



## AUTOBIOGRAPHY, AUTHENTICITY AND LIBERATION IN BESSIE HEAD'S *A QUESTION OF POWER* AND BUCHI EMECHETA'S *SECOND CLASS CITIZEN*

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**Abstract:** Literature mirrors human life as writers draw inspiration from life's experiences to create literary works from which readers, in turn, draw inspiration to improve on their own lives. The pleasant and unpleasant memories of writers provide contexts to their works and make them rich, profound and convincingly relevant. The aim of this paper is to show how Bessie Head in *A Question of Power* and Buchi Emecheta in *In the Ditch* draw inspiration from their own lives to create works of art in which they share their opinions, personal experiences and ideas with mankind and society for purposes of their relaxation, education and development. It will also show how their experiences shape them as individuals and enable us to have insights into the historical periods in which their works were written. Through the Critical Theory lens, it is revealed that both novelists focus on identifying and overcoming social constructs that privilege some people while oppressing others. Thus, readers are enlightened on issues that cause pain or trauma within a population. Thus, their success stories would inspire and motivate their readers who, like them, tend to consider the situations of their lives from different angles before taking pertinent decisions.

**Keywords:** Autobiography, Authenticity, Liberation, Trauma, Feminism.

**AUTOBIOGRAPHIE, AUTHENTICITE ET LIBERATION DANS "A QUESTION OF POWER" PAR BESSIE HEAD ET " SECOND CLASSE CITIZEN" PAR BUCHI EMECHETA'S.**

**Résumé :** La littérature reflète la vie humaine en ce sens que les écrivains s'inspirent des expériences de leurs propres vies pour créer des œuvres littéraires dont les lecteurs, à leur tour, s'inspirent pour améliorer leurs propres vies. Les souvenirs des écrivains – qu'ils soient agréables ou non – fournissent des contextes à leurs œuvres afin de les rendre riches, profondes et convaincantes. Cet article vise à montrer comment Bessie Head dans *A Question of Power* et Buchi Emecheta dans *In the Ditch* s'inspirent de leurs propres vies pour créer des œuvres d'art dans lesquelles ils partagent leurs avis, leurs expériences personnelles et leurs idées avec l'humanité et la société pour fins de leur détente, leur éducation et leur épanouissement. Il montrera également comment leurs expériences personnelles ont contribué à les façonner en tant qu'individus et nous ont permis d'avoir des aperçus des périodes historiques au cours desquelles leurs œuvres ont été écrites. A travers l'objectif de la théorie critique, il a été révélé que les deux romanciers se concentrent sur l'identification et le dépassement des constructions sociales qui protègent certaines personnes tout en opprimant d'autres. Ainsi, les lecteurs sont éclairés sur les problèmes qui causent des douleurs ou des traumatismes au sein d'une population. Alors, leurs « success stories » pourraient inspirer et motiver leurs lecteurs qui, comme eux, ont tendance à considérer les situations de leurs vies sous différents angles afin de pouvoir prendre des décisions pertinentes.

**Mots clés :** Autobiographie, Authenticité, Libération, Féminisme.

## Introduction

A writer who draws from his/her life experiences to create fiction succeeds in representing reality in their works by portraying mundane everyday experiences that readers can easily identify with. Their creative works depict familiar places, people and even stories that go a long way towards achieving realism in their works. Therefore, autobiographical elements in a work of art easily achieve realism which makes the work more authentic, engaging and relevant to the reader who, most of the time, identifies with the life of the author. F.R Leavis (1979) buttresses this point when he says that you cannot be interested in a work of art while forgetting that the life of the creative individual is indispensable. Bessie Head's life - like that of Buchi Emecheta's - is psychologically very rich and full of variety. The wisdom and beauty exhibited by both authors in their works stem from memories of the storms they lived. The Critical Theory enables us to see that the social problems lived by the characters stem from social structures and cultural assumptions like those lived by the novelists. The viezs of Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm and Max Horkheimer that seek to liberate people from all forms of slavery and also work to create a world that takes care of human needs and provides comfort will go a long way in animating the discussions.

