe for Beloved validates the reason why Sethe attempts to murder all her children and succeeds only with Beloved. It also indicates that man is a double faced being composed of both halves of kindness and wickedness. Morrison's preoccupation with the idea of mysticism is succinctly brought out in her narrative in *Song of Solomon* when she compares Guitar and Milkman's embrace of the Gold idea they were about to cart away to the passion of Christ, and is essential for understanding Morrison's embrace of myth as a structural pattern for her narrative:

> Suddenly the moon came out and shone like flashlight right into the room. They both saw it at the same time. It being heavy, hone green like the green of Easter eggs left too long in the die. And like Easter it promised everything the Risen Son and the hearts love desire. Complete power, total freedom, and perfect justice (203)

However for this Easter promise to become a reality, every individual must come to terms with the reality of death, dying and the afterlife. Morrison enunciates this explicitly through Pilate who asserts:

> Nobody owns a hungman, but whoever kills a many owns him even dead."…if you take a life, then you own it. You responsible for it. You can't get rid of nobody by killing them. They still there, and they yours now… papa told me to, and he was right, you know.

> You can't take a life and walk off and leave it. life is life. Precious and the dead you kill is yours. They stay with you anyway, in your mind… (227)

The implication of her statement simply put is that a person would be haunted by the ghost of whoever they kill. As much as Paul D tried therefore in *Beloved* to exorcise the ghost of Beloved, he meets an obstacle however in Sethe who insists:

> It was one thing to beat up a ghost, quite another to throw a helpless coloredgirl out in territory infected by the Klan" Desperately thirsty for black blood, without which it could not live, the dragon swam the Ohio at will. ( 79)

Morrison's resort to mythologizing the Ku Klux Klan and their activities, by comparing them to vampires and dragons which sucked human blood for food, accounts for why Sethe is unable to accede or so it seems to Paul D's request to put Beloved out of 124. However , Morrison seeks to show that Sethe's position, rather than being a product of her own independent thinking, had everything to do with Beloved who operated from a higher psychic frequency from where she manipulated everyone around her. Infact the psychic dimension to the issues outlined above is succinctly illustrated when as Paul D was thinking of how to get Beloved moved out, she (Beloved) chokes on the raisons and bread pudding she is eating as though she had known what he was thinking towards her

> No sooner did he have the thought than loud strangled on one of the bread pudding. She fell backward and off the chair and thrashed around holding her throat. Seth knocked her on the back while Denver pried her hands away from her neck. Beloved, on her hands and knees, vomited up her food and struggled for breath. ( 79)

Morrison establishes through this scene that there are psychic individuals who could connect with others at the thought level. By imbuing, Beloved with a capacity for

clairvoyance, Morrison clearly detours into mysticism. Basically, Morrison's characters in *Beloved* are all imbued with this basic psychic quality of knowing things they shouldn't be knowing, seeing things other's don't see or knowing something would happen which others never imagined would. In *Song of Solomon* the encounter between Ruth Forster (Milkman Dead's Mother) and Hagar (Milkman Dead's cousin and girlfriend) (150-152) provides a Silhouette to another approach by Morrison to the subject of the dead and living Vis –a- Vis life and the afterlife.

The conversation between Pilate and Ruth about whether there is life after death or whether some people should or should not live forever (155-156) is part of the author's attempt to interrogate life and death and their beyond. It plays to an Africa thesis which is so prevalent as a borrowed presence in African –American literature, that there is a world of the living and a world of the dead and people just move in and out of one world to another on a cyclical basis (Soyinka 1979). In *Beloved*, Morrison's approach is eclectic, she suggests that if Beloved was a reincarnation of Sethe's murdered daughter (baby Beloved) who haunted the house before the adult Beloved appeared, then it gave Sethe hope that her sons, Howard and Burglar, too "could come back home from the timeless past– certainly her sons could, and would, come back from wherever they had gone to". (54). The mystical belief in a contiguity of time, space and place, an eternity to which you men go and from which all men return is a strong aspect of African American beliefs – (Evans-Wentz 1911 ) By making allusions to how Saul in *The Holy Bible* (1Samuel 28:1-8) called up the ghosts of Samuel through the assistance of the witch of Endor ( 94), Morrison universalizes the idea that ghosts are interested in the affairs of man especially when man invites their involvement. No wonder in a similar manner to the Saul saga, Sethe and Denver seek to call Baby Suggs up.

> Baby suggs died shortly after the brothers left, with no interest whatever in their leave-taking or hers, and light afterward seethe and Denver decided to end the persecution by calling forth the ghost that fuel them so. Perhaps a conversation, they thought, an exchange of views or something would help. So they held hands and said, "come on. Came on you may as well as well just come on." (72)

The import of this séance which is by all means mystical is mitigated by the mythified memory of Baby Suggs, desperate to stay alive. In the same breath, it is unnatural and ironic that it is when Sethe finds happiness with Paul D that Denver suddenly becomes unhappy and lonely. Paul D's presence thus becomes a catalyst for the disruption of a relationship between the mother and daughter; for the mother because he provides a husband presence for which she had also longed and for the daughter because he reminds of an absent father and takes her place in a relationship with her mother. The absentee father syndrome was a symbol of the dysfunctionality in which the black families in the works of Toni Morrison operate. In all of her stories Morrison mirrors the dysfunctional family system which pervades the black families which people her novel. In *Tar Baby* for instance this dysfuctionality is seen in the relationship of Valerian Street to his wife and their relationship as a couple to their son.

Consequently, dichotomies between male and female, motherhood and fatherhood, single and married and between black and white in the novels of Toni Morrison is a very compelling devolvement into the mythopoesis of the author. These dichotomies are the reasons for the stratification of the society along gender lines especially considering the patriarchal nature of most African American families, as well as along status lines. The invariable implication of this is that norms are broken and the family structure is placed under undue stress. In *Sula*, Morrison extends this discourse when she portrays Sula as a

disaster; she was a powerful being, women and children feared her and men could not resist here. Eventually, she takes Jude Greene Nel's husband to bed and destroys their beautiful marriage. Even though the initial inclination would be to condemn her as a sinister, dark and evil character, for her seemingly unpardonable sin, Morrison seeks through her to show that all men have a part that is dark and a product of our environment; physical as well as psychic. Sula sleeps with Nel's husband but she also sleeps with whitemen and is thus considered to have committed the racial hara -kiri. While she is covertly condemned for sleeping with Jude , she is overtly condemned for doing same with whitemen. What makes Sula's situation ironic is the attitude to her of blacks who themselves are products of illicit relationships with white men in their lineage. Morrison shows that such prejudices occur because their colour forces them to choose a side and stick to it though "the fact that their own skin color was proof that it had happened in their own families was no deterrent to their bile"(80.), Nor was the willingness of black men to be in the beds of white women a consideration that might lead them towards tolerance"(83). In other words sexual discrimination against black women within the black community was often hidden under the cloak of racism. The same things that women were accused of as having no rights to do, the men were approved if they did them. What was so wrong then for a woman was not so wrong for the men. In *Sula*, Morrison's female characters seemed to have been cast in the image of nymphomanias whose sole obsession in life is sex for it's sake alone so she says of Hannah: "Hannah simply refused to live without the attention of a man, and after Rekus' death had a sequence of lovers, mostly husbands of her friends and neighbours…"(87)

Clearly , the relationship that the women had with men were always shortlived and also the relationship women had with each other was full of suspicion and this is why

in *Sula*, Morrison centers the narrative around the powerful bonds of friendship between Sula Peace and Nel Wright, who meet as girls and maintain their friendship into adulthood. This bond is ruptured, however, when Nel finds her husband in bed with Sula. In *Sula,* Morrison explores the importance of female friendship in the formation of individual identity, which in reality is often superseded by women's relationships with men. In *Sula* (42-43) and *Tar Baby* Morrison sought answers to the question: what does sex do to a woman. She does this through the character of Hannah who says "Sex was pleasant and frequent but otherwise unremarkable" (51) Hannah represents sexual indulgence and thus becomes a social hazard. Morrison by charting the inheritance of these traits by Sula from Hannah, and Hannah from Eva explores a family tree which indicates that these challenges are trans-generational not simply because they are mystically fixated but because the attitude of rejecting people's social right to choose relationships is society fixed and truncates individual into deviant behaviours and madness. Morrison instead of disparaging the character of Sula shows through her that all peoples regardless of colour or sex share a common humanity. The need for sex, for instance knows no color barrier and men were not in any way superior to women when it comes to seeking for attention and affection. She challenges and condemns as sheer oppression the paradigm that suggests that it was right for a black man to sleep with a white woman but wrong for a black woman to sleep with a whiteman for instance.

In *Song of Solomon*, Hagar's kind of love is tragic (343), it emanates from lack and rejection within her family, creating an atmosphere of insecurity which ultimately climaxes in another fatal rejection by Milkman. Hagar, Reba's daughter and Pilate's granddaughter, puzzled her mother and grandmother from her childhood. She was often petted and allowed whatever she wanted, for example because she hated dirt and

disorganization, she was often offered clean and pretty bedsheets to sleep on even though she never took part in washing them. As a result of this type of upbringing, she is unable to handle her lovers –Milkman's - rejection and goes mad when he dumps her after almost fourteen years.

The stratification in society along race and gender lines was an unfortunate reality that is evident in all Toni Morrison's novels. This in part also account for the stultification of family, group and individual relationships. (121) Morrison shows that self-fulfillment is not found in the relationships that an individual has with others but rather within the self. A good example of this is Jadine in *Tar Baby* who discovers that she is not quite ready to explore the person she really is. An individual who is not fulfilled first in his heart, Morrison argues would have unfulfilled relationships. Through the characters of Hagar in *Song of Solomon*, Jadine in *Tar Baby,* Sula and Hannah in *Sula* and Beloved in *Beloved*, Morrison submits that sex is not a substitute for enduring intimate relationships. Sex and sexual relations and how they have been mysticised and mythified is very important to understanding why it leads to the psychosis or the madness of some characters in Morrison's narrative. For instance, Hagar wants Milkman dead for "fucking" her, "sucking" her as one would an orange and then dumping her, he in turn lived in trepidation awaiting his own murder because he realized how so despisefully he had treated his lover (76). Sex in the novels of Toni Morrison especially illicit sex , produced an enormous maniacal pleasure during the act but emotional pain, sorrow and misery in the aftermath . Sex obliterates classes; for those in the upper class of the society can descend to have it and those in the lower class can ascend to offer it. Sex may not translate to marriage but at the moment it is obtained it satisfies a need; Corinthian Dead faces this

reality and offers herself to have sex with Harry Porter who lives in an apartment he rented from her father.

