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## Nadine Gordimer: The Politicisation of Women

Dorothy Driver

Throughout both her fiction and her other writings and statements, Nadine Gordimer has been committed to getting away from what T.T. Moyana calls “one-eyed literature”, a literature that views the world with a (in her case, white) racial perspective.<sup>1</sup> In basic agreement with Marxist critics, who recognise, in the words of Terry Eagleton, that literary works “have a relation to that dominant way of seeing the world which is the ‘social mentality’ or ideology of an age”,<sup>2</sup> Gordimer has at various times noted the extraordinary difficulty that a writer may have in subverting or transcending that dominant ideology. Speaking for whites, she has said, “we actually *see* blacks differently, which includes *not seeing*”,<sup>3</sup> and proceeds in her fiction to document these blinkered perceptions, to show the hesitant and often inarticulate shifts into awareness of white South Africans towards black, and, on one occasion at least, to present quite explicitly the perspective of a white South African who has developed “eyes the colour of the lining of black mussel shells” (BD, p. 308).<sup>4</sup> Her major literary effort seems to be geared towards freeing herself from her white consciousness (“my consciousness has the same tint as my face”<sup>5</sup>) and freeing white consciousness from the colonial strictures which trap whites into roles of capitalist exploiters, landlords and employers, whether in towns or on farms, whether male or female, always in some way perpetrators and perpetuators of apartheid, that final and most inhuman entrenchment of colonialism, “the ugliest creation of man” (Gordimer, 1983, p. 21).

Gordimer has repeatedly been referred to as a writer “remarkable for her ability to reflect changing moods and issues in the South African society she describes”,<sup>6</sup> as a writer who “responds with immediacy to important social and historical developments” and who constructs “fictional ‘types’ . . . representative of social and historical movements”.<sup>7</sup> She has herself noted the strong relation between her fiction and society. In the Introduction to her *Selected Stories*, for example, she refers to the historical sense that the chronological order of the stories lays bare: “The change in

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social attitudes unconsciously reflected in the stories represents both that of the people in my society — that is to say, history — and my apprehension of it; in the writing, I am acting upon my society, and in the manner of my apprehension, all the time history is acting upon me.”<sup>8</sup> She has spoken of the immediate effects on work in progress of external events — of the Soweto children’s uprising in 1976 on *Burger’s Daughter*, for instance<sup>9</sup> — and has even composed one of her public lectures as a *mimesis* of that continual impingement.<sup>10</sup>

Critics generally identify her various novels and short story collections as specific stages in the social psychology of a white South African who shifts from a position of uneasy liberalism to a recognition of the marginality of liberalism and of its inherent hypocrisies, and finally into a ‘revolutionary’ attitude, which accepts as both inevitable and welcome the take-over of power in the country by a “liberating African consciousness that will eventually transcend white cultural and political domination”.<sup>11</sup> (Her last four novels, published between 1970 and 1982, would all qualify for such a ‘revolutionary’ position.) This sort of development is as clear in her non-fictional statements as in her fictional ones, and it is therefore probably no surprise to those who have read her recent novels to discover that in her recent James Lecture, presented at the New York Institute for the Humanities on 14 October 1982, she acknowledges the justness of Bishop Tutu’s statement that blacks must have “a primacy in determining the course and goal of the struggle. Whites must learn to follow.”<sup>12</sup> *How whites follow is crucial:*

Since skills, technical and intellectual, can be bought in markets other than those of the vanquished colonial power, although they are important as a commodity ready to hand, they do not constitute a claim on the future.

That claim rests on something else: how to offer *one’s self*.