### 1. Achieving realism/authenticity

Generally speaking, character construction or development in literary works is the craft of giving characters the personality, depth and motivation that propel them through a story. In mirroring real life, Head and Emecheta draw from their own lives to create fictional characters by assigning goals to them, identifying the obstacles on their way and highlighting the conflicts lived by them. This is done for purposes of connecting readers to the stories by making the characters relatable. Consequently, they create believable characters who are unique and three dimensional. Each character has real attributes - like appearance, personality and backstory. In this light, a character's motivations inform their actions and decisions, thereby creating the narrative arc in the story. In *A Question of Power*, Elizabeth is both a mirror image of Head and her mouthpiece. Through her, she beautifully mirrors the societal ills of gender bias embedded in the social politics of apartheid. First and foremost, she captures it beautifully through the choice of her characters that are constructs modeled on the reader's conception of people, thus person-like. From the genesis of the birth of Elizabeth, one cannot fail to visualise the painful discriminating Apartheid society of South Africa. Elizabeth is the incarnation of what Bessie Head and thousands of coloured women endured under the Apartheid regime of racist South Africa. Elizabeth's mother, like Head's mother, is ostracized and restricted to a mental asylum because she fell in love with and got a baby by a

native stable boy. It goes without saying that only one who has felt profoundly can express such rich and touching emotions that move readers to tears. Head lived with the bitter and painful reality of never knowing who her father was. Such is what fate reserves for Elizabeth as well. Head uses this experience in her life, creatively, to denounce this age old phenomenon of her society – bias against the girl-child or the woman. She does so through her witty use of irony and satire. It is ironical that in seeking to resolve a problem, society instead creates a worse problem for those involved and even for the society at large. This can be seen through the hard-heartedness of the executioner of the law. It is a cruel society that sends the knife of division between a mother and a child with the hypocritical assumptions that she must have been insane to go so “low” as to having a relationship with a stable boy. As if the pain of being deprived of her baby were not enough, this cruel family and society condemn the mother to imprisonment. It has to be the mother, whose only crime is that of having carried a baby for nine months in her womb that has to pay the price. This is the story of Bessie Head and her mother recreated in Elizabeth and her mother. One cannot fail to notice the discriminating application of the law in this instance: lenient on the man but hard on the woman. Head must have found it suffocating and traumatising to function in such a patriarchal society. Elizabeth’s story is not in any way different from that of Head’s. Again, the vivid and moving diction and symbols used by Head are informed by her childhood experiences; this makes the story of Elizabeth very pathetic. Such is the case at the “Red House”. This is a very symbolic setting in the novel; one that actually existed in the days and life time of Elizabeth. The image of the “Red House” is appropriately used in painting a pathetic and moving story of the sad history of Elizabeth which reflects that of Head’s. No one would read these lines without bursting into tears for Elizabeth who is not only discriminated against but also bears the worst brunt of patriarchy and the ills of the social politics of apartheid in South Africa:

“Seven years later, when she had become a primary school teacher, she returned to the small town where her foster-mother lived and said: “Tell me about my mother”. The foster mother looked at Elisabeth for some time and then abruptly burst into tears. It’s such a sad story, she said. “It caused so much trouble and the family was frightened by the behaviour of the grandmother. My husband worked on the child welfare committee and your case cause up again and gain. First, they received you from the mental hospital and sent you to a nursing home. A day later, you were returned because you did not look white. They sent you to a Boer family. A week later, you were returned. The woman leader on the committee said: “What cans she do with this child? Its mother is white”. My husband came home that night and asked me to take you I agreed. The next thing was the family came down in a car from Johannesburg on their way to the race course in Durban. The brother of your mother came in. He was very angry and said: “We want to wash very angry and said: “We want to wash our hands off this business. We want to forget it, but the old lady insists on seeing the child. We had to please her. We heard that your mother wanted you. When you were six years old, we heard that your

mother suddenly killed herself in the mental home. The grandmother brought all her toys and dolls to you." (P. 17)