A crucial issue that closely relates the genders and their marital status is the issue of abandonment: Valerian street abandons life in the west to live out the rest of his life in Isles de Cavalier; a Caribbean Island, in so doing he abandons civilization and his family for nature; Son abandons Jadine to return to the Carribbean; Jadine abandons her black ancestry in order to gain acceptance from a white family- the Street's. When relationships end in abandonment it takes its toll on the mental state of the characters and drives many into madness and alienation. The emptiness that develops in the soul of the character is thus filled by a longing for any form of essence at all. This leads to mysticism as evident in *Song of Solomon* where Ruth's mystical disposition towards her late father is established by these words:

> It was important for me to be in his presence, among his things the things he used, had torched. Later it was just important for them to know that he was in the world. When he left it, I kept on requiting that cared-for feeling that I got from him.(63)

In situations and circumstances of extreme rejection, individuals like Ruth resort to mysticism as sanity – preserving measures, so that they stay in control of their mind states. She explains to Milkman "With Nobody touching me or even looking as though they like to touch me. That's when I started coming to Fairfield."(49) Alienation especially of those of the female gender especially young girls creates a feeling of mutual longing amongst them and could lead to a cultic form of relationship. In *Sula*, it is apparent something is terribly wrong and mysterious about two young girls aged twelve conspiring and eventually seeing to the murder of a small boy – Chicken. It also indicates that these

girls suffered from a measure of madness stemming from their hatred of the male – folks who harassed on them on and off and truncate them into regrettable acts. However as is soon readily discovered in Morrison's novels, it is not just the female characters that are insecure, the male characters are too. In *Song of Solomon*, Toni Morrison sought to present the insecurity of the male folk and how this negative trait has impacted on the family structure post-slavery. Macon narrating to Milkman why he hate's his (Milkman's) mother so much, projects himself as a person unable to come to terms with the huge disparity between his own origin and background and that of his wife, Ruth. In attempting to justify his reasons for beating Ruth, he unwittingly admits a measure of self-conceit and consequently madness. His suspicion that Ruth and her father were engaged in an incestous relationship because of Ruth's insistence that her father who is a medical doctor deliver his, Macon's, own children during childbirth against his opposition is a figment of his imagination that eventually determines his behavior towards Ruth. Morrison shows that in giving these inaccurate accounts of things to his son Milkman, Macon Dead endangers his son's psychological balance and future by undermining his accurate understanding of his family circumstances. She puts it thus:

> In "poisoning" the mind of Milkman and engendering questions what was he supposed to do with this new information his father had dumped on him? Was it an effort to cop a plea? How was he supposed to feel about the two of them now? Was it "true", first of all? Did his mother… had his mother made it with her own 'father? (85 )

In writing the word "true" in quotation marks italics, Morrison's queries our understanding and definition of truth. She interrogates its frontiers and shows that what is true or not is largely mythical. We believe many things to be true or not true either because we think them to be true or not true or have been made to believe they were true

or not true. So truth in itself is largely subjective. This was the reason why a huge emotional turmoil is generated in the mind of Milkman at the revelation of what might have transpired between his mother and father; the truth, set him into a state of mental delirium. (87-*90)*

Paul D's re-emergence into the life of Sethe in her new found home, creates for him a re-connection to her but alienates Denver from Sethe, thus creating a rift and destruction in mother –daughter relationship. Denver's attempt to possess her mother in an intimate relationship is challenged not just by the attention seeking ghost of baby Beloved but also by the return of Paul D. This accentuates the myth of the absence or the presence of a father. In *Beloved*, Halle, Sethe's husband is broken when he sees the humiliation of Sethe by the white boys and realizes, he could do nothing about it. So Halle instead of returning to her left for good and is eventually murdered.(81) Sethe says of that episode " They took my milk and he saw it and didn't come down?. Sunday came and he didn't. Monday came and no Halle" (82, 87). In *Song of Solomon* there is no real father figure to which the children could depend; Macon Dead Snr is alienated from his daughters and eventually from his son; In *Sula*, the women; Sula, Hannah, Eva Peace epitomize quintessential family discord and the tragedies it produces. While in *Tar Baby*, Valerian has a complete disconnect with his son, in *Beloved*, Sethe, Denver and Beloved create opportunities to have fun on the ice in the absence of a male- figure.(205) . Consequently the absence of the male figure becomes a stronger impediment to the emergence of a robust family structure. Male absence is a recurrent issue in the novels of Morrison. However, the absence of male presence is also an indication of every individual woman's need for freedom and self actualization. Though both women and men were victims of the extreme poverty which slavery produced for blacks, the women were worse off as they

were raped from time to time by men, black and white. Sethe implied this in her defense of why she allowed Beloved's continued stay in her house.

> "Well, feel this, why don't you? Feel how it feels have a bed to sleep in…. if that don't get it, feel how it feels to be a colored women roaming the roads with anything God made able to jump on you. Feel that ..... (80 )

The use of the repetition "feel" in the above passage is a stylistic feature of Morrison's narratives. These refrains are designed to deepen the significance of the statement.

> Each seemed to be helping the other two stay upright, yet every tumble double their delight. The live oak and coughing pine on the banks enclosed them and absorbed teen laughter while they fought gravity for each other's hands their Skirts flew like wings and their skin turned bowler in the cold and dying light.(104)

Man is naturally weak when it comes to women. The fact that a man has sex with a woman however is not an indication that he is in love with the woman. However without doubt a one-off affair, that is allowed to fester, damages and alter relationships with potential future benefits. This is evident in Paul D's sexual escapades with Beloved who seduced him. His sexual activity with Beloved is purely carnal as against his genuine love for Sethe. It wasn't morally right but it was convenient for Paul D to cheat on Sethe. The foment in Sethe's mind as a result of Paul D's proposition about having more children (155) creates a psychological stress that could lead to dementia. However, the rejection of the idea for childen by Sethe for Paul D provided the lee-way for Paul D's fall to Beloved. The need to be valued thus becomes a factor responsible for acts of infidelity. Beloved endures similar mental stress and suggests that Sethe make Paul D. go away (157). A suggestion to which Denver standing by replies "she might be mad at you if he leaves…." (157). Generally, therefore the mental state of the characters in *Beloved* was also an index

of the space to which they were limited and which they occupied, both physically (124) and psychologically (relational slavery), with a resigned acceptance.

Unlike characters in other Morrison novels, the characters in *Tar Baby* were well-travelled, ex.posed and well diverse. Having interacted and mixed with people from other climes, the characters are more evasive about their submission to accepted values wherever they found themselves. Instead they question, query and seek to validate or invalidate such values to suit their own individual temperament (125) Jadine's concern and fear about the presence of Son ,the strange blackman who "smelled"(126) soliloquizes about whether Valerian doesn't know "…the difference between one black and another or does he think we're all… some mess this is" (129) . In her desire to distinguish herself from Son , the man with whom eventually she makes love, she discovers an amazing truth, which is, that there really is no essential difference at all between them. However the need for personal survival in a clime where everything is skewed against the ordinary uneducated black, factors in to a possibility of giving away another of one's colour who has become a danger (126). This train of thought constrains Jadine in her attempt to confront her fears.

> She felt a curious embarrassment in the picture of herself telling on a black man to a white man and then watching those red-neckedgendarmes zoom him away ....( 126)

The passage indicates that inspite of her fear of being raped, and of the rapist who is black and whom she disdains, and inspite of her seeming love for Valerian and Margaret, her benefactors, Jadine in the core of her heart was still principally racist herself with a part of her whose first loyalty is to her color rather than to core values which transcend color. The idea that one race is superior to another are among the myths that Morrison debunks

in *Tar Baby*. The need for loyalty to the tribe thus often creep up each time a black man attempts to disparage a whiteman or vice-versa even when the offending party needs to be so disparaged:

> No. not open. Just sitting there holding it. He must have picked them up from the floor. Oh God, he scared the shit out of me. He looked like a gorilla. Jadine's neck prickled at the description she had volunteered nigger – but not gorilla. We were all scared, Margaret", she said calmly it had been white we would still have been scared."(59)

Sethes act of naming her daughter after "Miss Amy Denver of Boston" the "barefoot white woman with unpinned hair" (100) who unwittingly and unplanned became her birth assistant, was Morrison's way of debunking the myth of racial superiority or inferiority and deepening her thesis, that outside of the strict demands of society and social constrictions, all men both black and white innately share a common humanity. She asserts.

> On a riverbank in the cool of a summer evening two women struggled under a showed of slivery blue. They never expected to see each other again in this world and at the moment couldn't careless. But there on a summer night surrounded by *bluefin* they did something together appropriately and well. A patroller passing would have suggered to see two throw-away people, two lawless outlaws – a slave and a barefoot white women with unpured hair – wrapping a ten-minute-old baby in the rags they wore. But no pateroller came and no preacher. (118.)

in Morrison's narrative therefore social and religious agents; the patroller and the preacher, are the sources to which perpetuation of the myth of superiority of one race over another, rather than equanimity of the races, could be ascribed. In the absence of these agents, the equanimity of the races is struck and established on the basis of mutuality, a mutuality with a capacity to help bring about the successful delivery in child birth of a new life; the baby Denver. In spite of their color differences, the co-operation between

poor Sethe and Amy Denver far away from social and religious influences is what in actual fact differentiates these two women from others white or black. They both project Morrison's universal endeavour with man's common humanity which slavery defiled and which in modern times the issue of immigration and emigration has come to symbolize. Morrison's universalism, from the context of the world view of a people, the African – American's, pitches her in the camp of writers creating universal thesis about mankind. In *Tar Baby*, Morrison in her stories comes pretty quickly to the fore as a writer with a global framework and reference . Her characters divulge information on diasporic issues; immigration, citizenship, belonging and comparative economic advantages of one nation over another which makes *Tar Baby* a study in universality:

> After all he *had not* left much: Just U.S. citizenship, the advantage of which was the ability to send an occasional ten-dollar money order, buy a leisure *suit* and watch TV. ( 108)

In a globalizing world madness ensues as a result of the continual contention between diaspora and home , between the self and the other and between black and whites etc. Madness thus results from a complete state of desconsolance, which is often created by man's discovery that he is limited in action but limitless in the mind. This is clearly indicated in Toni Morrison's statement that:

> Mr. Smiths blue silk wings most have left their mark, because when the little boy discovered, at four, the same thing Mr. Smith had learned earlier – that only birds and airplanes could fly – he lost all interest in himself" (15).

Man is principally therefore whether in America, in the Caribbean or Africa a product of both nature and nurture. However while nature is relatively constant, nurture isn't. The same environment which robbed Milkman Dead at an early age of the reality of physical

flight devolving it into the realm of mythology also predisposed him to Soul flights. In addition, it creates a social atmosphere of inequality which pre-dispose it's inhabitants to acts of madness; as portrayed in the character of hysteric Porter, one of Macon Dead's tenants of whom Morrison's says he "Ain't out for nobody in particular just perched himself up in the attic window and commenced to waving a shotgun. Say he gotta kill him somebody before morning." (31) That Porter had this the madness streak "None of them had suspected…. Just go to show, they murmured to each other, you never really do know about people". (15). Porters mental regression is thus a product of his rejection and sexual neglect (324-326) Milkman on the other hand unable to do anything about his ancestry which condoned mistreating the women, later regrets not just his actions which made Hagar mad and suicidal but also his own selfishness which makes him never to see beyond himself as he remembers his dealings with family and friends. With regards to Hagar he says:

> He had used her-her love, her craziness and most of all he had used her skulking, bitter vengeance. It made him a star, a celebrity in the Blood bank; it told men and other women that he was one bad dude, that he had done some unforgivable thing to her, but because he had fucked her and she was driven wild by the absence of his magnificent joint.(132)

While madness in *Song of Solomon* was more psychological than anyhing else, *Beloved* presented actual acts of physical violence where for instance among others, Sethe murders Beloved and attempts to do same for her other children. Later, Sethe in a state of temporary dementia and 'seeing things' attack Mr. Bodwin who had come to 124 to pick Denver to work. (315 ) Ironically, this same man was the one who prevented Sethe from being hanged for the murder she had earlier committed. Sethe, Denver and Beloved as well as the boys suffered varying levels of dementia which led to withdrawal; into self,

violence and escapisms. (97) Till's attempt to deconstruct the myth of white superiority by crossing the barrier to go and "fuck" a white woman, an act for which he paid with his life was considered by all, white and black as madness indeed. (107) The propriety of his action generates divisions even among his fellow blacks. Thus, in Railroad Tommy's barbers shop, Guitar cautions Milkman to avoid being railroad into the same trap that caught Till "I don't know Guitar. Things seem to be getting to me, you know". Guitar's response to the huge pressure that caused Milkman's comment is "Don't let em unless you got a plan"… ( 91-93).

