

# Janus-Faced Madness in Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*

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## Abstract

This paper is an attempt to discuss the concept of madness and its different causes and functions in Bessie Head's semiautobiographical novel *A Question of Power*. It aims to explore the multifaceted insanity of Elizabeth the exiled colored protagonist in terms of different theories. We will see how once a devastating trauma turns out to be a habilitating schizophrenia. Head challenges the readers' normalized responses with this controversial concept (i.e. madness) and throws a new light on the capability of apparently silenced and insane people. Withstanding the long preserved devastating epistemology of the institutionalizing power, she clarifies that one can avoid being inside a power archive through insanity like Shakespearean fool.

**Keywords:** Madness; Schizophrenia, Unreason; Bessie Head, *A Question of Power*

## 1. Introduction

It was a Saturday morning when she arrived at the loony bin. The attendant there greeted lunatics with laughter. She was a big surprise. It was strictly for poor and illiterate Botswana who were treated like animals. They seemed to be the only people who went insane in Botswana (Head, 1974, p. 184).

The liveliness of images, the violence of passion, the great retreating of the spirit into itself are all part of madness, but are also the most powerful, and therefore the most dangerous tools that reason can use. "There is no great spirit who is not tempered by a touch of madness . . . many wise men and countless brave poets have

ventured into madness, and some have become lost there.” Madness is a hard but essential moment in the labor of reason. Madness, for reason, was nothing more than a secret life and a source of strength (Khalifa, 2006, p. 34).

Madness has been a myriad and complex concept in literature, literary theory, and psychology. In fiction, for instance, it can be used in different ways to complicate the novel, to make the character unreliable, hyper-sensitive or highly conscious, and to challenge the dividing lines of normal/abnormal, reason/unreason, and social norms. In *A Question of Power*, madness can be considered as an offspring of a closed, despotic, poverty-stricken, racist, and colonized society; on the one hand, interestingly, a strategy applied by Bessie Head and her protagonist Elizabeth to survive, resist, and revolt in the face of the colonized society, a very influential procedure contributing to the narrative’s polyphony and plot as well as the oppressed’s self-expression.<sup>1</sup> “When a narrator or one of the main characters is affected by insanity, this leads to certain tensions and instabilities in the narrative, to use the terms with which James Phelan specifies narrative progression” (Bernaerts, Herman, & Vervaeck, 2009, p. 86)<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. Madness as a Question of Power

It was as though a crossroad had been reached and that people would awaken to a knowledge of their powers, but this time in a saner world. None of mankind’s God-like figureheads recorded seeing what she saw in this nightmare soul-journey (Head, 1974, p. 35).

As mentioned above, by no means is madness limited to strictly defined epistemological notions nor is insanity an opposite of sanity<sup>3</sup>. It has contradictory functions in Head’s novel; a product and destroyer of the institutional power! Initially, it is the back-breaking life of shut-in society of South Africa, where people suffer from nervous tensions, prompting the protagonist’s insanity, whereas, interestingly, this situation later on paves the way for her liberation and defiance.

Elizabeth as the daughter of a white woman and a black man comes to know about her parentage, for the first time, at the age of thirteen in the mission school where the principal says to her:

We have a full docket on you. You must be very careful. Your mother was insane. If you're not careful you'll gate insane just like your mother. Your mother was a white woman. They had to lock her up, as she having a child by a stable boy, who was a native. (Head, 1974, p. 16)

Obviously, it is the power apparatus anticipating and, subsequently, jeopardizing Elizabeth's life with the permanent fear of possible insanity; the fear of being locked up and committing suicide "like her mother." This traumatic event is so shocking that she keeps recalling throughout her adulthood. She is inculcated to believe in her natural aptitude for lunacy. In this respect, her mental problems come close to what Freud considers as "trauma." It is pertaining both to the moment of the traumatic event itself as well as to the moment of recalling such an event. Trauma is due to the excessive excitation of stimuli with which the body's psychic processes are unable to deal.... However, the traumatic event does not necessarily retain its original form in the process of retranscription during recall.... The traumatic event may be traced to the saga of familial relationships (from the oedipal complex and the so-called castration anxiety through to the emotional interruptions of care giving either due to separation, physical or psychological incapacitation, or death; Quayson, 2004, pp. 842-843)