Head could not have creatively reproduced herself in Elisabeth any better. The insensitivity of the social politics of the apartheid system cannot be ignored from the above passage. The fundamental crime of Elizabeth is that she is the daughter of her mother; an innocent child who stands condemned with her mother for a crime about which she knows nothing. One cannot fail to admire the beautiful story of the grandmother, her defense, her insistence on filial ties in a country where people were not people at all. Elizabeth's origins, like Head's, are tied to the "Red Buildings", such an unforgettable painful past that lays the platform for the pain and trauma of her life. In very concrete terms, Bessie Head effectively employs the above irony to man. It's ironical and painful that as a child Elizabeth dreaded the Red House only to find out later in her adult life that it had everything to do with her painful origins. The physical environment of the house further highlights the paradox of human action – a mental asylum situated on the same road with the bird sanctuary that signifies not only freedom but also a wonderful playground for children. Even the general setting of *A Question of Power* is informed by Head's life in South Africa – her country of origin. It is not only about where she was born but also about what took place there. The life of Elizabeth in South Africa concurs with Jean Jacques Rousseau's philosophy that 'Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains. Elizabeth, like Head, lives the nightmarish and traumatizing realities of racist South Africa. Pathos helps to reinforce the message of Head here because it is not only nightmarish but also traumatizing to discover that one's fate in life is determined by where he/she comes from. In highlighting this through Elizabeth's life in the novel, Head is condemning the Whiteman who passes for a Lord, a commander, a dictator and an oppressor in a land that is not originally his. On the other hand, she laments and sympathises with the Blackman who is the downtrodden, a hand and, consequently, a second class citizen in his/her own country. Head echoes the thoughts of the Africans who are questioning the colonialists as to who gave them the mandate to classify the races or peoples of the world in the first place. It is so sad to see that a people who have existed in their continent for as long as it was created are suddenly said to have been discovered by foreigners. Their identity is taken away from them and it is too painful to see them being considered as human beings without personality. Not only did Bessie Head see this manifested in Apartheid South Africa, but she was also a victim of it. Thus her story in *A Question of Power* is very emotional and pathetic as it is coined from first-hand experience.

Upon a closer look, racism is even more monstrous and unpardonable than anything else when we see the conservative racist grandparents of Elizabeth tag her

mother as a mentally deranged being and summarily send her to a mental asylum, her sole crime being that of having had a child with a black stable boy. It is ironical that the fruit of something as beautiful as love is condemned. Elizabeth is, therefore, classified as a coloured, the lowest category of persons in racist South Africa. She, like Head, is totally lost as she is neither white nor black. Her sense of pride and self-esteem is further destroyed. Even more traumatising is the hypocrisy of the missionaries who preached God but could not live it. The racism in South Africa is also extended to education. As seen in the novel and through the experiences of Elizabeth, it is thought that the Blackman is naturally dull, stupid and inferior. Ironically the same people who think so are the first to deprive the Blackman of education which is the tool of liberation. Even when a lone school is provided, it is understaffed and has no reference books. The few teachers sent there do not have any better training themselves. They rake up information from their minds to teach their students. Apart from this, the freedom of movement for the indigenes is restricted in their own country as they must carry a pass in order to go anywhere in their own country. Head makes us see the bitterness of what they lived in their own country through what her main character, Elizabeth, lives in this racist society. It is painful, ironical, provocative, nay, inadmissible that the Whites should be doing this to Africans in their own land. It is unimaginable that a people that were once free have become slaves in their own land

Again, Elizabeth mirrors Head in her bitter experiences with men. She, like the novelist, goes through traumatising sexual abuses from the men in her life. Head uses her experience to create a story that exposes the attitude of men towards women. Women in this society are there only to satisfy the men; and the men do not really care in what form this satisfaction comes. From the experiences of Elizabeth, we applaud the excellent craftsmanship of Head who uses various character indicators (direct and indirect) to paint the horrifying image of the African chauvinist using Elizabeth as her alter ego. First Elizabeth, like head, is married to a reckless, adulterous and homosexual husband. Unfortunately for him, Elizabeth is just another pleasure gadget in his life that can be used and discarded of at will. One wonders aloud why he had married her in the first place. This becomes a very painful source of trauma for Elizabeth who had not lived love of any kind. Thus, she moves into marriage with a sigh of relief believing that she would find in her husband's arms what her biological family never afforded her: love. But her husband turns out to be a reckless adulterous homosexual who thinks that the world turns at his beck and call. One wonders why he had to exercise his male chauvinism on helpless women if he was having a swell time with other men. Marriage does not stop him from his homosexual tendencies, nor does it keep him off other women. He shamelessly has it off with Elizabeth's neighbours just like Head's husband did