Morrison's style is therefore hugely thrilling. Her novels are dense with allusions; allusions to the Bible – Honor thy mother and thy father that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee (Exod us 20:12; Deutoronomy 5:6). The title 'Song of Solomon' actually adopts the name of a book of the bible. Morrison's narrative also operates at different levels of paradox. Morrison employs paradox in her choice of names and style of naming for instance in *Sula* she refers to a community on top of a hill called "Bottom". Also she surnames her main family in *Sula* Peace when the family is full of discord. Other paradoxes she uses is that of gentrification to which Morrison alludes in *Sula* when she says:

> The beeches are gone now, and so are the pear trees where children sat and yelled through the blossoms to passersby. Generous funds have been allotted to level the stripped and faded buildings that clutter the road from Medallion up to the golf course.... there will be nothing left of the Bottom (3)

There is also the main paradox of producing two symbiotic characters in the person of Nel and Sula. The symbiosis between this two culminates in major tragedies such as the death of Chicken Little and the apparent silent agreement by both about the act when "the water

darkened and closed quickly over the place where Chicken Little sank" (Morrison 61). Their symbiosis also leads to the destruction of the marriage of Nel by Sula who felt she had equal right to Nel's husband as Nel. Indeed Bergenholtz (49) describes them as representations of the dichotomy between good and evil. Thus Morrison uses normal words to counter poise and create contrast that other writers would simply glide over for example " So Baby Suggs Holy having devoted her freed life to harmony, was boned amid a regular dance of pride, fear, condemnation and spite."(124)

The tradition for creating contrast , exists naturally in African American story telling traditions which had a tendency to transmit myths from one generation to another. Based on this understanding, Morrison accesses the ancestral myth as a backdrop to her narrative in *Song of Solomon*. She shows that while the male version of the myth (men taking to flight) was passed on, those aspects of the ancestral myth with specific application to the female gender (Ryna's story) was not passed down along with it in for future generations of the male folk. This Morrison argues was deliberate in order to solidify the significance and place of patriarchy for societal order and control. As a result, in *Song of Solomon* for instance, Milkman Dead is in a flux about his identity and looks to the patriarchal part of the myth in order to find a basis for self definition only to discover that he was not complete without the stories of the female part of his ancestry. In pursuance of this line of thought, Morrison makes female characters such as Susan Bryd a transmitter of these tales in order to deconstruct the significance of patriarchy and affirm that without these women there would be no stories of ancestry today. It was Susan who tells Milkman about the legend of Solomon's leap. Also, she is the first in the text to reinterpret the story of Solomon's flight and express a sense of shame rather than pride about her heritage when she supplies Milkman with essential information about his family

tree and ancestry when she added details of the devastating negative impact of Solomon's flight on Ryna who is rammed into despair as result of being left several children to raise on her own. Ironically, while Solomon's flight is celebrated by the male folk and becomes a myth of the return, it's devastating effect on Ryna, Solomon's wife, is not given the same pre-eminence for if it were it would naturally diminish Solomon's achievement and the myth around him.

It is significant and natural therefore that Morrison's devolvement to mythology also significantly dictacted her structural approach to her narrative and the need for introducing certain magical elements in all her novels to provide explanations for occurences beyond the natural comprehension of the human mind, while at the same time indicating that it is man's attempt for comprehending life that almost always make him susceptible to madness. In *Beloved,* the story is told through a combination of symbolisms which originate from a myriad of sources and take different forms. However the principal sources are Number symbols which come from astrological sources (124). For instance the number 124 in addition to being the number of Sethe's home is also distinct as it appears as the first character of each book of the novel.

In addition, it tells us of Sethe's family configurations; Sethe has four children. The third one is dead, while numbers two and four remain. Another significant number is twenty-eight – 28. Twenty-eight is the length of the menstrual cycle, the lunar month, and the duration of Sethe's happiness: "Sethe had had twenty-eight days - the travel of one whole moon - of unslaved life. From the pure clear stream of spit that the little girl dribbled into her face to her oily blood was twenty-eight days" (95). Sethe has lived twenty years of sorrow, for twenty-eight days of pleasure, and spends another eighteen

suffering before Paul D and Beloved brighten her life again. "Those twenty-eight happy days were followed by eighteen years of disapproval and a solitary life....Was that the pattern? she wondered. Every eighteen or twenty years her unbelievable life would be interrupted by a short-lived glory?" (173). Also, There are thirty women that arrive to remove Beloved. Thirty according to Schimmel (1993) is a symbol of justice and order,. Two is duality, a pair, a division. It is also a unity, two halves of the same whole. Sex is expressed in many cultures as a duality, the Yin and Yang, father sky and mother earth. In Beloved, twos, fours, and even twenties occur in situations related to sex and children. Baby Suggs has eight children (209), four girls, four boys. Sethe has four. Two boys, two girls. 124 has two stories, and Sethe and Paul D have sex on the second floor.

Sixo is African. His name is coined from the number six taken from "Sixty Million and more", the first words after the title, which refers to the number of slaves brought here; the number six is associated with Africa. It evokes wildness and an inability or refusal to conform. What better character to embody Africa than a man "with a number for a name" (208), Sixo. He is first introduced as "Sixo, the wild man" (11). Sixo is the acme of disobedience to the white folks. He talks back, refuses to speak English, leaves the farm of his own will, and suggests escape to the others: "Running was nowhere on our minds.... It was Sixo who brought it up" (197). Other signs of his alien nature are his poor sense of time and his love of nature. "Time never worked the way Sixo thought, so of course he never got it right" (21). Sixo's confidence is impressive to others: "That was the wonder of Sixo, and even Halle; it was always clear to Paul D that those two were men whether Garner said so or not" (220). Six represents rebellion, an unwillingness to conform, and nobility that allows one to endure suffering, even to laugh, quite literally, in the face of

death. Significant numbers occur starting with the first symbols of the text and the words on the pages before the body of the text starts.

The first paragraph of *Beloved* is quite instructive about the style of Morrison. Except for the first sentence, it is entirely unpunctuated and infact difficult to identify where a new sentence begins. Through this technique which is quite similar to James Joyce's in *Ulysses* Morrison makes a statement about life as one long unpunctuated story. But the shock is only about to begin as the first paragraph only precludes a section that is also completely unpunctuated. This pattern suggessts that there are no full-stops in life. There may be pauses but no full-stops and very few commas. Life this section, appears to suggest can be confusing demeaning and indeed incomprehensible; that facts may point to the reality of things, but the reality of things do not always contain the facts; that what we think we are is not what it seems and so on, are mystical dimensions to the discourse about the nature of life that Morrison brings to the fore here in *Beloved*.

The narrative pattern that Morrison adopts is to say the least very compelling. She uses flashback to narrate more cogently Sethe's and Paul D's past in order to deepen our understanding of the experiences that each had gone through which accounts for their joy or sadness. (181- 182) The role of Stamp in the narrative is very significant since he reveals Sethe's murderous past to Paul D. who is unable to handle it and thus abandons Sethe. The place of retelling, can never take the place of telling, but retelling – provides the basis for myth-making, since it orchestrates an opportunity as well as creates an avenue for embellishments which provide mythic and mystical substance to the story being told. Denver in narrating to Beloved, the story of her birth which her mother, Sethe, told her modifies the entire story for effect and to provoke Beloved's sympathy and affirm

the need for her to stay. Apparently for Beloved, the need to know the story of Denver is important and significant because it determines their measure of bonding. In addition Morrison allows Denver hear her mother's story again in other to create a collective empathy through the re-memory of her mothers past:

> "Now, watching Beloved's alert and hungry face, how she took in every word, asking questions about the color of things and their size, her downright craving to know, Denver began to see what she was saying and not just to hear it: there is this nineteen-year-old slave girl—a year older than herself—walking through the dark woods to get to her childrenwho are far away. She is tired, scared may be, and maybe even lost. Most of all she is by herself and inside her is another baby she has to think about too. Behind her dogs, perhaps, guns probably; and certainly mostly teeth, she is not so afraid at night because she is the color of it, but in the day even sound is a shot or a tracker's quit step. (92)

In hearing a re-narration of her mother's ordeal Denver immerses herself in her mother's experience and is able to feel "how it must have felt to her mother" (37). This enables her understand what Beloved had passed through, since she shared a similar story and experience. The setting of *Beloved* is very crucial to understanding the content and context of how issues bordering on mythology, mysticism and madness influence the narration of Morrison's stories. Even though the action of *Beloved* focuses primarily on Sethe, it tells several stories at once besides her's. This has to do with the plurality of African methods of telling stories, where there may be an originator, but where the embellishment of the story by the infusion of other stories and angles is collectively done and communally transmuted from one generation to another.Morrison's pun on phrases and whole sentences rather than on single words is a marked departure from several other novelists of her time, take as an example the expression below:

> …only the employed, the self-employed, and the very young were available deliberately available because they'd heard about it, or

> accidentally available because they happened to be walking at that exact moment in the shore end of Not Doctor Street, a name the post office did not recognize. (43)

In addition, as part of Morrison's narrative technique she employs a style of division for her novels that is significant for understanding the story being told. Sula is divided into two parts. Part one covers the period of eight years (1919 – 1927). Part two covers a period of twenty eight years (1937-1965). The entire novel therefore covers a period of thirty six years. it therefore follows that the issues that are discussed in it are largely trans-generational. Within each part there were years that can be referred to as voided years, this are years that were not represented within these parts. The implication of this exclusion is that these years were probably not explicitly germane to the significant direction of the story. These years in part one includes 1924-26. In part two, these years are 1938 -1964. In between parts one and two, a period of ten years from 1927-1937 is completely voided and provides no addition to the narration in the text. The significance of this narrative technique one would assert is that it shows that a large portion of our lives have little or no memories by which we remember them. There are productive years and there are years of no harvest at all. In *Tar baby*, the authors approach is slightly different in that she adopts the conventional chapterization for her story; in all she tells a lucid story within eleven chapters. *Song of Solomon* on other hand is divided into two unequal parts; part 1 contains ten chapters while part 2 contains five chapters only. *Beloved* is divided into three parts; parts 1, 2 and 3 and like *Sula* the chapter heading is left out. However similar to her approach in *Song of Solomon*, part one is larger than part two and part two larger than part three. The significance of the way Morrison structures her novels lies in the fact that she utilizes structure as style. Morrison engages in vigorous experimentation

in most of her novels. An example of this effort is in *Beloved* where she produces a conversation between Sethe and a character that is supposedly Beloved:

> Tell me the truth. Didn't you come from the other side? Yes I was on the other side .You came back because of me? Yes. You re-memory me? Yes. I remember you. You never forget me? Your face is mine …( 254-256)

In the passage above , Morrison neglects to use speech marks to indicate the speech interaction that takes place. Instead she writes in stanza's as though writing a poem, Morrison evokes what could reasonably be termed a conversation between a mother and her daughter and through this technique suggests that the suffering of the daughter who was murdered by her mother parallels the suffering of the mother who murdered her. So in a sense while to the larger community "Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (156) and this is where frustration opens the door to depression and ultimately madness.

Names and naming occupy a very significant place in the novels of Toni Morrison. This is because the naming and names of the characters also determined how they were portrayed by Morrison and the roles they played in her thematic discourse. For instance Stamp Paid's history in *Beloved* indicates that he changed his name the day he was forced to give his wife up to his master's son to fuck. "On that day he'd decided that all his obligations, whatever they were, were paid, and began to help runaway slaves to freedom."(274.) Many of Morrison's characters lack proper names, while other characters' names are allusions from ancient Egyptian mythology, the Bible, and African culture. Morrison's choice of names for her characters include the names of biblical figures, books or things. It speaks not just to the rootedness of the characters aggreagates of their origin and experiences, their hopes, aspirations, and future but also to the divinity of the

individual characters. She portrays them as symbolic and representative of archetypes from all seasons. Examples of such names in *Song of Solomon* for instance are First Corinthians ( an allusion to the book of Corinthians in the bible), Hagar ( Genesis 16:1-3) and Ruth ( Book of Ruth ) , Reba, Magdalene (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2 ; John 20:1,16), Pilate (Mark 15:5; Luke 3:1), other bible characters Morrison alludes to in *Sula* are Hannah ( I Samuel 1:10), Shadrack (Daniel 1-3.) , Eva ( which is the latin form of Eve found in Genesis 2-3.) amongst others .