In the case of Elizabeth, her nightmares recur her traumatic bitter past in symbolic and metaphoric ways. In her dreams the trauma shows itself in forms of her lack of vagina, beheaded or mutilated women, occupation of her bedroom with intruders, dead people, and sexually perverted huge men.

Elizabeth is shattered by a bitter colonial past which still haunts her<sup>4</sup> and a traumatic experience of apartheid. Not being able to discard her tormenting past, she cannot find any answer for her current unreasonable afflictions and the maddening condition, as a result.<sup>5</sup> Freud believes those who suffer from trauma cannot normally live in the present or future; they are haunted by the traumatic event or its symbols. Despite living in Botswana<sup>6</sup>, Elizabeth cannot get rid of her experience of South Africa where people who are created to "be hated" are called "dog and filth." In her

mind, the record of “dog, filth, the African will eat you” with monotonous, repetitious and never ending tone would run incessantly. She takes refuge in her garden in order to escape from her trauma of racism, loneliness, and orphanage.

It is believed that the traumatic event may be forgotten, whereas it can remain active in the unconscious of the traumatic person and an event can bring it into the consciousness in the different forms of flashbacks and intense emotions, such as panic or rage, and nightmares. In the case of Elizabeth, first mental breakdown occurs when she overhears the radio (i.e. a recording) in the office with a “hissing sound” relating the Africans are stupid and cannot even ‘figure out the name of the radio’ (Head, 1974, p. 51). This reminds her of mission school’s principal’s “docket<sup>7</sup>” in which she is recognized as a potential insane for her mother’s affair with “an African stable boy.” The second event leading to the resurgence of her illness is her encounter with Miss Jones who constantly talks about Christ, love, and humanity. Her behavior is also reminiscent of missionaries’ hypocrisy and their cruelty. As mentioned, the principal is the first one who tells Elizabeth about her origin and mad mother. That is why she hits Miss Jones on the head and runs away. During the story Elizabeth is continually threatened in her nightmares by Sello and Dan’s “prophecies” about her death, madness, and even her son’s murder. These prophecies are also related to her traumatic experience of childhood in the mission school where the principal foresees her insanity and is always ‘on the alert for Elizabeth’s insanity’ and orders to isolate and lock her as foreshadowing her future hospitalization in an insane asylum.

Fanon, in his *Black Skin, White Masks*, believes trauma and mental harassment is the direct outcome of exposition to the opposing world (white or black). When the Negro makes contact with the white world, a certain sensitizing action takes place. If his psychic structure is weak, one observes a collapse of the ego. The black person stops behaving as an *actional* person (Fanon, 1986, p. 154).<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, Elizabeth herself is the very outcome of this traumatic encounter. She is the “offspring” of an illicit union between a socially superior white mother and a subordinate black father, “a stable boy.” In this respect, she is an heir of a

predetermined insanity. Fanon believes that colonialism through its hegemonic discourse of white/black division causes serious psychological disorders in both whites and blacks. The condition for Elizabeth becomes even worse because she inherits both 'narcissism' and 'inferiority' (terms used by Fanon to describe the nature of white/black relationship, respectively). Thus she is rejected not only as a racist by blacks but also as an inferior race by whites. Therefore,

*AQP* demonstrates that part of the psychological struggle against domination and prejudice that means coming to terms with the binary divide created by hegemonic discourses, or to use Fanon's terms, the 'situational neurosis' created by colonialism. The protagonist's journey through "madness" is an exploration of collective images of power that form part of the mental constructions of apartheid and racial segregation. (Talhaite, 2005, p.150)

