Bessie Head: Re-Writing the Romance: Journalism, Fiction (and Gender)

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This thesis examines the relationship between Bessie Head's work as a journalist during the late 1950s and two of her novels: the first written just after she had left formal journalism and the second a decade later. I claim, in this thesis, that early journalistic writing by Head, which has been critically ignored, and even dismissed, not only merits critical attention but, furthermore, that knowledge this work will yield new insights into Head's fictional writing for which she is famous. Between 1959 and 1960, before she left South Africa, Bessie Head wrote two weekly columns for children and teenagers, some book reviews and had a role in the production of "True Romance" stories for Home Post, a tabloid supplement to the Sunday newspaper Golden City Post. Head was involved in the production of these romances for over a year and I provide an analysis of the "True Romance" stories published in Home Post. I maintain that these romances, like all texts in popular romance genre (which I discuss) constructs the feminine in very particular ways. I locate this analysis within wider, but related, discussion about the representation of women in both Golden City Post and Drum magazine as they were both considered to be the authoritative newspapers representing black South African life in the 1950s. Head's columns, I claim, especially the one for teenagers, present constructions of the feminine, as well as the masculine, which are significantly at odds with the dominant representations of the feminine, and masculine, in the media I have mentioned, during the late 1950s. A close reading of the representations of gender which Head set up in this column, together with the book reviews she wrote, will give us new insight into her fictional work, particularly The Cardinals which is an early work written and set during this period but only published posthumously in 1993. Reading this novel against the background of the journalistic work and world Head was engaged in just before she wrote it will enable us to read its complexities, specifically those regarding gender and romance. I claim that Head also gave us what is probably the earliest gender perspective, and critique, of 1950s black journalism - a period generally considered to be a vibrant one for black journalism and writing in South Africa. In The Cardinals, which fictionally recreates the black journalistic *milieu* of the late 1950s in South Africa, Head suggests that black women journalists (and writers) found themselves facing a very different situation from black male journalists. Finally I suggest that with

romance structure and the role which gender plays in the novel. Although critics have persistently read this novel as an idealistic, and unrealistic, romance with a happy ending, I suggest, in this thesis, that one can read the novel, in the light of Head's earlier work, as being a radical subversion of the romance.

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Introduction

While she was in her early twenties Bessie Head, who was later to become an acclaimed writer, spent a few years as a journalist with a weekly newspaper, Golden City Post. This was between 1958 and 1960 before she left South Africa for Botswana in 1964. After working as a reporter for the Cape Town edition of the paper she went to Johannesburg where she worked for the Reef edition and wrote two weekly columns - one for children and another for teenagers.[1] These appeared in a supplement to Golden City Post, called Home Post, where she also wrote some book reviews and participated in the writing of "True Romances" which appeared in the supplement.[2]

As this is such an early and, as yet, undocumented period of Head's life, one which has only recently begun to elicit critical interest (due to the posthumous publication in 1993 of her early novel The Cardinals), the extent of Head's involvement with these romance stories is not absolutely certain. Yet there is no doubt that she participated in some way. While these stories were always published under pen names Margaret Daymond has stated that Head "help[ed] Dolly Hassim [who was the editor of Home Post] to produce ... escapist love stories" (1993:viii). This leaves some uncertainty about the actual role Head played. Gillian Stead Eilersen's biography, on the other hand, mentions "the weekly love story she [Head] wrote in the *Post*" (1995:192, emphasis mine). Head refers, unfortunately rather vaguely, to this activity in a letter written in 1979.[3]

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[1] I am indebted to Gillian Stead Eilersen's (1995) biography of Bessie Head, Bessie Head: Thunder Behind Her Ears, for this reconstruction of Head's life.

[2] As this was prior to her marriage to Harold Head she was writing as Bessie Emery. This is the name which appears on her review of Althea Gibson's autobiography. The True Romances, as I will detail, were written under pen names. The children's column was just signed "Bessie" as was the teenagers' column occasionally. I will return to a discussion of this in the thesis itself.

[3] The letter is to Jim Bailey (28 February 1979). As Head's participation in the production of these True Romances in crucial to my thesis I will return to this discussion.

Shortly after leaving journalism she wrote a novel in which the main protagonist is a black female journalist.[4] This novel was, as I have already indicated, The Cardinals. Very little critical work has been published on The Cardinals thus far and no critical work has been done on Head's early journalistic writing with Golden City Post.[5]

I will claim in this thesis that Head's early journalism is of crucial importance and an understanding of this work sheds new light on her fictional writing. Certainly in The Cardinals, Head incorporates the language of popular romance while subverting the genre. Annie Gagiano has mentioned the pulp "romance" frame which Head uses in The Cardinals (1996:47). The aim of this thesis is to examine both Head's journalistic writing within the journalistic *milieu* as well as how she (re)constructs and represents this *milieu* in The Cardinals and the implications that this representation has for her later fiction.

The Cardinals is set during the late 1950s when Head was working as a journalist.[6] This period is generally considered to be a vibrant one for Black journalism and writing in South Africa. This is largely due to the emergence, in the 1950s, of Drum magazine which gave opportunities to a generation of black men who subsequently became well known writers. These include Lewis Nkosi, Bloke Modisane, Can Themba, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Alex la Guma. Yet Head was one of only two Black South African women who published books in English during the 1960s and both of these women did so from outside of the country (Driver, 1996:231). What happened to black *women* writers in this period of vibrant journalism? Although journalism of the 1950s provided a springboard for black male writers, black women writers were obviously not part of this movement. Thus, as Dorothy Driver has claimed, "[Head's] recently resurrected early work, The Cardinals, suggests that "Head survived as a writer *in spite of* Drum" (emphasis mine, 1996:231).

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[4] Margaret Daymond's introduction to The Cardinals claims that Head wrote the novel between 1960 - 1962 (1993:vii) and according to my own research as well as Eilersen's biography, she left Golden City Post in 1960.

[5] Although Eilersen does mention these columns she is doing so more in the interest of reconstructing the activities of Head's life rather than the critical or theoretical implications, although she does, at times, include analysis.

[6] The Cardinals gives the date "Wednesday, September 28th, 1959" (1993:33).

Golden City Post was owned by Jim Bailey (son of the mining millionaire Sir Abe Bailey) who also owned Drum magazine. Golden City Post shared offices with Drum magazine in Cape Town and Johannesburg and Head worked in both places. So although Head did not work directly for Drum she did, nevertheless, work in the same environment.[7] Drum and Golden City Post were considered to be the major leaders in the black media and shared (or at least encouraged) joint readership.[8] Drum magazine carried advertisements for Golden City Post with the caption: "Every DRUM reader reads POST".[9]

The name of the (fictional) newspaper in The Cardinals is "African Beat" which seems to be an obvious echo of African Drum, the original name of Drum magazine. There is, of course, also the associative connection between the words Drum and Beat. The telegraphic address of Golden City Post, the newspaper which Head worked for, was "Drumbeats".[10] It would appear then that Head was deliberately evoking associations with the names of these major papers in the (fictional) title of her newspaper, "African Beat". This would seem to suggests that Head is fictionally recreating journalism of the 1950s.

Like Drum magazine in the 1950s, "African Beat" also has a (liberal) white editor and is staffed entirely by male journalists until Mouse, the main protagonist in the novel, comes along. In Drum magazine in the early 1950s all the writers were men. This is clearly

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[7] Tom Hopkinson, who was editor of Drum (in Johannesburg) during the period in which Head worked for Golden City Post gives details of the close contact, in the offices, between Golden City Post and Drum (male) reporters. See Hopkinson, 1962:58.

[8] Lewis Nkosi claims that

> [b]y the end of the fifties DRUM and POST had become ... widely accepted as the most authoritative newspapers on the life of black South Africans ("The Fabulous Decade: The Fifties", Home and Exile and Other Selections, London, Longman, 1983:21).

I discuss this further and include circulation figures in Chapter One.

[9] Drum magazine, September/October 1956.

[10] This information is given on the last few pages of Golden City Post along with the physical address of the newspaper. See, for example, Golden City Post, October 1959, p. 20.

demonstrated by turning to any contents page of Drum during this period.[11] The lack of women writers is further demonstrated by fictional stories, written under female names, which constructed feminine sexuality in certain ways, actually being written by men (Driver, 1996:235-6).

In the "True Romances" which Head "produced" for Home Post it is always men who are positioned as the writers or creators of any kind.[12] Women are only ever the "objects" of male creativity or the silent muses. These "True Romances" were rigidly bound by the genre of "Romance", which I will discuss in the thesis, and positioned women in very particular ways. Marriage and the domestic sphere was posited as the only appropriate, and *desirable*, place for women. It is thus *extremely significant* that in The Cardinals Head created a black *female* journalist. In her recent analysis of gender in Drum magazine Driver has claimed that, despite the numerous analyses and reminiscences of Drum magazine, "none see it in relation to black South African literature written by women and very few even refer to gender" (1996:232). In The Cardinals Head may, in fact, have given us the earliest, gender(ed) perspective, and critique, of black South African journalism in the 1950s.

My thesis is that Head is, in this novel, providing a revolutionary picture of a black woman *especially* for the period in which it was written in South Africa. Mouse *is* a writer and the relationship that she ends up having with her co-journalist, who is also her father, is brought about through her talent as a writer. Unlike the situation of women in the "True Romances" where, it is suggested, pursuing any sort of career will make them unattractive to men, the fact that Mouse is a writer *is* what makes her interesting to Johnny and it is what gives her power over both of their stories and histories. Unlike the romances marriage is not posited as any kind of resolution or solution for women within this novel.

Furthermore, by providing a fictional deconstruction of the "truth" of journalism and by blurring the boundaries between truth and fiction, the text of The Cardinals could be

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[11] This is also clearly demonstrated by Dorothy Woodson's (1988) index to authors of Drum magazine in Drum: An Index to "Africa's Leading Magazine" 1951 - 1965, Madison: University of Wisconsin.

[12] I adopt Daymond's term for Head's involvement with the romances.

suggesting that the images the black media generated, including the images of (black) women, had nothing to do with "reality" and everything to do with construction. This suggestion, specifically with regard to the representation of women, seems to be borne out by Driver's recent analysis of Drum magazine between 1951 and 1959 (Driver, 1996).

I will thus, in this thesis, locate the text's representation of Mouse within a reading of the representation of women in black news media in the 1950s. This will include Golden City Post, Home Post and Drum magazine. The "True Romances" in Home Post will be analysed to see how they construct women. As sport was a crucial feature in these papers, I will look at the representations of sportswomen in Drum as well as a serialised review by Bessie Head of the autobiography of the African American tennis star, Althea Gibson. In this review, the way in which Head represents a single, successful, ambitious woman is strikingly at odds with the way in which male journalists represented women in sport.

A reading of Head's columns for children and teenagers shows how this very early writing by Head works against the construction of women in the "True Romances" and tries to divert teenage girls (and boys) away from romance and marriage as the sole focus of their lives.

Head's energetic encouragement to girls especially to develop interest in careers and not make marriage their sole ambition seems to be re-written in The Cardinals where, I will claim, Head's representation of Mouse is fundamentally different from conceptions about *women and writing* in the 1950s. A close reading of the thematic concerns of this early work should, I believe, lead to a re-reading of Maru showing how ideas about gender and race are taken even further than they are in The Cardinals.

Head's fiction, at least in the case of The Cardinals and later Maru (published in 1972), seems to be exploring the possibilities for women to be authors and to assume the *author*ity to create themselves and, in Maru, others as well. Both Mouse in The Cardinals and Margaret in Maru use creative forms to express themselves in ways that it is otherwise impossible for them to do so. Mouse writes and Margaret paints. Both of these novels detail a woman's relationship with a man and the concept of "romance" is certainly present. Yet both of these novels, I will argue, undermine the concepts prevalent in popular romance. This undermining

is even more forceful in Maru than in The Cardinals. Maru has often been, and still is, read as a "fairy tale" romance with a happy ending. Re-reading Maru, in relation to *all* Head's other romance writing in its various forms, will give rise to a new understanding of how "romance" and particularly Margaret's marriage to Maru, functions in the novel.

Thus I will conclude by looking at how in the 1970s Head's indictment of the notion of "True Romance" is taken even further than in the 1960s and how she uses the (inverted) romance structure to claim that *both race and gender* are fundamental grounds of subjectivity.[13]

[13] See Teresa de Lauretis, 1988, "Displacing Hegemonic Discourses: Reflections on Feminist Theory in the 1980's" in Inscriptions 3/4, pp. 127-144.

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Home Post's "True Romance": Drawing the Boundaries of Gender

In March 1959 the weekly newspaper Golden City Post began publishing "True Romance[s]". This inauguration of the weekly romance was concurrent with the launch of a new supplement to the paper, a tabloid called Home Post, in which these romances appeared. The Home Post was a women's supplement filled with advice about beauty, fashion, interior decorating, cooking as well as a column for children and an advice column for teenagers written by Bessie Head.[1] In addition to this a much publicized "Bride of the Year" competition was run in Home Post during the first year, 1959. The romances continued to appear, weekly, on the front page of Home Post, with a few exceptions, until June 1960, when they were replaced by general articles about fashion, shopping or beauty.

It is interesting to note that the cessation of the romances seems to concur exactly with Head's resignation from her job with Golden City Post. Although Head stopped writing the columns at the end of April 1960 Eilersen claims that

> after a period in hospital [Head]... returned to Cape Town [and] her job on the *Golden City Post* was waiting for her. For two months she tried. But ... she had to resign from her job. (1995:50)

This would be one explanation for the rather abrupt end to the "True Romance" series. Despite the fact that two critics *have* claimed that Bessie Head was involved in the writing of these romances, which were published under pen names, no critical attention has ever been paid to them or to the columns that Head wrote. The columns have been dismissed by one commentator on the grounds that they were written for children and adolescents and published in a women's supplement and do not, therefore, constitute serious journalism or merit critical

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[1] This information is provided by Eilersen (1995:41) and Daymond (1993:viii). The children's "Dear Gang" column was signed "Bessie" and accompanied by a picture of her. The "Hiya Teenagers" advice column was occasionally signed by "Bessie" as well. See, for example, Home Post, 10 January, 1960, page 2.

attention.[2] To cite an example of a totally dismissive critical attitude towards romance stories of this period one has only to turn to Don Dodson's (1974) analysis of Drum magazine between 1960 and 1965. While Dodson is referring specifically to Drum magazine, Golden City Post was part of Drum Publications and they shared the same offices and many of the same journalists, so one could, with extrapolation, consider his conclusions to apply equally to the Home Post romances. In fact he begins his analysis about romance with a story written by Juby Mayet who used to write for Home Post as well. Juby Mayet wrote the children's and teenagers' columns before, and again after, Head under the pen name of Sharon Davis.[3]

Dodson discerns what he terms "the four modes of Drum" magazine: humour, irony, realism and romance. He discusses these four modes in terms of the way he sees them relate to the oppressive structures of apartheid and then catagorises them as either helping to maintain or subvert the existing social order. The most common of these modes in the magazine, he claims, is romance. After some description and discussion of romances that appeared in Drum he comes to the astounding conclusion that the "MORAL" of these romances is that "[t]here isn't one!" (1974:341). He sees romance as providing an inane "escape" from the oppressive political structure of apartheid, "making what cannot be changed endurable" and, therefore, as encouraged by "[s]uperiors in the scale of hierarchy ... on the assumption that it will keep the masses happy --- or at least diverted" (1974:320).

His naivete becomes patronising when he comments on readers' responses to these romances. Citing letters to the editor of Drum, in which readers endorse the "reality" and "truth" of these romances, Dodson claims that "[s]uch delusions may be dysfunctional for daily role behaviour". Dodson does not give any names, or references, for the letters quoted nor does he indicate whether these letters were written by males or females. In fact he pays no attention to gender at all. He concludes with the claim that romance fulfils psychological needs for the masses "because it helps them to forget their daily cares" and that "[t]his is

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[2] See Eilersen, 1995:42. I will discuss this issue in chapter two.

[3] This information about Juby Mayet's pen name in given in Golden City Post in the Home Post, October, 1959. The columns were signed "Sharon".

almost essential for endurance in an oppressive system" (1974:341). Thus while Dodson tries to isolate a reading of romance in terms of the racial politics of apartheid, he totally ignores the politics of gender and thus, more crucially, the complex interrelationship between the two, *especially* in apartheid South Africa.

Dodson's study stands as a prime example of what Dorothy Driver is referring to when she claims that despite "the numerous analyses and reminiscences of *Drum* magazine, none see it in relation to black South African literature written by women and very few even refer to gender" (1996:232). Dodson totally ignores the social and gender context in which Drum was produced. While he states that the magazine has been "a training ground for many of South Africa's best writers", he fails to note that the writers he lists are all male, as were almost all of the Drum journalists. While Dodson sees readers' response to romance as "delusion[al]" and "dysfunctional" and totally ignores the question of gender, Driver sees gender as a crucial to a reading, and understanding, of the complex social (re)constructions that were being negotiated in Drum during the 1950s. According to Driver "gender was deeply implicated in the modernizing process" that arose out of the social upheaval of the 1950s caused by both massive urbanization and the migrant labour system (1996:232).

Anthony Sampson, one of the earliest editors of Drum magazine, has claimed that the shift that took place in the early 1950s *away* from (rural) Africa was as a result of readers' responses to the material in African Drum as the magazine was originally called (the loss of "African" in the name change to Drum is itself indicative of the shift *away* from Africa):

> "Ag, why do you dish out that stuff, man?" ... "Tribal music! Tribal history! Chiefs! We don't care about chiefs! Give us jazz and film stars, man! We want Duke Ellington, Satchmo, and hot dames! Yes, brother, anything American.["]
> ...
> "Give us girls man ... Tell us about gangsters... Cut out this tribal stuff. Show us things that *matter*..." There was no escaping the formula for selling papers ... The workers of the world were united, at least, in their addiction to cheese-cake and crime. (Sampson, 1956:20 and 30)

The environment in which this desire for "hot dames" is articulated was a male one: the "Bantu Men's Social Centre" where Sampson was taken by Henry Nxumalo, a journalist who became known as "Mr. Drum". In this urban environment made up of a male editor, male journalists and male readers in the "Bantu *Men's* Social Centre" women were constructed as desired objects of the male gaze. This was part of the change of editorial policy during the early 1950s which resulted in the doubling of Drum's circulation.[4] It is thus clear that the shift that took place *away* from tribal (rural) Africa was represented by certain images of women or, as Driver has claimed, the shift from rural "past" to urban "present", from "tradition" to "modernity", was negotiated by means of the representation of women (Driver, 1996:234).

The fact that the urban environment *was* male dominated, was due to the apartheid migrant labour system which resulted in proportions of men to women of between four and seven men to one woman in the Reef area and thus left "[c]ommunity and family structures in disarray".[5] In the face of this social confusion, says Driver,

> *Drum* magazine blandly reproduced European and American constructions of gender as part of an overall ideology of romantic love ... a modern form of romantic love within an ideology of domesticity, aiming for the establishment of a consumer orientated nuclear family, headed by the husband and father and hospitable to female authority in only its most carefully controlled domestic forms. (1996:233)

The modernising process that was negotiated in, and through, Drum magazine involved new gender roles for both women *and* men. These gender positions were constructed largely through romance stories, especially the "True Romance" stories published in Home Post, as these set themselves up not merely as the objective "truth" about romance but as the "true experiences" of female (and a few male) readers.[6] Through the weekly

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[4] Compare Sampson, 1956:37 and 1956:52. The first circulation figures listed are 35 000 and the second 60 000.

[5] See Driver, 1996:233.

romance slot the boundaries of femininity and masculinity were being drawn. Any characteristics that were inappropriate to either gender construction were expunged from within the stories: represented either through the (female narrators') "natural" process of "growing up" (into a gendered identity) or through a process of reward and punishment where the correct behaviour is rewarded and inappropriate behaviour punished in the stories.

That these processes of gender construction, and naturalisation, were being played out in 1950s black media in general, not just in romances, is particularly clear from the ambivalent representation of women who exceed the boundaries of femininity, as it was (in the process of) being constructed. There are, often, attempts in articles by male journalists to retain (powerful) women as domestic, and therefore feminine, even while documenting achievements that fall outside of the realm of the feminine.[7] Yet while these complex borders are traversed, in an uneasy fashion, in feature articles, it is in the "True Romance[s]" that the gender territory was being unambiguously mapped out.

Thus to dismiss these romances as having no "moral" is to deny the formative influence that these stories must have had on readers around South Africa.[8] The influence of Golden City Post is suggested by Lewis Nkosi's claim that "[b]y the end of the fifties DRUM and POST had become ... widely accepted as the most authoritative newspapers on the life of black South Africans" (Nkosi, 1983: 21). Les Switzer documents that by the late 1960s Post, as Golden City Post was then known, had emerged as the most successful black commercial publication in Southern Africa (Switzer, 1979:115). W.A. Hachten and C.A. Giffard list astounding circulation figures of 224 000 ("with an estimated 1 158 000 African, Coloured,

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[6] A few of the "True Romances" were published under male names. For example 3 May, 1959 by "Len Buys"; 24 May, 1959 by "Solomon Neft"; and 14 June, 1959 which is by Sexton Mabena - with a picture of him - which I refer to later in this chapter.

