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CONTENTS

Editorial: A Tradition of Black Women As Writers	2
Readers' Forum	3
Features	
Photographic Essay: SAGE Staff	4
Angelina Weld Grimké, Mary T. Burrill, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Marita O. Bonner: An Analysis of Their Plays DORIS E. ABRAMSON	9
<i>The Color Purple</i> : Revisions and Redefinitions MAE G. HENDERSON	14
Women and Identity: A Black Francophone Female Perspective KAREN SMYLEY WALLACE	19
Woman and Womanchild: Bonding and Selfhood in Three West Indian Novels by Women YAKINI KEMP	24
The Scary Face of the Self: An Analysis of the Character of Sula in Toni Morrison's <i>Sula</i> NAANA BANYIWA-HORNE	28
✓ Venturing into Feminist Consciousness: Two Protagonists from the Fiction of Buchi Emecheta and Bessie Head NANCY TOPPING BAZIN	32
Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker: A Spiritual Kinship ALMA FREEMAN	37
Mothering and Healing in Recent Black Women's Fiction CAROLE DAVIES	41
Close-Up	
Black Women Writing: Creating More Space BELL HOOKS	44
INTERVIEWS WITH BLACK WOMEN WRITERS	
Dorothy West at Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts LORRAINE ELENA ROSES	47
Buchi Emecheta at Spelman College THELMA RAVELL-PINTO	50
A Conversation with Lucille Clifton THEMA BRYANT	52
BLACK WOMEN'S PRIVATE WRITINGS: EXCERPTS FROM DIARIES AND JOURNALS	
From the Alice Walker Journals ALICE WALKER	53
Journals and Jive Talk: Random Thoughts PEARL CLEAGE	54
Excerpts from a Dakar Diary FLORENCE CAWTHORNE LADD	55
Filling in the Gaps in Black Women's Herstory ELEANOR SMITH	56
At Yaddo BARBARA SMITH	58
A Summer in School with Mother HARRYETTE MULLEN	60
Document	
A Letter (with Poem) from Georgia Douglas Johnson to Lugenia Burns Hope ELEANOR HINTON HOYTT	62
Reviews	
Sharp Focus on Black Life: <i>A Century of Black Photographers, 1840-1960</i> ALVIA J. WARDLAW	64
<i>No Crystal Stair: Visions of Race and Sex in Black Women's Fiction</i> MIRIAM DeCOSTA-WILLIS	66
<i>Clay's Ark</i> HODA M. ZAKI	67
Resource Round-up	
African-American Women Writers: A Selected Listing of Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations JANET SIMS-WOOD	69
Newscope	71

VENTURING INTO FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS: Two Protagonists from the Fiction of Buchi Emecheta and Bessie Head

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Media reports about international women's meetings and even sessions at the National Women's Studies Association conferences, too often perpetuate the myth that third world women hold women's issues in low priority. It is important, therefore, to note that two of the best novels by contemporary Black African women writers focus upon the growing feminist consciousness of their protagonists. Nnu Ego in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joy's of Motherhood* (1979) and Elizabeth in Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* (1974) both move away from innocence into an understanding of the patriarchal culture in which they live. They gain this understanding through experiences so overwhelming and horrifying that each woman barely survives. However, the two protagonists emerge from their ventures with strength, wisdom, and clarity of vision they did not previously possess.

Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* illuminates brilliantly the meaning of Adrienne Rich's concept, "the institution of motherhood."¹ Although the general public rarely perceives the distinction, feminists are not against biological motherhood but they are against what Rich describes—namely, the patriarchal use of motherhood to keep women relatively powerless. Buchi Emecheta's novel begins with Nnu Ego, in a state of despair, running blindly towards the river to drown herself. Nnu Ego has already lost one husband because she did not become pregnant, and the son she had born for her second husband has just died. As this point Nnu Ego attempts suicide because, when pain and anger rose inside of her, "sometimes anger came to the fore, but the emotional pain always won."² By the end of the book, her consciousness allows the anger to dominate the pain, thereby giving her the power to act and to choose rather than simply to suffer. Like Elizabeth in Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*, Nnu Ego never achieves much freedom. However, anger has forced her to analyze the situation of women, thus giving her the basis for wiser decisions.