What makes this naming pattern important is that it holds symbolic value to Morrison's narration in her novels within our purview . For example the image of Hannah in *The Holy Bible* is completely negated by the image of Morrison's Hannah; While the Hannah in the bible supplicated God till she had her situation turned around, Morrison's Hannah gives in to despair and her life ends in it . In *Tar Baby,* Morrison uses amorphous names with universal resonance such as Son, Sydney etc. She approaches this differently in *Sula* and this borne out by the etymology of her characters names. Sula is a variant of Shulamith (Hebrew) and Ursula (Scandinavian, Latin), and the meaning of Sula is "peace; little she-bear" and Nel a variant of Cornelia (Latin) and Nelly (English), and the meaning of Nel is "horn. Other accounts of this etymology exists, however they are all agreed that these names are not popular first or surnames and are rarely used by any one (http://www.babynamespedia.com/meaning/Sula).

Clearly from the stories that Morrison writes nature provides the basis for myth making through a generous location of archetypes. Mythmaking on the other hand has the capacity to nurture certain behaviour within a nativity to generate psychosis which her individual characters experience. Narratives that have myths as a structural organizing

principle, as can be clearly seen in the novels of Toni Morrison also make use of archetypes as the basic unit of their mythopoeia. It is therefore then not surprising that Morrison uses several archetypes in her stories some of these include the ghost , death and rebirth , garden , tree etc. these archtypes generate the needed mystical atmosphere such that the characters strange acts seemed to be echoed by the response of the environment to them.

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# CHAPTER FIVE

## 5.0 CONVERGENCES AND DIVERGENCES IN THE USE OF MYTHOLOGY, MYSTICISM AND MADNESS IN THE NOVELS OF BESSIE HEAD AND TONI MORRISON

Together, Bessie Head and Toni Morrison remain undoubtedly one of the most prolific and well-recognized black female voices of the 20th[h] and 21st century respectively. Fewer African or African - American authors have generated the level of interest and scholarship, which these two and their works have received. Toni Morrison is the first black woman to win a Nobel prize in Literature and with new works such as *A Mercy* recently published in 2008 is still as prolific as when she handed the world such classics as *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon* etc., Head on the other hand even though dead is still studied for the beautiful artistry, power and passion that produced such classics as A *Question of Power, Maru* and others. These two female writers even though from two different continents; Bessie Head -Southern Africa and Toni Morrison - the United States of America, their antecedents of shared experiences by virtue of their origins, shaped their collective concerns such as slavery, discrimination of all forms , segregation etc and this have coalesced to make them dominant literary voices of their periods and continents. In addition, the similarities in both authors' adult life experiences meant that there are points of contact in terms of their sense, sensibilities and challenges that bears significance to and enhances their art. Consequently, the international prominence of these two authors is anchored not just on the themes they present, which easily resonates with local and international audiences but also the styles they have employed in deploying them. In their individual capacities, the similarities and differences in their life

experiences dictated the way their stories were written and explain why there are both convergences and divergences in their approach to mysticism, mythology and madness within the corpus of their writing.

These authors careful philosophical approach to writing life and the critical blend of themes and styles is more pronounced in their major works selected for this study. The texts are *A Question of Power*, *Maru*, *A Bewitched Crossroad* and *When Rain Clouds Gather by* Bessie Head and Toni Morrison's- *Song of Solomon*, *Tar baby, Beloved , Sula*. As a corollary to the philosophy behind their writing both Head and Morrison intentionally largely excluded whites from their narrative. Price (1995) affirms that in *Song of Solomon* "…the absence of whites, or their spectral irrelevance of her characters existence, is all but half the book's meaning."(xi) . Morrison's thus makes a statement that bears a lot of relevance to the novels of Bessie Head since virtually all Head's major characters with the exception of Gilbert in *When Rain Clouds Gather* and Valerian Street and his wife in *Tar Baby* are blacks. However differences in character portrayal exist due to differences in their approach to the psychic and mythical component of their story and the characters through whom they tell them.

Bessie Head's characters are cast first as individuals before being categorized as types; examples include Elizabeth in *A Question of Power*, Maru in *Maru* and Makhaya in *When Rain Clouds Gather*. These characters seek to find happiness as individuals in psychically dislocated social environments through attaining an inner peace and a necessary mental balance despite the difficulties they face in adapting to their foreign communities and their own mental turmoil which is a product of their traumatic pasts and repressed feelings . Toni Morrison's characters on the other hand are often introduced as

types; an everybody if you like, before they are then gradually unveiled as individuals. At the beginning of *Song of Solomon,* Morrison introduces us to a black Doctor without name; simply referred to as the Doctor , whose influence within this community is unmitigated by his color; as atypical of many black 'greats' of the early 1900's. As the narrative progresses, she particularizes the character and gradually unveils him, not as people see him from his professional standpoint as a doctor, but from his personal standpoint as a husband and father. She uses this to indicate that societal failures do not often occur at the level of colour, professional status or group but rather at the level of the individual especially within the context of the family.

> Solid, Rumbling, Likely to erupt without prior notice, Macon kept each member of his family awkward with fear. His hatred of his wife glittered and sparked in every word he spoke to her. …Ruth began her days stoned with stillness by her husband's contempt and ended them wholly animated by it. (17)

Toni Morrison's story in *Song of Solomon* utilizes a myth structure such that the story begins from the present and flings the reader into the past. *Song of Solomon* starts with the story of a dead doctor and the events surrounding his living daughter into a resurrected delineation of the life he lived and the legacy he bequeathed. Head on the other hand while utilizing myths as symbolic tools, does not structure her stories around them. Rather as is evident more clearly in *A Question of Power* and to varying degrees in her other novels , she employs the trajectory of paranoid schizophrenia as a basic structure for her novels. By this approach many of Head's characters are a reflection of her and her struggles. However, this is not the case in most of Toni Morrison's texts where there is a large disconnect between her and the stories she tells.

Toni Morrison in *Song of Solomon* just like in Bessie Head in *A Question of Power* seemed to be concerned about the collapse of the family structure in their respective societies especially among their own race. In portraying this disturbing picture in *Song of Solomon*, Toni Morrison through the exchange that takes place between Pilate and Macon Dead (sister and brother respectively) says:

> He trembled with the thought of the mute men in the bank – the men who helped him buy and mortgage houses discovering that this raggedly bootlegger was his sister. That the propertied Negro who handled his business so well and who lived in the big house on Not Doctor street had a sister who had a daughter but no husband, and that daughter had a daughter but no husband. A collection of lunatics who made wine and sang in the streets "like common street women! Just like common street women! (54)

Though both Toni Morrison and Bessie Head's unanimity about the family is not in doubt, their approach are significantly different. Morrison mirrors dysfunctional families in her novels than Head who on the other hand is disturbed by the absence of family and the abandonment of traditional family structures. So in *A Question of Power* for instance Elizabeth's siblings do not feature nor even is her parents mentioned except what we infer about them from the narrative. In Morrison's novels on the other hand for instance in *Tar Baby* we see a full complement of a family structure; father , mother , child or children etc albeit however it is a structure that is dysfunctional since all the homes she spotlights are hit by discord, male absence and disparate family values. It is very significant, however to add that both authors are united by the fact that all their characters had experienced the break-down of the traditional family structure.

In both Bessie Head and Toni Morrison, the family structure is literarily broken down; we see a setting where the women play a greater role for sustaining the children and where the men were never present physically, financially or emotionally. In *Song of*

*Solomon,* Pilate takes care of Reba without a father figure and Reba also gives birth to Hagar outside of wedlock and has to take care of her and herself with the help of her mother. In *A Question of Power*, Elizabeth has a child which she has to take care of even when she suffers from mental sickness. The issue of an apparent lack of support systems for the children in both authors' novels is huge but more heavily unexplored in the novels of Bessie Head. In Morrison's narration the support system is in every way matriarchal, rather than a combination of patriarchy and matriarchy which is what a normal home should resemble. Both Head and Morrison thus focus on the dysfunctional family in a society emerging from the oppression of slavery and apartheid. However a major score of their approach is to situate this dysfunctionality as a product of the myth of patriarchal superiority, a life system which holds sway both in Africa and America. They progressively project that a breakdown of the family setting is inadvertently a breakdown of society with attendant consequences for mythicization, mystification and madness. While the Black family system under apartheid engendered a myth making that resulted in madness, the Black family system during slavery and the period shortly after slavery which form the focal period for Morrison's narration castrates black men and destroys their capacity to be responsible .

Consequently, the blackman was mentally stultified and any attempt to break this barrier was considered madness not just by whites but by fellow blacks as well. "(70) In *Song of Solomon* for instance – Guitar – had no father –his father had died in a rather tragic way "my father got sheed up in a sawmill and his boss came by and gave us kids some candy". (53), while Macon Dead and Pilate had to watch their father being murdered by white men and are uable to do anything about it. The inherent danger of this type of experiences is that young black men grow without any evident desire or

wilingness to provide any measure of protection for their families. In *Sula* there is basically no male figure of influence, while in *Tar Baby* for instance Mr. Valerian Street lives alone in his Island with his Margaret visiting often. Their only son is enstranged from them and lives in the United States of America . In *Beloved* , Paul D attempts to be the man but he is soon overwhelmed by a lack of moral and sexual integrity,a weakness that makes men of no consequence in the American community.

While the issue of dysfuctionatility is a concern for both authors ,a greater concern in their works was the issue of complete family disintegation. In both Head and Morrison, we encounter disintegrating family systems and units where marriage and sex was no longer a product of mutuality but rather that of brutality, where the men were irresponsible ( e.g Nel's husband in *Sula* , Elizabeths husband in *A Question of Power* ) and the women reprehensible like Sula in *Sula*. The destruction of the family structure is all too palpable in *Song of Solomon* through the character of Guitar, a homeless boy whose father died working in a sawmill and whose boss 'settled' the children with Candy. Morrison's attempt to relate the candy to divinity is not all too clear. However what is clear is that Toni Morrison holds up a mirror to reflect on the transient nature of life. The complete breakdown in the family structure and the absence of real family life is a point at which both Head and Morrison converge.