[7] The examples I will cite deal with sportswomen or female political leaders. I will discuss examples of women in sport later in this chapter and a discussion of a feature article on Lillian Ngoyi will be dealt with in chapter two of this thesis.

[8] Although (according to Les Switzer) there were 5 different local editions of Golden City Post around South Africa, Head's columns received letters from all over the country which *suggests* that the Home Post, with its "True Romances", was circulated throughout the whole country. See Switzer, 1979:115.

and Indian readers") for Golden City Post by 1968 (1984:148).[9] Thus given the widespread circulation, popularity and "authority" of Golden City Post the weekly "True Romance" must have exerted a great influence on women readers of the period by holding up (ideal) constructions of femininity (and masculinity) that were part of the appeal of the "modern" promulgated by media like Golden City Post and Drum magazine.

The "True Romance" was supposed to have been sent in by a reader and was thus constructed as the "true" romance experiences of the readers themselves. Early editions of the Home Post ask readers to send in their "True Romance" for this page. On only one occasion, 14 June 1959, some four months after the inauguration of this page, there is a wedding picture of a couple and the romance is written in the name of the husband, Sexton Mabena. Generally, however, the few early photographs of couples which were reported as "posed" quickly disappeared and were replaced by silhouetted drawings. Unlike Drum magazine's invitation to readers to write their "first love" story where readers' names and areas of residence were given,[10] Home Post's romance readers are given no such details and are told that pen names are used by the writers. This total anonymity considered together with the fact that all the stories in Home Post are so similar and that the representation of women adheres so uniformly to the rules of the romance genre (which I will discuss) seems to reinforce Eilersen's repeated claims that these stories were in fact written by Bessie Head and not by readers themselves.

There is also the crucial question of where the first week's "True Romance" came from as there was no request for "True Romance[s]" from readers in the weeks preceding the launch of Home Post. This first romance is not only typical in style of the romances which follow, but introduces a theme that will be central in many of the romances: the shift from traditional arranged marriage towards modern romantic love. Thus the possibility that this

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[9] They also list a total weekly circulation of 470 000 for Drum's three African editions by 1969 (1984:148).

[10] This "first love" story series was published in Drum magazine during 1957.

story was editorially written (perhaps as an "example" for readers of what they themselves could send in) seems to be reinforced.

It seems appropriate to note that very much later Head wrote a short story called "The Lovers" which also deals, in a different context, with the question of arranged marriage and the shift towards a modern version of love. In a letter Head mentions this story (published in 1980) specifically in relation to the Home Post romances:

> I well remember the days when I worked with Dolly Hassim on the woman's magazine page of Post. I used to type out one true romance story a week ... I thought I would bring everything full cycle be [sic] submitting a true romance story once again.[11]

While the reference to typing leaves some doubt about whether she actually composed the stories, her next claim, that she thought she "would bring everything full cycle be [sic] submitting a true romance story once again", suggests that she was *writing* the true romance stories. This story was sent to Jim Bailey to whom the letter was written. Presumably she was sending it to him for Drum magazine, which he still owned during 1979. Eilersen claims that this story was returned by Drum although Head had hoped they would publish it "considering all the love stories she had written for *Home Post* so long ago" (1995:203). It is significant that while "The Lovers" deals with the theme of modern love this is negotiated in ways which differ significantly from the "True Romance" formula which indicates that Head was re-working the romance genre in her later fiction.

The use of these "True Romance[s]" in a women's supplement presumably followed in the wake of the success of the popular romance genre in the 1950s in North America and partly satisfied, and thus reinforced, that desire for "anything American" that readers are reported to have had. Through their adherence to the popular romance genre, these stories

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[11] Bessie Head letter from the Khama Memorial Museum, dated 28 February, 1979. I do not yet have permission to quote from this letter although I am in the process of requesting this from the Khama Museum in the event of publication. I would like to thank Margaret Daymond for bringing this letter to my attention.

reproduced the ideology of romantic love in which women were positioned in very specific ways. The success of romance in America followed on from Great Britain where mass-produced popular romance, as we know it today, was pioneered by the company Mills and Boon. In 1954 Mills and Boon romances were doing exceptionally well.[12] While Mills and Boon supplied the British market with romances, the company that introduced them to North America was Harlequin. Harlequin began as a re-print operation in 1949 and published romances bought from Mills and Boon as well as other material. Following the success of Mills and Boon, Harlequin made a decision in 1957 to concentrate on romances which the company did from 1958, giving rise to a burgeoning industry as Tania Modleski has noted: "[s]ince 1958 when the first Harlequin Romance was published, over 2,300 titles have appeared" (1982:35).

As it was just a year later that Golden City Post began their own "True Romance" series it is worth briefly comparing the Home Post and Harlequin romances. Harlequins are produced according to strict formulae which the publishers dictate to authors. The romance, which has to be the central focus of the plot, has to have a happy ending which involves the heroine getting married.[13] The stories must be told through the heroine's point of view in the third person.

Although the romances that the Home Post published differ in several ways from the Harlequin romances which Modleski, among others, describes, the Home Post romances do, nevertheless, draw on the popular romance genre. Thus although the Home Post stories are very much shorter than the approximately 187 page-length Harlequins they do all have the happy ending which involves the marriage of the protagonist. They also represent women in ways which are typical of the representation of women in popular romance and thus I will argue that they constructed femininity in very specific ways.

There are three main differences between the Home Post romances and the popular romance novels. The first and most obvious is the length of the texts. The other two

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[12] See Radway, 1987:39.

[13] See Modleski, 1982:36.

differences lie in the Home Post stories being posited as "True Romance" while the Harlequins are fiction and thirdly, while the Harlequin novels must be told in the third person the Home Post romances are told in the first person, usually from the protagonist's point of view. The last two points are obviously related: a "true" romance can only be told "truly" by the person to whom it happened. The fact that these stories are posited as "true" suggests that they attempt to constitute the "truth" about romance: about women and men and their relationships.

Though the Home Post romances deal with a variety of cultural backgrounds they always do so from the position of the "insider", the woman who relates her story. The romances offer "wisdom" from women who are older, wiser, more experienced and *married*, as these romances are written in the past tense after the marriage of the narrator. Given that marriage is constructed as a situation that all women (should) aspire to, the fact that the women who narrate the tales are all already married means that they have already "succeeded" in reaching their appropriate position in life, and can therefore speak from a position of superiority and experience and "recommend" marriage to other unmarried women. Thus the stories and situations that are offered as real life situations present women readers with a very particular view of what their lives should be about and this view is "naturalised" through the suggestion that this is the way that all women feel.[14] No desirable alternative to marriage is offered in these stories: marriage is the only meaningful situation that all women aspire to and desire.

Janice Radway has suggested that through repetitively reading romances "women ... participat[e] in a collectively elaborated female fantasy", one

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[14] I am here referring to Roland Barthes' concept of *naturalisation* where, through language, history is turned into nature. See Barthes, "Myth Today", 1983:116.

> that unfailingly ends at the precise moment when the heroine is gathered into the arms of the hero who declares his intention to protect her forever because of his desperate love and need for her. These women are telling themselves a story whose central vision is one of total surrender where all danger has been expunged, thus permitting the heroine to relinquish self-control. Passivity is at the heart of the romance experience in the sense that the final goal of each narrative is the creation of that perfect union where the ideal male, who is masculine and strong, yet nurturant too, finally realises the intrinsic worth of the heroine. Thereafter, she is required to do nothing more than exist as the center of this paragon's attention.... (Radway, 1987:97)

Radway's claim that after marriage the heroine "is required to do nothing more than *exist*" seems to be borne out in Home Post by the fact that any job which the narrator may have before marriage, like teaching, or nursing (which is what a lot of the women in the stories do) is seem simply as temporary measure until marriage. Ambition is presented as a serious threat to any woman's marriage chances. Any activities that may disturb a woman's femininity must be curbed as part of the "ideal ending" in which she ends up getting married. Real love will, in any case, cause a woman to "outgrow" any tendencies that are less than feminine.[15] This is the picture that these True Romances present of, and to, women.

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[15] The title of Linda K. Christian-Smith's book, Becoming a Woman Through Romance, (New York and London: Routledge, 1990) clearly suggests the role romance plays in constructing femininity and womanhood.

Home Post's "True Romance" Stories

The first "True Romance" story that appeared in Home Post (on 1 March 1959) was entitled "A Marriage has been Arranged" and the author's name was given as "Shani".[16] In this story Shani is taken out of school at fifteen to prepare for an arranged marriage which she is not looking forward to: having seen her husband-to-be she claims that she knows she would be miserable married to him, but there is nothing she can do. She then meets Sayed, the cousin of her husband-to-be and falls in love with him. The arranged husband conveniently runs off with another women who is "coloured". This causes a scandal and Shani is thus saved from the marriage. Soon after this her aunt takes her shopping one day while Sayed and his parents negotiate business with Shani's parents and she comes home to find out that she is to be married to Sayed whom she loves. The story seems to reward Shani for adhering to traditional structures and thus gives her what she desired because she was "obedient" and submissive. Yet at the same time the ideology of romantic love seems to be incorporated into the traditional arranged marriage structure because she ends up marrying the man she falls in love with in the romantic tradition. Although the marriage is still negotiated by the parents, Shani had *already* chosen Sayed.

Another story dealing with arranged marriage six months later (6 September 1959) makes the shift from tradition to romance. "Bibi" is "The Quiet Widow" and the standfirst tells the reader: "[t]hey belonged to different worlds: hers was narrow and lonely; his was unconventional and exciting". Bibi is 19 years old and has been left a widow after her husband, from an arranged marriage, dies. She is very depressed about having to go back and live with her parents again and wishes she were dead. She is sent to visit her married sister who has become "modernised". There Bibi cuts her hair, lifts her hems and falls in love for the

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[16] For the sake of the reader's convenience these stories are listed in the bibliography, in a separate section, according to date of publication. As the authors' names are pen names, are cited inconsistently, and as they are often included as part of the title ("True Romance by .... ") I have elected to include the name of the author with the title, rather than arrange the stories alphabetically by "author".

first time. The parents of the man (who is never named), with whom she falls in love, object to her because she is two years older than their son and she has a child from her marriage. She "obediently" leaves and goes back home to her parents. He follows her and asks her to marry him (in contrast with arranged marriage). He is a lawyer and he sets up a practice in her home town where they have friends among the younger people in the town.

There is an interesting progression from "Shani" to "Bibi": although Shani gets her man it is only because she is "saved" from the arranged marriage by her future husband's bad behaviour while Bibi is actually proposed to, in the romantic tradition, by her second husband. It is also very significant that this happens to Bibi only after she has gone to live with her "modernised" sister and has cut her hair, raised her hems and fallen in love -- all in the "modern" way. Thus there seems to be a distinct suggestion that being "modern" is what will bring women happiness. Thus while the first story seems to attempt to incorporate romantic love into the traditional arranged marriage structure through making space for Shani's desire, the second story seems to radically displace, and re-place, the traditional structure with romantic love. Yet *both* stories insist that romantic love underpins *all* unions and thus these stories, like the romances Radway describes,

> continue to advance the ideology of romantic love, insisting thereby that marriage between a man and a woman is not an economic or social necessity or a purely sexual affiliation but an emotional bond freely forged. (Radway, 187:170)

These two stories thus clearly demonstrate how *romance* is implicated in the modernising process and how gender roles are being (re)defined through this process. The traditional and romance structures seem to merge in the suggestion that marriage is the only appropriate space for women: Bibi is only "allowed" between the homes of her parents and *married* sister and the suggestion, with both of her marriages, as with Shani's, is that marriage offers women (the only version of) independence. Yet "romantic" marriages are held up, above traditional ones, as the more desirable for women. It is significant that in Home Post's

first "True Romance" the ideology of romantic love begins to invade, and triumph over, the tradition of arranged marriage.

While the first story *introduces* (the ideology of) romantic love, the story two weeks later is the first of many in which a "plain" woman, in spite of her lack of beauty, gets (what is constructed as) an extremely desirable man. This story begins to define the desirable characteristics which a woman must have in order to achieve the romantic union. In "Dance, Little Lady" (15 March 1959) Doreen is "thin" and "mousy-looking" but she is a good dancer. At a dance she is approached by the desirable football hero, Dennis, who dances with her and then asks her out on a date. Dennis is one of several popular, desirable sports heroes. That desirable men are often represented as good sportsmen indicates one of the ways in which these romances constructed ideal masculinity too. For the date Doreen makes herself "glamorous": she does her hair and puts on lots of make-up. He rejects her this way and at the next dance he tells her that he likes her as she is and not as a cheap imitation of glamour girl: "you have more than enough personality to cover lack of facial beauty," he says. He tells her he likes her because she is a tiny, fragile thing and needs someone big, like him, to take care of her. Doreen's smallness is matched by Dennis' largeness. Although Doreen is not beautiful her petite fragility makes up for this. Jeanne Dubino calls this "[t]he Cinderella [c]omplex":

> [o]nly with a beautiful, firm and small body can ... heroines of romance fiction have access to love. Western society requires that women be small, like Cinderella, and not in the physical sense only. Cinderella wins her prince not because of merit --- her stepsisters are as obedient to their mother's wishes as Cinderella is --- she wins him because she has the smallest feet, and because she is the most self-effacing of the three women. (1993:115)

What we see in Home Post then are these values of "Western society" being propagated, through these romances, as *natural*.

While Doreen's smallness makes up for her lack of beauty, Billie must learn to constantly (re)construct herself as the object of the male gaze. In "Lover, Come Back to Me" (12 April 1959) Billie loses her fiancé to her best friend, Rose, who has always been the

glamorous party girl and always looks good. Billie has become too much like a house-wife already and does not take enough care of her appearance. She gives the ring back to Adam, then regains her glamour and eventually gets Adam back. Through this experience "she learned a lot" about not neglecting her appearance to which Adam's affection seems to be directly -- and proportionally -- linked.

Yet, while beauty and appearance are important, "plain" women still have a chance of acquiring an attractive man if they display other "feminine" characteristics, like Doreen whose smallness and fragility Dennis found irresistible. In "Mr Wonderful and the Mouse" by Charmaine Harris (July 19 1959) "plain" and "unpopular" and insecure Charmaine is asked out by the attractive and intelligent Dick Richards after he injures himself while playing cricket (another sportsman) and Charmaine dresses his wound for him. Thinking that he is "toying" with her she rejects him when he tries to kiss her. She was "so obsessed with her plain face" that she missed all the signs that he really wanted to marry her which, naturally, he eventually does. What is it that makes up for Charmaine's lack of beauty? He tells her that he wants to marry her because she has so much *more* than glamour. What is it that makes Dick Richards see the "real" woman underneath the shy, "plain" exterior and what is it that he sees? It is *while* she is dressing his wound that Dick sees her as a composite of the feminine characteristics of nurturance, silence and modesty:

> Now I know something more [about you]. You have a gentle touch, you don't giggle or chatter and you blush. (Home Post July 19 1959: 1)

The theme of women "nursing" men is one that occurs throughout these stories and, according to Janice Radway, throughout the genre of the popular romance where

> [t]he ideal heroine's ... true femininity is never left in doubt ... she is always portrayed as unusually compassionate, kind and understanding. Typically, some minor disaster occurs in the early stages of the story that proves the perfect occasion for her to display her extraordinary capacity for empathetic nurturance and tender care... This characteristic, early demonstration of the romantic heroine's ability to transmute the sick into the healthy reassures the reader that the heroine is, in reality, a "true" woman, one who possesses all the nurturing skills associated by patriarchal culture with the feminine character. (1987:127)

This theme occurs in several other Home Post stories where many of the narrators are nurses. In one of the "True Confessions" which replaced the "True Romance" in 1960 "Ice-Cold Annie" steals her man from another woman and is "punished" because he won't consummate the marriage. Then he gets ill and she nurses him back to health. She follows her nursing care with the selfless act of leaving, and thus freeing, him. This "redeems" her and causes him to love her: a clear case of the Cinderella complex. Here is also an example of what may be termed the reward and punishment system that seems to operate, particularly in the "True Confessions". Annie is "punished" for stealing her man, by losing him, and then "rewarded" for the selfless act of nursing and leaving him as this results in his love for her. This is a clear case of the positive reinforcement of "feminine" characteristics.

Dubino's Cinderella complex seems to intersect with what Modleski calls the "disappearing act", another feature of popular romance.[17] In many of the romances that Modleski discusses, as well as in the Home Post romances, women who feel they are not loved "disappear" only to have the hero, who suddenly discovers that he cannot live without them, come after them and propose. While this happens in "Ice-Cold Annie", discussed above, it is more clearly played out in another of the "plain woman gets desirable man" stories, "Love is for Always" by Jennifer Adams (23 August 1959), where Jennifer says:

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[17] See Modleski, 1982:36/7.

> If you are a person like me just a plain girl who is a little ambitious but very homely, you may also have found it impossible to believe that someone like Donald could love you. (Home Post 23August 1959: 1)

Jennifer and Donald are childhood friends. He goes away to boarding school, comes back and gets engaged to a pretty girl. Jennifer, who loves him, cannot stand by and watch and thus applies for teaching post in the country to get away. He goes after her and claims, "You always seemed to belong to me in such a way that I didn't even question it. I only realised it after you had gone". Thus in order to get a man's attention women have to *literally* make themselves disappear.

It is interesting that Donald goes after Jennifer "who is a little ambitious but very homely". Like many of the other women in these stories Jennifer is a school teacher, but the central focus of her life is obviously Donald and marriage. I find it noteworthy the way the "*little* ambitious" is qualified by the "*very* homely" because the most disturbing stories, for me, are those that deal with the impossibilities of women having careers or ambition.

One of the earliest romances that deals with a career in relation to marriage is not a True Romance of a reader but the "True Romance" of Margot Fonteyn told by Mabel Barnes (31 May 1959). It tells of how "[o]n the eve of her wedding" Margot is asked: "I suppose now you will retire?" Her reply:

> Margot looked across the room at Roberto with a smile: "My husband has not yet made any plans for me to do so. If he had, I suppose I should". (Home Post 31 May 1959: 1)

Even the careers of famous female performers, it is suggested, are controlled by the plans of their husbands. Even though she won't retire she still needs her husband's "permission" to carry on working. Fonteyn, as a ballerina, is a literal embodiment of that "smallness" that Doreen will be prized for a few weeks later. Here this physical smallness is also translated into the self-effacement that Dubino describes in the Cinderella complex.

In "Dear Enemy" (4 October 1959) a woman's career is controlled by her husband in a different way: she ends up becoming a doctor simply because she is following her prospective husband. This is the story of the "Girl who fought through life with the Clever Boy" by Gloria Dixon. Gloria works hard at school to beat this boy. Although her parents don't want to send her to high school she begs to go in order to be with him. She comes top of the class only in order to beat him. Then she goes to Medical school because this is what he's always said he wants to do. In the end, of course, she marries him. Thus the whole story of a woman acquiring a professional education is structured around her rivalry with a man which will "mature" into love and he will then become her husband. In spite of the fact that she beats him at school, *he* is still named as the clever boy in the sub-title.

The most disturbing by far is, however, a story called "All that Glitters" by Nomahle (13 September 1959) which was published about a month before "Dear Enemy". Nomahle is a part-time singer in town and has a manager called Lew. She loves him but is afraid to admit it because he seems so "slick". She meets a friend of her mother's who castigates her for deserting her parents in a rural village for the good life in the city and not visiting them in four and a half years. Nomahle returns to her rural family home. Lew follows and, once there, asks her to marry him. Before he saw her in her "rural" family setting, her go-getting attitude in the city made him afraid to tell her that he was just a chauffeur and didn't own the big car he drove. Nomahle says:

> I didn't realise it was my hard, go-getting attitude that prevented Lew from declaring his love. How near I came to missing it.
> (Home Post 13 September 1959: 1)

Here is a case where Nomahle's ambition almost prevents her from getting her man and the message is clear: ambition will prevent men from declaring their love.

There are, however, a host of problematic associations going on in this story. The "real" Nomahle is associated with rural and family values and the hard singer-in-town Nomahle is *not* the "authentic" woman. I wonder if this story could be a response to black women jazz singers of the 1950s when, as Driver has claimed, jazz was beginning to open up a different

space for black women where female sexuality could exceed the strict boundaries within which it was usually constructed and contained.[18] This story could then be an attempt to put (black) women back in their place: in rural areas caring for the family, reinforcing all those "feminine" values that could be momentarily disturbed by the female jazz singer. On this note, it's worth mentioning that this is one of the few stories with a name which overtly suggests that it is a black woman telling her story. While silhouetted pictures usually accompanied the romances which *suggested* that all the characters were black and while some stories bear overt references to Indian or coloured communities, this story is the only one which has specific references to a (rural) *African* community. As the title, "All that Glitters" suggests, Nomahle really desired domesticity with Lew and the allure of city night life wasn't real. Underneath that feisty singer she was just a "real" women with "natural" feminine desires. The city night life distracted her from her real duties, like caring for her family and thus the city and its nightlife made Nomahle "selfish". However, when reprimanded she returns to her duties and real self and is given Lew in return.