Buchi Emecheta frequently uses African belief systems to provide the framework for her story.³ In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego's initial infertility is said to be the revengeful work of her father's slave girl who became understandably angry when she was told she must accept the custom of being buried alive with her dead mistress. Although "a good slave was supposed to jump into the grave willingly," even happily, this slave had to be killed to make her lie still (p. 23). To free Nnu Ego from the young slave woman's curse, the father frees all his slaves (p. 35). Longing so for the baby required by the community, Nnu Ego dreams that a baby boy is offered

to her; as she wades across a stream to get it, the slave woman laughs mockingly at her and the water rises so she cannot reach the baby. Ironically, she is glorified after her death by a shrine, and she herself has become the woman in the other world who denies fertility to young wives: "however many people appealed to her to make women fertile, she never did!" (p. 224). She denies them fertility, however, not like the slave woman, to be vengeful, but rather to save them from the fate she had known. The change from weeping because she is childless, to anger because she spent the rest of her life bearing nine children and caring for the seven who lived, is the consequence of the feminist consciousness she has acquired through her experiences.

Nnu Ego has long been aware of the cruel treatment women received from men. In her flight towards suicide, she recalls the tales of her father's polygamous behavior. He had at his disposal seven wives and two mistresses. He flaunted his favoritism for one of the two mistresses, Nnu Ego's mother, by noisily making love to her in the courtyard so all his neglected wives could hear. To dominate even this favorite, the father tried to reduce her "to longing and craving for him," to humiliate her "in her burning desire" (p. 20). This courtyard behavior caused his first wife to have a seizure and die (p. 22).

Nnu Ego also learned about patriarchal attitudes through her experiences with her first husband. When she does not become pregnant, she masochistically takes the blame: "I am sure the fault is on my side. You do everything right." (p. 31). But he feels free to make this cruel statement: "I have no time to waste my precious male seed on a woman who is infertile" (p. 32). Soon he takes a second wife who becomes pregnant the first month. The husband tells Nnu Ego: "I will do my duty by you. I will come to your hut when my wife starts nursing her child. But now, if you can't produce sons, at least you can help harvest yams" (p. 33). Such male behavior was usual; therefore, although Nnu Ego suffers, she continues to blame only herself for her pain.

Nnu Ego's education in the ways of the patriarch continues as her father buys her back from her first husband and sells her to another family. In each case, the bride price changes hands between the males. Although Nnu Ego finds herself in Lagos with an ugly, fat husband whom neither she nor her father had met, she feels she must accept the situation because the chief concern of her family back in Ibuza is that she get pregnant. She knows they will not tolerate any rebellion on her part. When she receives a message from home, it is,

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"Your big mother said I should tell your husband to hurry up and do his work because her arms are itching for a baby to rock" (p. 76). Given this kind of pressure from the family, her reaction to pregnancy is not surprising: "He has made me into a real woman—all I want to be, a woman and a mother" (p. 53). Although that first baby dies, she goes on to have two sons, Oshia and Adim. At times she is extremely miserable in the marriage, for example, when her husband inherits his dead brother's wives and brings one home to live with them. But still she cannot protest, for her father would say:

"Why do you want to stand in your husband's way? Please don't disgrace the name of the family again. What greater honour is there for a woman than to be a mother, and now you are a mother—not of daughters who will marry and go, but of good-looking healthy sons, and they are the first sons of your husband and you are his first and senior wife. Why do you wish to behave like a woman brought up in a poor household? (p. 119)

Even when she goes back for her father's funeral, she knows that people will soon say, "You have already proved you are a good daughter, but a good daughter must also be a good wife" (p. 155). Her roles of daughter, wife, and mother are rigidly defined and she is expected to fulfill them according to custom for, in her husband's words, "What else does a woman want?" (p. 49).