Underlining the presentation of the family structure as well as all the other concerns of these two authors is their use of language in the explication of mysticism, mythology and madness. The importance of Language, its use and its relationship with myth is eloquently put by Ernst Cassirer (1946), when he says:

> Mythology is inevitable, it is natural, it is an inherent necessity of language, if we recognize in language the outward form and

> manifestation of thought; it is in fact the dark shadow which language throws upon thought, and which can never disappear till language becomes entirely commensurate with thought, which it never will. Mythology, no doubt, breaks out more fiercely during the early periods of the history of human thought, but it never disappears altogether. Depend upon it, there is mythology now as there was in the time of Homer, only we do not perceive it, because we ourselves live in the very shadow of it, and because we all shrink from the full meridian light of truth. . . . Mythology' in the highest sense is the Power exercised by language on thought in every possible sphere of mental activity. (122)

An examination of language thus provides a valid basis for comparing and understanding not just the mythopoeia of these two writers but also the mystical underpinnings of their works. The difference in language use between Head and Morrison is quite broad. While Head adopts the use of the Western canons of the use of the English Language, Morrison indigenizes it by writing in the spoken form of the language for example she says *"You should of called Reba"* which based on Standard English would better have been written as "*You should have called Reba"* . Morrison utilizes the language of the blacks in the American South. In so doing Morrison's deliberately allows the tone and inflection of the speech of her characters reflect in the written form which she produces, thus tones, intoning and intonations colour her entire work. However Head's approach to the use of language is different because she uses interior monologue couched in lyrical language in her novels, to describe her characters inner workings. Coundouriotis ( 1996) puts this into perspective in her discussion of language in *A Question of Power* when she says:

> The question "Why is everything so pointed, so absorbingly profound?" is (to apply Dorrit Cohn's terminology) *narrated monologue*: Elizabeth's thoughts embedded directly in the narration. But Head increasingly formulates the solutions to Elizabeth's problem of identity in what Cohn has identified as *psycho-narration*. In psycho-narration the narrator describes a character's mental state but tells us more than the character knows (19)

Consequently, a major area of divergence between both authors that lends credence to the assertion that while Head's novel is protest literature, the same cannot be said of Morrison whose novels are literatures of self affirmation and discovery is the difference in the use of language. The difference in their categorization has historical antecedents but so does their similarities. Slavery just like apartheid deflates the myth of male superiority among black's families both in America and Southern Africa but inflates the same amongst white or oppressing black families in order to establish the basis for a white racial superiority over blacks or of the superioritity of one black tribe over another . It is the inaccurate use of myth as a narrative to perpetuate the concept of the superior and inferior races that accounts for Morrison's use of myth as a structure for some of her novels especially *Song of Solomon*. Morrison and Head show that the social system historically and in present fact prevent family cohesion amongst an oppressed group by fanning the myth of racial superiority through a deliberate weakening and breaking of the male figure who is made to lose his breadwinner and protection provider status. They agree that the key therefore to prevent the cohesion of any family was to make the male weak and ineffective by not just breaking him in the sight of his women and children and but also through subverting his authority and making him unable to provide for his family direction or security. This as Morrison shows in Song *of Solomon,* chips away his capacity to have a voice and therefore authority in his home and environment.

Another area of convergence between Head and Morrison is that African's and African American's share a belief in the existence of magic and the practice of magical powers. Naturally an atmosphere of oppression or war or insecurity generates a predilection towards mysticism Examples abound in *A Bewitched Crossroads* and Song *of Solomon*. The passage below from *Song of Solomon* buttresses this:

> …years later Ruth learned that Pilate put a small doll on Macon's chair in his office. A male doll with a small painted chicken bone stuck between it's legs and a round circle painted on its belly….This object was meant to be a message and Macon seemed to have unfortunatelly understood what the message is for "he must have remembered the round five-red stomach, for he left Ruth alone after that. (146)

This predilection towards voodoism is of great significance in Bessie Head's *A Bewitched Crossroad*. The title of the novel itself is quite symbolic for it addresses the African Belief about the significance of the cross road in magic and mythmaking. And in using this she signifies a crossroad in physical, historical and ethereal time.

Ngomane, Elvis (2004) agrees with Mackinnon (1987:246) that Toni Morrison and Bessie Head approach the issue of sex and sexuality slightly different but never clearly expresses these differences. The women in Morrison's novel are freer to express themselves sexually, while the women in Head's book are discouraged from such free sexual expression except in the course of a neurosis as in the case of Elizabeth in A *Question of Power*. At the same time, the woman who decides to live an openly sexual life will pay a price for such freedom in the African-American culture, as in Sula's case. Bessie Head suggests differently in *Maru* where she shows women who never had the priviledge of the freedom to decide their destinies. Both writers, however agree that sexual rejection and deprivation can truncate the deprived into neurosis, dreams and fantasy, that manifesting collectedly in the individual is madness, a good example is Ruth in *Song of Solomon* whose:

> … passions were narrow but deep. Long deprived of sex, long dependent on self-manipulation, she saw her son's imminent death as the annihilation of the last occasion she had been made love to (163)

Both Morrison and Head show that sex is used by the male characters as an instrument of patriachal control. Mma baloi refers to this in *When Rain Clouds Gather* when she suggests that "...a man was nothing more than a grovelling sex organ..."(15), thus suggesting that having a penis between the legs then is the only reason why a man is a man.

Bessie Head in an effort to portray sexuality and defray the sexual imbalances that exist between the sexes employs a combination of phallic (groveling sex organ -penis) and yonic (vagina) symbolisms in *When Rain Clouds Gather* and A *Question of Power* respectively. The issue of sexuality as a behavior determinant is a very vital aspect of the discourse of both authors. Consequently, in both authors' works, women are more prone to suffer psychotic problems than men as a result of broken relationships, which may or may not include; being jilted, being abandoned, being divorced or being rejected for another woman (355-357). Examples include Hagar in *Song of Solomon* and Elizabeth in *A Question of Power*. However while many of the women in Morrison's fiction often end up committing suicide physically, emotionally or mentally , the women in Head's stories are able to redeem themselves from their mental abyss and enjoy self reclamation. It is poignant to understand however that Morrison considers these women's suicide as a form of actualization of themselves. Morrison's women once in the descent to madness never seem to recover from it, usually because theirs is linked solely to sexual abuse and rejections.

In terms of setting and it's relationship to the mythopoesis of Morrison and Head , it is crucial to note that aside from *A Bewitched Crossroads* which Bessie Head sets in a distant historical past to establish a foreground to her discourse on the origin of racialism and tribalism within the Southern African region, all her other novels , *A Question of*

*Power* , *Maru* and *When Rain Clouds Gather* were set in contemporary times during the period when most African nations had began to become independent and when intra-national rivalries , and manifest injustice and oppression within and among the nationalities began to express themselves . She was concerned with the contemporary issues, like apartheid and the need to lift people out of poverty through improved agricultural practices and techniques. Head's places are actual places in existence because Head's story is as much a story of her life as it is the story of these places where she had set them. Morrison on the other hand varied the setting of her stories to situate them in historical past, foreign lands and in contemporary America. Unlike in Head, Morrison especially in *Tar Baby* utilises more than one setting to tell her story – the Carribean and U.S.A. In the novels of Toni Morrison, there are several types of spaces the spiritual and psychic space; this represents the ethereal- that other of man, the mythic space; represents time in all it's ramifications and the maternal space which represents mothers, mothering and motherhood. Prominent in the novels of Bessie Head on the other hand is the economic space; representing factors which truncate individuals into poverty, the geographical space; actual physical places and the historical space which has a close relationship with the mythic space because history is never absolute and by this tendency generates myths. These spaces define the life of everyman and are manifest in the novels of both writers. This differentiation in setting does not detract from their mythopoesis but rather enhances their capacity- to extrapolate that the predisposition towards madness and mysticism exist in human beings regardless of where they are.

In Head's works the use of spatial differentiation is unique in it's leverage of the oral story telling tradition that is a strong aspect of African culture especially in *A Bewtiched Crossroad* which relies heavily on but creatively reconstructs the historical

details of a period of ferment in African history. The significance of these differences in the appropriation of space between these two authors is it's manifestation in their charcterization of persons that populate their stories and it is intricately bound up with their efforts to bridge the gulf of the unreal through the usage of myths and mysticism. The fact that things happen to their characters which are naturally inexplainable gives credence to their choice of these strategies for their narration. Head is concerned about the concerns of a particular generation, the energy of that generation symbolized by its young that is both creative as well as destructive; a generation that has suffered injustice mostly. She seeks to help her find healing in a justice system that divine nature has provided within. She achieves this by focusing mostly on her own generation with the previous generation largely an example of where they had been and failed. Head's writing is a critical departure from all writings out of Africa of her time.

In Toni Morrison's works there is a significant number of old and aging characters, an example is the 70 year old Valerian Street in *Tar Baby*. In *Beloved, Song of Solomon and* Sula on the other hand there is a mixture of the bright and the dark, the young and the old. Head's characters however are young mostly probably within the range of the ages of 30-50 except with a sprinkling of oldies like Mma Baloi and Dinorego. Morrison's choice of older characters reflect the nature of her style of narration which thrives a lot on what might or has happened in the past and her concern with older peoples as repositories of the stories of the past; through their eyes, their laughter, their words, the food they ate, the things they valued, a trend from past to present, that helps us to understand the present and survive in it is discovered. Inspite of their differences however, both authors characters whether good or evil, kind or harsh, slavers or slaves, victims or victors ultimately lived on the edge struggling to survive one

thing or the other. For instance women in *Tar Baby* are types, even though they often exude peculiar differences in emotion, character and appearances, innately they are types because it is believed they would eventually react differently to a given circumstance the same way. In *Tar baby*:

> Yardman came alone on Saturday's, pulling his own oars In his own mid-coloured Boat with prix de France Fading in blue on the prow. Today being Saturday and no dinner party or special work to be done , he did not bring a Mary who , according to Sydney , might be his wife , his mother , his daughter , his sister , his woman ,his aunt or even a next-door neighbour (38)

In addition both Head andMorrison regarded the mind as the place where men and women, had their greatest battles and succumbed to defeat, ultimately become demented, or psychiatric cases in the end. Some characters which fit into this category include Elizabeth in *A Question of Power*, Matenge in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, Hagar in *Song of Solomon* , Denver in *Beloved* and Jadine in *Tar baby* who " ... Kicked off the sheet and buried her head under the pillow to keep the moonlight out of her eyes, and the woman in yellow out of her mind". (47).

Being concerned in *Tar Baby* about racialism, where blacks who are African American's discriminate against other blacks who are immigrants, Morrison preoccupies herself as Head does in *Maru* with tribalism exhibited by blacks against other blacks. Both venerate their ethnic or group consanguinity in Africa and America and its impact on the evolvement of an identity that is not subject or determined by racism or color fixations. They show that both tribalism and racism are an innate attitudinal problem. Racialism and racism was also more acutely displayed towards the female rather than the male gender. Toni Morrison was as concerned in her works very much like Head about the sexploitation of women; about how women were treated as mere sexual objects, in just

the same way that dogs relate to their bitches's (*Tar Baby*) and how they had to fight for their dignity, in a society where this malaise was accepted by and large as normal ".... so she decided then and there at the age of twelve in Baltimore never to be broken in the hands of any man. Whatever it took – knife blades or screaming teeth – Never ...." (43). In both Head and Morrison, female characters (Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* , Ruth in *Song of Solomon* , Margaret in *Maru* and Margaret in *Tar Baby* for instance ) were portrayed as often being more likely than other male characters to regress into madness, what Morrison in describing Margaret 'understood as feminine dementia'. Exceptional beautiful women' Morrison suggests are more easily prone to hysteria (Ruth in *Song of Solomon*), masochism (Hagar in *Song of Solomon*; Elizabeth in *A Question of Power*) and narcissism (Sula in *Sula*). A recurring decimal of Morrison's style is the use of negating words in repetitive sequences with prefixes such as pre- with other words in order to create an emphasis that dove-tails to reveal the character under her microscope within a particular narration. This example from *Sula* is poignant:

> Twenty –two years old, weak, hot frightened, not daring to acknowledge the fact that he didn't even know who or what he was ...with no past , no language , no tribe , no source, no address book, no comb , no pencil, no clock, no pocket handkerchief, no rug , no bed , no can opener , no faded post-card, no soap, no key , no tobacco pouch, no soiled underwear and nothing nothing to do ... (12)

Morrison's repeated use of no before each noun word e.g. bed, opener, soap etc serves to emphasis the fear that the character felt. In addition it also serves a musical purpose to create rhythm and melody thus sparing the reader from getting drowned in the drudgery of straight prose as it embraces life's most pressing issues. In addition, the concern with songs can be linked to Morrison unlike Head, whose works had little space for songs and

melody, creating them only from an intricate tapestry that emerged as she submerges her reader into her concerns with issues of life and death, good and evil. In *Sula* for instance she asserts that:

> What was taken by outsiders to be slackness, slovenli-ness or even generosity was infact a full recognition of the legitimacy of forces other than good ones . They did not believe doctors could heal – for them, none ever had done so. They did not believe death was accidental – life might be, but death was deliberate. They did not believe nature was ever askew – only inconvenient. Plague and drought were as "natural as springtime. If milk could curdle, God knows robins could fall. The purpose of evil was to survive it and they determined (without ever knowing they had made up their minds to do it ) to survive floods, white people , tuberculosis , famine and ignorance. They knew anger well but not despair, and they didn't stone sinners for the same reason they didn't commit suicide – it was beneath them. (97)

Since the concepts of good and evil as well as life and death are major concerns of all major religions, an aspect of their narrative style is in their critique of formal religion. In Head's oeuvre there is therefore the use of an amalgam of religious beliefs; Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and indeed traditional paganic religious beliefs to interrogate these concepts because as Head shows they are concepts well seated in the philosophy of most religions. Morrison on the other hand sits well into the Judeo –Christian philosphy and how these concepts are percieved within them. For instance Morrison criticizes the concept of a triune god in the same way as Head had done.