Foucault in his *History of Madness* proclaims that the boundary of reason and unreason is not something inherent and essential but an artificial demarcation imposed by the power institute of each era. Definition of norm and deviation is within the frameworks of the discourses of power changing from one archive to another. Sanity or insanity is a label to exclude the Other:

[Medusa] started shouting in a shrill, high voice: "We don't want you here. This is my land. These are my people. We keep our things to ourselves. You keep no secrets . . . ." Why was everything so pointed, so profound? The wild-eyed Medusa was expressing the surface reality of the African society. (Head, 1974, p. 38)

In the course of the story, Elizabeth has to stay in an asylum twice because based on the "standards," she is not a "normal" creature. In "The Birth of Asylum," Foucault argues that asylums are constructed to collect the deviants, to make the society seem salubrious and homogenous. In these places, the abnormal people are mentally chastened. They assert a kind of forced "homogeneity"; otherwise, the

defiant must be silenced. As Elizabeth “had to choke back a rush of words . . . [while there was no one to unfold] mental drama of torture in Motabeng village” (Head, 1974, p. 58). For Foucault, asylum functions in accordance with the morality of the society. As a result, in *A Question of Power*, the colored protagonist has to be imprisoned under indictment for ignoring the established rules and, sometimes, even the divine ones. As a colored, she belongs to neither of the good or evil realms of white or black worlds, respectively.

### **3. Moving to an In-Between World**

In the nomenclature system of unifying apartheid, South African society labels everybody behaving against the norms of that society as insane and mad. Both Elizabeth and her mother are iconoclastic in some ways. Elizabeth is a hybrid and product of interracial contact (according to the Act of Immorality miscegenation between white, especially the white woman, and black is illegal). As a deviant female, her mother is also designated as mad and hospitalized in the asylum for being pregnant by a black man. Because of the suffocating condition of racist apartheid society the mother commits suicide. Elizabeth as a traumatic person lives in two worlds. One is the everyday real life in Motabeng; the other is the horrible life of her nightmares related to colonial apartheid system of South Africa. ‘The soul personalities’ who live in her dreams are not only related to her personal and private experiences, they are also representative of sociopolitical condition of Elizabeth’s life in apartheid South Africa. ‘One would go stark raving mad if a deep and endless endurance of suffering, such as one could encounter in South Africa, were really brought to the surface’ says Elizabeth (Head, 1974, p. 83). Elizabeth is a colored who belongs to the realm of “immorality.” The major part of her nightmares and mental breakdowns are related to affairs and murdered women by Dan the millionaire bourgeoisie. She unconsciously suppresses her sexuality to detach herself from her mother’s tragic life. Elizabeth “is obsessed with her colored origins and this brings her to the brink of paranoia. She is always afraid of being rejected and persecuted” (Seingier, 1997, p. 67). She is born in South Africa and, meanwhile, is robbed of her heritage, parentage, origin, and family. She is afraid of loneliness that has been her lifelong experience. Whenever she is alone, the “soul