In addition to fulfilling her roles, which includes almost constant pregnancy, the two customs that cause Nnu Ego to suffer most are the practices of polygamy and son preference. Her husband Nnaife's attitude was: "If a woman cared for him, very good; if not, there would always be another who would care" (p. 95). When the second wife, Adaku, comes into their home, Nnu Ego observes: "Strange how in less than five hours Nnaife had become a rare commodity" (p. 121). She has to prepare her bed for Nnaife and Adaku and at night has to listen to their love-making. She tried to block her ears, yet could still hear Adaku's exaggerated carrying on. Nnu Ego tossed in agony and anger all night, going through in her imagination what was taking place behind the curtained bed" (p. 124). On Nnaife's first night home after the war, Nnu Ego endured his public declaration that he must go to Iboza to see another wife, Adankwo, inherited from his dead brother. He makes all the male visitors laugh by saying, "She must be longing for a man. For a woman to be without a man for five years! My brother will never forgive me" (p. 182). Although Nnu Ego becomes pregnant once again, he still visits Adankwo and gives her her "last menopausal baby" (p. 183). However, she will not go back to Lagos with him, so he pays the exceptionally high price of thirty pounds to bring home a sixteen-year-old bride (p. 184). Nnu Ego, who is expecting twins, screams at him, "We only have one room to share with my five children, and I'm expecting another two; yet you have brought another person. Have you been commissioned by the white people you fought for to replace those dead during the war?" (p. 184). Yet a neighbor quiets her by saying, "Your father would not be happy to see you behave this way." She does not think for herself, for "even in death Nwokocha Agbadi ruled his daughter. She belonged to both men, her father and her husband, and lastly to her sons. Yes, she would have to be careful if she did not want her sons' future wives to say, "But your mother was always jealous whenever her husband brought home a young wife" (p. 185).

Nnu Ego accepts for a long time the patriarchal attitude that sons are much more valuable than daughters. When she bears twin girls, she feels ashamed. Her worst fears are realized when

their father looks at them and say, "Nnu Ego, what are these? Could you not have done better? Where will we all sleep, eh? What will they eat?" (p. 127). Her co-wife Adaku consoles her by saying: "It's a man's world this. Still, senior wife, these girls when they grow up will be great helpers to you in looking after the boys. Their bride prices will be used in paying their school fees as well" (p. 127). Adaku herself is not respected because she has no male children. But ironically, the female loses either way. Simply because Nnu Ego was "the mother of three sons, she was supposed to be happy in her poverty, in her nail-biting agony, in her churning stomach, in her rags, in her cramped room...Oh, it was a confusing world" (p. 167). When Adaku loses a baby boy, she goes into deep depression. As Nnu Ego's son Oshia tries to console her by saying she still has her daughter Dumbi, Adaku snaps back, "You are worth more than ten Dumbis." From then on, Oshia realizes his superior status; he refuses to fetch water or help cook because "That's a woman's job." This behavior is excused by the community as being "just like a boy" (p. 128).

Nnu Ego follows the custom of expecting boys to get much more education than girls. Her daughters go to school for only a couple of years and, even at that, they must do petty trading after school; "the boys, on the other hand were encouraged to put more time into their school work" (p. 180). Nnu Ego tells her girls that they must do this work to raise money to educate the boys and "put them in a good position in life, so that they will be able to look after the family." The mother cites the reward for the girls: "When your husbands are nasty to you, they will defend you" (p. 176).

As Nnu Ego participates in the patriarchal system both as victim and as perpetrator of it, she is angry more and more frequently. She realizes more and more clearly that the institution of motherhood has greatly limited her freedom and power. When Nnaife gives his wives too little money for food, Nnu Ego finds that, because her children might starve if he becomes angry, her power to struggle against him is minimal:

"She was a prisoner, imprisoned by her love for her children, imprisoned in her role as the senior wife. She was not even expected to demand more money for her family; that was considered below the standard expected of a woman in her position. It was not fair, the way men cleverly used a woman's sense of responsibility to actually enslave her" (p. 137).

Growing more and more rebellious, she asks, "God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage?" She laments: "What have I gained from all this? Yes, I have many children, but what do I feed them on? On my life. I have to work myself to the bone to look after them" (p. 186). Even after her death, they will worship her dead spirit, and if things do not go well, they will blame her. In desperation she asks "When will I be free?" (p. 187).

Finally, through her experiences with her father, husbands, and sons, she has come to understand the patriarchal nature of her culture and her own role in perpetuating it:

"The men make it look as if we must aspire for children or die. That's why when I lost my first son I wanted to die, because I failed to live up to the standard expected of me by the males in my life, my father and my husband—and now I have to include my sons. But who made the law that we should not hope in our daughters? We women subscribe to that law more than anyone. Until we change all this, it is still a man's world, which women will always help to build" (p. 187)

Moreover, when Nnaife is proud of his sons, they are his children; but when they fail to meet his expectations, they are her children. Nnu Ego became fed up with "this two-way standard" (p. 206).