The shifts between the "modern" city and traditional "rural" are complicated here. While Nomahle returns to the city with Lew and still sings, they both retain rural family links. Yet in the end it seems as though it is neither the city nor the rural that triumphs but the ideology of romantic love. Lew tells Nomahle that he fell in love with her the first day he heard her singing but he "wanted [her] to grow up" which involved relinquishing her ambition and returning to her feminine (nurturing) role. The city is no longer "bad" for Nomahle when she is in her proper place, with Lew.

While Nomahle's story tells of her *giving up* her ambition as a singer because of marriage, it is interesting that in many other stories the creative act is *always* in the hands of men: women are never positioned as the originators of any creative act. The True Romance, "To Hear You Whisper Low" (19 April 1959), by Jean Musi portrays an 18 year-old Jean who is bored with men her own age and yet feeling lonely in a restaurant full of couples. Peter, who is 30 years old, comes in. He is a writer and has published a story in Drum magazine. He

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[18] See Driver, 1996:238-240.

takes her home and there is a moment of anxiety, for Jean, about going into the apartment of an older man and gauging his intentions. Then he leads her to the couch. He, however, only wants to read "How do I love thee" to Jean and ask her to marry him. He is the literary writer and reader of poetry and she is his muse. At the end of the story we are left with an image of *Peter as the writer*. The act of writing *the romance story itself* is obliterated by the fact of *Peter being the real writer*. Even though Peter is being written by Jean, Jean is not the writer, Peter is. Thus the story itself sets up the idea that "True Romance" writing is not "real" writing; the "real" writing is what Peter publishes in Drum magazine. Perhaps this is partially because the "True Romance" constructs itself as exactly that: "true" so that no (fictional) creation is seen to be involved? Yet of course this idea was also one that was current at the time: men were the (real) journalists and journalism was seen, in many ways, as an essentially *male* activity.[19] Peter is thus left as the *writer* and the fact of Jean's writing is annihilated by her own story.

The idea of men being (the only) creators is even more apparent in a story called "The Tomboy Falls in Love" by Claudia Smith (26 July 1959). Claudia is reformed from being a tomboy after falling in love with George who is a "cross between Professor Higgins and St. George". Claudia wants a man to sweep her off her feet but George does something else: he *paints* her and this is how they fall in love. Yet he does more than paint her - he *creates* her in the act of painting her: she is a restless person and yet he paints her sitting still. She falls in love with George at this moment, or is it with the image of herself and thus the "woman" that she becomes through George? From the wild, impetuous "tomboy" George "creates" a serene woman.

The description of George being a cross between Professor Higgins and St. George is worth interrogating. Professor Higgins creates the identity of Eliza Doolittle in George Bernard Shaw's play "Pygmalion". There are, however,

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[19] I will discuss this in the next chapter in detail.
Lewis Nkosi claims "that being a DRUM man ... one was supposed to exhibit a unique intellectual style; usually urbane, ironic, morally tough and detached" (1983:9).

many versions of this play. In the original play Eliza, who is "just a successful experiment" to Higgins, "assert[s] herself as a human being and reject[s] Higgins" at the end of the play. "Yet the film adaptation of 1938, which Shaw approved, brought Higgins and Doolittle together at the end" (Ousby, 1988:810). It was this version which was made into the extremely popular musical comedy My Fair Lady in 1956, just three years before the True Romance about George was written. Thus the popular understanding of this play and the one that was current in the late 1950s, after the musical, was that Professor Higgins creates Eliza Doolittle and that she falls in love with her creator in the end.

The other half of the equation, *Saint* George, seems more difficult to unravel. As popular legend has it Saint George slew the dragon. Could this be a reference to George slaying the old tomboy Claudia and creating, through the painted image, a new "woman"? This would seem likely given that Claudia says: "he is a bit of a *miracle maker* -- look how he changed my life" (emphasis mine).

It is precisely these ideas of writing, painting and their possibilities for the (re)creation of women that Head tackles in her novels The Cardinals and Maru. Maru, which seems almost a direct response to stories like Claudia's, is a novel which gives a female protagonist the power to create both herself and others through painting. This is after she has *also* been a "successful experiment" at the hands of others. Similarly The Cardinals can be read as a response to the idea presented in the romance by "Jean Musi" that it is men who are the real writers or that writing is, in every way, a male pursuit.

If it is not yet clear that the lives of women (and men) were being represented and constructed in very specific ways, the "True Romance" at the end of 1959, the year during which these stories began, leaves no doubt that marriage and domesticity was the only desirable space for women. It presents the suggestion that women never would, or should, choose to be single. The story in question is called "We were man-haters until..." by Chookie (13 December 1959). Chookie founds a "Bachelor women's club". The members are "proud spinsters" and interested in sisterhood, staying friends and are all strictly anti-marriage. They emphasize the independence of working women versus the serfdom of being a housewife. This story starts out representing modern women who work and are independent. Yet when

they have a membership drive the description of the members is very telling indeed: "some had been jilted", "some divorced", "some unhappily married". There is obviously no real choice involved in staying single. Chookie and her friends go on holiday together to Johannesburg where they all meet men. As they were "quite lively and irrepressible young women" Chookie tells, "it wasn't long before we had *thawed* completely" (emphasis mine). She goes home, dissolves the Bachelor Women's Club and then she and her friends "retreat" into married life: "that absolutely blissful obscurity that we had said was drudgery and serfdom" (emphasis mine). Thus the suggestion is that it is only "drudgery and serfdom" to those who cannot attain it or have not yet "thawed" from their *frigid* state.

A representation of a single woman which works against these ideas is contained in Head's review of African American tennis star Althea Gibson's autobiography I Always Wanted to be Somebody that was published for two weeks in place of the usual "True Romance" during August 1959. In this review Head seems to negotiate the representation of an active, ambitious, successful, single woman on the one hand, while still retaining her as "feminine" on the other.

Being a well-known Black sports player Gibson was regularly featured in the media in the late 1950s. There are several feature articles about her in Drum magazine and I will attempt to locate my analysis of Head's review both in terms of the "True Romance" slot as well as in terms of representation of sportswomen in Drum publications.

The representation of Althea Gibson and black sportswomen

I have already pointed out that in "True Romance" stories, published in Home Post, desirable men were often represented as sportsmen or sports' heroes. These men were also positioned in direct *opposition* to women who were petitè, fragile and self-effacing. Thus sport, along with the masculine physique accompanying it, was mapped out as a male domain. Given the construction of these gender(ed) binary oppositions it is hardly surprising that women who excelled at sport presented something of an anomaly within this signifying system. This is clear from an article written by Casey Motsisi about women's hockey and published in Drum magazine in 1957.[20] In this article Motsisi alternates between describing these women in "masculine" terms and re-placing them in feminine positions: they *emerge* from a feminine, domestic position in Motsisi's article, occupy a masculine position as he describes the "battle" and are then "stripped of all the masculinity" by Motsisi at the end of the article. Even while celebrating their activity Motsisi makes their domestic point of origin clear by stating that "[t]hese women surprise you with their energy and skill ... [a]fter doing all their womanly chores at home *before* the match" (emphasis mine). "Those girls sure know how to use the big stick" claims Motsisi in a line which emphasizes the phallic proportions of the "big stick" in relation to the diminutive associations of the term "girl". Although the girls wield this "big stick" for a while this remains a "show-a-leg game" and "[a]fter the match"

> the girls were stripped of all the masculinity they had displayed on the battlefield, and were as feminine as a wisp of cloud as they walked towards the dressing room. It was as if they had been magically transformed from the tigerish hellcats [...] into ... well, FEMALES. (Drum October 1957:30)

As Driver's astute comment points out, "this change happened `as they walked *towards* the dressing room' ... as if Motsisi's litany ... was all that was required to transform these unnatural

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[20] Drum October 1957, pp 29-31.

beings into the most natural of things, `wisp[s] of cloud'" (Driver, 1996:237). It is thus through *Motsisi's writing* that "the girls were stripped of all .. masculinity" and both returned to the domestic realm ("feeding bottles, babies, husbands") and re-placed as the objects of the male gaze:

> I asked one cutie whether they padded themselves ... "No", she panted at me. "Everything we've got is our own!" ...Who says men aren't interested in hockey or is it the players that are the big attraction? (Drum October 1957:31)

As Driver states, writing -- the real big stick -- remained in male hands after all (1996:237).

There seems to be an uneasy shifting of the "feminine" taking place in Ezekiel Mphahlele's article about Althea Gibson in Drum in October 1956. Although she *is* a "long-legged net queen", she "is *not* glamorous" (emphasis mine):

> She doesn't cause a ripple on the pavilion like film tennis star Ginger Rogers when she enters a court. (Drum October 1956: 35)

While Rogers here represents "glamour" (one version of the feminine), Gibson was seen (in another Drum feature) as "ruthless in action".[21] Thus the "tennis for glamour" caption that accompanies a photograph in Golden City Post of an "18-year-old" who "shows ... how graceful a tennis player can be" does not quite fit Gibson.[22] This would account for Mphahlele's contradictory and oscillating characterisation of Gibson as feminized ("long-legged queen") on the one hand and yet "not glamorous" enough to cause a stir on the other. It is not her "glamour" that makes her visible. Gibson, it would appear, cannot be entirely "stripped of masculinity" and reduced to a spectacle.

This is the (signifying) context within which Head wrote the lengthy (two week long) review of Gibson's book. Although the book is called I Always Wanted to be Somebody the

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[21] Drum, October, 1957, p. 37, There is no author attributed to this article.

[22] Golden City Post, 18 October 1959, p. 13.

title of the first part of Head's review (9 August 1959) is "From Tomboy to Star". It's significant that this time the tomboy is not falling in love and becoming a woman, but becoming a star. Unlike other stars featured in this slot Althea Gibson was a single woman at the time that the autobiography was written and, in contrast with the usual True Romance, her story does not end in marriage. It is interesting to see how Head negotiates this picture of a single, successful woman which goes against just about everything that the True Romances are usually suggesting about women and it is fascinating that Head, under her own name, filled this slot with this representation of such a woman.

She begins the review by talking about autobiography as a genre:

> Autobiographies are not my favourite reading matter as I feel it's difficult for the persons concerned to write frankly and objectively about themselves. Perhaps there is some facet of their lives that they would be afraid to reveal or perhaps be too modest or leave out with the skeptical feeling that all they claim about themselves couldn't be quite true. (Home Post 9 August 1959: 1)

This provides a fascinating glimpse of the way Head felt about autobiographical writing and perhaps explains why she chose fiction, rather than autobiography, as a vehicle for her own writing, in spite of the fact that much of her fiction has an autobiographical aspect. Her statement could perhaps also be read as a comment on the "True" Romances that usually occupy this slot.

Head claims to be riveted by Gibson's book:

> *I can't remember when last I picked up a book and failed to put it down until I had read the last word, or been so stimulated by a writer's vitality and personality.* (Home Post 9 August 1959: 1, emphasis in original)

Much of the review consists of Head quoting large extracts of the text and summarising to fill in the story. Head summarizes Gibson's description of her childhood:

> In the first part of the book she gives a vivid description of Harlem slum-life and the escapades she and her pals used to get up to. It's real and one can see a replica of those cheeky, mischievous little devils in our Vrededorps, Windemeres and Sophiatowns. (Home Post 9 August 1959: 1)

It's interesting that "cheeky, mischievous little devils" is used here, by Head, to talk about Gibson as a young female. I don't think that a description of the "cheeky, mischievous little devils" in Sophiatown would normally include females. But then Althea is "wild" and "undisciplined":

> During this time the somewhat wild, undisciplined Althea "who wouldn't stay at home and wouldn't go to school" was taken under the wing of the Welfare Department and they got her a furnished room in a private home and a small allowance ... "All I had to do was report in once a week and pick up my allowance". (Home Post 9 August 1959: 1)

There is a tantalising absence in Head's review regarding the cause of Gibson's removal from home. Her rebellious behaviour is vindicated by the language and tone of the review. It is fascinating to note that these details about Gibson's life are similar to those which Head (re)created in her novel The Cardinals which she began writing in the year following this review.[23] The main protagonist, Mouse, is an orphan and when she turns sixteen the welfare find a room and a job for her and she leaves the care of foster families. Significantly "[t]his arrangement made her feel peaceful and secure for the first time in her life" (1993:12). These details are also, in some ways, reminiscent of Head's own life when she left school which is perhaps why she found Gibson's book so engrossing and Gibson's story so inspirational.[24] Yet these (biographical) similarities are all narratives about single women operating outside of the

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[23] Daymond's introduction to The Cardinals claims that Head wrote the novel between 1960 - 1962 (1993:vii).

[24] See Eilersen, 1995:31 for the biographical similarities I am suggesting.

confines of the family which usually regulate young women's lives. This is certainly the picture that Head presents of Gibson and one that she seems to endorse.

Head's extract of Gibson speaking about being on the court is revealing:

> "After a while I began to understand that you could walk out onto the court *like a lady all dressed up in immaculate white, be polite to everybody, and still play like a tiger and beat the liver and lights out of the ball*". (Home Post 9 August 1959: 1, emphasis in Head's review)

It's fascinating that Head found this quote so significant as to reproduce it with italics. On the tennis court, Gibson has the right to "play like a tiger". In spite of the civility that is associated with tennis this is a space where Althea can be "wild" and yet still acceptable, even a star. While the metaphor of playing *"like a tiger"* is similar to Motsisi's "tigerish hellcats" there is a fundamental difference in Gibson's extract. Gibson can be "*like a lady ... and still play like a tiger*" (underlining mine). The two are simultaneous and one does not displace the other. Here is a breakthrough in the representation of women of this period: women can engage in tough, competitive sports and yet they do not have to (temporarily) occupy a male position to do so. I realise that this comes from Gibson who, being African American, came from a country with a tradition of strong black women that reaches back to slavery and she was thus not limited by the gender constructions that dominated (black) media in South Africa in the 1950s. Yet it is *Head* who fills the romance slot with this radical representation which she selected from the autobiography. The following week it appears as though it was necessary to tame some of the wildness that was displayed in the first week's review.

In the second part (16 August 1959) Head discusses Gibson's relationships with men. While the first week may have presented Althea as a rebellious "little devil" and a "tiger" on the court, the negotiations in the second week of the review seem to be more complicated. Head begins with the story of how, at college, Gibson developed interests other than tennis, like dating, and she quotes Gibson:

> "Tennis no longer seemed like everything in the world to me. I was much more interested in going out on dates and having a good time". (Home Post 16 August 1959: 1)

The representation here (from Gibson herself and reproduced by Head) is of a "normal" young woman interested in dating and fun and without too much ambition. At college Gibson got involved in a relationship with an older man, a captain in the army, and she almost gave up tennis. Head quotes Gibson's words:

> "But two things worked against it. There was the captain's feeling that he was too old for me, and there was a nagging doubt in me that I was giving up something that I'd put so many years and so much sweat into." (Home Post 16 August 1959: 1)

I find it interesting that Gibson mentions *his feeling first* and *then* her own nagging doubt is voiced only after the captain's feeling. Yet the "doubt" about "giving up" something is about giving up tennis and not the romantic liaison with the captain, suggesting that tennis was the more valuable to her. The alternatives are represented as mutually exclusive: tennis or the captain. While the choice is not an unusual one for the "True Romance" slot, the outcome is: in the "True Romance" *nothing* is ever more (or even equally) important to women that their relationship with a husband-to-be. Thus Head presents a woman who has a successful career which she does not want to give up. Gibson's decision is, nevertheless, not presented as an unambiguously ambitious decision to stay in tennis rather than settle down; it is mediated by the Captain's feelings.

The next incident Head quotes is when the United States State Department asked Gibson to be part of a Goodwill tour of South East Asia with Karol Fargeros who was, according to Gibson, "pale, blonde and pretty as a movie star". In contrast with this Gibson describes how -- in Rangoon, Asia -- she had to wash her hair:

> "I had to do my hair, and for a Coloured girl ... that's a real problem ... I'd brought most of the things I needed -- a pressing comb, a curling iron, a can of hair grease, and even an old soup can with the top cut off so that I could make a fire in it and heat the iron. I went into the bathroom and washed my hair ... when I walked back into the room [Karol] took one look at me and jumped on the bed and started rolling around and laughing. I didn't mind a bit. I was a sight. When I first wash my hair, it absolutely stands up straight. *"Go ahead" I told her, get your kicks. You'll see when I get finished"*. When I got through Karol came over close to me and touched my hair and said "Gosh you've got really fine hair". And I said "that's because I pressed it. If I don't press it with a hot iron like that it would be a mess". (Home Post 16 August 1959: 1)

After this gruelling description one cannot help but wonder if her next plea for someone "I ... could let my hair down with" isn't more than just a figure of speech:

> After that tour ... "I became a Negro with a certain amount of international significance. It was pleasant to think about but hard to live with ... I thought if only I had someone of my own, someone I could relax with and let my hair down with I could be happy ..." (Home Post 16 August 1959: 1)

This suggests a desire for a space where she doesn't have to construct herself in this way. She is, of course, not just a "Negro" (sic) but an African American *woman* who has to construct herself both as black person and as black woman. While she can be "like a tiger" on court, it would appear, that she has to tame all that "wildness" in order to present herself to the world off the tennis court. Gibson's call for someone she can let her hair down with is a call for someone with whom she doesn't have to (re)construct herself. Gibson's desire suggests the intersection between race and gender: her hair presents a problem because she is a "*Coloured girl*". She is expected, in terms of both gender and race, to construct herself in a particular way. It is significant then that tennis seems to give Gibson a space where she can legitimately give expression to "wildness" while she has to tame it in order to present her self off the court. Thus while black South African women playing sport were represented by men as "masculine"

in order to participate in sport, Gibson and Head seem to create a space where women can represent themselves as sports*women*.

This review presents a remarkable picture of a single, successful black woman whose story undermines much of the construction of women that the True Romance attempts to naturalise. Through her selective re-presentation of Gibson's own text Head presents an, albeit tentative, picture of a *single, successful sportswoman* in which those terms are not incompatible with one another.

2
Bessie Head's Columns in Home Post: "[Not] Dramatic Journalism"?

Between May 1959 and April 1960, Bessie Head wrote two columns for the Home Post supplement to the weekly newspaper Golden City Post. One was for pre-teen children called "Dear Gang" and the other was a teenage advice column called "Hiya Teenagers". In the "Dear Gang" column Head responded to letters from "the gang", held competitions, suggested activities for the children, told stories and told them about herself and her ideas. That she was immensely popular with the children is suggested by the "There's no one but Bessie for us" motto that was sent in by one of the readers (9 August 1959).

The "Hiya Teenagers" column, when Head took it over from "Sharon", was mostly an advice column where teenagers sent in their problems and received advice. As Daymond has pointed out, "she broke abruptly with the earlier assumption that ... teenage readers were moody, self-centered, love-lorn `kids' and worked hard to turn their interests outward, to the actual world around them" (1993:viii). Throughout the eleven-month period during which she compiled this column Head tried to encourage the teenagers to engage in a process of dialogue with herself and with one another through the column. Head tried very hard to introduce new topics of discussion and debates into the column and in the latter she certainly succeeded. Teenagers' letters take issue with her and there was often a lively, and witty, exchange.

Gillian Stead Eilersen has claimed that -- while "her approach obviously appealed to young people" -- "[d]ramatic journalism it was not". As if to demonstrate what dramatic journalism *was*, Eilersen moves directly from this statement to a discussion about Drum magazine, which shared offices with Golden City Post, and the journalists whom Head got to know. These journalists, Lewis Nkosi, Can Themba and Dennis Brutus,

> were all journalists of considerable reputation, men who were "supposed to exhibit a unique intellectual style, usually urbane, ironic, morally tough and detached". As a *Drum* reporter, it was assumed that "one couldn't deal professionally with urban African life unless one had descended to its very depths as well as climbed to its heights". Neither could be considered part of Bessie's life. (Eilersen, 1995:42)

Hence the suggestion that Head's journalism is "not [d]ramatic" enough for serious critical attention. This lingering assumption is, perhaps, the reason why Head's journalism has still not received any real critical attention.

It is difficult, in the extract above, to try and discern the voices that dismiss Head's journalism. While the quotation is from a Drum journalist, Lewis Nkosi, Eilersen seems to cite this as an explanation of why Head was excluded from "[d]ramatic" journalism. Yet there is far more to this issue than Eilersen suggests. Something that the extract does not make explicit is the question of gender: *all* of the Drum reporters during most of the 1950s were men. Eilersen records that Head was the only female journalist working for Golden City Post and "this meant that she was always being given stories connected with women and children, `while the men reporters got murders and politics to do'" (1995:39). While Head got "women's stories" with Golden City Post, Drum magazine, until the late 1950s, had no female reporters or journalists. The lack of women writers in Drum in the early 1950s is demonstrated by the regular "Heartbreaks" section. This featured an advice column under the feminine name of "Dolly Drum". "Dolly Drum", was actually answered by "a worried syndicate of men" (Sampson, 1956:122). It is interesting to read that although "[b]eing Dolly was a job that everybody tried to escape" and Drum "tried all kinds of people for the job", not one of these *people* Sampson lists was a *woman* (Sampson, 1956:122).[1] Driver has claimed that "`Dolly Drum' was in fact a contrapuntal `feminine' voice, a voice produced partially or even largely by male journalists in the name of the ideology of domesticity and romantic love" (1996:235).