(1983, pp. 21-22)

Gordimer urges the fictional selves of her characters, male, female, black as well as white, into a state of preparedness for the ‘new era’ with a dedication so fierce that it almost dispels the tones of disillusionment and near-cynicism that characterise her voice. Her novels usually end with the characters facing forward, looking ahead, existing now in something akin to a state of grace,<sup>13</sup> whether a moment of confession — as in *Occasion for Loving*, where Jessie Stillwell hangs her head in shame at Ann’s betrayal of Gideon, herself (guilty by gender) standing “drawn up” before her husband

“as before a tribunal” (p. 288) — or a moment of commitment — as in *Burger’s Daughter*, where Rosa stands in the prison cell, blessed by the same ray of light that fell on her father. Never clearer than this are Gordimer’s affinities with Graham Greene, whom she finds “unique” for that “questing lucidity that no other writer in the English language can come near”.<sup>14</sup>

Gordimer has always felt a strong sense of political duty as a writer, and her fiction has a marked didactic thrust, sometimes emerging, as it does early in her career, in the form of less irony and more authorial explication, or, as it does later, in the form of more irony and obliquity. Even in her first novel we see an effort to document the kind of South African life in literature that has not been documented before as a political act, an anti-colonial and anti-racist act: “I had never [says her heroine] read a book in which I myself was recognisable, in which there was a ‘girl’ like Anna who did the housework and the cooking and called the mother and father Missus and Baas” (LD, p. 20). By 1966 Gordimer had published a book that she called “subversive”<sup>15</sup> and which was indeed banned, and had consciously striven to create a fictional world as “part of the African continent”<sup>16</sup> rather than as a colony of Europe, with the attendant cultural and political implications. Ten years later she concluded *The Conservationist* with an allusion to the ANC slogan, “Afrika! Mayibuye!” — “Africa! May it come back!”: “They had put him away to rest, at last; he had come back. He took possession of this earth, theirs; one of them.”

Until recently, however, Gordimer has felt the need to insist that she is not primarily or essentially a political writer; that she has no ‘message’, just writes about what she sees. In 1965 she said, “I don’t suppose, if I had lived elsewhere, my writing would have reflected politics much. If at all.”<sup>17</sup> This sort of comment appears again and again. But last year she admitted that she would “cross out the final phrase, ‘if at all’: “Obviously if I had lived elsewhere, even in apparently ‘happy’ countries, like Sweden and Canada, shall we say, there are always particular trends in society, particular problems, that would again affect people’s lives, that would have come into my work, so that there would have been perhaps directly or indirectly some kind of political concern.”<sup>18</sup>

It may be that Gordimer would have been a different kind of writer in a country in which she was not constantly faced with the fact of apartheid; whether she would have revealed an interest in class or gender rather more than an interest in the abiding dishonesties, hypocrisies and ironies of human life is open to debate. Her early emphasis on short fiction and her preoccupation with Mansfield-like ‘slices of life’ and moments of revelation

suggest an apolitical interest that was gradually overtaken: witness the growing concern with what she calls not “the how, but the why” (Ravenscroft, 1965, p. 28); witness, too, the changing proportion of story to novel.<sup>19</sup> Nor is she a political writer in the sense that she has made an original contribution to a political philosophy; she has, on the whole, translated existing political philosophies into fictional form, and, but for the transcending function of her irony, has toed a straightforward political line, though not necessarily party-political. Nevertheless, not only was she the first major South African writer to provide a critique of liberalism, she was also the first to illustrate the psychological repressions implied by colonialism. She has explored in the most thorough-going fashion the relation between the private and political self in a country with legislation and social habits that continually impinge on the sense of individual privacy; she has re-evaluated the kind of political commitment that leaves far behind E M Forster’s dictum that personal loyalty is more important than patriotism;<sup>20</sup> she has examined the psychological unfitnes for revolutionary change that characterises even those whites who yearn for revolution and also the majority of blacks, who have lived too long in dependency to whites.