But Nnu Ego has awakened too late; she says at the end of the book, "I don't know how to be anything else but a mother" (p. 222). She has also recognized too late a fact that is evident to the reader all through the book—male and female perspectives are very far apart. Her drunken husband Nnaife tried to kill a potential son-in-law because he was from the wrong tribe, so he is put in jail. Her sons whom she expected to care for her in her old age are university students who neither write nor send money. The reality of her life is contrasted with the views of a man who is driving back to her home village:

"This life is very unfair for us men. We do all the work, you women take all the glory. You even live longer to reap the rewards. A son in America? You must be very rich, and I'm sure your husband is dead long ago . . ."

She did not think it worth her while to reply to this driver, who preferred to live in his world of dreams rather than face reality. What a shock he would have if she told him that her husband was in prison, or that the so-called son in America had never written to her directly, to say nothing of sending her money. If she should tell him that, he would look down on her and say, "But you're above all that, madam." (p. 223).

Nnu Ego's experiences have made her realize that women must work together to "change all this" (p. 187). Nnu Ego has ventured into feminist consciousness, but it is not until after her death that she is free to take action by denying fertility to the young women. She knows that the continuous pressure to bear sons that drives them to her shrine will enslave them as it did her. Freedom for them must begin with rejecting the patriarchal glorification of motherhood.

Nnu Ego's journey into feminist consciousness is through marriage and motherhood. Bessie Head's protagonist in *A Question of Power* arrives at the same destination through a bout of madness. In her mad nightmare world, Elizabeth struggles against and survives patriarchal efforts to manipulate her spiritual and sexual being. She is able to regain her sanity only by recognizing that she must not respond passively to those who wish to dominate her. But Bessie Head's protagonist goes beyond the rejection of domination as a principle that determines attitudes and behavior to the articulation of an egalitarian philosophy. Whereas Buchi Emecheta's focus is upon personal experiences and social customs in a patriarchal African culture, Bessie Head's concern is with the spiritual or philosophical significance of patriarchal behavior.

The title *A Question of Power* clarifies further what this novel is about.⁴ To Bessie Head whose daily life was shaped by the racist practices of South Africa and the sexist attitudes of the men she lived with, the question of who has the power is indeed important. Like Virginia Woolf, Zora Neale Hurston, and Doris Lessing, Bessie Head views the need of the male to see himself twice as big as he really is as one of the chief causes of unjust, undemocratic, and unkind behavior. In *A Question of Power* the male need to dominate and feel superior to others is represented by two men, Sello and Dan. They come to life and into power through the made imaginings of Elizabeth. They are so real to her that she talks with them and feels her life literally threatened by them. It is because Sello and Dan use every power they have to try to destroy Elizabeth psychologically

that she is mad. To regain her sanity, she must defeat them.

Elizabeth learns that Sello has already "killed several women," and he has molested his own child.⁵ Moreover, he is the creator of the powerful Medusa, who inhabits Elizabeth's mad world. His Medusa is really "the direct and tangible form of his own evils, his power lusts, his greeds, his self importance" (p. 40). Medusa, manipulated by Sello, tortures Elizabeth until she almost obliterates her: "It wasn't Elizabeth's body she was thrusting into extinction. It was the soul; the bolts were aimed at her soul. It seemed to make death that much slower, that much more piecemeal. The narrow, mean eyes of Sello in the brown suit stared at her over Medusa's shoulder" (p. 87).

Sello and Dan try to kill Elizabeth's spirit. They do this primarily through manipulating her feelings about sexuality and through using sexuality to degrade her. To undermine Elizabeth's sense of herself as a woman, Sello uses Medusa, and Dan uses his "seventy-one nice-time girls" (p. 173). Medusa with a smile offers Elizabeth some secret information:

It was about her vagina. Without any bother for decencies she sprawled her long black legs in the air, and the most exquisite sensation travelled out of her towards Elizabeth. It enveloped from head to toe like a slow, deep, sensuous bomb. It was like falling into deep, warm waters, lazily raising one hand and resting in a heaven of bliss. Then she looked at Elizabeth and smiled, a mocking superior smile: "You haven't got anything *near* that, have you?" (p. 44).

Sello displays before Elizabeth his own attraction to Medusa. He "issued a low moan of anguish. He seemed to be desperately attached to that thing Medusa had which no other woman had. And even this was a mockery. It was abnormally constructed, like seven thousand vaginas in one, turned on and operating at white heat" (p. 64).

