



*Class Notes on*  
**“THE COLLECTOR OF THE  
TREASURES”**

by

**Bessie Head**

FOR  
B A ENGLISH  
SEM - VI  
ENGL3016

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# THIS PPT COVERS...

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- ❖ Bio-note of Bessie Head
- ❖ Literary contribution of Bessie Head
- ❖ Bessie Head **against** homogenization
- ❖ **Characteristics** of her Short Stories
- ❖ Africa in **Three Phases**
- ❖ **Types of Men**

# BESSIE HEAD

## (1937- 1986)



- ❖ Bessie Amelia Emery Head
- ❖ Born on 6 July 1937 to an upper class white woman and a Black labourer in **Pietermaritzburg**, South Africa.
- ❖ White mother (who was placed in a mental asylum during her pregnancy) and black father (who then mysteriously disappeared).
- ❖ She suffered rejection and alienation at an early age.
- ❖ Born and brought up in a deeply segregated and racially polarized South Africa



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- ❖ Such a child was deemed illegitimate in the segregationist South Africa of 1930s.
  - ❖ Moved from foster parents to an orphanage school
  - ❖ Felt an outsider in her own country
  - ❖ Had no sense of belonging
  - ❖ She had an early marriage

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- ❖ Not accepted by both white and coloured communities of Africa
  - ❖ In 1964, she abandoned her homeland, her teaching job, and her husband and took her small son to Botswana, seeking personal asylum and tranquillity in simple village life.

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- ❖ Tried to find place in Anti-Apartheid struggle and was associated with Pan-African Movement and Black Consciousness Movement (1968)
  - ❖ She observed that both the movements were ideologically based on sharpening a racial dialectics opposed to integration of white, black and coloured people.



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- ❖ In Botswana Bessie Head was looked down upon for being an outsider and for not being “black enough”
  - ❖ “Nothing can take away the fact that I have never had a country; not in South Africa or in Botswana where I now live as a stateless person”- Bessie Head.
  - ❖ Died of hepatitis, on 17 April 1986, in Botswana

# BESSIE HEAD'S WORKS

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- ❖ *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968),
- ❖ *Maru* (1971),
- ❖ *A Question of Power* (1973)
- ❖ *The Collector of Treasures and Other Botswana Village Tales* (1977)
- ❖ *A Bewitched Crossroad: An African Saga* (1984), is historical, set in 19th-century Botswana



# HEAD'S WRITING RESISTS THE HOMOGENIZATION

- ❖ Head in her writings consciously resists the homogenizing and marginalizing rhetoric of anti-apartheid narratives
- ❖ She tries to escape the black and white polarity which characterized the South African writing of the period

# CHARACTERISTICS OF HER SHORT STORIES

- ❖ Head was deprived of family, race and nationality
- ❖ She explores several aspects of African life, especially the **position of women**
- ❖ Focus on the tragic human experience of **oppression – native African** subject.
- ❖ How colonialism snatched their dignity and made them powerless in their own land
- ❖ Attempt to foreground the **oppressed and exploited rural woman**.

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- ✖ Breakdown of the family life
  - ✖ Denying the traditional structure of security that the institution of marriage provided to married women
  - ✖ Vulnerable sexual exploitation of married women
  - ✖ Female characters learning to survive the emotional, sexual and psychological violence built into the everydayness of patriarchal society



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- ✘ Depict African woman as a victim of colonialism apartheid and patriarchy
  - ✘ Female protagonists create for themselves 'a destiny of their own'

# **“THE COLLECTOR OF THE TREASURES”**

- ❖ Head's short story “The Collector of the Treasures” is already discussed in the class.

# CHARACTERS

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- ❖ Dikeledi Mokipi – housewife who murders her husband
- ❖ Garesego – Dikeledi's husband
- ❖ Paul Theoblo – Dikeledi's neighbour
- ❖ Kenalepe – Paul's wife
- ❖ Kebonye – Dikeledi's friend in prison



# SETTING

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- ❖ Puleng
- ❖ Central state prison, Gaborone

# AFRICA IN THREE PHASES

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- ❖ Through this short story Head looks at Africa through the **Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial** lenses
- ❖ She takes note of various positive and negative transformations in Africa

# PRECOLONIAL AFRICA

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- ❖ In Precolonial Africa the ancestral traditional practices were of utmost importance
- ❖ Africans followed these practices without questioning them
- ❖ Dominance of African men in the name of culture,
- ❖ Women were victims of this social system in Africa



# COLONIAL AFRICA

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- ❖ New systems encroached in the Traditional and Cultural life of Africa
- ❖ Breaking down of the institutions, forms of family life in Africa
- ❖ Mining became source of earning livelihood
- ❖ Working for pittance to pay British Tax
- ❖ People's Migration from one place to another
- ❖ Provided space for women

# POSTCOLONIAL AFRICA

❖ Vast job opening in Africa



**Paul  
Theoblo**

❖ Heavy salary

❖ African men becoming  
immoral and corrupt

❖ Women at the receiving end  
but started fighting of creating  
their space

**Garesego  
Mokopi**

# TYPES OF MEN IN “THE COLLECTOR OF THE TREASURES”

## TWO TYPES OF MEN

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graph TD; A([TWO TYPES OF MEN]) --> B[Animalistic, lusty Garesego]; A --> C[Loving and caring Paul Theoblo]
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**Animalistic,  
lusty  
Garesego**

**Loving and  
caring  
Paul Theoblo**



# GARESEGO MOKOPI

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- ❖ A clerk in district administrative service
- ❖ Heavily paid salary
- ❖ Womanizing and drinking
- ❖ Three sons – Banabotho, Inalame, Motsomi
- ❖ For Garesego his wife, Dikeledi was boring, semi-literate, traditional sort
- ❖ Lot exciting women around Garesego for his money

# PAUL THEOBLO

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- ❖ His wife Kenalepe and three children
- ❖ Transferred to Puleng as Principal of primary school in 1966
- ❖ Good at managing household
- ❖ Helping nature
- ❖ Loving and friendly husband

# YOU CAN READ MORE...

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<https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/south-african-literature-biographies/bessie-head>



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**THANK YOU**