with her own neighbours. Head here portrays society as a male dominated world in which men think that they can do just anything they want with women and go away scot free. This is very painful and traumatising for a love starved Elizabeth who could only express her anger by taking her son and walking away, a thing the man would not do if it were the woman cheating on him. Elizabeth's experiences with Dan further show this disgusting bias which men have against women. Dan dates many men not in pursuit of sexual satisfaction but to swell his pride.

Like Head, Elizabeth also moves from one job to another with little or no satisfaction derived therefrom. She started her working career as a teacher and while still in South Africa, she was tormented through all forms of discrimination on the job. She was looked down upon and treated as a numskull who could be suffering from mental disorders like her mother. From teaching, she ventured into journalism and once more lived very traumatising experiences as a coloured woman in journalism in a racist South Africa. Pushed to the wall, Elizabeth, like Head, finally leaves South Africa with a not-to-return visa to Motabeng. But before leaving Motabeng, she tried teaching once more and the experience had not been any better. Elizabeth finally gives up teaching for creative writing. Like Head, she realises some benefits but not enough to keep her going. She joins Tom's gardening scheme and, for the first time, finds pleasure in what she is doing. There is a limit to the pain that the body can bear. Unfortunately, Elizabeth, like Head, suffers from a mental breakdown and finally leaves the garden. True to the chronology of the life experiences of Head, Elizabeth begins a downward journey that starts with illness and depression. Hallucinations set in and her activities become hysterical. She even denounces the president, like Head did, and writes accusations against him and pastes them at the Post Office exactly like her. After spending sometime in the hospital, she comes back feeling better and gets connected to her mission of fostering the universal brotherhood of man. In the same light like Head, Emecheta, in *Second Class Citizen*, creates characters that are constructs modeled on the reader's perception of people around her. The story of her life is replicated by her main character, Adah. Emecheta transcends the physical "wounds and damages" on her body and soul in the patriarchal Nigerian society and creates characters that are life models. Adah's pain, like that of Emecheta, starts at birth. She cannot be detached from patriarchy which forms the background to the oppression of women. The fate of Adah, an innocent child, is sealed at birth just because she is a girl. She came into the world as a girl when everybody was expecting a boy. In the Ibo culture, you are a man, and a successful one, depending on the number of male children you have fathered. Consequently, Adah was a disappointment to her parents, her immediate family and her tribe. The situation was so bad that nobody even thought of recording her birth, for she was an insignificant being. All she was told about her birth was

that it occurred during the Second World War. Hence, Adah, right from birth, had to take up the place reserved for the girl child by this strict patriarchal society. Like her mother, she is born to take care of the home. The only right she has, as a girl child in this society, is the right to basic education and then to basic sewing. That is because she has to learn the rudimentaries that would enable her to take proper care of her home. Adah inwardly assesses the situation and rejects this fate for herself. This is very important and crucial, that is to say, identifying the sources of trauma. By so doing, she builds a strategy for herself and maps out a path to be followed.