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[1] Both Mike Nicol (1991) and Dorothy Woodson claim that women were involved in "Dolly Drum". Nicol claims that "*Drum* was staffed largely by males -- with the exception of Dolly of the *Heartbreak* column" (1991:147). Woodson mentions "`Heartbreaks' by Dolly Rathebe" (1988:5); yet she paradoxically also quotes Anthony Sampson's (1956) discussion of the letters to Dolly who was actually a "worried syndicate of men" who discussed the trickier problems round the office (1956:122). Possibly the feminine name and construction has been confusing to scholars. Driver states cases where it was assumed that stories written under feminine names were written by women when in actual fact they were written by men (see Driver, 1996:236). Alternatively women may have actually worked on this column after the period which Sampson mentions.

It is in this regard that Head's work in Home Post becomes fascinating: to see how she as a black *woman* constructed her own advice column, albeit to a younger generation, and to view this construction in relation to the predominant constructions of femininity in the media of this period. In Nkosi's description of the style of Drum writers the adjectives "intellectual, urbane, ironic, morally tough and detached" are those that are associated with *men* during this period. Popular stories, including the "True Romance" in Home Post, constructed men as the intellectuals. Women were warned, through these stories, that being too clever or involved in a career would ruin their chances of marriage which was seen as the only appropriate occupation and position for *all* women.

It seems to be *precisely* this style and the fact that it is associated with men that Head tackles in her first novel, The Cardinals. The main protagonist of this novel is a young black woman, called Mouse, who refuses to appropriate the characteristic style of the newspaper and, as a result, her writing usually elicits critical responses from the editor. The accusation that her copy is "sentimental junk" seems to embody a particularly gendered critique (1993:18). Yet Head's novel vindicates Mouse and suggests that she *is* indeed a writer and deserves to be recognised as such. In fact, her "sentimental junk" is often shown to bear more truth than the actual newspaper copy.

Although Head wrote this gender(ed) critique of male-dominated journalism in the early 1960s it was, almost predictably, not published during this period or even during her lifetime. Even before she wrote this novel, while she was still working in the male-dominated world of journalism, it is possible to see, as I will argue in this chapter, that Head was already taking on some of the stereotypical constructions of gender and undermining them.

One of Head's earliest "subjects" is herself. On 28 June 1959, five weeks after she began the columns, she introduces herself in the "Dear Gang" column:

> I think I'm an adventurous sort of person and because of that I always seem to be getting into trouble. When I was small I often got a good box on the ears because I was forever going down to the river near my home or climbing in the hills when I should have been in the back yard playing with dolls. Agh! I just hated dolls. I wanted to know all about boxing and race-horses and everything a girl shouldn't know about ...

> A short while ago I was a school teacher and it seemed to me that I wasn't going to see the world that way, so I gave it up and so far I've been around quite a bit. (Home Post 28 June 1959:7)

Head constructs herself in terms that are opposed to the predominant construction of women. The suggestion that she was a tomboy while growing up is not unusual: in the "True Romance" women often undergo some sort of "transformation" from being tomboys into being women. This usually occurs through falling in love with the "right" man and results in marriage. In fact the "True Romance" on 26 July 1959, just a month after Head's introduction of herself, is entitled "The Tomboy Falls in Love". It begins with words which resemble Head's description of herself:

> In my younger days I was the wildest tomboy you could find. My legs always had innumerable scars from the scratches I received climbing trees, scrambling through barbed wire fences and the falls I took during the wild games we played. (Home Post 26 July 1959: 1)

Yet while the "True Romance" description of growing up is similar to Head's in "Dear Gang" the difference between the two soon becomes apparent in if one continues quoting the "True Romance" text: "*Now the few, almost invisible scars that remain are usually concealed by sheer, silk stockings*" (Home Post 26 July 1959: 1, emphasis in original). It seems, from a close reading of the extract, that women -- as represented in the "True Romance" -- had to "conceal" any "marks" or traces of any unfeminine behaviour under the sign of femininity signified here by the silk stockings.

There is of course the tantalizing possibility that Head wrote the story and that while she was forced by the genre of the "True Romance" to transform the tomboy into a woman, her "Dear Gang" column forced no such transformation upon her. Thus in her "Dear Gang" self-construction she presents herself as a tomboy in her childhood while as an adult woman she represents herself as adventurous. Head shifts between her past childhood and her present adulthood with apparent ease and continuity. Unlike the "True Romances" where there must be a break between the childhood tomboy and the adult woman, there is no suggestion in Head's text that she is any different as an adult woman; in fact quite the contrary is suggested.

As a child she resisted gender socialization by climbing in the hills when she should have been in the yard with dolls preparing for domestic roles. She constructs herself as someone who exceeds the space allotted to her in society. Head's narrative self construction is one of continual movement; she is "adventurous", "climb[s] in the hills" as a child and then leaves the teaching profession to "see the world". She thus constructs herself as someone who was, and is still, continually *moving*. Her "getting into trouble" is also in the present tense and is related to her desire for adventure which if it was inappropriate for a girl is even more inappropriate for a woman.

As a girl she wanted to know "all about boxing and race-horses and everything a girl shouldn't know about" (emphasis mine). The gender boundary is inscribed here as well as her desire to cross it. Given Head's fictional construction of her biological father one cannot help but notice that *race-horses* are part of everything a girl shouldn't know about. One wonders if Head's fictional familial construction regarding *race*-horses was not somehow perhaps a response to her mother's transgression of the *race* barrier implemented by the Immorality Act.[2] It seems worth noting that the very same issue of Home Post carried a "True Romance" which was set at the Durban July where "Margaret", who is poor, goes to the races to win money and "masquerades" as "Cinderella for a Day". Predictably she meets her Prince Charming and is ushered into the upper class world of horse racing.

While there are several other noteworthy entries in Head's "Dear Gang" column -- such as her obvious concern for orphans or marginal figures and her stated interest in the meaning of names which has significant ramifications for the study of her fiction -- it is in her teenage column that her interrogation of gender and her open defiance of conventionally constructed femininity are most visible. The "Hiya Teenagers" column often stands in stark contrast to the "True Romance". The main issue that is responsible for this contrast is the question of

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[2] See Head's construction of her biological father as groom and her mother's family as race-horse owners in "Notes from a Quiet Backwater." Drum, February 1982, 35-36, Rpt as "Notes from a Quiet Backwater I." Bessie Head A Woman Alone Autobiographical Writings, Ed. Craig MacKenzie, Oxford, Heinemann, 1990. Compare this with Kenneth Birch's "The Birch Family: An Introduction to the White Antecedents of the Late Bessie Amelia Head" in English in Africa, 22, 1, 1995.

romance and marriage, especially for teenage girls. From the first week that she wrote this column Head tried to direct teenagers' attention outwards and get them to channel their energy into worthwhile activities.

One of the letters during Head's first week on the column is typical: Laura from Durban complains that she cannot go to the cinema too often and can't talk to boys because her mother won't let her. While the previous, and subsequent, writer of this column, "Sharon", would often agree with teenagers that their mothers were unreasonable and old-fashioned, Head adopts a conciliatory tone:

> This is a time in your life when your mother should be your best pal ... Few mothers are deliberately "nasty" or spoilsports ... so try to cultivate some interests around the home, such as reading and getting that patch of garden in order. (Home Post 31 May 1959:6)

It is poignant to see Head, who "lost" one mother during her teenage years, only to find that she had already lost her biological mother, and for whom the lack of a mother loomed so large, articulating the value of mothers to teenagers girls. It also seems extraordinary that the advice dispensed here about "reading and getting that patch of garden in order" delineates the activities that will dominate Head's own later life. From suggesting that Laura shouldn't be so interested in dating and talking to boys Head becomes more explicit several weeks later (5 July 1959) with the headline "Don't rush to Marry". By 12 July 1959 her exasperation with the teenage obsession with love and marriage is unambiguously stated:

> "Those Other Problems"
> P.S. A word to all love-lorn or love-lost teenagers: Please send me some of your other problems too -- like the careers you want to choose or what you think should be done about this muddled-up old world.
> ...
> My definition of a teenager is: "One who is gay, slightly crazy and always up and doing things -- no not always falling into complications like ... LOVE.
> (Home Post 12 July 1959: 8).

The next week's column is devoted to a letter from a teenager who responded to the call for other topics. The Headline of the column tells us: "She wants to be a Pilot!" It is

fascinating that this first full page feature about careers is devoted to a girl, Cynthia Smith, with a very unusual ambition as indicated by Head:

> "One day", her letter said, "I would like to be a pilot. I've always loved aeroplanes and read quite a lot of books on them. I'd like to own my own 'plane some day." Of course I just could not believe it. So I paid a visit to Cynthia at home and found a determined young lady who firmly claimed that if she did not become a pilot then she would like to do something else that was equally difficult and important. She wants to GET somewhere, be SOMETHING. (Home Post 19 July 1959: 6)

Head's emphasis on a girl wanting to "GET somewhere, be SOMETHING" is striking in comparison with the way women are represented in the "True Romance[s]" where being a wife and mother are held up as the only "ambition" a woman should have and where if they are represented as working it is in the traditionally "feminine" pursuits of nursing or teaching. In the "True Romance" that very week in Home Post the female protagonist tells that she helped out in the school clinic and also helped the school secretary and claims that "[a]ll in all, it wasn't a bad job". A striking contrast with Head's female pilot.

The following week Head prints a letter from Ismail Khan who speaks about his life in words that are strikingly similar to those used about Cynthia Smith the previous week:

> I am 19 years old and the only thing that is important to me is success in life. I WANT TO BE SOMEBODY.
> ...
> "*And the thing I think least about is getting married. I feel that getting to be something first is more important.*"
> (Home Post 26 July 1959: 8, emphasis in original)

I find it interesting that the last section is italicised in the original. While Ismail's and Cynthia's words are similar in the two letters, the words "be something" were used by Head, the previous week, to describe Cynthia: "She wants to GET somewhere, be SOMETHING". Yet Ismail makes his claim in relation to not getting married: for him it is more important to be something *first*. Given the constructed importance of marriage for women this claim could, realistically, only be a made by male. Yet I wonder if, by cross referencing Head's use of the same language to describe Cynthia, one can't construe this as Head's message to *all* teenagers

including, and perhaps especially, girls. The conflation of Cynthia's, Ismail's and Head's words would be: Getting somewhere, being SOMETHING (first) is more important than marriage.

Head continues to advise teenagers, and girls particularly, against taking one partner too seriously. These responses by Head are admirably summed up in a letter written to Head which appeared on 1 November 1959:

> [Head] A young lady who calls herself "just Morgana" has written me a very long and admonishing letter in which she decided to put me right on a few points...
> She writes:
> Who do you think you're kidding? Not me, I assure you. My grouse is that you're trying to make us teenagers believe that there is nothing like young love. Week after week I read such advice as: "Forget him, make other friends" or "you're too young to know what love really means".
> Well, I'm telling you you're wrong. We do know the meaning of love. We cannot forget so easily. From the way you talk I'd say you have never been in love once in your life. (Home Post 1 Nov. 1959: 6)

Head's response must be quoted, if only for the witty opening repartee:

> No kiddin'
> I'm not attempting to kid anyone, old girl, I'm speaking from experience. As for saying I haven't been in love! That accusation is a terrible understatement when I think of Harry or John and all those heartaches and how each time I thought the end of the world had come or this was the real thing ... well when it all came to nothing I got over it all right and the world went on and I made other friends. (Home Post 1 Nov. 1959: 6)

In spite of, perhaps *because* of, all the opposition Head claimed she received to her attempts to dissuade teenage interest in love and romance, only two weeks later she was again attempting again to restructure the column to include "those other problems":

> Hiya Teenagers: Take a look at your page today ... Quite a difference isn't there? From now on we're going to discuss our problems in a different way.
> Each week we will deal with a different aspect of teenage life -- careers; how much pocket money we should get; at what time should we be home at night; how old a girl should be before she is allowed to use make-up or have a boyfriend -- that sort of thing. (Home Post 15 Nov. 1959: 6)

Although this concept did not appear to take off as there are no letters to this effect, on 29 November 1959 the column is taken up with a single letter from a boy, calling himself "Thoughtful" and talking about intelligent girls. The heading reads: "His Girl Friends Must Be Beautiful and BRAINY". The opening of the letter sheds interesting light on the way "Thoughtful" (and thus perhaps other teenage readers as well) perceived Bessie:

> "You know Bessie", he writes, "I can just hear you say `oh yes', in a very condescending way, when I say that I usually choose only beautiful girls to go out with. But wait a second and I'll tell you that there's some other quality that is a guide in helping me choose my girlfriends -- and that is intelligence["].... (Home Post 29 Nov. 1959: 6)

"Thoughtful" suggests that when he started going out with girls he assumed that they would only be able to talk about "girl's things":

> "*When I first started going out with girls I accepted as natural that we should talk about ordinary everyday things such as who was our favourite actor, what songs we liked on the parade or just plain gossip.*["]
> "Then I met a girl who could talk about things most people do not usually talk about. At first I thought she was quite crazy. She'd get stuck on a speech that we had a soul and things like that.
> "She was always onto something abstract, and I often used to laugh at her and tell her that most of her ideas were improbable.["]
> "*But secretly I liked the way she talked... What I am trying to say is that it was stimulating to be with her. She could pose a question and we'd work it out together.*["] (Home Post 29 Nov. 1959: 6, emphasis in original)

The two sections in italics in the original text almost seem to speak to one another. The first suggests that although boys should talk to girls, it is "*natural*" that boys will have to talk down to girls who can, and should, only talk about girls' things. The second section (in italics) seems to be a response to the idea that boys will not like girls who talk about intelligent things and it is intriguing that "Thoughtful" likes this "*secretly*" and then lets this "secret" out in the "Hiya Teenagers" column. Although "Thoughtful" *secretly* liked the way she talked, *he* talks about her in the past tense and the letter ends on an ambiguous note:

> ["]Of course, I still have a preference for pretty girls even if they are dull company; but I don't think there is anything more satisfying than going out with a girl who can talk intelligently!" (Home Post 29 Nov. 1959: 6)

There is a movement in the letter between the commonly represented and propagated ideas about what boys like in girls and the *secret* (which is that boys actually like intelligent girls); a secret which is uncovered but then (almost) covered up again.

It is fascinating to note that Head is represented, in "Thoughtful['s]" letter, as someone who will condescendingly disapprove of a boy who only likes "pretty girls". The suggestion is thus that she approves of his liking intelligent girls and although the letter may be slightly ambiguous, Head's position is not.[3]

Two weeks later "Thoughtful II", a girl this time we are told, replies to "Thoughtful". The response to "His Girl Friends Must Be Beautiful and BRAINY" is "This is What A Girl Wants In A Boy" (13 December 1959). "Thoughtful II" claims that "Thoughtful's letter in Home Post, November 29, made me do some thinking too. Not being highly intelligent, that took a little time ...". "Thoughtful", she claims, seems confused:

> Now I ask you what exactly does he mean when he talks about the "value of the company of an intelligent girl" and then expresses his preference for a pretty but dumb cluck? (Home Post 13 Dec. 1959: 6)

This description of pretty girls as "dumb cluck[s]", along with the witty, sardonic opening and the astute analysis of "Thoughtful['s]" letter suggests either a very confident female teenager or the fact that Head wrote this letter herself. "Thoughtful II" misquotes "Thoughtful" and accuses him of some things he didn't actually say -- certainly in the published version of the letter. She ends by chiding "Thoughtful" because, according to her reading of his letter, he's never the first to start a conversation, he enjoys listening, but he also enjoys *looking* and it's obviously this *looking* that annoys "Thoughtful II":

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[3] I am reminded here of a statement by Head in a letter to Randolph Vigne: "I really live with my heart and my mind not my looks. Even if someone had to love me, it would surely be infantile of him to love my looks. He might love my heart or my mind" (1991:71).

> "Thoughtful should learn that conversation is an interchange of ideas on both sides. Something that both parties should enjoy and participate in" (Home Post 13 Dec. 1959: 6)

Thus "Thoughtful II" claims that females do *not* enjoy being the object of the male gaze or male discourse.

The idea that women could participate in intelligent dialogue with men is not a concept one comes across often in Golden City Post and Drum magazine of this period. The "True Romance[s]" represent the ideal woman as one who doesn't "giggle or chatter" which is often the only way that female discourse is represented. In these "True Romances" men often marry women precisely because they are shy and withdrawn and won't "YAK-YAK-YAK" all the time. This "YAK-YAK-YAK! Yak-Yak-Yak" is what "Mr Drum" suggests housewives do "[e]very second of every day".[4] They don't just "yak, yak, yak" on their own however, they do it to their men: "my girl is the ORIGINAL nagger. You should hear her yak, yak, yak".[5] The only "solution" is thus a woman who will be as silent as a mouse. This is literally the case in one of the "True Romance[s]" where the protagonist who doesn't "giggle or chatter" is named "Mouse".[6] Head's character called Mouse in The Cardinals seems to be a response to this idea about women. Head's Mouse gets her name because she is timid yet she develops a voice through her writing.

The only alternative representation, in the popular black media of the 1950s, to women who are either as silent as mice or women who "Yak-Yak-Yak" all day, is a powerful female political figure like Lilian Ngoyi. Ezekiel Mphahlele describes her in Drum magazine.[7] In her analysis of Mphahlele's article, Driver has claimed while Ngoyi's body is reproduced "in terms of conventional space-gender dichotomies", her "voice was less easily managed":

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[4] "It's a Farce! Mr Drum tackles Housewives" Drum, October, 1956, p. 63.

[5] "DRUM Pin-up gets Pinned!" by Moses Casey Motsisi, Drum, April, 1956.

[6] "Mr Wonderful and the Mouse" by "Charmaine Harris", (Home Post, July 19 1959). See Chapter One for an analysis of this story.

[7] "Guts and Granite! Lilian Ngoyi." Drum, Mar., 1957: 63-65.

> Quoting a member of the audience -- "She almost rocks men out of their pants when she speaks" -- Mphahlele added: "She can toss an audience on her little finger and get men grunting with shame [and] a feeling of smallness." (Driver, 1996:236, underlining mine)

While one may be tempted to read this as a positive representation of a strong woman's voice it seems to me, following Driver's suggestion, that the metaphor of her emasculating voice is clear ("men out of their pants" and "a feeling of smallness"). Thus when women do break out of the "YAK-YAK-YAK" and speak with a powerful voice this is represented in terms of castration to men.

Given the limited possibilities for women's speech, it would appear then that the possibilities for dialogue between men and women become impossible. And yet it is this very possibility that "Thoughtful II" suggests in her letter, *and that Head suggests* throughout the "Hiya Teenagers" column. On 10 January 1960 she tells about her hope for the new year:

> I have wanted you to use this page as a forum where you can express yourself, and where we can all get together (in mind) and discuss things positively. Well this is the page for you to discuss those things with other teenagers. There will be a space for everything and everyone's ideas. Isn't that a lot to hope for? (Home Post 10 Jan. 1960: 6)

It is interesting that this begins in the past tense because three months later Head was to leave Golden City Post. Yet in the eight months or so that had passed since Head took over the column she had indeed *created* the *possibility* of a space for everything and everyone's ideas. These included the possibility that teenage boys and girls, and thus later, men and women, could enter into dialogue and that *women could speak and be heard* as well as express, and act on, desires that went beyond marriage. Head's hope for "a space for everything and everyone's ideas" is *still* a lot to hope for.

During the first few months of 1960 Head wrote these columns for the last time. "Sharon" resumed the columns in May 1960. Yet the last few columns were written during such an important time in South Africa's history that Head's pertinent comments on these events cannot be ignored. During March 1960, as Eilersen points out, Head abandons the advice column and "writ[es] on a specific subject" (Eilersen, 1995:45). Eilersen claims that

"the article that first week [with the new format] proved to be of no little historical significance" (1995:45). Bessie talks to a jazz musician who says that "[i]f young people like jazz, which is really great music, then these young people are just great too". The musician was Dollar Brand "then about to embark on an international career as a jazz pianist" (Eilersen, 1995:46). I have already discussed, in chapter one, Driver's assertion that jazz opened up a different space for the representation of women, so it is significant, in the light of her gender agenda in the columns, that Head encourages teenagers to listen to jazz.

Yet there is another reason why this week's columns were of no little historical significance: they were published the day before the Sharpeville massacre. Given Head's well known support, and admiration, for Robert Sobukwe, leader of the Pan African Congress, who initiated the protest which gave rise to Sharpeville, it seems likely that her "Dear Gang" column on 20 March 1960 was not just, as Eilersen claims, "an informative article about the habits of ants" (1995:46). Head introduces the lazy Queen ant who is kept by the soldier ants and then poses the question:

> What would happen if they just got tired of all this hard work and got tired of their wicked lazy Queen and said to themselves: "We just don't want to be soldier ants anymore?" (Home Post 20 March 1960: 5)

Head then institutes a competition for answers to this question. It seems unlikely that the content of this article is only coincidentally related to the fact that the following day Head was present to witness the arrest of Sobukwe at Orlando police station.[8] Using insects as a metaphorical way of commenting on South African politics had been established by Casey Motsisi's series about bugs featured in Drum magazine between 1957 and 1958.[9] Here Head thus seems to give her support to those who are tired of supporting the atrocious system of apartheid.