All these statements are intended to pay tribute to a writer who has as one of her major purposes the redefinition of political consciousnesses and political roles. Her voice has been directed not simply towards Britain but towards the Western world in general so that they may see their responsibility to “the West’s formerly subject peoples” (Gordimer, 1983, p. 29), people of the so-called Third World who have long served to support the ‘developed’ world. In different ways, both her literary and her geographical allusions help to universalise the issue of colonialism, to spread the blame: she draws from and therefore looks to a wider literary and geographical world than other South African writers of her generation. Although the structure of the South African publishing world has until recently made it necessary for her to publish her works outside the country and to make the corresponding adjustments in her narrative process (a glossary, the inclusion of information that a South African readership would not normally need<sup>21</sup>), and although she has said that she does not write for a specific audience<sup>22</sup> and that South Africans seem incapable of coping with as modern a style as she uses, she has nevertheless hoped that her fiction will be seen as “liberating” for her South African readers.<sup>23</sup> Her scrupulous attention to black participation in South African society and culture as well as what seems to be a constant need to assure blacks of the presence of at least some whites who take account of their struggle for freedom would make of

black South Africans what Stephen Clingman calls, after Jean-Paul Sartre, a “virtual public”,<sup>24</sup> if not an actual one. More directly than this, Gordimer’s fiction is also addressed towards white South African women in a way that draws them into the circle of blame and responsibility. It is only when we understand this incorporation that we can understand her particular narrative stance towards and her treatment of women; it is initially only within these terms, within the terms that Gordimer has created her fiction, that we can understand her presentation of the political issues of race and sex.

Given Gordimer’s recognition of ideological controls over perception as well as her felt relation to the current socio-political climate, it is perhaps disappointing that she has been reluctant to think of herself as a feminist writer. Indeed, many of her comments may even initially be taken as reactionary in feminist terms. Susan Gardner notes that Gordimer is on record as saying, presumably defiantly, that she is simply “a writer who happens to be a woman”,<sup>25</sup> thus refusing, at least publicly and officially, to assume what a feminist critic assumes to be the duty of a woman writer. One might note, too, as hopelessly out of touch with the current social situation, Gordimer’s statement that “All writers are androgynous beings”,<sup>26</sup> for she must know as well as anyone else what Kate Millet shows in her *Sexual Politics* (1971): that not all writers are androgynous nor even attempt to be. Gordimer surely means that all writers (like all people) *ought to be* androgynous, and that she strives to be so to make up for a society which is not androgynous. She recognises, for instance, that women comprise a generally disadvantaged working group,<sup>27</sup> and are in a legally subordinate position, “being honorary children”.<sup>28</sup> She has Bernard Chabrier say to Rosa Burger that having a child on her own is “no easier than it ever was” for a woman (BD, p. 303). In fact, throughout her fiction she makes enough statements for us to acknowledge her interest in the debased status of women in society, and her recent admission that she has become “much more radical” both “as a woman and a citizen” (Gray, 1981, p. 271) reminds us of that correction regarding her political function cited earlier, and authorises us not simply to look for a recent development of feminist thought but to doubt that this feminist impulse had ever been absent.

Relationships between men and women in Gordimer’s fiction are generally characterised by inequality. Many of her white women define themselves in terms of how males wish to see them; wearing the masks of make-up so that they look “two-dimensional”, as in “The Smell of Death and Flowers” (NPL, p. 124), and speaking, also in this story, in a “small,

unassertive feminine voice, a voice gently toned for the utterance of banal pleasantries” (p. 128). But Gordimer also records the exceptions; like Leric in “Six Feet of the Country”, whose enthusiastic managing of the farm clearly threatens her husband, as does her untidy, ‘unfeminine’ appearance; like Rita Cunningham in “Friday’s Footprint”, who has to wait until her husband’s death to find out that she is a good business-woman; like Barbara in “The Life of the Imagination”, who recognises in herself mothering an ill child the “image of the mother that men have often chosen to perpetuate, the autobiographers, the Prousts” (NPL, p. 423).

