

Bessie Head to Virago Modern Classics

More than two decades after her death, 2010 will see two novels from the renowned African author Bessie Head back in print. Virago Modern Classics have picked up *WHEN RAIN CLOUDS GATHER* and *MARU*, arguably her best-known works of full-length fiction.

Bessie Head is one of the great African authors of the late twentieth century – and her work is currently undergoing a major rediscovery, following the 80th anniversary of her birth in 2008. Born in South Africa, she spent most of her life in exile in Botswana. The child of an illegal union between a Scottish woman and a black man, she was taken from her mother at birth and raised in a foster home until the age of thirteen.

Her writing has a powerful autobiographical streak, and draws inspiration from her turbulent beginnings. The issues she deals with – race, discrimination, refugee status, African history, poverty, and the struggles and hardships of life in postcolonial Africa – are still painfully apposite today. She died in 1986 at the age of just forty-nine. All three of her major novels, *WHEN RAIN CLOUDS GATHER* (1969), *MARU* (1971), and *A QUESTION OF POWER* (1973), were written in Botswana during the 15-year period when she was a political refugee. Bessie has a passionate fan-base in both Africa and the USA, where there is constant demand for her prose in exam papers, magazines and journals.

WHEN RAIN CLOUDS GATHER is about a poverty-stricken village in the heart of rural Botswana, a haven to the exiles gathered there. When a political refugee from South Africa joins forces with an English agricultural expert, the time-honoured subsistence-farming method and old ways of life are challenged.

MARU tells the story of Margaret Cadmore, an orphaned Masarwa girl, who comes to Dilepe to teach, only to discover that in this remote Botswana village her own people are treated as outcasts. In the love story and intrigue that follows, Bessie Head brilliantly combines a portrait of loneliness with a rich affirmation of the mystery and spirituality of life.

For more information and details on translation rights, please contact Ed Wilson on info@johnsonandalcock.co.uk.