personalities” come to torture her. Medusa of her nightmares is the ‘surface reality of African society’ (Head, 1974, p. 38). As Foucault has argued, madness has, throughout the history of the Western world, been constructed in the form of exclusion through the process of ritual exiles previously performed by lepers in the medieval period and then in the seventeenth century.<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth also has to leave South Africa because she is also susceptible of insanity. Throughout the story, she is hospitalized in the insane asylums or to quote Elizabeth in the “loony bin.” She must be a normal human, a “docile” woman who must ignore her “analytical mind.” And exactly due to this reason, Dan one of the “soul personalities” occupying her nightmares, as an elite nationalist tries to give her an apparently sane African woman’s insight. Sue J. Kim believes that a “persistent theme” in Dan’s “drama” is that Elizabeth “was not genuinely African; he had to give her the real African insight,” and “in almost every way she had to be aware of Africans as a special holy entity and deep mystery he alone understood” (Kim, 2009, p. 159). The major part of her nightmares is due to her active mind and rejection of different norms.<sup>10</sup> If she accepts the long-established typical role of a black woman that is to be a sex object for Dan, he will no longer torture her. During Elizabeth’s hospitalization, Shorty, her son, tells her: “All the standard two’s are saying that you are mad” (Head, 1974, p. 185). In order to resist the passivity, she must violate the norms. Resisting the normalization, she becomes a sacrifice of complex nexus of power that even affects her family and “demands for conformity.” She must be hospitalized in order to be a morally normal person. Foucault considers the language of psychiatry (as the relic of the colonialist’s epistemology) as a monologue that silences the difference. In the asylum, Elizabeth is not allowed to talk about Sello; she must forget about him. “She looked at the nurse and asked: ‘You know Sello?’ The nurse shook her head: ‘The doctor told us not to allow you to talk about Sello’” (Head, 1974, p. 183). Western epistemology not only creates psychology but also its language and even its subjects. Elizabeth is the outcome of colonial contact with “barbarians.” She is an anomaly who resists the homogenizing reason and therefore must be confined in order to be normalized. The function of asylum for Foucault is to imprison the mad in a defined moral world and to correct them through a monologic reasoning.

Asylum becomes a tool in the hand of “ideological state apparatuses” to eliminate differences, to suffocate protest, to prevent dialogic involvement. In the asylum, Elizabeth gets shots and spends her life in sleep, in silence in apparently complete passivity. “Later Elizabeth said to Tom she didn’t know how she got out of there” (Head, 1974, p. 181). Despite all these restrictions Foucault believes that unreason can go beyond the reason through art. Foucault argues that one can hold of language through art and especially literature. He believes that literature illuminates the most “quotidian” aspects and in this way it can cross the boundaries and represent the hidden, the secret, and the invisible. It resists the classification. Elizabeth’s garden in the novel acts like poetry to quote Elizabeth herself: “Her version of gardening was so poetic and fanciful, she was so liable to fill in her gaps of knowledge with self-invented agriculture” (Head, 1974, pp. 112-13). Furthermore, she has a notebook, she composes poetry, she writes and in this way she “takes hold of her language.” In her poem “Ancient ones,” Lebogang Mashile says,

Because there’s a pen for every sister/And every mother in every  
home/There’s a healer in these hands/ That writes the lines of  
every poem/For every ancient who prayed/For another heavenly  
power to save them/There’s a meditation of peace for you/ In the  
lines written by this pen. (Vogt, 2008, p. 241).

Although at first she seems to be passive in the face of her torturers, in fact she becomes active and through her “analytic mind” begins to question the “unreasonable” reason!

*A Question of Power* attempts to redefine “illness” and “madness” as constructions of the “other” . . . [it] can be read as an attempt to replace it with a hybrid and plural space where the self can be transplanted and recreated outside the hegemonic boundaries set by hegemonic discourses of identity. (Talahite, 2005, p. 148)

#### **4. Wondering in the Garden**

When Elizabeth finds herself desolate and mentally broken down, she begins to grow a garden trying to be productive and active, and consequently,



retrieves her long-suffocated voiced and marginalized identity. In this way, Elizabeth tries to “write back.” She rewrites her history of invisibility which has been written by colonial imposters. Foucault believes modern literature can transgress the boundaries and represent the secret, the “infamous,” and in the case of Elizabeth, the immoral resulted from the shame of being a member of a “shame family.” This history does not follow the classification of classical era because it is the reappearance of “multiple profusion” of language.<sup>11</sup> Thus, Elizabeth can overcome the negative aspect of her madness that is to be insane because of oppression. Surprisingly, madness can also be a strategy to masquerade her voice and deceive the oppressor.