Gordimer often gives particular polemical force to her documentation of inequality in male-female relationships by employing it to define female growth. Helen Shaw’s development in *The Lying Days* is imaged partly in terms of her noting the extent to which John Marcus dominates Jenny Marcus; another part in terms of her perceiving the domestic trap that she’s walking into — “‘Hell, Helen,’” says her lover Paul to her, “‘you’re becoming a rotten wife. You might have put food on’” (p. 285) — and finally knowing that she must move out of its reach: “‘Here I was, back where they [the women like her mother] were, cooking a man’s breakfast and keeping my mouth shut’” (p. 314). In *Burger’s Daughter* Rosa Burger chooses to be in a prison cell as a political prisoner rather than in a Paris apartment as a sexual one: her recognition of the French prostitute as a “‘poor thing, a hamster turning her female treadmill’” that makes Rosa’s “‘sense of sorority’” suddenly appallingly clear, her decoding of Bernard Chabaliere’s invitation —

I want first to show you *la dame à la licorne* in the Cluny. —  
 — You will arrange treats for me. —  
 — What is that? —  
 — When you take children out to amuse them. — (p. 288)

and her vision of the unicorn’s Lady, “‘bedecked, coaxed, secured at last by a caress’” (p. 341) with the attendant images of a “‘pet monkey tethered by a chain’” (p. 340), the mirror that the Lady holds to give the unicorn back the image of himself, the plaits on her head “‘imitating the modelling of his horn’” (p. 340), and the reminder of “‘the age of the thumbscrew and dungeon’” (p. 341), all these moments explain Rosa’s choice.<sup>29</sup> The paradoxes set up here are tantalising ones: the taken-for-granted personal freedom of the life of a mistress is only an apparent one; it is only in prison that Rosa becomes free.

Obviously, Gordimer’s women become more politically involved in the struggle against apartheid during the course of her fiction — against

Elizabeth Van Den Sandt of *The Late Bourgeois World*, with her tentative agreement to open her grandmother's bank account to PAC funds, one measures Antonia of *The Conservationist*, arrested and deported for subversive activities; and against her, Rosa Burger, actively at the service of black revolutionaries (Maureen Smales, though "yearning for there to be no time left at all" (JP, p. 8) until the black take-over, and an admirer of Castro, "the bourgeois white who succeeded in turning revolutionary" (p. 37), is probably a regressive step; history has not moved fast enough for Gordimer's reflecting artistic consciousness). Whether these women become politicised in feminist terms is debatable: there are no self-defined feminists as heroines. If there is at least a shift (one that Gordimer herself suggests<sup>30</sup>) towards the portrayal of women who show more independence and self-sufficiency either within their marriages or, more important, while deciding to remain unmarried, Gordimer's endowment of independence even to these later heroines is, except in the case of Rosa Burger, noticeably grudging. Antonia seems continually to need to show herself off against Mehring, to use his conservative politics as a foil for her revolutionary image.<sup>31</sup> The relationship between Maureen and Bam Smales is an uneasy balance of power and Maureen's position not always sympathetically depicted: she has "a will that twisted itself around [her husband], he was split and at the same time held together by it" (JP, p. 44). And the repeated references in this novel to the "master bedroom", both as generalised concept (p. 65) and as the particular place where Maureen and Bam used to sleep, signal irony: unlike Maureen, the rural black women sleep in their own houses. This contrast reminds us of the contrast Gordimer sets up in the novel between the black women's role regarding food and the white woman's: it is not given to Maureen, never before responsible for the family's food, to be responsible now — the author withholds from her that right, thus refusing her that state of grace referred to earlier.

Gordimer's continuing concern with the position of white women in a colonial, racist society is particularly evident both in the ways that she explores women's sexuality and in the ways that she exploits sexual development in her presentation of political development. Even as early as *The Lying Days* she refuses to explore experience "only through sexuality", which, as Carolyn Heilbrun suggests,<sup>32</sup> is one of the commonest traps into which a non-feminist writer falls. For Helen Shaw, sexual intercourse comes to mean both copulation and communication: new political experience is accessible to a young woman primarily through participation in a male world, and to this world she can have access most easily through sexual communion. Yet Helen strives to dissociate herself from the men who teach

her and she also takes pride in being ahead of them: her reference to being better-read than Ludi acts as a significant comment, albeit unwitting,<sup>33</sup> on Doris Lessing's Martha Quest, who, like other heroines before her,<sup>34</sup> gets her reading matter from men. In *Occasion for Loving* Gordimer has Jessie Stillwell say, "You know, Boaz, I sometimes get afraid that everything we think of as love — even sex — is nearly always power instead" (p. 154) and suggests, through Jessie's husband, that Ann's affair with Gideon is her only way of living the "serious" life that the intelligent Jessie naturally lives (p. 282).