Elizabeth is attracted to Dan's overwhelming masculinity: "He made a woman feel like an ancient and knowledgeable queen of love" (p. 106). But Dan displays his power not just over her but over all women. He sadistically parades his many women before her and his message to her is that she should be jealous: "I go with all these women because you are inferior. You cannot make it up to my level." But, of course, just at the moment when she decides she dislikes him and wants "to pull her mind out of the chaos," he says: "If you leave me I'll die, because I have nothing else" (p. 147).

One of the key images in Elizabeth's madness is Dan "standing in front of her, his pants down, as usual, flaying his powerful penis in the air saying: 'Look, I'm going to show you how I sleep with B . . . She has a womb I can't forget. When I go with a woman I go for one hour. You can't do that'" (pp. 12-13). His women include Miss Wiggly-Bottom, who "had small round breasts and a neat, nipped-in waist. She walked in time to a silent jazz tune she was humming and wriggled and wriggled her bottom" (p. 129). There was also Miss Sewing Machine who "liked her penny-button tickled" (p. 127). He added to the display "Miss Pelican-Beak, Miss Chopper, Miss Pink Sugar-Icing, whom he was on the point of marrying, Madame Make-Love-On-The-Floor where anything goes, The Sugar-Plum Fairy, more of Body Beautiful, more of The Womb, a demonstration of sexual stamina with five local women, this time the lights on, Madame Squelch Squelch, Madame Loose-Bottom—the list of them was endless" (p. 148). Elizabeth took heavy doses of sleeping tablets to block out his all night activities with these "nice-time girls." For Dan sometimes tumbled

these women into bed right beside Elizabeth ("They kept on bumping her awake"), and he encouraged them to use her personal possessions to clean up: "He was abnormally obsessed with dirt on his women. They washed and washed in her bathroom; they put on Elizabeth's dresses and underwear and made use of her perfumes." (pp.127-128).

Of course, if Dan finds that any of his seventy-one "nice-time girls" are too sexual, then he panics and turns against them. He views women as dirty if they are more sexually potent than he. He could not stand the sexual potency of Madame Loose-Bottom or the hysterical, feverish orgasm of Body Beautiful. Because the pelvis of Madame Squelch Squelch was like "molten lava," going with her made him throw up (pp. 164-165). One night he decided Miss Pelican-Beak with her long, tough vagina was "too pushy," so he broke her legs and elbows and re-designed her pelvis to make it more passive (pp. 167-168). Then he left her for Miss Chopped. Thus, his hatred for women was not all directed at Elizabeth. But she takes his behavior personally: "Why, why, why? What have I done?" Indeed it drives her further into madness; she becomes dysfunctional and must be hospitalized (pp. 173,176).

Both Sello and Dan use male homosexuality to make Elizabeth feel excluded. Dan tells Elizabeth it is a "universal phenomenon" (p. 138). He makes Sello appear before her with his boyfriend (p. 148), and he says, "They do it all the time" (p. 139). The displays of homosexuality like the displays of heterosexuality are meant to degrade her. These nightmares are extensions of her experiences with her husband: "Women were always complaining of being molested by her husband. Then there was also a white man who was his boy-friend. After a year she picked up the small boy and walked out of the house, never to return" (p. 19).

Elizabeth's recognition of the similarity between racist and sexist attitudes is clear. She knew that white people "went out of their way to hate you or loathe you" (p. 19); similarly, Dan hits her with a "torrent of hatred" every day (p. 168). She finds the misogyny of some African males to be untempered by "love and tenderness and personal romantic treasuring of women" (p. 137). She calls both racists and sexists power-maniacs. "What did they gain, the power people, while they lived off other people's souls like vultures?" (p. 19). Medusa serves as an image for domination; she represents these attitudes: "Who's running the show around here? I am. Who knows everything around here? I do. Who's wearing the pants in this house? I am" (p. 43).

On a philosophical level, Elizabeth is saved from permanent madness by her faith in a value system different from Dan's and Sello's and by a different concept of God. In practice, she is saved by working in a garden with a woman friend Kenosi, who admires and respects her. Her work relationship with this woman provides her with a feminist model. Ultimately, Elizabeth rejects the patriarchal model of thinking and behaving in favor of a feminist mode of thinking and behaving. This rejection of a philosophy of domination in favor of an egalitarian philosophy is reflected in her comments about God.