From the above, one can say that Emecheta created characters that are relatable. From her life experiences, she creates Adah, gives her a personality and depth – traits that strongly capture emotions of sympathy from readers. One is marveled at her great art of representation through Adah and the other characters. This is because her characters are constructs modeled on the perception of the people around the readers – person-like characters. Characters' names are well chosen to serve as labels for a trait or cluster of traits. Boy represents the men who are born with golden spoons in their mouths in a discriminatory patriarchal society. The women characters are given names because the fate of one is the fate of all. They are individuals who must be kept in their little corners to run their homes. This relationship between Adah and her mother reflects that which Emecheta shared with her mother. Adah sides, in this instance, with her father because she thinks that he would be more understanding with her. Ma, her mother, would rather find it outrageous that she fights to go to school, a level above the level decided for her by society. Emecheta uses strong communicative stylistic devices to x-ray, satirise and condemn the demonic patriarchal system in Ibo. Not only does she expose the things she has gone through as a girl and as a woman but she also goes further to satirise them through the development of Adah in order to draw attention to them for subsequent change. For example, Adah uses contrast to show the loopholes of the system. When it comes to earning money for the family, the woman is either used as a commodity to be sold for money or is given the pride of place to bring in money. As a child Adah, like Emecheta, has to be sent into marriage so her bride-price can be used in paying her brother's school fees. As if this were not enough, she is used as the hen that has to lay the golden egg in marriage. Thus, when it comes to earning money for the family, the woman is given the pride of place for a change. The man is then relegated to the background as the woman takes the place of the bread winner for the home. It is very ironical that when it comes to taking a decision as to how that money she has earned is to be spent, she is no longer given the pride of place to say something. Her place or position in earning money is a total contrast to the one assigned to her when spending the money. Decisions and projects are drawn up and she has to fund them without asking a question. This elicits the pathos

of readers who do not only feel sorry for Adah but also cry indeed with her. Her father-in-law even goes to the extent of telling his son, her husband, Francis, that she, Adah might be a millionaire but her money should go to making him, Francis, a millionaire and an important person in society; and that he, Francis, should turn a deaf ear to what his friends may be saying about Adah's better salary and see it rather as a golden opportunity. He further rubs it in by letting him know that once a man pays the bride price of a woman, he and his family see her as a piece of property and chattel.

More humiliating is the fact that the woman is often stripped of any value when men bargain and haggle over the bride price to be paid for a girl child. Adah's situation attracts more pathos when Francis's family even goes to the extent of owning her without meeting up with the requirements of the bride price. This is because she, like Adah, is not only a girl child but also an orphan with nobody to exact the payment of the correct bride price or some expected to be paid to her. In brief, be it a daughter, a girl child or a wife, all are seen as a bank account and it seems only right that men should draw from it from time to time for their welfare. In the case of Adah, she is a guarantee for Boy's education, a source of living for Francis's family and a ticket for his education. The pain is even deeper when Adah is conditioned by this oppressive and biased societal mindset to perpetrate discrimination against her girl child. Like many other Nigerians, she thinks that a boy child is worth four girl children put together. This explains why she is very furious at the mere thought of something that might go wrong with her son. There is a shift in mindset towards the end of her story as she values all her children for what they are worth. From this orphaned background, Emecheta also draws from the painful experiences of living with her paternal uncle after her father's death to enrich the novel. The ups and downs in her uncle's home do not stop her from going after her goals. Adah is not only determined like Emecheta, but would do just anything to get what she wants. For example, when she was bent on going to school, she watched out even for Ma's distractions to sneak to school. She throws away shame and happily moves into the classroom with her baggy clothes just to have a feel of what it looks like being in a classroom and living your dreams. Also, at her uncle's, she breaks protocol to have money to pay her school fees. She does not have the money and has no idea how to get the money to pay for exams. She has to lie to her cousin's wife when she is asked to go buy a pound of steak from the market. She says that she has lost the money but her cousin's wife does not believe her. Adah realises that what she has done is wrong and that it is not good to tell a lie. All the same, she believes that what she has done is for the sake of her destiny. She does not mind taking the strokes as punishment and does not allow them to crush her spirits. This is very much in the spirit and character of Emecheta.



Finally, Adah passes the exams, confirming the fact that she is not only intelligent but also critical and daring as well. Not only was she the best kid for that year but she equally qualified for a scholarship. This goes a long way to prove that like Emecheta, Adah is able to manage her challenges and traumas critically in order to achieve her goals. Like Emecheta, Adah is diplomatic with her in-laws, satisfying them at their different points of needs and desires in order to have what she wants. First and foremost, she accepts to allow them use her salary for their own pleasure; she accepts to sponsor Francis to Britain with the hope that this will enable her and the kids to follow one day; she even accepts to stay on for two years to keep working the money with which to support him and take care of the family. When the time is ripe enough, she even gives up her jewelry to her mother-in-la to pacify her so that she can allow them to leave for Britain. She then gives up her lucrative job and moves on to meet her husband.