> ...They would no more run Sula out of town than they would kill the robins that brought her back, for in their secret awareness of Him, He was not the God of three faces they sang about . They knew quite well that He had four , and that the fourth explained *Sula* (114)

In her criticism of the 'God' image, Head explores myths from Europe, Africa, Asia and America in order to find a crisp description for African leaders who had constituted

themselves into tin-gods and whom she considered the source of madness of ordinary citizens:

> …there was a strange parallel in her observation to mankind's myths they began to seem vividly looming, monstrous personalities they called 'the God's, personalities who formed the common humanity base of their attitudes to royalty and class (43)

She deconstructs these myths by making it plain that humans of all races, colors and nations apart from social constrictions are all equally gifted in every respect. Morrison unlike Head is concerned about time, the process of time; the impact of time and what happens in – between – the 'bedded High above the breath of the snake and the fall'' In *Sula,* Morrison's segmentation of narration into years bears this out clearly as she examines the transformation of people, values and society in the process of time from 1919. This passage from *Sula* is apt in this regard:

> Nothing like these kids. Every thing had changed. Even the whores were better then: though, fat, laughing. Women with burns on their cheeks and wit maimed to their meanness: or widows covered in small horses in the woods with eight children to feed and no man. These modern- day whores were pale and dull before those women. These little clothes – crazy things were always embarrassed. Nasty but shamed. They didn't know what shameless was. They should have known those silvery widows in the woods who would get up from the Denver table and walk into the trees with a customer with as much embarrassment as a calving mare. (168 )

Instead of a sequential narration, Morrison picks significant periods or years and ties them up together to form a story or a whole for a period. A particular date titles the narration of that particular portion. So for instance part 2 begins with 1937, 1938 is skipped, and it continues with 1939 etcetra.

In handling the issues of "divine spots and places" Head and Morrison approach the issue very differently. While Head debunks the superiority of any one faith and holds

that people are gods only if they recognise it, Morrison allows, as evident in *Beloved*, the experiences of characters like Sethe a closure to the memory and travail of her past and propels a desire for self actualization in her future, "it was only a tiny disturbance anyway – not strong enough to divert her from the ambition welling in her now: she wanted Paul D. " (116) "No matter what he told and knew, she wanted him in her life….". In addition, Sethe's tendency to correlate and mystify Beloved as a reincarnation of Beloved receives a knock and disappears after the intervention at the clearing. The tendency of Morrison's characters to want to have the one and the other in their lives ultimately means they are dysfunctional in their relationships since they are unable to manage the ambivalence which these longings usually generate. Trust and re-memory, - as succinctly espoused by Sethe (116 ) thus' became a vital ingredient for not only freeing herself from the trauma and memory of her past but also the co-ingredient in her struggle to reclaim herself. "There was no question but that she could do it. Just like the day... at 124 – sure enough, she had milk enough for all". (118)

In writing about the experience of Sethe in the clearing with the ghost of Grandma Baby and in alluding to Jesus's "walk-on-water", Morrison sought to ascribe a measure of divinity to Sethe's personality, the same way Head did to the character of Elizabeth in *A Question Of Power*. That there are spots and places where the divine is provoked to become pre-eminent is without doubt alluded to by both writers. "...The peace Sethe had come here to find crept into her" (114). Thus Sethe is able to fully understand what she had just been through as she headed away from the enchantment of the clearing. (115)

In terms of textual structure, both writers avoided the use of chapters, this makes a statement about the unending nature of life; life in life and life in death. That life is an

unpunctuated discourse in continuity seemed to be a very good example of a point were both writers meet. In *Beloved,* Morrison explores the mind of Sethe and Denver, just as she had earlier done with the workings of Stamp Paid's mind. Morrison employs a lot of flashback to tell her stories while Head on the other hand employs the stream of consciousness technique especially in *A Question of Power* and *Maru* to extricate for the readers the turmoil in her characters mind.

Morrison ascribes to social and religious agents; the patroller and the preacher, the origin of the myth that whites are superior to blacks and the perpetuation of the same. In the absence of these agents, equanimity of the races is struck and established on the basis of a mutuality strong enough to produce a co-operation that enables Sethe give birth to the baby, Denver. Price (1995 ) puts more poignantly this way:

> Thus the bones of Morrison's language participate in every scene, every sidelong comment, in creating the paradox of a degree of racial repression that is (through the length of the story) both important and negotiable for the reader's experience of the book. Her words and emphases, her syntax itself and the speed or langour with which it deploys itself across the page, make two prime claims on us – claims which lie only just beneath their visible business of narrative movement and emotional charting. (xv)

The essential nature of man Morrison submits is evil and it is therefore difficult to tell who was good and who was not. Examples abound in *Sula* and *Beloved* (146) However Head seem to detour a little bit rather seeing man as an ambivalence of good and evil as represented in Maru and Moleka, and Dan and Sello. This attempt to travel the chasm of good or evil firmly propels the writer's activity into mysticism in order to find an appropriate paradigm with which to represent the experience of their characters. Morrison like Head held religion in derision, in abeyance and in askance. "Occasionally a kneeling

man chose gunshot in his head as the price, may be, of taking a bit of foreskin with him to Jesus." (127)

Morrison's style dictates her denial of certain actual Negro experiential reality, in exchange for a tendency to attenuate and romanticise her African antecedents. In Bessie Head on the other hand an attempt at redefinition, which in unmistakable terms has been coloured by white influence and philosophy invariably, compels her to fantasize along the line of the individual's comprehension whether white or black of contemporaneous reality. She celebrates therefore not the superiority of one race or culture over another but the supremacy of the individual self and the equality of all cultures. Here in lie the vistas of mythology, mysticism and madness. Even though in this endeavour, Head and Morrison converge, their directions in thinking it through diverge. Morrison refuses to give in to comparison but rather highlights the inherent divisions, petty jealousies, dysfunctionality of family and self that is so prevalent within the black community itself exclusive of the presence, activity or interventions of the white race or man as the case may be.

Moore (2002) in summing up the influence of the negritude movement on African-American writing suggest that "….without even knowing, in the vast majority of cases from which part of Africa his ancestors came he was obliged to build a romantic , idealized vision of "guinea" , a kind of heaven to which all good negroes go when they die.(27) The question of heritage thus forms a vital basis for the writing of Morrison ingrained in this question is a desire for answers and these answers are provided by the employment of such myths as the myth of the flying African not just in order to approximate the possibility of a return but also to capture the strategies which each character within her narration choose to employ to effect this return. Though Morrison

herself did not believe that such return was possible in the physical sense, she did believe it is possible in a spiritual sense. So at the end of *Song of Solomon*, Pilate returns by committing suicide and Son in *Tar Baby* returns to the valley. On the other hand, Bessie Head's characters like Makhaya in *When Rain Clouds Gather* live in exile without the benefits of neither a physical or spiritual return. Though both wrote fiction, they wrote based on information from a reservoir of personal experiences that span the tragic, the hilarious, the sobering and the creative.

Horváth (2005) in The Power of Language in Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon asserts that Morrison's persistence in her narratives " To treat 'death' as the beginning of something new, reveals an organic and cyclic perception of the world. For instance, the flight of Robert Smith on the 18 February 1931 happened exactly on the same day Toni Morrison was born –18th February, 1931. This coincidence serves a mythological purpose to show the interplay between life and death and also between the authorial and textual voice. One person takes his own life in apparent belief in his own capacity to break down life's barriers, another is released into the world dignified on its account:

> It was a genuinely clarifying public notice because it gave southside residents a way to keep their memories alive and please the city legislators as well. They called it not doctor street and were inclined to call the charity hospital at it's northern end No mercy Hospital since it was 1931, on the day following Mr. Smith's leap from its cupola, before the first colored expectant mother was allowed to give birth inside its wards and not on it's steps. The reason for the hospital's generosity to that particular woman was not the fact that she was the only child of this negro doctor , for during his entire professional life he had never been granted hospital privileges and only two of his patients were ever admitted to mercy, both white . Besides, the doctor had been dead a long time by 1931. It must have been Mr. Smith's leap from the roof over their heads that made them admit her. In any case, whether or not the little insurance agent's conviction that he could fly contributed to the place of her delivery, it certainly contributed to the time. (11)

Head's depiction of madness in both *Maru* and *A Question of Power* derive from her own family and personal experience of real life neurosis. Head's mother was the victim of a mental breakdown and was put in the family way by a black stable hand in whom she sought solace from her woes. She eventually committed suicide. Head herself was born in a mental hospital in Pietermaritzburg in the Natal province of South Africa and later "went through a period of serious mental illness culminating in her hospitalization in a psychiatric institution in Gaborone, the Botswana capital." (Peek, 306) inspite of this Peek asserts that:

> Bessie Head made an extraordinary contribution to the literature of her continent in her relatively short literary career. Her work, including three novels, two collections of short stories, an oral history, a historical narrative, and a collection of articles on her life and writing, panoramically reconstitute patterns of experience in southern Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth century. Head established and explored connections between her own autobiography and these larger patterns so that, as her work documents the personal textures of historical experience , so too history is embodied in processes of psychic breakdown and renewal within the individual. (303)

Morrison's use of inversion as a demythologizing tool is a vital part of her mythopoesis. For example she refers to certain public places not by their actual names but by or with the opposite of their actual names. So Doctor's street becomes Not Doctor Street and Mercy Street become No Mercy Street. This type of inversion is rather strange to the writings of Bessie Head who uses fictional truth (derived from her background) to strengthen her narrative.