As discussed earlier, madness in the novel is both positive and negative. In its positive concept it can be considered as deconstructing the meaning and decentering the irrational and oppressive “reason.” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their book *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* argue that ‘both the political and the psychological field are permeated by the same form of energy, libido, which has effects on both political (the class struggle) and individual (*délire*). Libido and politics interpenetrate’ (Sarup, 1993, p. 93). They differentiate between paranoia and schizophrenia and consider paranoia as the characteristic of a fascist society, whereas the latter is related to a revolutionary society. They reject the Freudian idea of Oedipus complex and believe that the capitalistic society is responsible for mental derangement of people and force them to behave according to its abnormal norms. In this case Elizabeth’s mental condition is not only an outcome of her traumatic experience of childhood, but the fascist and closed society of South Africa under a colonial apartheid regime. They consider schizophrenia as deconstructing and the only sane response to the insane condition of the society. For a schizoid meaning is not referential but deferential, arbitrary, and never-ending. The marginalized minority groups, the nomadic people like the exiled and colored Elizabeth who lives in diaspora can deconstruct and decenter the established binary opposition and hierarchy constructed by fascist society. In the light of her madness, Elizabeth challenges apartheid’s closed system. Of course, at first she is a paranoid, a by-product of fascist society that formulates and territorializes everything. As

mentioned in the novel, at first, “She was entirely dependent on what he (Dan) would do . . . she was in an easily invaded world” (Head, 1974, p. 105). However, as time passes by, she recognizes her potential power and begins to reject the control of the “soul personalities,” Dan, Sello, and Medusa that are representatives of different oppressive aspects of Africa. The very concept of her hybridity and marginalization helps her to be a simultaneous paranoid and schizoid and in this respect a “transcendental signifier” that can resist. In response to Tom when he asks why she did not find a husband, Elizabeth replies “It’s not part of my calculations, Tom . . . . I think I ought to live too, like everyone else. I don’t care to be shoved out of the scheme of things. I want to live the way I am without anyone dictating to me” (Head, 1974, p. 192). These words are words of Elizabeth as a schizoid. She wants to be a free “revolutionary” in a fascist colonized society.

Like her journey from South Africa to Botswana Elizabeth’s madness is also “passing.” Her madness can be considered as trauma or paranoia of apartheid fascism that develops into schizophrenia (in the sense of Delueze and Gattari) of nomadic life of a hybrid minority in the borderline of transition. In the latter sense, Elizabeth uses her madness as “lines of flight” to fulfill her revolutionary “desire” that is universal love, humanity, and equality for mankind through her prophetic mission. Her madness of the colonialism and postcolonial nationalism turns into unreason of Foucault where she can trick and perplex whites like Tom using her power of language: “‘Tom,’ she persisted ‘what would you do if you were both God and Satan at the same time?’ . . . ‘But it’s possible, isn’t it?’ she persisted” (Head, 1974, p. 161). It is only through her schizoid self, her fragmentary identity, and mixed origin that she is not trapped by the system which has determined her to a “planned death.”

Madness can be also considered as a strategy in the hand of Bessie Head and Elizabeth, to challenge the normal way of narration and negotiation. Through her madness Elizabeth fuses worlds of reality and dream and finds answer to her questions through suffering and her quest in companion with the “soul personalities.” Bessie Head can also challenge the reader’s concept of reality as

ideologically constructed “attitude” through her specific way of narration. The reader is continually perplexed with Elizabeth’s intermixed worlds and is compelled to read the book with “analytical mind.” Madness helps Head to let the invisible, the ‘infamous,’ and the silenced speak. In this way, *A Question of Power* becomes an orchestra of different voices, a “carnavalesque,” and a “multivocal” novel that resists the monolithic body of colonization and apartheid.<sup>13</sup> Through Elizabeth’s madness, Head lets different classes and ideas be heard. The ‘soul personalities,’ the masses of poor that occupy insane Elizabeth’s nightmares, the African, Afrikaners, women, Coloreds, and blacks all have given their voice through Elizabeth’s madness. Although Elizabeth’s hybridity is inadvertent (i.e., Elizabeth’s birth to which she has been doomed), *A Question of Power* is a deliberate political hybrid of different languages, strategies and ironies.