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[8] See Eilersen's chapter three, "Journalism in Cape Town and Johannesburg", especially 1995:46-49 for these details.

[9] See "Casey's Bugs", Casey and Co. Selected Writing of Casey Kid Motsisi, Ed. Mothobi Mutloatse, Johannesburg: Raven, 1978.

The reason for this circumlocution is the extreme check the Nationalist Government kept on political reporting. This is demonstrated by the fact that one of Drum's editors, Sylvester Stein, resigned in 1957, because Jim Bailey refused to let him publish a cover of Drum with a photograph of Althea Gibson embracing her white opponent after her Wimbledon win.[10] In fact at the end of March 1960, the South African government instituted emergency regulations and the Drum office was raided and copies of the April 1960 edition of Drum seized.[11] Similarly Sharpeville was never reported in Drum magazine at the time.[12]

Head, however, managed to get her comment on this momentous historical event published. Head's "Hiya Teenagers" column the week of 27 March 1960 was, as Eilersen astutely points out, "obviously inspired by the events of the preceding days" (1995:48). It was entitled "It takes Guts to be a Rebel":

> I want to quietly claim that I am definitely in favour of any rebel! And I have reasons to support it too. **To my mind a rebel is no tame weakling filled with self pity, but a person with a lot of guts. Someone who is willing to fight and learns quickly the value of being independent and standing on his own two feet.**
> In contrast those who do not rebel or make a stand for themselves are the kind who are willing to let others do their thinking for them, are constantly being pushed around and are full of the mopes and moans. (Home Post 27 March, 1960: 6, emphasis in original)

"Dramatic journalism"? I think so.

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[10] Detailed in Woodson, 1988:10 and Hopkinson, 1962:16.

[11] See Hopkinson, "A Raid by the Special Branch", 1962:248-292. The first edition of Hopkinson's book was "excised for certain political consideration" as a note on the contents page tells.

[12] See Woodson, 1988:13.

3
The Cardinals: reclaiming language through the "permanent revolution of language": literature

Bessie Head wrote The Cardinals directly after her period as a journalist with Golden City Post in Cape Town and Johannesburg. The novel tells the story of a young black journalist, called Mouse, and her struggle to become a writer. This is a struggle that Mouse must wage against the male-dominated journalistic discourses and the novel thus presents an interesting critique of black journalism in the 1950s. Mouse's development as a writer is brought about largely as a result of the relationship between herself and Johnny, another journalist on the paper, who takes Mouse into his care and under whose encouragement and tutelage she develops both as a writer and as a "woman" (Wicomb, 1995:13).

In this early, probably even her first, novel Head deploys the romance structure which she was so accustomed to using as a journalist with Home Post. The novel bears traces of the discourses of popular romance, both in its use of the romantic relationship as a device as well as in the representation of the love scenes between Mouse and Johnny and Ruby and Johnny. It is possibly for this reason that in some of the first critical writing that has appeared about The Cardinals, Mouse has been seen as essentially passive and at the mercy of men, in general, and Johnny, in particular.[1] Johnny is, unbeknown to both of them, Mouse's father and, in the readings mentioned above, Johnny's character takes all the sinister resonances of the phallic father-figure controlling and inscribing the daughter's text.

Yet I think that any reading of The Cardinals must be located within the journalistic *milieu* and, further, that contextualising a reading in this way will demonstrate that Head is neither using the romance structure in a straightforward way, nor is her representation of Mouse typical of the representation women within the discourse(s) of romance, which she knew so well.

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[1] Very little has thus far been published about The Cardinals. I am referring specifically to an article by Desirée Lewis (1996) and comments made by Maria Olaussen (1997). Annie Gagiano (1996), however, reads this differently and my reading concurs with hers on several points.

Similarly the relationship which Mouse has with Johnny is anything but typical of the romance structure and is rather, I will argue, a radical representation of a relationship between a man and woman which subverts the kind of romance story popular during the period when the novel was written. Following this trajectory I see the suggested incestuous relationship as ultimately liberatory. This conclusion must be reached through reading the suggestions in the text, the title, and the epigraph, that Mouse's incestuous relationship with Johnny will give rise to, and usher Mouse into, a new creative realm.

In order to appreciate the process which begins in Mouse's relationship with Johnny it must be noted that before Mouse begins to write, through Johnny's intervention, Mouse's life *is* written and re-written by (unconcerned) others -- even to the extent that her identity is recreated. Mouse lives without any fixed identity. She is named and re-named until her life becomes as fictional as some of the "true" stories she later produces for "African Beat". The name given to her by the woman who "adopts" her is "Miriam". Although this is the first name that Mouse learns to write, she easily discards it when the old man who teaches her to write dies and her tuition comes to an end. This discarding of her name, which she never speaks, suggests that this first process of writing her own name was, in fact, a process of mere replication: "`Look Uncle!` At the bottom of the page was an almost perfect reproduction of her name the way he had printed it" (1993:6). She refuses to identify herself by this, or any other, name. The text emphasises Mouse's refusal of identity:

> "Who are you?"
> "Where do you come from?"
> "Who are you?"
> ...
> "Who are you?"
> "What's your name?"
> To all these questions she kept silent. (1993:10)

"Miriam" is then recreated: "[s]he was given a new name and birth date and registered as Charlotte Smith, born 6th January 1939". Charlotte is now two years younger than "Miriam", completing the fictional nature of this character. It's worth noting that "Miriam" is born in

1937, the same year as Head.[2] While "Miriam" is born in June and Head was born in July (both in 1937), Charlotte's new date of birth contains the day (the 6th) that Head was born on, suggesting that Head is alluding, through these characters, to the unstable identities of her own childhood.

It is not only Miriam/Charlotte's name that is unstable: "[u]ntil the age of sixteen she was placed and re-placed in ten homes" (1993:10). This continues until she is sixteen years old when

> [t]he social worker told her that now she was sixteen, the grant to support her stopped. She found work for her as a tea-girl in a hairdressing salon and a room in a large slum house occupied by only an old man and his wife. The arrangement made her feel peaceful and secure for the first time in her life. (1993:12)

This is the first time that Mouse has a room of her own and lives totally outside of the confines of the nuclear family as she has experienced it in its travestied form. While Mouse still lives with the old couple the relationship is one in which she is independent. She is not dependant on their goodwill.

This echoes a statement Head made in her teenage advice column in response to "T.S." whose parents were dead and who wrote in saying that s/he was living with relatives and felt unwanted. Head replied that the Social Welfare Department would find work, boarding and lodging and reassured "T.S." that "[o]nce you are independent and working for yourself, life will seem quite different" ("Hiya Teenagers", 13 Sept. 1959). The notion of independence is a direct inversion of the societal norm, especially for a woman, and one that will prove to be important in the relationship that Mouse is able to have with Johnny.

Here "[f]or the next four years of her life she sat up educating herself", that is until she was twenty which is when she goes to work for "African Beat" (Head was twenty-one when she first started work as a journalist with Golden City Post). Although Charlotte goes to "African Beat" as "*Miss Smith*" it is there that she is quickly transformed into "Mouse": "`I've

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[2] See Birch, 1995:4 and Head, "Notes from a Quiet Backwater I", 1990:3, for Head's date of birth.

already introduced her', said the other man [Johnny]. `Her name is Mouse['] ... The name stuck. From that day on they called her Mouse" (1993:14). This gesture of another naming has been seen as evidence of Johnny's patriarchal inscription of Mouse; even Zoë Wicomb, who reads the incestuous relationship in a positive light, calls this "humiliating" for Mouse and the reader who are both forced to accept this name (1995:11).

Yet I think that this can be read another way. While all the names that have been given to Mouse have been totally arbitrarily imposed on her, Johnny's name for her seems to be rooted in at least some kind of reading of the character "Mouse". It is descriptive of her, and thus attached to her, in a way that none of the other names are. Unlike the arbitrary signs of her other names, "Mouse" is a motivated sign. There *is* some relationship between the sign and the referent. This is the first indication that Johnny is *reading* Mouse rather than merely inscribing her. Head uses a similar linguistic strategy in Maru where a sign that results from a *reading* of an image is attached to that image and is used to disrupt a racially derogatory stereotype. Margaret Cadmore senior draws the Masarwa women, Margaret's mother, and attaches the inscription "She looks like a Goddess" which gives Margaret an alternative sense of being Masarwa.[3]

The difference between Johnny's naming of Mouse and her other names seems to offer a comment on the political naming that was current in apartheid South Africa where people were assigned names and racial identities, on a totally arbitrary basis, by an "illegitimate" government authority representing only a small (white) percentage of the country. The newspapers of this period, including Golden City Post, were often filled with stories about families split apart by apartheid because some members of the family were classified "white" while others were classified "black".

It is as "Mouse" that Head's character (really) *begins* to write. Driver and Wicomb have both pointed to the patriarchal mediation involved in Mouse's "acquisition of reading and writing" (Driver, 1993:17 and Wicomb, 1995:13). It is the old man who first teaches her to write and then to read. It is significant that her lessons occur in this order, writing and only

[3] I will discuss this in the next chapter on Maru.

then reading, suggesting further that her first relationship with writing is one of mere reproduction, rather than understanding. Yet Wicomb points out that this is the only kind of relationship the old man has with writing. His

> scriptorial literacy, like that of early scribes who copied without understanding, allows him to perform only certain types of writing.... (1995:12)

Thus, "Miriam", in the process of learning to reproduce her name, undergoes a "symbolic act of obliterating the self":

> "I will teach you to write your name. Tell me what it is." She told him. He removed a sheet of paper, and with a shaky hand in bold print, wrote MIRIAM. He showed her how to hold the pencil and guided her hand to trace over the letters. ... He gave her the writing pad and she ran behind the tree. (1993:6)

Wicomb points out that the narrative voice refuses to let the character utter her name and that "[s]he told him" stands in to emphasise this lack of a name. This represents the character's lack of identity and underscores the fact that in order to reproduce writing she disappears "behind a tree". Yet even at this stage Mouse questions the reproduction of the old man's writing:

> "You are a clever child. No one here questions why I should use the book to write a letter. Should another man come and ask me to a condolence I write this same letter." (1993:5)

The entire circulation of "letters" takes place between men here: the old man talks about writing letters for men and the sample letter from "The Art Of Letter Writing", which is reproduced in The Cardinals, is to "Jonathan" from "Elijah". As Wicomb points out, these biblical names "conjure up the Judaic Law of the Old Testament" and thus point to the relationship between the Law of the Father and writing (1995:13). I will return to this point. Mouse's original relationship with writing is thus an initiation into the patriarchal economy of letters.

Her next experience of patriarchally mediated writing is when she goes to work for "African Beat". Here she encounters another form of writing which also involves mere reproduction of a particular discourse, as the editor's injunction to Mouse indicates:

> This copy is sentimental junk. When are you going to get it into your head that we are a filthy tabloid weekly. This paper is paying you only to write a dirty story ... Write it this way.... (1993:18)

Here it is demanded that she "copy" writing in almost the same way that she first learnt to write. While her ability as a (fiction) writer is recognized by the editor she is expected to appropriate the stylistic discourses of the newspaper:

> ["]She's a talented writer but definitely not a news reporter. ... Every single bit of copy she hands in sounds like a short story." (1993:27)

An irony is involved here: while the editor denigrates Mouse's fictional style, the text of The Cardinals reveals that any binary opposition set up between *factual* news reporting and *fiction* is an entirely fallacious division. The manipulation of information to fit a particular "style" is demonstrated in the text. For example, when Mouse writes a feature about a drug dealer she gets the following response from the editor, PK:

> I don't want to know that Mogamat Abdul was driven to peddle dope because he can't find work and has twelve children to support. That may make a good short story but it doesn't make our kind of news. Get some punch into it. Write it this way: *Mogamat Abdul is back in the jug again. He's been there sixteen times before -- all because he cannot give up the dope racket ... the public should have no sympathy for Mogamat's type ...*
> Get it? (1993:18)

PK's copy is represented in italics in the text drawing our attention to the very specific style of the newspaper writing and thus the way in which Mouse's writing is re-written by PK, the editor. PK's commands ("Write it this way", "Get it?") frame the actual newspaper copy, suggesting that all copy was framed by these commands. The manipulation of information to

suit the "filthy tabloid" style is clear, as is the way in which this style constructs the reader's attitude towards the issues that it reports.

This demystifying of the discourses of journalism in The Cardinals obviously has important implications for Head's own journalism, where she participated, in one way or another, in the writing of "True Romances", suggesting that the rigid discourses of journalism limit what can and cannot be represented; thus no reported journalism can ever really be "the truth". In contrast the "good short story" seems to be able to tell more of the truth.

The tabloid's discourses are associated with masculinity through the fact that the writing is controlled and maintained by the male editor and his all-male staff -- except for Mouse. The patriarchal environment is clearly represented and PK's first response to Mouse suggests that it will be difficult for a woman at the "African Beat" office:

> A look of comic despair came over his face. "I can't handle the job of training a woman. I can't even manage them in my private life. (1993:14)

That Mouse has to *endure* the male-dominated environment is clear:

> From a long habit of reserve and retreat she appeared to be indifferent to the battering effect of [Johnny's] personality, but this cold reserve seemed to drive him to extremes to taunt and provoke her. She fared no better with the other two men. James taunted her with sly, crude remarks and PK treated her with a patronizing and paternal indulgence that was humiliating. (1993:15)

While Mouse has been seen as passive it is, in the midst of this patriarchal taunting, precisely through her "blankness" and reserve that she, to some extent, resists the (patriarchal) position which the men try to put her in. Her blank expressionless face, which infuriates the men in the office, thwarts interpretation, and thus inscription to some extent. Mouse as a text resists interpretation. The men cannot place her because she does not occupy the usual feminine position. Even at this early stage, when she is not yet creating her own texts, her blankness *still* resists phallic inscription. This is demonstrated by the fact that any reaction from Mouse is seen as a victory by the men in the office:

> You pretend to walk around like an ice-berg when all the time you're a powder-keg underneath. ... He could gauge nothing from her expressionless face and sighed in exasperation. ... Her mouth quivered slightly and she could not control the look of intense hatred that darted out of her black eyes. He laughed, pleased that he had been able to provoke a reaction out of her.... (1993:21)

Although Johnny certainly contributes his fair share to the taunting of Mouse there seems to be slight differentiation in the text between his attitude and those of the other two men. For example, while Johnny mocks Mouse's *reading* habits, James talks about her, in her presence, as the object of his sexual fantasies:

> [Johnny:] "Why do you read such complex things? The average reading interest of women your age is the fashion magazine and the true-love story." ... James said ... I was telling my wife only last night that I had an itch to go to bed with Mouse["]....
> (1993:17)

Thus while Johnny notices that Mouse has reading habits that are not "appropriate" to her gender, James tries to place her only in the gendered position of sexual object. It is, however, only after Johnny has given Mouse a short story to (re)write that he really begins to see her differently. Mouse writes a fictional short story that is really, unbeknown to her, the story of Johnny, her father, and thus her own history.

It is only in this writing that Mouse can really be assertive and where she creates a sexually assertive female character who, again unbeknown to her, resembles her mother. While the subject matter of this story has much in common with the kinds of stories which were published in Drum publications in the 1950s,[4] the representation of the female character, who is never named, as well as Sammy's response to her, is extremely unusual in comparison with stories published in the black news media during this period:

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[4] The ending of Mouse's story is, for example, remarkably similar to the end of Casey Motsisi's short story "Mita" published in Drum magazine in March 1963, probably just after Head had written The Cardinals.

> She let him kiss her and feel her and after a time she started to feel him too. It shocked him. "Don't do that," he said sharply. She paid no attention to the command and once he had become accustomed to the idea, he found he liked the way she touched him. He had never yet found a woman as bold and daring as she was and when he took her home he insisted on seeing her again. (1993:41)

The representation of the woman in Mouse's story is positive even though she breaks out of the stereotypical feminine mould(s) of the period. Certainly in the "True Romance" stories which Head wrote in Home Post women were either represented as totally innocent and displayed no awareness of their own sexuality, which is typical of the discourse of romance, or alternatively they were represented as using their knowledge of their sexuality to their own (selfish) advantage. Tania Modleski points out how in popular romance "knowledge [always] entails guilt".[5] This latter practice characterised the "True Confessions" which replaced the "True Romances" in Home Post at the beginning of 1960 (around the time when Head began to write The Cardinals). In these stories women do engage in sexual activity, which contrasts starkly with the chaste representation of the "True Romance", and the narrative always shows them being socially "punished" for this activity: they end up pregnant, or abandoned by the man and repentant as a result. Depending on the motivation for the crime, they could be re-united with the man in question after a certain period had lapsed, just long enough for them to regret their actions. The representation of women's sexuality in short stories written by men during this period is even bleaker. Driver points out how in some of the short stories published in Drum magazine (written by men) "sexual desire in women (as opposed to love) was evil" (1996:236).

Yet Mouse's woman is not chastised for her behaviour; it is vindicated by the fact that Sammy "found he liked the way she touched him". Thus Mouse creates a representation of a woman that was ground-breaking in terms of the representation of women in popular black media in South Africa in the early 1960s. While the outline of this story was given to Mouse,

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[5] See Tania Modleski's discussion about how "[a] heroine must not even understand sexual desire, for knowledge entails guilt" (1982:51).

Johnny acknowledges it after she re-writes it as *her* work of creation: "Is this the first time you've written a short story?" (1993:42).

The woman in Mouse's story resembles Ruby in her assertive sexual behaviour. Yet while Mouse's woman seems to be positively represented, critics have suggested that Ruby is represented negatively and that her "guilt is established" (Lewis, 1996:75).[6] I am not sure that there is sufficient narrative judgement to support this statement. Furthermore I think that Head is doing more interesting things with Ruby's story, particularly in the way that it is inserted into the narrative. It follows on Mouse's story and thus endorses the "truth" of Mouse's (fictional) story, particularly regarding Johnny. It sets up a continuity at the level of narration between Head and Mouse, suggesting not only the autobiographical content of the novel but also that Mouse *is* a *writer* of *fiction* just as (Head) the author of The Cardinals is. That Mouse unknowingly writes the history of her father thus suggests that fiction can tell the "truth" as much as, if not more than, other forms of discourse and writing can.

The representation of Ruby's sexuality is taken even further than the representation of the woman in Mouse's short story. Ruby initiates the sexual act through which Mouse is conceived. By "judging" Ruby for her actions I think one reads her *within* those very discourses that the story is trying to work *against*. While I see how one *could* read Ruby as being "chastised" for her actions, in the same way that the characters in the "True Romance[s]/Confessions" were, there are fundamental differences in the representation of Ruby. Apart from the fact that Ruby makes love to Johnny because she desires him and for no other (narrative) reason, Ruby is not abandoned by Johnny; she abandons him. The impossibility of Ruby's marriage to Johnny works against the idealistic ending of the "True Romance" story where class differences are always overcome through romantic love. In several of the stories that appeared in Home Post women from "upper class" or wealthy backgrounds fall in love with men from the "working class" who are without any wealth or means to acquire wealth. In spite of the opposition of the woman's parents the couple is always united at the end, but never before the man has gone off to "better" himself - which he

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[6] See also Daymond, 1993:xiv.

always manages to do.[7] The ending of Ruby's story undermines both this popular formula but, more significantly, it thus underscores, as well as undermines, the class position that popular romance always constructs as universal and *natural*.[8]

Ruby is left with the option of marriage to Paddy, who obviously shares the same social class as Ruby. Yet in his attitude towards Ruby's pregnancy he betrays his (patriarchal) understanding of women, including Ruby, as essentially passive:

> "Who's the swine who did this to you?" he asked
> "What do you mean?"
> "I mean a man can have his fun but the woman has to bear everything." (1993:59)

His conventional view of women contrasts so starkly with the way Ruby is represented that one cannot help sympathise with her decision not to marry him. Thus in the three stories of women (and men) that are told in The Cardinals (Mouse, Ruby and the woman in Mouse's story) marriage is not portrayed as an option for any of them. The one impending marriage, that Ruby's mother sees as a solution, contributes to Ruby's suicide.

It appears to be Ruby's class position that traps her and keeps her from Johnny. Head is thus representing and (re)writing many of the social contradictions that were smoothed over in the "True Romance[s]" which appeared in the popular media. She simultaneously demythologises the class position that the romance stories were setting up as *natural* and thus attainable as well as the naturalised construction of women within that class (represented by Paddy's attitude towards Ruby). The conclusion must be bleak: Ruby cannot escape her class

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[7] See, for example, "Love is Worth Waiting for" by Jane Roux, Home Post, 10 May, 1959; and "Meant for each other" by Myra, Home Post, 29 November 1959.