To her greatest dismay, Adah, like Emecheta, discovers that even the British society is not void of gender bias. She comes to realise that men and women are not equal before the law in this society as she had thought. Francis still uses her as an object and possession. He abuses Adah both physically and psychologically. Nothing stops Francis from beating her up in front of her children and sometimes with a long pregnancy. He appoints himself a disciplinarian, claiming to be disciplining his wife when he cannot discipline himself. Like the Nigerian society, the silence of this other society is a "licence" for the husband to "put the woman in order". This extends even to psychological torture. This is exactly what Elizabeth, the heroine, goes through. Elizabeth purges her emotions of pain by x-raying and exposing them through Adah. She is burdened with paying Francis' school fees, taking care of the children and home, and taking care of herself. Her worst experience is lived during the family planning saga. Adah erroneously thinks that she is in a society where she is recognised as a human being endowed with her own fundamental rights and so can walk into the hospital and decide what she wants done on her. Embarrassingly, her request for a family planning pill meets with the bitter realisation that she cannot obtain this without the signature of her husband. This realisation increases her pain and only confirms her inferior position vis-à-vis her husband and other male counterparts. What this means to her and the womenfolk is that a woman is nothing without her husband who, ironically in Adah's case, would not cooperate with her; and worse still, one who sees nothing wrong with having children one after the other as long as he is not the one providing for them. Francis, her husband, does not even bother to analyse the impact of multiple births at very close intervals on the health of his wife. This adequately confirms the universal phenomenon of bias against the woman.

This is very frustrating for the woman who discovers the mechanisms built into every fabric of society with a view to allowing the man to dominate and lord it over all women wherever and whatever they are. Even the professional rights of the woman are censored by the man. Adah's creative power is controlled by Francis. What is even so disgusting about it is his belief that Adah is good for nothing. That her husband, Francis, would not read her book was bad enough. But that he had called it rubbish without as much as reading it was a deep hurt. He went as far as saying that she would never be a writer simply because she was black and a woman. This was an act of killing even her spirit as well. It left Adah, as it did Emecheta, with such a feeling of emptiness that she had only two options: fighting for survival or abandoning herself to whatever and be crushed. To Adah, like it was to Emecheta, marriage life is a journey to cavalry. Love is an almost inexistent commodity. To begin with, her marriage to Francis took off on the wrong premise, and subsequently constituted a major source of pain for her. It is her quest for education that pushed her to the doorsteps of a loveless, materialistic and exploitative marriage. The stifling patriarchal cultural practice only came in to make matters worse for her. She marries Francis to acquire a ticket for her education. This is because society frowns at any single girl who takes up lodgings on her own while going to school. For giving her this ticket, Francis expects unquestionable obedience from her. She must, therefore, remain silent and grateful to Francis and his family even in the face of oppression. This is the price she pays for having as husband, a man who sees her in terms of cash value. She swallows her pride and serves Francis and his family with slavish devotion. Even with this in mind, Adah believed she could shape her own destiny or reduce the pain of marriage. Unfortunately, and regrettably too, Francis's exacting nature transforms marriage, for Adah, into a slave-run farm. He puts the entire load on Adah's head without the barest iota of human emotion to lift a finger to help her out. For example, it is insensitivity that pushes Francis to demand for an eight hour sleep without disturbance in a one-room house shared with children and a pregnant woman. He behaves as if he does not know that in her condition, Adah needs financial, moral and physical help from him so as to have the psychological balance that is required for healthy procreation. Ironically and painfully, Adah is the one – even in her pregnancy – who has to rush out early in the morning for their daily bread. She also has to earn the money that Francis badly needs for his up-keep and tuition in order to enable him study comfortably. This indeed is the worst form of torture – oppression at its very worst. Francis's heartlessness could not have been better expressed. He is a slave master in the suit of a husband. Adah even feigns an excuse for coming back home from work because of labour pains simply because she fears to hear what her husband, the author of the pregnancy, would say about her coming home instead of going to work so as to bring in the much awaited pay

package. In her state of helplessness, she counts only on God to stand by her and give Francis a sign to believe her. She has to hang on the railway strike as a pretext to go home and have her baby.