Bakhtin accepting irreducible masqueraded dialogism considers irony as a way of resistance and polyphony (Pechey, 2007). The very concept of madness turns out to be an ironical mask because the colonizer considers the colonized and especially the African as incomplete human beings at the bottom of the “Great Chain of Being.”<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the condition of women as inferior sex is even worse. It is believed that due to her lack of psyche, the African woman never goes mad. Elizabeth’s madness in the hand of Head is a tool to deconstruct the long-preserved colonizer’s myth about the inferiority of the colonized. Through madness Bessie Head expels the centripetal system of a despotic society and adheres to dispersion and clash of ideas. It renders the novel a very complicated and writerly texture and makes the reader ‘rewrite’ the text and context. Linda Beard believes:

Bessie Head is the avatar of disconcerting paradox. With an idiosyncratic omnidexterity that has rendered her writing anything *but* transparent to those who have read her work, Head's revisionary prose undermines the binary madness—the formulaic antitheses—that long centuries of *de facto* apartheid begat long decades of *de jure* apartheid. (Beard, 1991, p. 578)

### 5. Concluding Madness

Through madness, Elizabeth is presented as an unreliable or maybe a highly reliable character. Her words are highly philosophical and challenging. At the same time, one cannot determine whether they are “delirious” words of a conventionally “insane” woman or the outcome of a highly conscious “unreason.” If she is mad why then her “mind struggles with questions” (Head, 1974, p. 173). Elizabeth’s madness allows Head to use a discontinuous, fragmentary, and ambiguous narrative. There are alternatives of reality and hallucination, ghosts and ordinary everyday people in the novel. Due to Elizabeth’s madness, the reader cannot decide whether Sello of Elizabeth’s nightmares is a man of God or a petit bourgeoisie, whether Tom the white American friend is really a good friend or as Elizabeth says “a bastard member of Ku Klux Klan” (Head, 1974, p. 187). It is this aspect of narration that Counihan argues as “the novel’s various narrative failures” (Counihan, 2011, p. 76). There are different letters written by Elizabeth, or her mad mother that highlights these narrative failures or maybe successes. When Elizabeth cruelly becomes aware of her mother, her shameful deed, her insanity, and her consequential suicide, she is given a letter written by her apparently “insane mother.” In the letter the mother asked: ‘Please set aside some money for my child’s education’ (Head, 1974, p. 16). How can an insane person think about the future of her child? In another occasion, Elizabeth while is “stark raving mad” writes a note that “SELLO IS A FILTHY PERVERT WHO SLEEPS WITH HIS DAUGHTER” (Head, 1974, p. 175) and signs her name under it and stick it “on the wall of Motabeng post-office.” Thus, one must question how a mad person can be so alert and conscious or how the other apparently sane people are so conditioned to their situation.<sup>14</sup> In this way madness becomes a universal language that can be both understood or misunderstood by the reader.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Clare Counihan in 'The Hell of Desire: Narrative, Identity and Utopia in *A Question of Power*' argues 'Elizabeth's postcolonial "madness" results from the cultural and institutional demands of the normative narratives of racial and national identity available to the subjects of postcolonial nations, and particularly to black women' (p. 69).

<sup>2</sup>It should be noted that the term madness is identical with insanity, lunacy, unreason, and mental breakdown; however, these words in different contexts have other implications as well. Throughout the essay, they will be used interchangeably maintaining some subtle and implicit assumptions.

<sup>3</sup>There are frequent references to madness, insane asylum, loony bin, nervous tension, mental breakdowns in the novel (e.g. pp. 23, 57, 58, 103, 112, 117, 135, 136, 139, 141, 150, 160, 161, 173, 176, 180, 182, 185, 189, 190, 192, 203, 204). The term 'normal' has been repeated several times in *AQP*.