[8] See Linda K. Christian-Smith's Becoming A Woman Through Romance where she argues "that romance fiction's version of femininity is actually rooted in a particular class and race, although it masquerades as a universal identity" (1990:6).

bias yet nor can she fit into the role of the "feminine" as it occurs in her social class (the latter leading us to the crucial point that gender construction is specific to class).

What about Johnny and Mouse? The fact that both Johnny and Mouse are not aware of nuclear family structures seems to be what qualifies them for the relationship they have. Johnny's mother keeps on having children with different men after the death of his father (1993:78). They are also not inscribed in a fixed class structure. Mouse, having been born out of the mixed class union, is dumped in a slum, leaves it and is placed in so many homes that she does not seem to belong anywhere. It is only after Mouse has written the story and told Johnny that she grew up in the slum that he becomes interested in the mystery of *her* story.

Once Mouse has written Johnny's story, he begins to see her differently. Her fictional story, which turns out to contain so much truth, contrasts sharply with the "factual" reporting in the newspaper which is either blatantly manipulated or just lies. Thus the rest of the novel suggests that Mouse's real future as a writer lies outside of the constraints of the journalistic discourses which dominate "African Beat". After Mouse has written her first story which deconstructs the popular representation of women she appears to begin to live out this deconstruction in her life. Thus her story turns out to be "true" in more ways than one: it is not just Johnny's story but it becomes hers as well. This resembles Margaret in Maru who also seems to live out the deconstruction of the racial stereotype contained in Margaret senior's inscribed drawing of the Masarwa woman.

After this story Johnny realises that "[t]here's only one thing she responds to": "Writing". (1993:68). It is precisely Mouse's "writing" that makes Johnny interested in her and causes him to pursue a relationship with her which, by the end of the novel, is about to be consummated. Like the representation of the other two women in the stories *within* The Cardinals Mouse's relationship with Johnny stands in striking contrast to the commonly accepted representation of women and men and their relationships. Mouse's fictional writing is the only space where she can express herself and be at all assertive and expressive. When Johnny gets a glimpse of this space and Mouse takes control of the narrative of *his* life, he decides that he loves her. Johnny recognises Mouse's superior talent as

a (fiction) writer, acknowledges her power and decides to assist her. This is an *extremely* unusual story given the male-dominated domain that writing was -- a situation which Head clearly maps out in The Cardinals via Mouse's relationship with writing from the beginning through to her job on "African Beat".

Johnny's relationship with Mouse is sometimes represented ambivalently; yet at other times the representation seems to redeem the relationship. Writing seems, towards the end of the novel, to represent a means of escape from the patriarchal hierarchies:

> An easy working comradeship developed between them. They both liked writing and he was content for a time to use that medium to draw her out of that tight shell of reserve and retreat. (1993:107)

This notion of an "easy working comradeship" between a man and a woman is an extremely radical one for the period. They use writing as a means to communicate where speech is not (yet) possible for Mouse. Yet Johnny still uses writing as a medium to get to Mouse. Thus while he demands that she live with him in order to pursue her writing, it significant that Johnny does offer Mouse (another) room of her own: "This room is yours and the front one is mine" (1993:73). This is a room that he also often invades.

The first advice he gives her about writing is precisely the opposite of *everything* that Mouse has been taught:

> in writing, as in every other aspect of my life, I observe no rules or style. Just the thought of having to follow a set of rules or wedging myself into a style is enough to make my hair stand on end. Style must conform to me ... I want you to feel the same way too. I want you to feel free to express yourself in an innumerable variety of styles. (1993:76)

This is a startling statement in relation to the other "instruction" which Mouse has received. Johnny's rebellion against "wedging [himself] into a style", and his behaviour at African Beat suggest that it was easier for him as a good black *male* journalist to break the rules that PK (and the white establishment) imposed (than it will be for a black female journalist). He wants to initiate Mouse into this freedom as well:

> Don't be afraid to develop your ideas, Mouse. They're yours. You can spread them out any way you like; and don't be afraid to trust your impressions either. (1993:114)

The first "trick" Johnny shows Mouse about writing is as enlightening. He takes her up the mountain and tells her:

> While you look at that town with the eye of an artist, look at it also with the eye of a writer and let there be no difference between the artist and the writer. (1993:135)

With this instruction, together with the instruction to Mouse that she should spread her ideas out any way she likes, Johnny seems to be moving *away* from the prescribed discourses that have characterised Mouse's encounter with writing.

It is significant that Johnny introduces art to Mouse as a way to this freedom. In Maru art will become Margaret's space of resistance against Maru. That the eye of the artist and the eye of the writer are presented as the same here suggests that what painting represents to Margaret, writing represents to Mouse. It will be a space where she is free to (re)construct herself and her desires. It is after showing her this trick that Johnny tells her that she should stop working at the paper, reiterating the point he made when Mouse arrived at "African Beat": "This is the last place `a writer of no mean ability' should come to" (1993:12). In some ways it seems as though Johnny is still dictating a discourse to Mouse: "Now describe it in words in the most compact form possible" (1993:135). Yet Head later described this compactness, derived from the influence of journalism, as characteristic of her *fictional style*: "I am not loose and baggy. I'm very concise and taut" (quoted in Head, 1990:xiv). This suggests that Johnny's tutoring is not disabling to Mouse's writing.

The kind of writing that Johnny appears to be describing to Mouse seems to connect with an idea suggested much earlier in the text, interestingly enough by PK:

> Word communication is dependent on reason and logic but there are many things in life that are not reasonable or logical. A jazz musician can say something in his music but it would be

> quite beyond me to translate into words what he is communicating through music. (1993:26)

Johnny's method resembles the alternative method(s) of expression that PK advocates. What PK advocates is precisely a method of *expression* rather than of final *communication*. Jazz has been associated with a particular style of African American writing. Toni Morrison has claimed that the intentional lack of ending, or fixing of meaning, in African American (and her own) writing comes from jazz:

> I think about what black writers do as having a quality of hunger and disturbance that never ends. Classical music satisfies and closes. Black music does not do that. Jazz always keeps you on the edge. There is no final chord. There may be a long chord, but no final chord. And it agitates you. ... There is something underneath ... that is incomplete. ... I want my books to be like that ... because I want the sense that there is more. (Interview, 1983: 429)

This writing does not attempt to set up a one-to-one relationship between the sign and referent and thus represent the transparent "truth". The emphasis is on the associative nature of the signifier rather than on an attempt to limit signification. This associative kind of language is associated with *fiction* in The Cardinals just as the limiting of language is associated with the journalism of "African Beat". The journalism in "African Beat" leaves no interpretive space for the reader (or writer) as is clearly demonstrated. The suggestion in The Cardinals that through exploiting the associative function of language one can begin to represent reality differently concurs with Morrison's own version of writing (jazz) in Beloved (1988). While Morrison uses fiction to tell the *story* of the gaps and omissions of *history*, Head's novel also seems to tell us that there are stories that could only be told in fiction. Only such fiction gives Mouse space to express herself and it is only within this space that the naturalised discourses of the construction of woman can be evaded.

In The Cardinals jazz is still associated with men: Johnny and PK listen to Miles Davis together. Yet Head expressed her enthusiasm for jazz in her "Hiya Teenagers" column, as well as her endorsement of jazz as suitable music for young people to listen to.[9] A recently

[9] Head also wrote an article about Dollar Brand which was never published and which has recently been discovered, see Coetzee and MacKenzie, 1996:30.

published early poem by Head "Where the Wind Don't Blow", "has a strong flavour of jazz" suggesting that Head was indeed experimenting with the influence of jazz on writing around the time that she was writing The Cardinals (Coetzee and MacKenzie, 1996:33).[10] I have already outlined Driver's argument that jazz in South Africa (following the African American tradition) provided women, momentarily, with a space where they could evade the rigid constructions of the feminine (1996:238). Thus in The Cardinals (male) jazz translates into (female) fiction that is associated with an alternative means of expression that defies the rigid linguistic discourses that dominated (male) journalism. The Cardinals also seems to enact this kind of writing with its embedded texts that signify intertextually on one another where meaning is created through the interplay of texts and stories rather than through a referential relationship between text and world (which is what "African Beat" sets out to do). Similarly the ending of The Cardinals also points the new beginning which "The Cardinals" will usher in. I will return to a discussion of this.

Roland Barthes identified "literature" or "the practice of writing" as a way of escaping the disabling effects of discourse. His "Inaugural Lecture [at the] College de France" has become associated with his (in)famous claim that "language ... is fascist". He explains that "fascism does *not prevent speech*, it compels speech" and part of what it compels is precisely the linear con*sequence*. It is this kind of writing that the notion of jazz, in The Cardinals, is moving away from:

> Language is legislation, speech its code. We do not see the power which is in speech because we forget that all speech is a classification, and that all classifications are oppressive ... Jakobson has shown that a speech-system is defined less by what it permits us to say than by what it compels us to say. In French ... I am obliged to posit myself as subject before starting the action which will henceforth be no more than my attribute: what I do is merely the consequence and consecution of what I am. In the same way I must always choose between masculine and feminine, for the neuter and the dual are forbidden me. Further I must indicate my relation to the other person by

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[10] Head's recently published early poems were, according to Coetzee and MacKenzie, "probably written in the second half of 1961 and early 1962" (Coetzee and MacKenzie, 1996:29).

> resorting to either *tu* or *vous*; social or affective suspension is denied me. Thus, by its very structure my language implies an inevitable relation of alienation. To speak, and with even greater reason, to utter a discourse is not, as is too often repeated, to communicate; it is to subjugate: the whole of language is a generalized *reaction*. (1983:460)

Barthes' words could not be more appropriate, I think, for Mouse's experiences at African Beat. Yet his words also take on a new meaning in terms of apartheid South Africa where people were compelled into a whole racist discourse of (non)identity. That the National Party in South Africa, through its institution of apartheid, negated the majority of people's identity entirely is suggested by the opening of The Cardinals where the slum is bordered by a graveyard and separated from a refuse dump by the national road, a clear allusion to the National Party and its racial classification system.[11] Apartheid thus, using Barthes' terms, compelled not just speech but a whole racist discourse of legislation. The prominence of the Immorality Act in the novel suggests that The Cardinals is dealing with the way in which race was "put into discourse" and the issues of "legitimacy" and "illegitimacy" that arise from this. "If", says Barthes, "we call freedom not only the capacity to escape power but also the capacity to subjugate no one, then freedom can exist only outside language". Yet, "human language has no exterior: there is no exit." "The only remaining alternative", claims Barthes, "is ... to cheat with speech, to cheat speech:

> This salutary trickery, this evasion, this grand imposture which allows us to understand speech *outside the bounds of power*, in the splendor of a permanent revolution of language, I for one call *literature*. ... I mean by *literature* ... the practice of writing ... the fabric of signifiers, which constitute the work. For the text is the very outcropping of speech and it is within speech that speech must be fought, led astray -- not by the message of which it is the instrument, but by the play of words of which it is the theatre ... The forces of freedom which are in literature depend not on the writer's civil person ... but rather on the labour of displacement he brings to bear upon the language. (1983:462)

Barthes' description of literature as the "fabric of signifiers" has much in common with the notion of jazz that I have outlined. Thus, in suggesting *writing as fiction* (as a way of evading

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[11] Gagiano makes this point and elaborates on it, (1996: 50).

the dominating influence of discourses) Head certainly brings the labour of displacement, which Barthes discusses, to bear on language. Thus Head's work seems to concur with Barthes' in suggesting that the rigid discourses of race, and gender, in 1950s South Africa could only be evaded through that "permanent revolution of language": *literature.*

As Wicomb points out, the lack of final meaning in The Cardinals lies in the narrative's refusal to comment on the incestuous act that Mouse and Johnny are about to embark on at the end of the novel (which I will argue actually represents a new beginning). Yet although there is no direct narrative intervention there do seem to be definite clues, within the text, as to how one should read this scenario. There is a suggestion that Johnny and Mouse are involved in a process of cosmic creation which will usher in a new creative realm through their incestuous union.

The epigraph of the novel explains the title: "*The Cardinals*, in the astrological sense, are those who serve as the base or foundation for change". Johnny, Mouse and Ruby seem, through a careful reading of the text, to be symbolically representative of a new universe. In Maru Head develops a cosmic realm in which characters become "gods and goddesses engaged in re-creating themselves and one another" (Driver, 1996a:47). There seems to be a movement towards this in The Cardinals: generally Johnny represents the sun, Mouse represents the moon and Ruby the earth. Yet at various times, both Johnny and Mouse are also associated with the ocean. Head does not want us to "judge" Ruby because there seems to be greater process, "[f]or the sake of destiny", at work in the story (1993:71).

Mouse's association with the moon is given to us in the opening paragraphs and reinforced often through the text:

> Look, it has opened its eyes. They are like great moons and as black as the night when the moon does not shine. Have you seen such a child before? (1993:3)

It is these eyes that draw Johnny to Mouse:

> "It's the inside part, PK. She's got something inside her that agrees with my system." ... Somehow it's all tied up with her

> eyes. On the surface they're just big and dark and unfathomable but they react on me["].... (1993:65)

Johnny's first symbolic association with the sun appears in the text just before he gives Mouse the short story, indicating clearly that this cosmic realm is connected with (Mouse's) writing:

> The day was grey and bleak and rainy.
> She stood at the office window and felt crushed as she watched the relentless downpour of the late spring rain. Click, bang, CRASH. And in burst Johnny like the sun. (1993:31)

This association is reiterated when Johnny is talking about Mouse's writing, re-emphasising the connection between writing and the cosmic realm. In this passage the sun, it's reflection (the moon), freedom and writing all become intertwined:

> I wonder where those birds are racing to? Some crazy bird-home, no doubt. The sun has set for us but they're so high up they can still reflect its light on their wings. It's damn beautiful. In one way I envy them but in another ... I am on par with them because inside me I feel that same high flying freedom. I say what I like. I do what I like and I think what I like. That's what I call inner freedom. It's absolutely necessary for anyone who calls himself, or thinks himself, a writer. You've got to break off the bolts that are keeping you locked up. ... I'm going to help you with your writing. (1993:75)

After Mouse has moved in with Johnny:

> "[t]he early morning sun awakened her and ... her feeling of surprise was supplanted by a feeling of indefinable happiness ... she attributed it to the warmth and quiet of the small house. (1993:77)

Here the sun is associatively connected with the warmth and security of Johnny's house. While the association between Johnny-as-the-sun and Mouse-as-the-moon is fairly sustained in the text, Ruby's association with the earth appears only once:

> "Love me! "Love me! "Love me!" she cried and it seemed as though his love was as fierce as the savage, battering beat of a high sea; or, like a storm beating down on the dry hard earth of her body and she absorbed its pounding drive, lost and lost in elemental ecstasy; and then, like the sweet shuddering sigh of

> the satiated earth, their limbs enclosed around each other in a close and relaxed embrace. She moved her hand caressingly down his back. "It's so strong and deeply curved." (1993:52)

That the language of this love scene is borrowed from the discourse(s) of popular romance is clear, yet Head is deploying this discourse for very different ends.[12] This scene will not lead to the (romantic) union of marriage. There is an almost identical love scene with Johnny and Mouse which suggests that these three form some sort of triad:

> She was hardly conscious of her agonized cry as his hard kisses ravaged her mouth. For her it was like a dissolution of body and bones; with only a heart left; a pulsing heart awash in an ocean of rushing tornadic darkness; helpless at its own forward rushing.... (1993:133)

In a moment in which Mouse reenacts her mother's love scene with her father her gaze is also "drawn to the magnetic, hollow curve of his back and at the same time she felt a strange sensation in her hands as though they wanted to reach out towards it" (1993:128).

In both scenes Johnny's love, and the women's ecstatic response, is associated with the ocean. Yet Johnny also sees the ocean reflected in Mouse's eyes: "I don't care to look into your eyes. They give me a horrible sensation of drowning" (1993:71). This mirrors the "helpless" sensation of drowning that seems to characterise Mouse's love scene with Johnny. This "drowning" is literally acted out by Mouse, earlier in the text, when she dives into the ocean at the same spot where she was conceived. She thus symbolically enacts her own death and thus completes some sort of cycle in which Ruby, Johnny-as-Sammy and she all die or have death enacted, indicating a kind of re-birth:

> She started to follow him then made a sharp turn and plunged into the sea. The waves were high and a huge, monster-like, rushing wall engulfed her
>
> ...
>
> Her body looked child-like too in the clinging wet clothes.... (1993:89-90)

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[12] Gagiano makes a similar point about the way in which the romance frame is used by Head. See particularly 1996:47 and 1996:52.

It is precisely at this moment of re-birth through death that we are reminded of Mouse's relationship to Johnny, by the description of her as "child-like", which connects the potentially incestuous relationship to the regereration. Just before this Johnny has told Mouse that

> [l]ife on this earth is dependent on the sun, the sea, the winds and the things that grow out of the earth. I am dependent on you.
> ...
> Why don't you admit that you need someone too? (1993:88)

The fluidity and "mirroring" between characters-as-elements who make up an interdependent universe represents what Johnny is talking about; a world that is very different from apartheid South Africa.

Mouse and Johnny are "The Cardinals" who can usher in this new universe because they are unaware of the nuclear family, as Johnny tells Mouse:

> you aren't aware of family relationships. I wasn't aware of them either. After my father died my mother kept on getting children from various men. (1993:78)

Johnny and Mouse have both grown up without those nuclear family structures and strictures, represented in its most radical form by the fact that they don't know that they are father and daughter. This blood relationship, the "inside part", seems to be what enables the cosmic creativity which they are involved in. Yet one still has to pose questions about why Head used an *incestuous* relationship to represent what the text suggests is a new (creative) realm.

The answer lies, I believe, in the relationship between "The Cardinals" as the base or foundation for change and the suggestion that this change has to do with creation and, specifically, (Mouse's) writing. This new writing, it is suggested, will be different from the first (patriarchal) writing which Mouse learned which was associated with the patriarchal economy of the law of the father.

Lacanian psychoanalysis has connected the incest taboo with the entry into language and thus into the law of the father.[13] Head's story of Mouse's first entry into language seems

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[13] See Jacques Lacan, 1977:66, "The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis", Ecrits: A Selection, trans. Alan Sheridan, London: Routledge.

to reproduce (metaphorically) this association; in this language she can only *reproduce* a preexistent identity. That the old man had no power to create his own texts speaks of the South African situation in which people were forced into (racist) discourses of (non)identity. The naming and re-naming of Mouse, and the fact that she discards these names without any sense of loss, reflects that Names in apartheid South Africa were imposed on people. Given Head's suggestion of a (creative) cosmic realm tied to the incestuous relationship of Johnny and Mouse, her text could be seen as tentatively moving towards a new way of *writing* which evades the law of the father. The impending incestuous act then, metaphorically, reverses the entry into the patriarchal language and a subject position in the symbolic system. It is through the intervention of the name of the father, or what Lacan called the paternal metaphor, that the Oedipal crisis is enacted and one enters a gendered position.[14]

In the South Africa of The Cardinals the law of the father also determined one's racial name and position. With the impending incestuous act at the end of The Cardinals Head seems to undermine the positioning of both gender and racial inferiority. While the patriarchal language which Mouse learns is one in which she is excluded as writer because she is a (black) *woman*; it is the same language through which people are racially named, categorised, and thus divided. It is thus significant, as Wicomb points out, that Mouse refuses to speak her own name(s) (1995:11). This reinforces the idea that she is resisting naming herself within the symbolic system of apartheid South Africa. Thus the suggestion of incest becomes a radical revision of the structures of apartheid society, questioning the language which names and creates people's subject positions and thus the white, racist law of the father in South Africa.

Yet we know that there is no escape from language; there can be no new language. Thus there can be no escape from patriarchal language which names and (dis)places people. Johnny and Mouse never consummate their relationship *within* the text of the novel. The last

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[14] See Lacan, 1977:67. I have also made use of Anika Lemaire's (1970) study of Lacan as a guide for the relationship between incest, Oedipus, the Name-of-the-Father and the accession to the symbolic. See particularly "The Role of the Oedipus in accession to the symbolic", Jacques Lacan, trans. (1977) David Macey, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 78-92.

words of the novel, about being "swept off into oblivion", which prefigure the incestuous sexual act seem to suggest that outside of the patriarchal language of the Law of the father there can only ever be "oblivion". Thus the novel's end seems to acknowledge that "language has no exterior" and that the enactment of the incest taboo and the entry into language and identity cannot, finally, be reversed. However, while the end of the novel only alludes to a new language, the novel as a whole orchestrates the only way in which the language and the law of the father *can* be evaded: through *writing*.

The new universe and language which Johnny and Mouse usher in is, as it is alluded to in the text, one of elemental dependency (1993:88) and in this sense it seems to prefigure the cosmic realm in Maru where characters become involved in a process in which they create one another. Thus by demonstrating this interdependency of Johnny, Mouse and Ruby, Head, through the text of The Cardinals, points to the possibility of a new world which is related to a new use of language.