Barbara Hill Rigney (1991) also talks about the maternal space as a source of strength within the corpus of the writings of Toni Morrison. While the patriarchal space has been torn up and thrown down and is now empty, the maternal space is ever filled by

both male and female characters or figures alike who return to find solace, comfort and sustenance from a mother figure. Consequently the male figures are engaged in a flight of some sort away from the reality that defines their lives. Many of the female figures are also on a flight however within the reality that define their lives, confronting it and making meaning out of it; sometimes succeeding and sometimes failing. Songs and signification as manifest elements of mythology and mysticism is an essential element of narration that seemed to put Head and Morrison in same boat. In Morrison's novels songs are instruments for the transmission of history. Rigney's commentary in this regard is instructive, she suggests that Morrison:

> ...often recounts her "rememories" in the form of songs, made-up ballads for her children, which constitute a transmission of history and of culture, but it is also her conversation, even her thoughts, which are musical. Beloved's own voice is "gravelly" with "a song that seemed to lie in it. Just outside music it lay, with a cadence not like theirs" (60). All women's songs, Morrison indicates, are "just outside music"; often also they are codes, ways to break an enforced silence; they constitute a protest. Cixous writes, in "The Laugh of the Medusa," "In women's speech, and in their writing, that element which never stops resonating, which, once we've been permeated by it, profoundly and imperceptibly touched by it, retains the power of moving us—that element is the song: first music from the first voice of love which is alive in every woman" (312). And also in Morrison's terms, music and the singing of women have a power beyond words, a transcendent meaning that can provide "the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words .. . a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees" (261)

Milkman, who, in addition to his other failings, "knew no songs, and had no singing voice" *(*340), learns to sing only on the last page of the novel when, at Pilate's request, he sings loud enough to wake the birds, although not the dying Pilate. Sixo, in *Beloved* who needs no Pilate because suffering has been his teacher, confronts death with his hand on the mouth of a rifle and singing a song; it is the song which tells the white captor that Sixo

is free in his soul and that he cannot be taken alive. All the songs at Sweet Home are expressions of a desire for freedom in which "yearning fashioned every note" (40). In Alfred, Georgia, Paul D expresses his passion in songs that are:

> "flat-headed nails for pounding and pounding and pounding". Dancing "two-step to the music of hand-forged iron," Paul D and the other chained convicts sang it out and beat it up, garbling the words so they could not be understood; tricking the words so their syllables yielded up other meanings. They sang the women they knew; the children they had been; the animals they had tamed themselves or seen.(40)

Toni Morrison's novels adopts the use of songs and poetry as valid instruments for her narratives and in doing so establishes a valid relationship between oral expressions such as sorrow songs and printed literature and thus a connection to African oral story telling traditions which Head eloquently utilises in *A Bewitched Crossroad*.

Slavery and slavishness is another issue both authors approached differently. For Head, apartheid was a form of slavery but for Morrison segregation was the very epitome of slavery. Both Head and Morrison's characters face forms of racial inequality and segregation, though both writers differ in their expression of the inequalities and segregations which their characters encounter. Morrison through her characters relates to these issues and the tensions they generate within the black community. Head on the other hand was concerned about not just the suppression of one race by another but also with children of mixed race parentage like herself who are rejected by both whites and blacks. In contextualizing the tensions that her characters experience Bessie Head is able to create a platform through which she generates the connecting rods that drive her characters eventually and practically into neurosis.

Since Toni Morrison's characters experience a rootedlessness right from the beginning of her narrations, the search for roots is thus a paramount endeavour for especially the major characters. This is a divergence from the experience of Head's characters who were highly rooted in the culture of their community and whose dislocations from this root often lead to devastating consequences both for their mentality and their individuality. So while the main challenge for Morrison's characters is the need to find affinity to and reclaim an heritage, though far removed through a mythic and mystical affiliation, the concern for Head's characters is to re- affirm the roots which they had and to which they knew they belonged through a purgation of their neurosis. This is why Bessie Head employs the duality of characterization in which it is really difficult to distinguish between the real physical characters and those that were a figment of her mind; the textual character she sees in dreams. As a result , the Sello and Dan that Elizabeth encounter in her fantasy dream resemble two other characters in real life of the same name with whom she had no relationship at all. In addition, it is clear that Bessie Head employs a strategy of character re-figuring in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, *Maru* and *A Question of Power* in that order. Consequently Gilbert and Makhaya in *When Rain Clouds Gather* return in *Maru* as Moleka and Maru and in *A Question of Power*, Moleka and Maru are return transformed as Dan and Sello in *A Question of Power.* Many Bessie Head characters descend into mental illness which however unlike Morrison's characters does not end in suicide. Burton (2009: 26.) suggests that:

> *A Question of Power,* her semiautobiographical novel, is about a mental breakdown; but it also breaks down storytelling conventions, notably linear time and consistent narrative point-of-view. The novel charts a four-year period of emotional and psychological distress for its protagonist, Elizabeth, who like Bessie Head is an émigré from South Africa, transplanted into a rural

Interestingly, the individual's mental breakdown in *A Question of Power* parallels a psychic communal breakdown that manifest in societal division and is visible both in *When Rain Clouds Gather* as well as in *A Bewitched Crossroad* where both writers were concerned with the issue of women's victimization. It is no wonder therefore that they make women their main characters depicting them as strong , relentless, able to cope with adversity and stand their ground. An example of this is Margaret Cadmore in *Maru* and Sethe in *Beloved*. Secondly, they show how these women are able to subvert accepted social norms which perpetually keep them in subjection. Examples of such characters include Sula in *Sula* and Pilate in *Song of Solomon*. These women it seems unlike many of their gender were able to "fly". Consequently, while both writers project the victim stasis, only Morrison appears to have analyzed the possibility of the women enjoying the pre-eminence of victor stasis in the battle against oppression with which these women contend.

Head relies largely on her own life experiences for a large portion of her narration. Her autobiographical account parallels the story of the past of the society from which she emerged. While it is true that Head is concerned with history, it is also true that she sources this history largely from within herself. On the other hand, Morrison relies largely on historical records as evidenced in *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon*. Morrison sought to recuperate a history that had been lost to the ravages of forced silences and willed forgetfulness. As a result she writes Sethe's story with the voice of a people who historically have been denied the power of language. *Song of Solomon* and *Beloved* also contain didactic elements as a consequence. From Sethe's and Milkman Dead's experience, a stable future can be created and the "ghosts" of the past confronted. Morrison suggests that, like Sethe, contemporary American readers must confront the

history of slavery in order to address its legacy, which manifests itself in ongoing racial discrimination and discord. (Sparklight:2011) . However inspite of the differences in the origin of their sources, they converge in being concerned with and grounding their stories on the daily life of men and women in their respective countries and continents:

> According to Gray, the character of Elizabeth in A Question of Power for instance is as complex as the author. For him:"being mixed-race and sexually ambivalent, not to mention on and off sane, Head was nothing if not hybridised. But she also liked to subvert all such discourses by speaking plain English" (2).

Without doubt both Morrison and Head focused on female characters, however how they assessed the reductionist power of slavery and oppression which the male folks undergo and its impact on their capacity to become actual role model fathers for their children is slightly different. For instance, Makhaya in *When Rain Clouds Gather* suddenly realizes that moving from South Africa where he is considered less than a man to Botswana does not necessarily guarantee the recognition of his manhood since the same structure that existed in South Africa between whites and black also exist in Botswana amongst the blacks themselves.

One major area of difference between Toni Morrison and Bessie Head is the area of the language they use in their narration. While Bessie Head simply uses plain English which to all intents and purpose is quite western, Morrison employs a language which reflects the native inflections of her fellow blacks or African – American. Basu explains this situation, when he asserts that:

> In Sula Toni Morrison doggedly pursues these possibilities of language. She has, in her non-fiction, made her intentions clear. She asserts that "in Afro-American literature itself the question of

> difference, of essence, is critical" ("Unspeakable" 11). She then asks, "What makes a book 'Black'? The most valuable point of entry into the question of cultural (or racial) distinction, the one most fraught, is its language - its unpoliced, seditious, confrontational, manipulative, inventive, disruptive, masked and unmasking language. Such a penetration will entail the most careful study, one in which the impact of Afro-American presence on modernity becomes clear and is no longer a well-kept secret" ("Unspeakable" 11).

The language used in a text is what gives it the voice that it requires and since voice is vital for any literary work to impact the audience for which it has been written and a vital key for creating or breaking down myths and mythmaking. Deconstructing existing social myths, Bessie Head especially constructs new ones. While it is true that *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *Maru* for instance revolve around the mental incapacity of an individual; Matenge and Elizabeth. It is also vital to note that they mirror the mental aridity of an entire communal space. This mental incapacity for acceptance of others is situated in the white man's thinking that they are superior to the blacks in South Africa for instance and in the assumption of certain black tribes in Botswana that they were better than the Marsawa's.

Morrison and Head present through their novels a web of male chauvinism which they sought to break. No wonder their women are voiceless and the authors denounce their objectification. They both show us that segregation and racism do not only belong to white communities. Blacks may be sometimes very cruel and tyrannical, to the enslaved and hybrids, as evidenced in *Maru* and *Tar baby*. Both writers agree that discrimination is neither a white or black phenomenon as it occurs between the races and within the races as well. For instance in *A Question of Power*, Elizabeth's mental situation impels her to begin to discriminate against blacks whom she sees as the perceived source of her own mental torture occasioned by her rejection by other blacks because she is a mulatto.

Essentially, it is in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* that the subject of black- white discrimination is most pronounced much more than in *Beloved*, *Song* of *Solomon* and *Tar Baby*. While in the first two texts there is a nudge towards distinguishing blacks from others, the last three create room for accommodation of whites by blacks. Hamedreza Kohzadi et al (2011) discussing Black feminism and womanism in relation to Morrison opines:

> Set in Toni Morrison's hometown of Lorain, Ohio, Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye* was published in 1970. The novel is the story of a young African American girl and her family who are driven in every direction by the white dominant culture that says to them "You aren't beautiful, you aren't relevant, you're invisible". In the novel, Pecola Breedlove as the protagonist of the novel because of her blackness and her darker skin is doubly pressed and victimized. On the one hand, she in pressed by a white racist society due to her black race, but on the other hand, she is victimized within her own black community due to her darker skin. Thus the blackness of her skin gradually disgusts her and leads her to embrace white beauty standards. She traps in white culture and white superiority. She believes that if she had blue eyes, she would be loved and her life would be transformed. More than anything she wants to be loved because she is constantly abused and tormented by her family and an abusive community available to her. But eventually her total submission to white beauty standards has a disastrous outcome for her and it is nothing but her insanity. (23)

Kadidia Sy (2008) in her dissertation titled Women's Relationships: Female Friendship in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Love*, Mariama Ba's *So Long A Letter* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* makes a point about the relationship between women in the texts she studied which bears a lot of relevance to the position of such relationship in the novels of Toni Morrison and Bessie Head as well when she says:

> Black women's common experience of oppression urges them to form bonds in order to fight back the impact of race, class and gender. Female friendship not only helps women counteract the effects of patriarchy but it also provides them with comfort, security and even healing. Although all four novels acknowledge

> the importance of female friendship, Morrison deliberately chooses to portray failed relationships in order to emphasize the power of patriarchy and warn women about the danger a lack of bonding is likely to cause in their lives, whereas Bâ and Atta present in their books forms of nurturing sisterhood, that is, a friendship based on sincere commitment. Each novel presents female friendship according to the social and cultural realities of its particular environment. Morrison shows the impact of patriarchal structures like race, class and even marriage on female bonding and what it means to be black and woman. (1)

While in the novels of Bessie Head the bonding between the women is very crucial and essential for overcoming patriarchal oppression, in the novels of Morrison as already stated above it is the failure to genuinely bond between the women that serves to expose the patriarchal oppressions which the women face. This difference in approach also points to a crucial area of divergence between African literature and the African American corpus of American literature.

One major area of disconnect between Morrison and Head is in the use of flora and fauna as instruments of style. While Morrison populates her narrative with flora and uses them in a symbolic manner, Head simply chronicles their presence or absence. In *Song of Solomon* for example white animals in Morrison's narrative carry with them negative connotations, for instance a white bull stampedes Freddie's mother into premature labour and death. The white peacock represents the corrupting influence of greed; artificial roses represent the "stifling life of the upper class and the oppression of women", this is in contrast to living roses which often symbolize love. Thus the artificial roses symbolize the absence of love in Macon Jr.'s household. This is why Wardi (2011) in his ecocritical reading of *Tar Baby* describes it as "...largely encoded in, and voiced by, the nonhuman world.". Consequently, there is a preponderance of such images; especially those in which Morrison personifies the flora ; examples include champion daisy trees which are

felled an act Morrison compares to murder and the grieving that followed by "trees that had been spared dreamed of their comrades for years" (10). In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, Head's relationship to nature is purely physical as epitomized in Agriculture project. However in Morrison relationship to nature is actually mystical. While Bessie Head wrote from the angle of social realism, Toni Morrison's work is from the angle of both social realism and magical realism. Mei Choa Aileen Bong-Toh (1990: 5) explains this in relation to Head's work thus :

> As a South African author, Bessie Head has chosen to write in the tradition of social realism. Drawing her artistic inspiration from the social circumstances surrounding her own life, she addresses the central issue which prevails in South Africa - the question of power and oppression.