What this means is that Adah, like Emecheta, finds it easier to confide in God than in the husband who made her pregnant in the first place. It is also so traumatising when she sees the husbands of other women in the ward paying them so much attention. All the tables in the ward have flowers except hers. She is the only one still putting on the labour-room night gown in the ward and feels really humiliated when the nurse has to remind her that she is not supposed to wear the labour room gown in the open ward. She cries out the same words and pain that Emecheta had had to cry during her worst traumatising moment - "The whole world seemed unequal, so unfair. Some people were created with all the good things ready made for them; others were just created like mistakes" (p. 24). This hospital incident only further opens her eyes to see the heartlessness of Francis - somebody who would use the money for her accumulated holidays to pay for his courses while she lies in the hospital in need. From this, it suddenly dawns on Adah that she is dealing with an enemy. This sudden awareness pushes her to wonder about the heartlessness of a father who would not even buy something for his baby with money that was given to its mother to provide for it. Francis's wickedness, selfishness and heartlessness gradually push her into being suspicious of everybody. It is very painful as she concludes that she has never been loved but has always been used by Francis's family as their source of livelihood. She finally concludes that if she leaves Francis, she would not lose anything except her pains. At this stage, there is no longer any space in her heart for him. Every little space has already been taken up by pains. From now henceforth, the once accommodating Adah starts fighting her husband. Even at this, she still does herself another great disservice - inflicting more pain unto self with the conclusion that her marriage is failing because she did not encourage her husband to work. One wonders aloud who encouraged her - or the other men who worked to satisfy their families - to work. This goes a long way towards confirming Emecheta's views that society has socialised men to confidently promote their abilities and women to doubt theirs. These women sometimes play down their abilities and quickly take to self-rejection; thus failing to pursue opportunities like the men. When a woman breaks through this barrier and writes, like Adah does, she is often seen as arrogant. The burning of Adah's creative work - her brain child - is, therefore, a turning point in life as it was to Emecheta. Her system can no longer be a slave to pain; she has had enough. She fights back with focused attention. The bitter experiences Emecheta went through with her husband in London are all well-crafted and exposed through the marital experiences of Adah. Like Emecheta, Adah lives the worst form of male domination in London under

Francis who thinks he can do just anything and get away with it. He even goes as far as standing in court and declaring that he has never been married to Adah. It is proof of his high degree of irresponsibility. In fighting to overpower his wife he sacrifices the interest of his own children. Francis's heartlessness is an unbreakable wall, not just because he has burnt their marriage certificate and the children's birth certificates but also because he goes farther to disown them in court. He is a good example of an irresponsible father who shamelessly declares in public that, "I don't mind their being sent for adoptions", talking of his own children. Adah sheds tears not for the bitter discovery of the emptiness of marriage but because Francis has succeeded to transform their marriage into chains of pain and imprisonment.

In a nutshell, Adah becomes Emecheta's mout-piece and an instrument of change. Through her, the man is seen as being responsible for a woman's plight in society. The man oppresses the woman, rendering her voiceless, incapable of progress and denies her all the rights to self-fulfillment. Adah's resolve to forge ahead without Francis shows a determination to fight against the "Second Class" position assigned to women. This authority of men over women in all sectors of life is considered by women as criminal because it makes women vulnerable. Adah, however, succeeds in standing on her feet as a black mother. She provides a way out for black women as she eludes the second-class position attributed to her by black men and men's colonial society. From the above, one can therefore conclude that the works of Bessie Head and Buchi Emecheta are a creative reflection of their lives as seen in *A Question of Power* and *Second Class Citizen* respectively. Not only do their writings carry their live stories but they also spell their goals and aspirations for the benefit of mankind. In her last article published in 1985, "Why do I write?" Head ends with her famous statement that "I am building a stairway to the stars. I have the authority to take the whole of mankind up there with me. Similarly, Emecheta writes not just to tell the world her own part of the story but also to inform her audience about the African lifestyle and the gender discrimination that impacted negatively not only on her person but also on all African women including those of today. Both Head and Emecheta advocate for the rights of African women; through their works, they lament and protest against the oppressive practices against women. They do this in a bid to improve the quality of life not only for women but also for men and society as a whole. They, therefore, proclaim hope for growth and the realisation of equality between African men and women. They encourage men to understand and respect the role of women in society and encourage women to fight for their freedom.