In Lacanian terms the failure of the normal resolution of the Oedipal complex, through the incest taboo, can result in psychosis. Lacan has described the psychotic as "possessed" by language (Dean, 1992: 115). In the absence of the transcendence of the Oedipus complex the subject cannot utilise the distinction between the signifier and signified correctly (Lemaire, 1979:238). The psychotic does not undergo that primal repression that constitutes the entry into the Symbolic.[15] Fredric Jameson has summarised the scenario as follows:

> Very briefly, Lacan describes schizophrenia as a breakdown in the signifying chain, that is, the interlocking syntagmatic series of signifiers which constitutes an utterance or a meaning. ... Meaning ... is generated by the movement of signifier to signifier. What we generally call the signified ... is now rather to be seen as a meaning-effect, as that objective mirage of signification generated and projected by the relationship of signifiers among themselves. When that relationship breaks down, when the links of the signifying chain snap, then we have schizophrenia in the form of a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers. (1991:26)

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[15] I do not wish to invoke psychosis in a clinical sense. Like Jameson, I think it works well as a metaphor, and particularly for what Head is suggesting about language in The Cardinals.

The psychotic is therefore

> reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers, or, in other words, a series of pure and unrelated presents in time. (1991:27)

Jameson's description of the psychotic is remarkably similar to Barthes' description of *writing* or the *writerly*, as he calls it in S/Z: "this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds" (1975:5). This emphasis on the fabric of signifiers is similar to the African American concept of writing as jazz in which language functions associatively rather than along the paradigmatic axis of language.[16]

Thus while there can be no escape from language, which has no exterior, in The Cardinals Head finds that way to cheat speech where, like the psychotic's use of language, the distinction between self and other is not stable and fixed.[17] Head thus re-claims patriarchal language through what Barthes called a "permanent revolution of language ... [:] *literature*".

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[16] Henry Louis Gates has described how there are practices of subversion built into African-American's use of language. He calls this practice of subversion Signifyin(g). He claims that while standard signification relies on the linearity of language and operates along what Ferdinand de Saussure called the syntagmatic axis, where a signifier points to a signified, African American Signifyin(g) with its emphasis on the rhetorical and oral, liberates the meanings of the paradigmatic, associative axis. While traditional signification relies on the closing down of associative meaning, Signifyin(g) invokes these other meanings, so that there can be no final fixture of meaning. (See 1988:48-50).

[17] See Lemaire's discussion of the different types of psychosis and how these relate to Lacan's formulation of language, 1977: 237.

4

Maru: *Writing* (After) the End of Romance

In Maru, which was written almost a decade after The Cardinals,[1] Head once again deploys the romance structure for her novel. Yet unlike The Cardinals, which ends with Mouse and Johnny about to consummate their relationship outside of marriage, Maru seems at first reading to uphold a more traditional romance structure as it ends with the marriage of the main protagonists. The story bears all the traces of a romance: a young orphaned woman who belongs to the lowest social grouping, the Masarwa[2] -- who are slaves in Batswana society -- ends up married to the man who was destined to be paramount chief of Dilepe. Maru is, in some ways, typical of the romance formula which Tania Modleski describes where a young, inexperienced and usually poor woman becomes involved with a desirable, experienced and wealthy man who is also generally older than she is.[3] Margaret and Maru's story could be read as a re-casting of this formula. Margaret marries a man who is about to become a chief, yet instead of her incorporation into Maru's position, as would usually happen in the romance, Maru gives up his chieftainship in order to marry her. This is only after he has disposed of his rival, Moleka, who also loves Margaret.

The marriage has, following the suggestion of the text of Maru itself, often been read as a resolution to the racial inequality of the Masarwa which the novel explores:

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[1] Although Maru was only published in 1971 Head claims in a letter to Randolph Vigne that she finished writing Maru during 1969. See Head, 1991:103.

[2] I will retain Head's terminology in Maru for the indigenous hunter gatherers, the !Kung San, in this paper even though Masarwa is a derisory term (BaSarwa is SeTswana for "bushmen"). See Barry Morton, 1994, for a discussion of this (1994:215). Head uses the term "Masarwa" as both singular and plural in the text of Maru.

[3] Modleski claims that "the formula rarely varies: a young, inexperienced, poor ... woman encounters and becomes involved with a handsome, strong, experienced, wealthy man, older than herself" (1982:36).

> When the people of the Masarwa tribe heard about Maru's marriage to one of their own, a door silently opened on the small dark, airless room in which their souls had been shut for a long time. (1987:126)

Yet in such readings the marriage is seen merely as a vehicle for the union of a Masarwa and Motswana, represented by Margaret and Maru, which will give rise to the new society which Maru dreams about. For some critics the form that this resolution takes is an unsatisfactory one. Cecil Abrahams reads the end of Maru as a "somewhat contrived" "fairy tale marriage" which is not an adequate solution to the problem of racial prejudice and Maru is thus a "rather weak vapoury study on the theme of racial prejudice" (1978:23).

Abrahams reiterated this point as recently as 1990 where he declares:

> Head's novel, unfortunately, has a fairy tale ending where Margaret mysteriously attracts Maru and this leads to the proposal of marriage. (1990:7)

Another essay in the 1990 collection of essays on Head, which Abrahams edited, makes a similar claim about the "fairy tale aspect" of Maru which "ends happily" (Gover, 1990:116):

> *Maru* is the story of racial prejudice conquered by idealistic love functioning as a socially progressive force that advances mankind in the direction of racial equality. It is also the story of the competition of two men for one woman. ... she [Margaret] becomes the prize in the traditional rivalry and power struggle that already exists between the two men ... For most of the story ... Margaret is unaware that she is going to be rescued by one of the two chiefs. (1990:113, emphasis mine)

As the quotation indicates Daniel Gover sees no conflict between "love" as a "socially progressive force" and Margaret being the "prize" in a "competition" of traditional male rivalry.

It is precisely the violent *way* in which this marriage is executed in the novel which is responsible for the feeling, amongst other critics, that the romance structure does not ultimately work. It all sounds, as Margaret Daymond has pointed out, rather incredible. Maru never approaches Margaret while he manipulates Moleka, whom Margaret loves, into

marrying Dikeledi and then he practically abducts Margaret.[4] While Daymond reads the novel as a "Visionary Fable" and sees the use of the marriage as metaphoric, Valerie Kibera reads Head attempting to delineate a new society with new gender roles through new egalitarian marriages. For her the marriage, which she reads literally, is thus also ultimately unsatisfactory:

> Maru ... for all his idealism, his denunciation of antiquated social forms and the exploitative relations between the sexes in his society, is himself manipulative, unscrupulous and overbearing. He uses his adoring sister, Dikeledi, as bait to steal Margaret away from his rival, Moleka, the man Margaret loves. Maru then proceeds to claim Margaret in marriage, bundling her off to some faraway isolated place. In none of these plans, which affect her so intimately, does he consult her, still less ask her consent. (1991:324)

Thus although they approach the text of Maru in different ways Daymond and Kibera have the same problems with the text -- problems which any thinking reader must have.

While the book ends, with Margaret's "abduction", we *are* also given a vision of what happens after "the end" of the novel -- in the beginning of the text. The prolepsis presents Maru and Margaret's married life together, out of chronological sequence, *before* we are given the actual story leading up to this moment. It is, I believe, in Head's use of the prolepsis that one can find the answers to the questions about the unsatisfactory nature of the representation of the romance in the text.

This prolepsis, as Head uses it, would be extremely unusual, even impossible, in a story that held strictly to the romance structure, a structure which Head knew better than most. This is the case even -- perhaps *especially* -- if romance and marriage were being used as a metaphor, for racial equality, because then this metaphoric use would surely have to be convincing. I have already detailed, in the first chapter, how the romance plot has to have a happy ending which involves the heroine's (impending) marriage and the "True Romance" features discussed amply demonstrated this movement.

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[4] See Daymond, 1989:248.

It is necessary to reiterate, at this point, that it is *crucial* to the romance structure that the story *end* with this movement towards marriage and closure. Radway has claimed that through repetitively reading romances

> women are participating in a collectively elaborated female fantasy that unfailing ends at the precise moment when the heroine is gathered into the arms of the hero who declares his intention to protect her forever because of his desperate love and need for her. (1987:97)

These women are telling themselves a story, says Radway, whose central vision is one of total surrender where all danger has been expunged, thus permitting the heroine to relinquish self-control:

> Passivity is at the heart of the romance experience in the sense that the final goal of each narrative is the creation of that perfect union where the ideal male, who is masculine and strong, yet nurturant too, finally realises the intrinsic worth of the heroine. Thereafter, she is required to do nothing more than exist as the center of this paragon's attention.... (Radway, 1987:97)

It is precisely this "after the end" of the romance that Head presents to us in the prolepsis in Maru. What is Head doing in Maru if the romance is really supposed to be a hinge on which the plot turns?

What Head presents in the prolepsis is very far from what romance stories suggest about the future that lies beyond marriage (for women and men). We are told in the text that the prolepsis represents Maru's dream translated into reality (1987:7). Yet when he enters the house "his wife looked up fearfully from her work" (1987:8). Although we are given a picture of alternating happiness and misery for Margaret, the very first picture we are given of Margaret's life is a bleak one:

> He sometimes had vicious, malicious moods when every word was a sharp knife intended to grind and re-grind the same raw wound. (1987:8)

Strong words indeed. We are told that it is "brooding and certainty that made [Maru] malicious" (1987:10). This is because "[t]here were two rooms. In one his wife totally loved him; in another, she totally loved Moleka" (1987:8). At night Maru watches over this other room while dreaming dreams in which a symbolically castrated Moleka appears. Yet there is nothing that Maru can do:

> on waking ... [Margaret] had no mental impression of her dreams, except those of the room in which she loved Maru. There was nothing he could invent to banish the other room. He seemed to be its helpless victim and it was not much to his liking.... (1987:9)

Thus far from an ideal picture of the union of Margaret and Maru we are given a picture of Margaret who *has*, as indeed the text warns us she will, "become another Dikeledi".

The prolepsis reveals the fulfilment of the text's forecast. Dikeledi (knowing Maru's plan) tells Margaret that she will be surprised at whom she will marry one day. The narrative commentary is telling indeed:

> [Margaret] was to remember those words one day when certain events occurred to throw her from the quiet, static niche she found for herself. That peace was only for one year. It was to depart for ever after that. She was to become another Dikeledi who alternated happiness with misery finding herself tossed about this way and that on permanently restless seas. She would have preferred that static endless hour... She recorded the hour of peace. (1987:114/5)

Here then is a statement, in the strongest terms, that Margaret would have *preferred* that endless static hour which was the hour of her *painting*.

Why does Head show the fulfilment of Margaret's predicted unhappiness in the prolepsis if she wants the romance between Margaret and Maru to stand for the racial union of Batswana and Masarwa? If Head were using the romance structure merely to introduce a new society begun by Maru and Margaret then why does she introduce the story with a prolepsis which cannot but negatively colour our reading of the ensuing chronological story? Head knew the romance structure so well that she must have known what anxiety this radical

adjustment to the traditional romance formula would (and obviously does) give rise to in readers.

The beginnings of the answers to these questions, I want to suggest, lie in a reading of the romance structure in Maru that does not see it merely as a vehicle for another message (read usually as one of racial unity). Nor do these answers lie in a reading which takes the romance literally and thus as an attempt to represent an "egalitarian marriage" (Kibera, 1991:322). I further want to suggest that readings which posit the ending of Maru as unsatisfactory, or even naive, are a symptom of the way in which Head's work has been generally read.[5] A reading of Maru which is able to account for its ending must be one that sees Head using the romance structure in a far more radical way than merely as a vehicle (or metaphor) for another message.

While the prolepsis presents us with the way Maru translates his dream into reality it is not the only representation of his dream. Zoë Wicomb points out that Margaret "paints her dream, which, in fact, is a projection of her powerful suitor's desire, and which later, when he sweeps her off into marriage is translated into reality" (1990:43). Wicomb claims that Margaret, "by separating the scene of his desire into discrete paintings, in other words by denying the unity of the composition, ... disrupts the realization of his dreams" (1990:43). Following Wicomb's suggestion then, it is to Margaret's paintings that this analysis must eventually turn in order to re-read the paintings of Maru's dream.

It seems vital, however, to locate any discussion of the paintings within the role of art, and how it is used, in Maru. Not only must Margaret's art be read in conjunction with, or

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[5] See Linda Susan Beard's insightful summary of Head criticism:

> [a] brief overview of Head scholarship reveals a preoccupation with one of three foci: the autobiographical madness, more or less, reconfigured in her work; Head's feminist ideology; or her seemingly apolitical commentary. These are usually treated as isolated, monochromatic lenses. (1991:577)

As an example of this kind of scholarship she, like Daymond, quotes Cecil Abrahams. I follow her suggestion that Head's work both undermines and supersedes this kind of criticism and that scholarship which is able to adequately animate Head's work must have a broader vision than the "isolated monochromatic lenses".

against (as the text itself suggests) Margaret Cadmore senior's art, Margaret senior's art also plays a vital role in the formation of Margaret's identity.[6] Right from the beginning of Margaret's life art plays a crucial role in that the only contact she has with her history or heredity is through art. It is also through a close reading of Margaret's art that I believe one can begin to discern the crucial role that Margaret plays in the text. While much has been made, in Maru scholarship, of Maru's dream, this dream is far from perfect as is certainly shown in the prolepsis. Yet, as I hope to point out, Margaret's art gives us another perspective on this dream and suggests that her role in creating a new society is a pivotal one.

Art thus becomes a radical space in Maru where other meanings exist. Yet art is also used to *change* meanings. Margaret's relationship with art begins with the sketch Margaret's foster mother makes of the Masarwa woman, Margaret junior's biological mother, and with its inscription: "She looks like a Goddess". This, as Wicomb points out, is not a caption which would have simply read "Goddess" from which the viewer would infer the comparison (1990:43). What Margaret senior's inscription does is to disrupt the naturalization of the meaning of the sign and language by which people are normally (dis)placed. The inscription as signifier for the sign of the drawing causes a rupture here between signifier and signified and thus points to the way in which language can be used to disrupt conventional meaning and how through meshing contradictory image and text the arbitrariness of the sign and its associative meanings can be re-invoked. Or as Wicomb puts it:

> The represented image can be altered through language: contradictory relations between image and text demand that the image be re-read, and a re-assessment of the visual information involves a change in the underlying presuppositions. The transparency of the image is questioned; the process of re-reading brings home the fact that what we see is ideologically mediated and that an alternative intervention in the process of seeing can produce a new meaning for the Masarwa woman. In the same way a proposition that starts off as false can, through cross-readings between image and text, become true. (1990:43)

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[6] See Maru (1987:87) where Dikeledi compares the style of the two Margarets as artists.

Here is an example of the way in which Head interrogates naturalized meaning in Maru and the relationship between what is assumed to be false and what is assumed to be true -- about the Masarwa. It is not only the transparency of the image that is questioned, but the transparency of language as well. While (naturalized) language is the way in which people are (dis)placed, language may also become a source of liberation when it disrupts conventional meaning.

The signifying relationship between the inscription and the image gives Margaret an alternative vision of being Masarwa. She first announces to Dikeledi "I am a Masarwa" in answer to the question about whether her father was a white man. When Dikeledi tells her that she should "keep silent about the matter" Margaret produces the picture, seemingly in explanation of her statement: "I am not ashamed of being a Masarwa" (1987:24). Without this inscription, the drawing of Margaret's real mother would be open to reinterpretation and re-inscription and could thus be subject to the same derisive labels that are attached to the Masarwa. However, because Margaret Cadmore senior attached this inscription the image is weighed down with (different) signified meaning.

The process of weighing down a signifier with a signified is the process that Roland Barthes described as creating meaning (1983:98). Through this weighing down history, or historically constructed meaning, is turned into nature and meaning becomes naturalized (1983:116). It is through precisely this process that the Masarwa have been made into "animals" in the first place. The discussion, in Maru, of scientists writing "a treatise on how Bushmen are an oddity of the human race" describes this process of naturalization exactly where historically constructed meaning is turned into nature or truth. Margaret Cadmore senior *re-enacts* the process of weighing down a signifier with a new, now positive, meaning and thus disrupts, or deconstructs, the (already) naturalized meaning of the sign of Masarwa. It is this unconventional understanding of her own Masarwa-ness which Margaret gains through art that drives the narrative of the novel.

By making the assertion "I am Masarwa" Margaret *lives* the rupture which has been set up by Margaret Senior's drawing and text. People see her and expect a "Masarwa" yet Margaret does not fit this expectation in the same way in which Margaret's senior's inscription

does not "fit" the image. While Head astutely articulates the binaries according to which (racial) identity is constructed in Maru, Masarwa have no one to whom they can turn around and say "At least I am not a ---" (1987:11). For the dominant groups, as Driver points out, "identity depends on the definition of the other as subordinate and loathed" (1996a:47). Margaret, however, as Driver articulates it, "is able to know herself as a Masarwa not by positioning an `other' but by placing that `I' in its own space" (1996:47). Yet this is precisely what the Masarwa are not supposed to be able to do:

> "They don't look you in the face and say, `I am a Masarwa.' ... They all listened to him with bulging eyes. Who had ever said, "I am a Masarwa"? It sent thrills of fear down their spines. They all owned slaves. (1987:44)

Thus when Margaret speaks, she does not speak from the traditional space of the Masarwa, which is one of silence and of being the object of somebody else's discourse:

> It was odd, because she had a vantage point from which she could observe the behaviour of a persecutor. What did it really mean when another child walked up to her and, looking so angry, said: "You are just a Bushman"? In their minds it meant so much. (1987:17)

She is somewhere else, in a position that no one can easily identify because she does not occupy the place allotted to her in the binary hierarchized symbolic system that constitutes social reality:

> It was the first time she had spoken and she [Dikeledi] could not quite place her [Margaret] in the scheme of things. The near perfect English accent and manners did not fit her looks. In fact, not one thing about her fitted another and she looked half like a Chinese and half like an African and half like God knows what (1987:23).

"Nothing tallied with Margaret Cadmore, whether Bushman or what" (1987:88). This is because

> [h]er mind and heart were composed of a little bit of everything she had absorbed from Margaret Cadmore. It was hardly

> African or anything but something new and universal, a type of personality that would be unable to fit into a definition of something as narrow as tribe or race or nation. (1987:15/6)
> ...
> in her heart she had grown beyond any definition. (1987:20)

Thus Margaret cannot be contained by the conventional meaning of the sign Masarwa. She is constantly dismantling perceptions about what a Masarwa should be and also always exceeding the boundaries of the (constructed) definition and place of Masarwa. There is thus, as Driver points out, a healthy split between the subject and object of enunciation when Margaret declares "I am Masarwa" (1996a:47).

Elleke Boehmer claims that Margaret Cadmore, who is marginalized on a number of counts because "she is a woman, an orphan, and above all a Marsarwa" (sic), finds a way of becoming an agent and "tak[ing] charge of the process of replication and produc[ing] her own images by beginning to paint" (1993:269). Margaret, she says "is granted selfhood [only] insofar as she is [first] reproduced, as image, like her mother; insofar as she is filled with another's subjectivity" (1993:269). Boehmer sees painting as the way in which Margaret escapes from her foster mother's reproduction of herself (in Margaret). Boehmer re-states the fact that in colonial representation the colonized was cast as corporeal and carnal and therefore silenced. The body of the colonized Other also became available as text that was to be read and interpreted by the colonizer. Head talks in very similar terms about the way in which the Masarwa were treated by the discourse of Western Science (1987:11). There is a sinister echo of this when Margaret Cadmore senior is also named by the text as "a scientist in her heart" (1987:15). While Margaret senior (re)produces Margaret's real mother on canvas, she also attempts to (re)produce herself within Margaret Cadmore junior, whom she names after herself and who becomes her experiment of creation:

> She was also a scientist in her heart with a lot of fond, pet theories, one of her favourite ... being: environment everything; heredity nothing. ... She had a real, living object for her experiment. Who knew what wonder could be created? (1987:15)

Thus, says Boehmer,

> This logic of replication is halted and reversed only when Margaret Cadmore, the Masarwa, takes charge of the process of replication and produces her own images by beginning to paint. (1993:269)

Wicomb makes a similar point about Margaret's painting but takes it much further than Boehmer does. She makes a compelling claim that it is not just being the object of Margaret senior's projections that Margaret junior must evade and counter, but being the object of Maru's projections and being a character in *his* dream.

> In representation we find a key to deconstructing the marginal-central casting of race and gender -- both the heroine's relation to representing as well as being represented. She paints her dream which is ... a projection of her powerful suitor's desire, ... which ... is translated into reality. But by separating the scene of his desire into discrete paintings, in other words by denying the unity of the composition, she disrupts the realization of his dreams. Head clandestinely represents the heroine's resistance to total subjugation through creating a space in which she could insert inventions of her own, representing her own desires. (1990:43)

If Margaret junior is the object of Margaret senior's experiment as a Masarwa, then in Maru's plan she features as both *woman and Masarwa.* In fact, it is only after Moleka has fallen in love with Margaret that Maru decides he will marry her, and thwart Moleka's plans, suggesting, as Linda Beard implies, that this desire is imitative (1991:581). Yet there is another, perhaps even more sinister, echo in the text of the term "experiment" regarding Margaret and it is spoken by Maru:

> Everything I have done has been <u>an experience, an experiment</u>. I have just moved on to <u>more experience, more experiment</u>. When she [Margaret] walked into the office this afternoon I merely said: <u>That's one more experience for me</u>, but it shows all the signs of being a good one. A woman like that would make sure that I am an never tempted to make a public spectacle of myself. (1987:70, emphasis mine)

Given the conflation of the words "experience" and "experiment" in the quotation I think that it is safe to assume that Margaret is just one more *experiment* for Maru. Yet as her paintings reveal she is never entirely the object of his experiment.