Elizabeth rejects a god in the sky, because "God in heaven is too important to be decent" (p. 197). Her ideal is to bring holiness down to earth. The gods are, in fact, those "killed and killed and killed again in one cause after another for the liberation of mankind." She saw the gods as "ordinary, practical, sane people, seemingly their only distinction being that they had consciously concentrated on spiritual earnings. All

the push and direction was towards the equality of man in his soul, as though, if it were not fixed up there, it never would be anywhere else." She concludes that "there are several hundred thousand people who are God" (p. 31). Her prayer is, "Oh God . . . May I never contribute to creating dead worlds, only new worlds" (p. 100).

Elizabeth concludes that this can occur only through a struggle against greed and arrogance and an excessive concern for self (p. 134). Sello admits, "I thought too much of myself. I am the root cause of human suffering" (p. 36). At one point Elizabeth and Sello "perfected together the ideal of sharing everything and then perfectly shared everything with all mankind" (p. 202). But it is through the horrors of her contract with Dan in her hallucinations that she has learned the most:

He had deepened and intensified all her qualities . . . he taught by default—he taught iron and steel self-control through sheer, wild, abandoned debauchery; he taught the extremes of love and tenderness through the extreme of hate; he taught an alertness for falsehoods within, because he had used any means at his disposal to destroy Sello. And from the degradation and destruction of her life and arisen a still, lofty serenity of soul nothing could shake. (p. 202)

The aim must be to tap into one's powers, and she places her emphasis on the soul: "If it's basically right there, then other things fall into place. That's my struggle; and that's black power, but it's a power that belongs to all mankind and in which all mankind can share" (p. 135).

Although her language is sometimes sexist, Bessie Head's philosophy and ethics parallel those of feminist philosopher/theologians such as Rosemary Ruether, Naomi Goldenberg, and Elizabeth Dodson Gray. They too reject the hierarchy in traditional religions and cry out for a more egalitarian world view. Feminist theologians speak out against the male God in the sky and the lingering Christian view that the world was created specifically for Man and that he has the right to use nature and women as he pleases.⁶ Nor is it surprising that the political philosophy in feminist utopian fiction is most akin to anarchism, for women are tired of being ruled, manipulated, and exploited by authoritarian figures. So, too, is Bessie Head's protagonist.

Throughout Elizabeth's madness, there existed the possibility of being healed and made sane by working in a vegetable garden with Kenosi. Kenosi had about her a quiet strength and purposefulness that appealed to Elizabeth. As they worked together, "Elizabeth clung to the woman. There seemed to be no other justification for her continued existence, so near to death was she" (p. 89). She found in the uneducated, hardworking Kenosi a "knowingness and grasp of life" that made her beautiful (p. 90). Most important of all, Kenosi needs her. Kenosi tells her, "you must never leave the garden . . . I cannot work without you" (p. 142). Her relationship with this woman keeps in sight the possibility of something quite different from the patriarchal relationships she has in the nightmare world: their "work-relationship has been established on the solid respect of one partner for another" (p. 160). Kenosi enables Elizabeth to maintain her belief that egalitarian relationships are possible. Sello's comment to Elizabeth about her relationship with Dan also helps to save her: "Elizabeth, love isn't like that. Love is two people mutually feeding each other, not one living on the soul of the other like a ghoul!" (p. 197).

Elizabeth withstands the cruelty and torture of Medusa and the two men who inhabit her madness through not giving in to their view of her as nothing. At one point she tells Sello that he is making a mistake, for she is God too (p. 38). Although they almost totally annihilate her sense of self, their misogynist behavior only serves to confirm her faith in the opposite of everything they represent. Throughout her struggle against these symbols of the patriarchal power system which people her hallucinations, she continues to articulate her faith in goodness, love, equality, and inner strength.

The movement toward mysticism found in feminist philosophy is obviously present in Elizabeth's as well. Elizabeth has been tested by the nightmare of madness created by Sello in his role as spiritual mentor. Once she has passed through this hell, her knowledge of evil helps her to rediscover an impersonal, mystical love. She is transported into a state in which there are "no private hungers to be kissed, loved, adored. And yet there was a feeling of being kissed by everything; by the air, the soft flow of life, people's smiles and friendships." This "vast and universal love" equalizes all things and all people. Elizabeth emerges from her hell with a confirmed belief in such love and a "lofty serenity of soul nothing could shake" (p. 202). At the end of the book she recognizes that humankind's fundamental error is the "relegation of all things holy to some unseen Being in the sky. Since man was not holy to man, he could be tortured for his complexion, he could be misused, degraded and killed" (p. 205).