## 2. The liberating force of autobiographical elements in the chosen texts

Bessie Head and Buchi Emecheta, in their works, *A Question of Power* and *Second Class Citizen* respectively, use their life stories to demonstrate, through their characters, that victims of pain can embrace pain and burn it as fuel for their journey in life. They buttress the view that recovery from traumatic pain or liberation from oppression begins first with embracing pain and resisting it by taking the risk of sharing it with others or leaning on the Supreme Being one serves for divine strength. Talking about their pain through creative works of art helps them to release or purge themselves of pent-up emotions like fear, anger, bitterness or sadness. They do not only bear the hard things of life, but they also turn them into glory as seen through the lives of their characters who go the extra mile to resist the margin and fight for liberation, thereby confirming the view that at the point of giving up, we never know how close we are to victory. The characters reflect the determination of the novelists to liberate the domestic space from trauma, thereby regaining sanity and comfort. The didactic element from their stories to the readers is that life's broken pieces sometimes need to be patched to enable onward movement or the formation of new shapes that should enable total movement out of the zone of pain. For example, Elizabeth undergoes the full cycle of liberation guided by a meticulous chain of careful analyses in which inferences are made from facts, synthesis made to enable new whole structures to be built from diverse parts put together, evaluation which involves the act of making judgment about the value of ideas or materials that come in to support the implementation of certain resolutions. Head uses images that magnify the ideas the readers receive and respond to. The symbols used by Adah also stand for things common to the readers too. Also, there is a projection of a powerful compelling voice that urges Adah to confront the dominance of the male superiority image even in the face of a highly repressive cultural belief and roles attached to them traditionally. She is an advocate of the fact that women should strive to pull themselves out from the quagmire of poverty, unhappy marriages and molestations to a comfortable liberated life. From the standpoint of self-assertion and personal development, Adah sees education as a way out of poverty and a means to liberate self from the cultural norms and perceptions that imprison minds.

### Conclusion

From the above analysis, we see, from the chosen creative works of Head and Emecheta, that pain lived in real life can be a good motivation for creative writing. The muse does not only spur the writer to write; it also renders the works authentic as characters are relatable to real life persons. From their life experiences, Head and Emecheta expressed, through their characters, their advocacy for the transformation of self so as to cause a positive impact on society and Mankind. They belong to the union of positive thinking people of the world and their works are a call for us to

join this union for a positive transformation of the world. They have known the pain of discrimination and would not want anyone to be bitten by it anymore. Through their characters, they caution us to avoid thinking along the lines of *I, me, mine, myself*, because it is death. Consequently, painful situations lived by right thinking and pro-active persons should move them a step ahead, liberate them and equally impact the lives of those around them. Pain, therefore, is an opportunity for growth. For people who have lived severe and chronic pain, like Head and Emecheta, the magnitude of their success is measured by the depth of their pain. By changing the context, we can, on a larger scale, be able to orientate our life experiences in such a way that they can be of benefit to self, society and the world at large. In conclusion, one confirms from the foregoing analysis that Head and Emecheta have gone beyond doubt to prove that pain, when viewed positively, projects to success. This is seen from the lives they have lived, the happenings in their societies from which they have drawn in order to build their ideas, and the myths they have demystified. The pain of Head and Emecheta, in real life, propels them to success. It is mirrored by the success of their two heroines in the selected novels. Their success is intended to motivate, encourage and strengthen their readers so that they should not give up when crushed by the wheel of pain. There is always a small window that brings in fresh air which, when combined with an inner strength and determination to bounce back, propels one to higher heights of success.

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