Wicomb's reading of Margaret's denying the unity of Maru's vision is crucial to my investigation of the paintings in relation to the prolepsis and it is worth examining this by borrowing some concepts from film theory; to me it seems as though Margaret's three paintings of Maru's unified vision represent an almost frame by frame deconstruction of the unity of Maru's dream.

Recent psychoanalytically based film theory has alerted us to the way in which film presents us with a unified, unfolding vision that reinforces our notions both about the film's "naturalness" and thus about our own individuality and autonomy. The frame by frame construction of this "naturalness" of film is usually precisely the activity that one is blind to:

> The events, people, landscapes and objects of the film, its fictional reality, are always and necessarily seen from a fixed point in its imaginary space, one that is occupied by the spectator. Thus visually positioned, the spectator is blinded to the work of the film, its frame by frame construction of what passes for reality. And just as the succession of the frames is effaced in favour of a continuous vision, so too is the film's ideological operation. Far from disrupting the unitary, perspectivally-defined position of the spectator's vision thereby revealing both their and the spectator's contingency, the succession of images in fact augments the spectator's imaginary dominance. (Lapsley and Westlake, 1989:79-80)

I want to borrow some ideas from this theory which will, I think, illuminate the way in which Margaret's paintings actually function *in opposition* to the way in which Maru sees them. The theory, to which I refer above, locates film in Lacan's Imaginary realm where spectators are offered unified images which are, nevertheless, frame-by-frame constructions. Yet one does not, in conventional film, see these individual frames and the unified image is therefore misrecognised in the same way in which one's own unity is first misrecognised in the mirror phase, which inaugurates the Imaginary.[7] Using these ideas can, I think, illustrate what takes place in Maru, as well as elaborate on Wicomb's reading.

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[7] For Lacan's mirror stage, see Lacan, "The mirror stage as formative function of the I" in Écrits, 1977, 1-7. I am specifically invoking Lacan's concept of the "body-in-fragments": in the mirror stage (between six and eighteen months) the infant misrecognises the wholeness of the image for itself and forgets the bits and pieces it really feels itself to be. I do not, however, want to introduce Lacan's mirror stage in a literal way here. I think that it serves as an

Margaret re-creates Maru's dream yet, as Wicomb's crucial point indicates, she separates his dream into three paintings or, I am suggesting, frames. Yet Maru does not see this. He sees only that she shares his dream. Thus while Margaret does *not* offer Maru a unified "mirror" image or reflection of his dream, this is how he misrecognises her three paintings, thereby reinforcing his own sense of control and autonomy - in this case over Margaret. It is crucial that the text gives us Margaret's alternative representation of Maru's dream (represented by the prolepsis) and that Margaret's alternative representation denies the possibility of the fulfilment of this dream. Thus the vision of Maru's dream in the prolepsis, with its already ambiguous representation of Margaret's life, is even further undermined by Margaret's paintings.

The significance of Margaret's deconstructive act is thrown into stark relief if one compares the three paintings with the one painting Margaret composes for Moleka. It is then that we can see how Margaret not only paints her resistance into one set of pictures, she paints her desire into another. Thus here the two rooms of the prolepsis, between which Margaret divides herself, seem to be prefigured, especially the room in which she totally loves Moleka. However, a more detailed analysis of the three paintings of Maru's projected desire leads into a comparison with Moleka's painting.

There is a curious ambiguity about the "yellow light" in the three pictures of Maru's dream. In the first picture of the house a queer light shines out of the windows which "did not look like lamplight and it revolved gently" (1987:103). The second picture of the yellow daisies reveals that this light is yellow: "[t]heir movement also created this effect of gently revolving light" (1987:103). In the third painting of the couple they are surrounded by this "yellow light" and embrace "in a blaze of light". It is fascinating that "yellow light" could represent either moonlight and thus represent Maru, or sunlight and thus represent Moleka (1987:58). A re-reading of this description seems to have suggestions of sunlight or at least that "half-sun" that "gazed with a glowing eye into her heart" in the painting she does for Moleka (1987:113) or the "half-suns glowing on the horizons of her heart" (1987:93). That

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excellent metaphor for the way in which Margaret offers Maru deconstructed images of his dream; yet he misrecognises these as his own vision which, in his own mind, is complete.

fact that this yellow light *could* represent the sun, that it is not definitely Maru, suggests that the other room in which "she totally loved Moleka" is prefigured here and perhaps arises out of her painting.

It is thus extremely significant that the same ambiguity is represented here in the paintings and in the prolepsis with its two rooms. This seems to suggest that what the prolepsis presents is the fulfilment of *Margaret's* version of Maru's dream, rather than his own. While Margaret paints Maru's dream and desire she also paints her own resistance and desire into it. If the prolepsis represents the translation of Maru's dream into reality then it still retains Margaret's desire.

Yet when Maru sees these three paintings he misinterprets or misrecognises them as merely a reflection of *his* dream: "'If we have the same dreams perhaps that means something'" (1987:107). Thus as Driver claims:

> In Maru's eyes most of the paintings confirm his power over Margaret. He believes that he recognises their vision of a shared destiny and so he starts to think and behave as Margaret's saviour and protector, finally taking her as his wife. (1996a:47)

The full extent of Maru's misrecognition is clear only once these paintings of Maru's dream are contrasted with the one painting Margaret does *for* Moleka. While Maru's paintings are divided, the one for Moleka is all-embracing:

> Its contours began from the slope of her hillside, encircled the village and swept towards the horizon where a half-sun gazed with a glowing eye into her heart. Only the two people who stood at the doorway with their still, unchanging love remained forever anonymous. (1987:113)

The contrast with Maru's vision is startling: as opposed to division, there is unity. Margaret has ownership and a sense of belonging: it is *her* hillside. The picture also speaks *to* her: a "half-sun [Moleka] gazed with a glowing eye into her heart". Here Margaret is also both subject and object, both viewer and character in painting, but there is reciprocity: she observes the picture as spectator but there is a gazing back from the painting. The divided *half*-sun

seems to suggest the two rooms between which she will divide herself. The adjectives that are used to describe this love between Margaret and Moleka -- "still", "unchanging", "forever" -- are very strong indeed and suggest a permanence that Maru will never be able to overcome, hence perhaps the other room which renders him a "helpless victim". The contrast between this description of the love between the two people and the resistance which Margaret expresses towards the couple in Maru's last painting is also striking.

It is interesting that Moleka is represented in relation to Margaret as a *half*-sun. There is the painting with its half-sun but also the "half-suns that glowed on the horizons of her heart":

> It was Moleka. Now and then she would pass him in the village. She could see quite clearly that he made a secret of the matter but his eyes glowed like the early morning sunrise when he glanced at her. The strange thing was that the love aroused no violent passions but blended in with the flow and rhythm of life in Dilepe. (1987:93)

The emphasis on *half* seems to prefigure that half of her life in which she totally loves Moleka. While in the quotation above Moleka is associated with the sunrise, in her painting he seems to be represented in the sunset. The setting sun in the painting seems to represent the future she *might* have had with Moleka because with the loss of the canvas "what was behind was done with" (1987:116). Yet the painting seems to have created a reality of its own with that "still, unchanging love" as the love between Margaret and Moleka is not totally displaced. It seems to exist through the painting.

The painting communicates Margaret's desire to Moleka. The reception which the paintings for Maru and Moleka receive, from the two men, are as different as the paintings themselves:

> How was she to know that Moleka would receive her gift after all, in an unexpected way, and that the message of its stillness and peace would reach his heart and that he would know that he was as powerful as the earth and the sky. It would set him free... In this strange tangle of secret events, secretly they all assisted each other... It was to seem as though [Moleka] came home each night specially to look at it... It was to become an important part of their life together. (187:116-7)

Thus, Dikeledi's life with Moleka is facilitated by Margaret's painting. The painting very clearly becomes a powerful and effective vehicle for Margaret's desire: she not only expresses her desire in the painting, but it ends up with Moleka and communicates with him just as it has communicated with Margaret.

This is in contrast with Maru's paintings where Margaret's expression of resistance seems to go astray because of Maru's arrogant assumption that they reflect his desire. The paintings for Maru and Moleka, both in terms of their actual content and their reception, reveal Margaret's desire but they disclose even more about the two men who ultimately own them.

Maru's reaction when he gets the painting which Margaret intended for Moleka is particularly revealing. When Maru sees the painting he knows it is not for him and rejects it: "Maru ... stared at it coldly for some time and said: `No, you keep it. I don't like it ... It's not for me'" (1987:116). Maru, in rejecting the painting, also denies Margaret her desire for Moleka. Although he banishes the painting from his sight, which we know is unreliable, this merely facilitates the painting ending up with Moleka where it communicates Margaret's desire to him. So although Maru disposes of the painting, his total authority is ultimately undermined. While he prevents any union between Margaret and Moleka, Margaret's painting still carries her message of desire which Moleka receives. Painting thus becomes a very powerful space where Margaret can express those desires which she does not speak. Thus, while Maru is constructing his dream, Margaret is constructing her own and is thus never entirely under Maru's (authorial) control. Thus, to return to Wicomb's statement:

> Head clandestinely represents the heroine's resistance to total subjugation through creating a space in which she could insert inventions of her own, representing her own desires. (1990:43)

It is also through her paintings that Margaret "creates" the new world which Maru sees. Margaret's paintings speak to Maru:

> Maru took in the whole range and depth of her pictures ... She choose her themes from the ordinary, common happenings in

> the village as though those themes were the best expression of her own vitality. The women carried water buckets up the hill but the eye was thrown, almost by force, towards the powerful curve of a leg muscle, resilience in the back and neck...
> ...
> the message of the pictures went deeper to his heart: You see it is I and my tribe who possess the true vitality of this country. You lost it when you sat down and let us clean your floors and rear your children and cattle. (1987:109)

Margaret thus gives Maru part of his vision. If her three paintings of Maru's desire are projections from Maru, then Margaret also projects her own visions to Maru through painting. Margaret also recreates Dikeledi as she has Moleka:

> Dikeledi, with her delicate expressions and coddled life was given the same treatment... and ... a third Dikeledi was emerging, who sat alone and aloof and stared with deep, penetrating eyes on the value of her own kingdom. (1987:107-8)

Maru marries Margaret because of her creative power: he marries her because *she* has a kingdom:

> But she looked down at him, indifferently, from a great height, where she was more than his equal. It had nothing to do with the little bit of education she had acquired from a missionary. He treated everyone as a single, separate entity, and measured the length and breadth and depth and height of their kingdoms with one, alert glance. ... People who had nothing were evil and malicious ... People who had kingdoms were careful not to betray those gods who dwelt inside those kingdoms. How few they were (1987:64).
> ...
> 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?* (emphasis mine, 1987:67)

Maru is right about this: Margaret is the centre of a creative force. Not only does she create Moleka as god overnight but she is also the catalyst for all the changes that occur in Dilepe throughout the novel. It is as though when Margaret herself embodies the unravelling of the sign of Masarwa, all the other signs and identities seem to begin to unravel as well.

Several critics have spoken about the way in which the quartet of main characters seem to embody aspects of one another or allegorically make up one or more composite character.[8] Beard locates this in Head's resistance to her apartheid past, saying that she is demonstrating the divisiveness of apartheid (Beard, 1991:581).[9] Yet if Head is talking about the false divisions between people, she is also demonstrating, orchestrating the exact opposite movement. Talking about the contrast between South Africa and Botswana Head claimed that in South Africa there were so many "divisions and signs you end up with no people at all". This situation defeated her as a writer and she "had no way of welding all the people together into a cohesive whole" (1990:62). In Maru, set in Botswana where "[a]ll those shattered bits began to grow together" (1978:429) Head seems to show how tenuous those divisions and signs are and how when characters stop constructing themselves in opposition to an other ("At least I am not a ___"), thereby stopping the process of death-dealing opposites, they can (re)create aspects of themselves and each other. Hélène Cixous has articulated the concept that where there are binaries, death must always be at work on one side because binaries are always *hierarchized* (1988:288). Thus while Maru reveals this deathly process of constructing meaning in relation to an other, it also demonstrates an alternative. Driver has described how Head's characters are

> gods and goddesses engaged in re-creating themselves and one another in a process too continuous and too variable to allow for the fixity of labels. (1996a:47)

In this process, as Driver points to, the self/other distinction can no longer be maintained. Margaret is at the creative centre of this activity.

In Maru Head seems to have developed the cosmic level which was alluded to in the text of The Cardinals more completely. The association between Maru-as-the-moon and Moleka-as-the-sun is clearly represented in the text (1987:58). While much has been written

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[8] See Beard, 1991:582.

[9] Beard reads this as only one of Head's multiple's voices (see 1991:582-3).

about the two male protagonists the female protagonists are often not mentioned in this cosmic scheme. Yet Dikeledi is the earth:

> Dikeledi's kingdom was like that of the earth and its deep centre which absorbed the light and radiation of a billion suns and planets and kept on dreaming and brooding, creating life in an eternal cycle. (1987:83)

Margaret, I want to suggest, fits into this cosmic scheme as the creator. Maru is first interested in her when she re-creates Moleka the savage as Moleka the god:

> 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? (1987:67)

Yet while Maru marries Margaret because of her creative power he also appropriates her creativity into his own dream. In doing so he selects what he wants from Margaret's vision and rejects what he does not, as he rejects her painting for Moleka. Margaret thus becomes subject to Maru's kingship when he practically forces the marriage upon her:

> A day had come when he had decided that he did not need any kingship other than the kind of wife everybody would loathe from the bottom of their hearts. (1987:6)

He thus incorporates Margaret into his plan. While this new world which Maru dreams about is one in which he seems to be moving away from a narrow definition of race, in one way he marries Margaret *because* she *is* Masarwa. Yet, of course, Margaret is also *not* Masarwa: she cannot be contained by the sign. Yet she is still *seen* as Masarwa in Dilepe: "When people of Dilepe village heard about the marriage of Maru they began to talk about him as if he had died ... 'He has married a Masarwa. They have no standards.'" (1987:126).

Yet the Masarwa themselves experience liberation:

> When the people of the Masarwa tribe heard about Maru's marriage to one of their own, a door silently opened on the small, dark airless room in which their souls had been shut for a long time. (1987:126)

If the room at the end of the book signifies the entrapment of labels or "divisions and signs", then what do the *two* rooms signify at the beginning of the book (which is actually the end)?

This must read as part of the function of the prolepsis in general. When Margaret marries Maru she becomes subject to his kingship and loses that "static endless hour" of her creative kingdom. Given the way I have suggested the paintings function to give us Margaret's version of Maru's vision (as well as the way in which Maru arbitrates over her painted creation and desire) the marriage then, is ultimately *not* the solution or resolution that scholars have suggested it is. That is why Head gives us this ambiguous prolepsis which warns us to read the ensuing story carefully. Margaret's resistance is built into that story through her painting.

Yet while the marriage *may* liberate Margaret from being placed in the position of Masarwa by others -- she will no longer be subject to the "tin cans rattling" (1987:18) -- she is now subject to happiness alternating with misery and being tossed about on permanently restless seas (1987:115). Thus reading the two rooms of the prolepsis through the metaphor of the captivity of the small, dark airless room reinforces what the rest of the text suggests, which is that marriage to Maru does not represent liberty for Margaret because Maru denies her desires and subjects her kingdom to his kingship.

If one reads the room as a metaphor of captivity in stereotype (as with the Masarwa) then this reading could be taken even further to suggest that both rooms, and perhaps both relationships with Maru and Moleka, represent some sort of captivity for Margaret even though neither of them can confine her. The way in which they hold her captive is perhaps not as Masarwa but as *woman*. Maru rejects Margaret's painting for Moleka but cannot entirely displace her desire for Moleka - she still expresses it in the other room. His response to this other room speaks of Maru's attempt to rule over Margaret in the same way that he did over her paintings. It also speaks simultaneously of Margaret's continual resistance to this process.

Yet Margaret has become another Dikeledi and Dikeledi had the "devotion of a dog" and "dog love" for Moleka (1987:28). Thus the fact that Margaret loves Moleka in another *room*, perhaps suggests the confining nature of this relationship as well. The idea of the room as captivity is reinforced by the description of the clouds which opens Maru: "They were not

promising rain. They were prisoners, pushed back, in trapped coils of boiling cloud" (1987:5). The "secret in their activity" in the "*evening*" could refer to the "other room" where Margaret goes in her dreams at *night* (1987:8). The word "secret" refers back to Margaret's painting for Moleka (1987:117) and the "boiling cloud" seems, in this reading, to prefigure the "hot tears" Margaret cries for Moleka at night.

Yet this "secret" also applies to plans Maru made to marry Margaret: "He had planned for that loathing in secret" (1987:6). Maru is also associated with the clouds: "there was a depth of secret activity in him like that long, low, line of black, boiling cloud" (1987:8). Maru is associated with the black clouds and "prisoners". While at one level I think that this could be read as Maru's attempted domination of Margaret and the room in which she loves him, there is a clear suggestion that Maru is also trapped somehow. While Margaret looks up "fearfully" when Maru enters the house, he watches "fearfully" over the other room at night. Maru has to watch the other room fearfully because although he has denied Margaret's desire for Moleka he cannot destroy it and the male rivalry for Margaret still persists, at least in Maru's mind. It is this uncertainty which makes Maru malicious and which makes Margaret, in turn, look up fearfully. Thus this suggests that relationships which are based on a denial of women's creativity and desires can only result in ultimate entrapment for both people involved. Margaret's two rooms are also a poor replacement for the creative cosmic resonances of her panting.

Thus the question posed in the prolepsis, "Was that not only a beginning?" seems to speak of the need for a new beginning for women; perhaps a space where Margaret can re-define "*woman*" as she has "Masarwa": where her desires as woman can be articulated, as they were in her paintings, *and* fulfilled and where she can *continue* to create. Thus Head seems to "confirm that gender is a fundamental ground of subjectivity" to use de Lauretis' term (1988:135). De Lauretis makes the point that black women experience racism not as "Blacks" but as Black *women* -- neither term is homogeneous (1988:135).

Thus scholarship which sees the marriage merely as a racial resolution seems to miss the multiple foci of Head's text which animates the need for black women to have space as creators. The marriage is ultimately *not* the solution or resolution that scholars have suggested

it is. That is why Head gives us this ambiguous prolepsis -- precisely so that the marriage at the end will not represent the "happily ever after" solution. The real new world which Head points to lies, not in the society represented in the prolepsis, but in the creative freedom and force of Margaret's paintings and the level of cosmic creativity she seems to inaugurate through which the characters become engaged in a process of recreating each other. Maru thus begins to suggest that when black women have this space, they will begin to show us all other ways of creating (their- and our-selves).

Margaret's painting thus resembles *writing* in The Cardinals where Mouse (and Head) can express their selves through *fiction*. Margaret senior's painting began to open up that space, through the loosening of naturalised relationship between signifier, signified and sign. This process is then taken over by Margaret herself who not only lives the rupture between the subject and object of enunciation but begins to reproduce a new world in which people are recreated, sometimes even as one another. While, as Barthes has indicated, the fascism of language lies in its very consequentiality, Margaret does not seem to be subject to this. In her utterance of identity, "I am Masarwa", Margaret is never unified within, or by, that statement. Thus the present of her utterance never coincides with her self. She thus moves *through* the sign of Masarwa and is not contained by it. She cannot be contained by language. Margaret exceeds the space allotted to her by the linguistic sign and thereby deconstructs its naturalised meaning; in doing so she begins to undermine all the other naturalised identities and divisions.

If "the Cardinals" represent the tentative possibility of another kind of language through which a new world can be created and people will be free of labels, then Margaret and Maru represents Head's creation of that new world through language. In Maru Head mobilises a new world through language where characters are involved in recreating one another in an interdependent universe "in a process too continuous and too variable to allow for the fixity of labels" to reiterate Driver's words. This creation is the exact opposite of the death-dealing binary oppositions and is replaced, in the example of Margaret and Dikeledi, by "constant communication and affection" which "assisted the subconscious change in the way Dikeledi became more like Margaret and Margaret more like Dikeledi" (1987:112).

Margaret stops painting after her marriage to Maru. She is forced to exchange her painting for the two rooms where although, because of her movement, she cannot be *confined* she is *defined* (perhaps as woman) rather than where she is creator. Yet in this very ending of Margaret's creation lies the beginning of *Head*'s creation: it is the contrast between Margaret's life as a painter and her subsequent movement between the two rooms which speaks of the need for black women to have space to express, and create, their desires.

Audre Lorde, talking about poetry, which can be read as *writing*, could be referring to the decade of Head's *writing*, discussed in this thesis, when she says:

> For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest external horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by poems .... Poetry is not only dream or vision, it is the skeleton architecture of our lives. (Quoted in Fullbrook, 1990:212)

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