Bessie Head chooses to focus on sexism rather than racism in *A Question of Power*. This forces her African readers, more familiar with racism, to see the similarities between the two and their common root in the philosophy of domination. Men degrade, manipulate, and abuse women in Elizabeth's night-

mare, basically because they fail to perceive sacredness in them. Elizabeth advocates a philosophy that insists upon the sacredness of all life because of her subjection to this patriarchal behavior. This is typical of the evolution of feminist thought. That is why feminists speak of ecological and peace issues as well as equal rights; and that is why they speak of equal rights not only for women but also for the poor, the handicapped, and the racially oppressed.

Buchi Emecheta⁷ and Bessie Head⁸ speak for millions of Black African women through their novels, for they describe what it is like to be female in patriarchal African cultures. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nigerian Buchi Emecheta focuses upon the patriarchal beliefs and practices that must be eradicated—son preference, polygamy, double standards, rigid sex roles, and above all, the glorification of motherhood in order to render women powerless. In *A Question of Power*, set in Botswana, Bessie Head portrays even more abusive patriarchal behavior, relates it to all forms of oppression, and presents a philosophy for living quite differently.

The two novels describe the spiritual growth of their protagonists, Nnu Ego and Elizabeth. Both "female heroes" rise above their suffering by resisting the training for submission that they have had within the patriarchal culture. Both finally are able to release themselves from dependency because they have acknowledged at least inwardly the patriarchal cause of their suffering. Through very personal experiences, the two protagonists show us the social and spiritual consequences of a power structure based upon a philosophy of domination. Buchi Emecheta focuses upon the social and Bessie Head upon the spiritual consequences. As the protagonists explore these domains, they venture into feminist consciousness and thereby gain confidence in the rightness of their own vision.

NOTES

¹Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Bantam, 1977), p. 20.

²Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood*, African Writers Series, 227 (London: Heinemann, 1980), p. 9. All further references to this work appear in the text.

³Buchi Emecheta's other novels are *In The Ditch* (1972), *Second-Class Citizen* (1974), *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977), *The Moonlight Bride* (1983), and *Double Yoke* (1982).

⁴Bessie Head has written two other novels *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1969) and *Maru* (1971). She has published a collection of short stories *The Collector of Treasures* (1977) and the history, as told by its people, of *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind* (1981). She has also written plays for television, children's stories, articles, and poetry.

⁵Bessie Head, *A Question of Power*, African Writers Series, 149 (London: Heinemann, 1974), pp. 28, 144. All further references to this work appear in the text.

⁶See, for example, Rosemary Ruether's *New Woman New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), Naomi Goldenberg's *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), and Elizabeth Dodson Gray's *Green Paradise Lost* (Wellesley, MA: Roundtable Press, 1981).

⁷For further information about Buchi Emecheta, see an interview with her in the September 1981 issue of *Opzij*, a Dutch feminist monthly and her autobiographical reflections, "Head Above Water," in *Kunapipi*, 3, No. 1 (1981), 81-90. The chapter about her in Lloyd W. Brown's *Women Writers in Black Africa* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981) was written before the publication of her last three novels. See also "Buchi Emecheta," *Africa Woman*, No. 2 (Jan. 1976), 48 ff; Judith Wilson, "Buchi Emecheta: Africa from a Woman's View," *The Bride Price*, *World Literature Written in English*, 16 No. 2 (Nov. 1977), 310 ff; Alice Walker, "A Writer Because of, Not in Spite of Her Children," *Ms.*, 4, No. 7 (Jan. 1976), 40 ff; and Marie Umeh, "African Women in Transition in the Novels of Buchi Emecheta," *Présence Africaine*, 116 (1980), 190-99.

⁸For further information about Bessie Head, see an interview with her in *Conversation with African Writers: Interviews with Twenty-six African Authors*, ed. Lee Nichols (Washington D.C.: Voice of America, 1981), pp. 49-57 and her statement about her life which precedes her short story "Witchcraft" in *Ms.*, No. 5 (Nov. 1975), pp. 72-73. See also Charlotte Bruner, "Bessie Head: Restless in a Distant Land" in *When the Drumbeat Changes*, ed. Carolyn Parker et. al. (Washington D.C.: Three Continents, 1981), 261-77 and the chapter on her work in Lloyd W. Brown's *Women Writers in Black Africa*, pp. 158-79.