



Critical Essays on Bessie Head (Contributions in Afro-American & African Studies)

Maxine Sample

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Through narrative and rhetorical strategies that subvert genre and challenge the discourse of race and gender, black South African woman writer Bessie Head creates alternative healing spaces that empower and enoble the marginalized, provide potential for transcendence and self-creation, and render ineffective the power of language to subjugate. This book features new critical material on her life and works and explores the techniques she uses to inscribe an idealistic vision in response to the psychic fragmentation and rootlessness she experienced as an exile.

The traumatized characters of *When Rain Clouds Gather* reflect Head's own use of agriculture and writing as means of coping with her suffering. *Maru* is a radical subversion of the romance genre, arguing for black women's need for space as creators. *A Question of Power* employs madness as a potential site of resistance to official constructions of reality. Viewed from the Lacanian association of the incest taboo and the entry into language, *The Cardinals* proposes a cosmic realm as an alternative to the categorical edicts of patriarchal language. And endowed with a didactic voice, the narrator of *The Collector of Treasures* claims the authority of several hundred groups to critique the patriarchal society she views. The contributors to this volume draw on new biographical information as well as Head's private papers.

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