<sup>4</sup>A main reason for Elizabeth's mental fragility is her sense of orphanage. She cannot think of any origin, or parent, and history. This lack renders her identity

and psychology as shattered and weak. In a description of her birth, the narrator remarks: 'Then he (Sello) turned and showed Elizabeth a small, round, deep opening in the earth from which her soul had emerged. It was a black, shapeless mass with wings' (Head, 1974, p. 43).

<sup>5</sup>'Die, die, die, you dog! I hate you! I hate you!' Her mind struggled with the questions: 'Why, why, why? What have I done?' (Head, 1974, p. 173)

<sup>6</sup>Botswana is a landlocked republic in south-central Africa that became independent from British control in the 1960s.

<sup>7</sup>Concepts like record, writing, docket, and notebook are very important in both colonial and postcolonial literature. Kurtz of *Heart of Darkness*, the missionary of *Things Fall Apart*, Jim of *Lord Jim* write letters, take notes, and compile their reports about their observations in the colonies. In these ways, they can control and subjugate the colonized. They used terms like zoology for their observations. Homi K. Bhabha in *Location of Culture* argues that: 'Recordation is a strategy of colonialist regulation.... If the spirit of the western nation has been symbolized in epic and anthem, voiced by a 'unanimous people assembled in the self-presence of its speech', then the sign of colonial government is cast in a lower key, caught in the irredeemable act of writing. J. S. Mill to a select committee of the House of Lords in 1852:

All the orders given and all the acts of executive officers are reported in writing.... [There] is no single act done in India, the whole of the reasons for which are not placed on record. This appears to me a greater security for good government than exists in almost any other government in the world, because no other has a system of recordation so complete.' (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 93-94)

<sup>8</sup>He uses the term *évolué* for such a person.

<sup>9</sup>Foucault talking about the seventeenth century France, asserts that it (Hôpital Général) had nothing to do with medical concept. It was an instance of order, of the monarchical and bourgeois order being organized in France during this period (Rainbow, 1994, pp. 125-126).

<sup>10</sup>For example Elizabeth belongs to a ‘shame family;’ besides, she is a hybrid and also does not believe in Christianity. She wants to commit suicide; she wants to establish her identity against the grain of South Africa and its norms. So she not only disregards religion but also social morality.

<sup>11</sup>I think by language Foucault means something like voice, or Bakhtinian concept of polyphony. It represents the hidden and the silenced. Literature, unlike psychiatry, is dialogic. For more information see also Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things, An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*.

<sup>12</sup>Bakhtin argues, ‘the carnival setting [through its irony, travesty, and parody], is freed from the dogmatism of religious and ecclesiastical forms of social domination.’ (Edgar, 2002, p. 15). See also Pechey’s *Mikhail Bakhtin: the World in the World*.

<sup>13</sup>Going mad as a refugee in Botswana—and then transforming that madness into writing—Bessie Head violates more than one colonial stereotype and break a few rules. It was widely believed by colonialists in Africa that women did not go mad. ‘African women,’ writes Megan Vaughan, ‘were said not to have reached the level of self-awareness required to go mad’ (Vaughan, 1990, p. 22). They lacked ‘interiority’ twice over, as African and as woman’ (Rose, 1994, p. 405).

<sup>14</sup>Elizabeth also writes a letter for Tom and accuses him of being a member of Ku Klux Klan (Head, 1974, p. 187). She also writes Miss Jones a letter of apology and amendment (head, 1974, p. 196). Deleuze’s idea of ‘flight line’ fits the concept of letter writing because there are many gaps, many unwritten words that can be read between the lines. The letters not only cause the ambiguity of narration, they also challenge one’s normalized and conventionalized idea about madness. Some Marxists like Gramsci also believe that one must read between the lines, the gaps, the silences, and the unwritten words.