The physical environment which Head writes about mirrors the power tussle and oppression in the lives of the people, so Head for instance presents images of a thornbrush in detail, commenting on it's tall, straight trunk like tree, branches short like rough wild grass, "white thorns" , and " clusters of pale olive-green leaves" While Bessie Head generalises her narration of the impact and the import of the fauna on her characters , Toni Morrison is particularistic in her presentation of the flora and fauna in her narrative such that they become an organizing principle for the narration in her texts. Head in presenting a general arid environment which symbolized by the drought for instance almost destroys the life of her characters in *When Rain Clouds Gather* creates a counter-poise to Toni Morrison who configures the conquest of the flora and the fauna by the whites as a conquest of the individuals whose lives and livelihood depend on such flora and fauna. So she gives to these inanimate things a life of their own in order to establish a mystical connection between man and nature. From this dimension of her examination of

florality, she agrees in a measure with Bessie Head's endeavour in *When Rain Clouds Gather* and A Bewitched Crossroads. Stephanie Seingier (1997:20) explains this:

> Golema Mmidi means 'to grow crops'.Here the name of the village is judicious and symbolic; it calls for a change in tradition. Agriculture means two important modifications: the replacement of tribal migration with permanent settlements, which will result in changes to family life, and provide more than the bare necessities -- even profit with tobacco export. Also it forecasts a change in women's social standing, for it promises to offer them more power through economic independence.
>
> In the narrator's words, "Makhaya tumed to agriculture for his salvation" (WRCG 81). Agriculture gives him a fair battle to fight, not only against tribalism but also against the harshness of the land: "..A harsh and terrible country to live in. The great stretches of arid land cornpletely stunned the mind, and every littie green shoot that you put down into the bmen earth just stood there, single, frail, shuddering, and not even a knowledge of soils or the germination ability of seeds or modem machinery could help you defeat this expansive ocean of desert" .

*Beloved's* difference lies on the moving description and analysis of female reception of sufferings in a white male-dominated society during slavery in addition to the story being grounded on real life.

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# CHAPTER SIX

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

This study provides a comparative approach to illustrate how two female authors; Bessie Head and Toni Morrison from different literary and historical traditions have appropriated the novel genre as a medium for explicating the issues of mythology, mysticism and madness. In particular, the study unearths their portrayal of the symbiosis between mythology, mysticism and madness to explore human experience in fragmented social contexts. Through an analysis of at least four novels each by Head and Morrison this study establishes the veracity of myth criticism as a tool for excavating certain universal archetypes that underline the writings of these authors and in the process broaden the understanding of our common humanity and enables us cross the boundaries of time, place, nationalities, languages and cultures.

This comparative study of mythology, mysticism and madness in the novels of Toni Morrison and Bessie Head began with a basic foregrounding of the key words and elements of the study both denotatively and connotatively. Beginning with an examination of the perception and interrelationship of these terms as viewed by critics from ancient Greek times, European, American and African perspectives, the study found that myths from these different climes and times express values, identify moral standards, and embody profound philosophical reflections, so desperately held by all peoples but which have the capacity to mutate over time.

The study further establishes that myths are archetypal in nature; as they are universally understood symbols or patterns of behavior, a prototype upon which others are

copied, patterned, or emulated . In addition, because of the archetypal nature of myths, this study establishes that there is a link in the myths from different parts of the world. While the central core or structure of the stories that embodies the myths of all people are essentially the same, the embellishments and finer details of the stories may differ slightly in order to suit and adapt to the idiosyncrasies of the local people and give the stories a measure of localized authenticity. It is this authenticity that guarantees an author's readership and which served as a basis for the selection of the novels of both Toni Morrison and Bessie Head as subjects for analysis in this study.

Consequently, the extent to which both writers are connected by their use of myths as a platform for capturing human experience in fragmented social contexts is illustrated and justified. In addition, in order to posit a basis for a comparable endeavour between these two writers whose fiction has literally become reference points about or on good black writing, the study locates their individual experiences within a larger context of the experience of oppression and slavery that large swathes of the world's poor population especially of black extraction are subject all the time. As a result, it has projected the similarities in historical and cultural milieus of both writers that provide a durable basis for a comparative endeavour. As a basis for carrying out an extensive discourse of the presentation of mythology, mysticism and madness in the novels of both authors, the study establishes that the key features of archetypal narrativity in the texts selected for these study are that:

i. myths—like dreams—condense the material of experience and represent it in symbols (Sigmund Freud);

ii. there is an image from collective unconscious ;an inherited memory represented in the mind by a universal symbol and observed in dreams and myths present in everyman (Carl Jung)

iii. the primary function of myths is to resolve contradictions between such basic sets of opposites as life and death, nature and nurture (culture) , and self and society (Claude Lévi-Strauss).

Through these established features this study illustrates how Toni Morrison and Bessie Head have employed the basic parameters of the novel: Plot, characters, conflict, setting and theme to navigate their historical and social experiences through the medium of mythology, mysticism and madness and thus establishes the basic convergence and divergences between the two authors.

The choice of the novel by both authors as their main and major medium is very essential to their discourse of madness as a literary subject and technique. In the same breath the novel also provides an avenue for an investigation into the supernatural especially the belief that personal communication or union with the divine is achieved through intuition, faith, ecstasy, or sudden insight rather than through rational thought. However, in the very process of denotating madness in literature is the essential fact that these experiences are often a very mythical one unfortunately and mythical experiences often have over them cloaks of mysticism. The novel as a genre and its capacity to accommodate the diversity of intents and collocations on the part of these authors narratology makes it a readily available attraction for studying the novels of these authors rather than their other works of literature belonging to other genres. Through this genre these two writers were able to provide a richly detailed tale of their characters experiences and their growth within the stories they tell. Their novels have the scope of an epic poem, the rhythm and imagery of a lyric poem, the tension of a drama piece and the type of

commentary found in an essay. Consequently, eight texts , four from each author viz *Song of Solomon , Sula; Tar Baby* and *Beloved* by Morrison and *When Rain Clouds Gather; Maru; A Question of Power; A Bewitched Crossroad* by Head were utilised for a critical consideration of how the authors have reflected , portrayed and presented mythology, mysticism and madness in their work.

In order to arrive at a conclusion about whether as a result of their narratology there are convergences or divergences in their approach to the narration of this broad subjects, this study relied on the deployment of a myth critical approach and has adopted an inter-disciplinary and inter-textual bent to demonstrate that literature ,in this case the novel form, acts as a platform on which diverse discursive fields converge in order to further explore dimensions contingent on the human experiences.

Furthermore, this study has shown that the myth critical approach is a valid but neglected approach to the study of mythology, mysticism and madness. It further asserts that an understanding of myths and the classical patterns of deciphering them is vital to unlocking mythology mysticism and madness in the writings of both authors. Thus, it insists that the archetypal nature of myths means that they might reflect surreptitiously in every imaginable conception of mysticism and madness, which indicates that in the long run mystical experiences are highly mythical and myth's themselves have mystical covers on them . In the same breath, madness is a myth and being deluged by a myth can be considered madness. The study generates its understanding of the interwoven nature of these themes through an examination of the characters of both authors many of whom in many respects are archetypal.

Also , this study posits that archetypes provide some explanation for general human behaviour and this archetypal gene is without regard to colour , creed or race. It however suggests that there are areas of void in any attempts to provide a connect between archetypal representations between peoples and places, and this void is an essential legitimate target for exploration and study because it supplies the mystical content that is so critically desired to make a complete statement about issues especially where the boundary between the truth and lie , the good and the bad , evil and righteousness, life and death have become completely blurred as readily visible in the novels of both Toni Morrison and Bessie Head. That mythology, mysticism and madness bisects through the novels of both Toni Morrison and Bessie Head. This has been adequately supported by the deep seated analysis of the thematic and stylistic concerns of both authors done in this study.

In addition, in a critical departure from previous approaches such as psychoanalysis, feminism, reader- response etc to the works of Head and Morrison individually, this study adopts the myth critical approach. The myth critical approach provides a valid platform for the evaluation of the depth, breath and length of the connectivity's that exist; intra-text, inter-texts for each of the authors and cross- text between the two authors. In order to achieve the objectives of the study which in essence sets up a comparative challenge worth pursuing, this study selected four texts from each author. The selected texts were novels. The novel genre was chosen because it is normally a long work of fiction usually not less than 200 pages and thus allows the novelist to tell more richly detailed tales. It provides a plethora of characters and tells a complex story through these characters who are placed in a number of different situations which serve revelatory functions.

Mysticism in the African novel as a rule has been used to offer an explanation for the essence of being. Wole Soyinka in *Myth Literature and the African World* makes these connections very succinct when he suggest that there is a cyclical relationship between the world of the dead and that of the living and such should be captured in African Literature. His theory is very relevant to our endeavour here in this novel study because it gives a basis to extrapolate his assertion to the African American novel.

Mythologies offers illuminating examples of the workings of myth in the structure of societies past and present—how we create, use, and are guided by systems of myth to answer fundamental questions about ourselves and our world. As a result, by its very nature, therefore, it provides a platform for individuals to express their hope, aspirations and frustrations with existing types and stereotypes within their respective societies in order to proffer meaningful solutions to their peculiar and or intractable problems. This thesis found that these problems with slight differences from the works of Toni Morrison to that of Bessie Head had the same basic concern ; that man finds and gets restored to his basic dignity, which is a right regardless of colour , religion , gender or creed. As a result of this approach both authors serrate through seeming disparate "others" to produce a thesis which though different in its matter is basically the same in its relation to a myth structure and indicates that all men living and dead are interconnected with each other in an otherwise interestingly cyclical fashion. Their work together show that it is this basic interconnectedness that explains why individuals from differing clans , tribes, backgrounds, religion, continents and cultures appear to believe and behave in virtually the same way when confronted with oppression , victory and dehumanization. It also explains basically why man is unable to manage advantage as well as disadvantage.

The above explanation this thesis submits proves the validity of myth criticism as an approach for interrogating literature from diverse cultural and national backgrounds. Since African American literature is a division of the American literature or letters, this study of the work of Toni Morrison and Bessie Head thus provides another angle for engaging in a comparative study of American Literature particularly African – American literature ( as opposed to diasporic literature) vis-a-vis African literature.

This study contributes to scholarship by bringing attention to myth criticism as a cogent and invaluable literary critical tool for indepth comparative analysis of literature of the same progeny especially those from different continents. This study does not in any way pretend to be exhaustive, its achievement lies in its rekindling of interest in an otherwise neglected tool and elevate its importance for literary criticism of a comparative nature. In using two authors that symbolise the very best of what African and African – American literary canon has to offer and in examining their occupation with three trans-generational subjects; mythology, mysticism and madness, in their effort to create and dismantle myths, this study has achieved its aim of highlighting the importance and significance of myth criticism as a tool for further future discourse of the works of these two writers. This is vital because it also indicates that other writers with similar creative directions as these two writers could also have this method of criticism extended to them. In addition it is hoped that this research has provided a basis for further investigation into the impact and significance of myths and mythology as a structural organizing principle in many writers narrative structure today.

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