Sexuality is important in Gordimer's fiction, both as a concept and as a device. Her general aim, to speak first of sexuality as a concept, seems to be to retain for women the right to be sexually attractive and vital beings, without being therefore classified as 'merely' feminine. While her views on sexuality are controversial,<sup>35</sup> they should not be taken as simplistic or accidental. Her discussion of the popular feminist concept 'sex object' will serve my purpose here. In *The Lying Days* Helen Shaw is looked at by Joel with "that deeply desired, faintly insulting recognition of the pure female, discounting me, making of me a creature of no name" (p. 201), and, at least for the moment, assumes the right to do the same: "and I saw him then for a moment not as Joel, but a young man alive and strange beside me" (p. 201). But, lest one take as absolute her assertion that one may take an impersonal sexual pleasure without necessarily harming the other or oneself, Gordimer must also present the ironic obverse: Mehring in *The Conservationist* is severely characterised through his de-personalising treatment of the Portuguese girl on the plane, as is Brandt Vermeulen in *Burger's Daughter* through the plastic female torso in his house. This latter image, taken from the 'permissive' society, both validates Rosa's bid for a private life through sexuality, by compelling us to see her as different from the plastic torso, and foreshadows her subsequent discovery about sexual 'freedom'.

There are a variety of other occasions where Gordimer shows a deep and explicit interest in feminist issues. To keep still to *The Lying Days* and *Burger's Daughter*, one thinks of her ironic portrayal, in the first novel, of Isa, "the ardent feminist" (LD, p. 218), and, in the second, of the two different songs, the 'private' love song that the Creole singer Josette Arnys sings in the bar (BD, p. 270) and the 'public' love song that the black revolutionary Marisa Kgosana sings in prison (BD, pp. 354-55). But the point to be made here is that Gordimer frees herself to use sexuality as a device through which to give her female characters social mobility, as suggested above; and also to reveal to them the "fullness of life, the

revealed and the hidden” (LD, p. 183) but particularly the life under the surface of things. If she draws on sexuality as a common bond between men and women, she draws on gender identity as a common bond between women; she also explores through sexuality the notion of a private life, so complex a concept in South African society, and she is able to set up a reverberating metaphorical relation between sexism and racism that has important implications regarding her political stance. Above all, the device of sexuality is a crucial component of her didactic voice and also of her ironic mode.

Early in her fiction Gordimer opens up the general area of racism and sexism in terms of chaotic, pre-rational responses. The first chapter of *The Lying Days* presents Helen Shaw’s first move out along the road of independence as she disobeys the parental injunction that comes from racial/sexual fear: “a little girl must not be left alone because there were native boys about” (p. 14). Her journey is textured with sexual and sex-related imagery: the “hard and cool” tree trunk, the “tough little seal of dried blood” (p. 17) of the scab that Helen lifts off, feeling “the pleasure of the break with the thin tissue” (p. 17), the blood in the butchery, the reptilian images, the smell of urine that “had soured the earth with a crude animal foulness” (p. 23). Her subsequent retreat is precipitated by knowledge of that very complexity of race and sex that she had tried to discard:

. . . I passed a Mine boy standing with his back to me and his legs apart. I had vaguely noticed them standing in that curious way before, as I whisked past in the car. But as I passed this one . . . I saw a little stream of water curving from him. Not shock but a sudden press of knowledge, hot and unwanted, came upon me. A question that had waited inside me but had never risen into words or thoughts because there were no words for it — no words with myself, my mother, with Olwen even. (p. 24)

She knows now the answer to that earlier question: “A curious feeling prickled round my shoulders. Was there something to be afraid of?” (p. 18).

The topic is picked up again in Gordimer’s next novel, *Occasion for Loving*, where Jessie Stillwell talks to Gideon Shibalo of the irrational truth about race and sex:

“I remember the young black man with a bare chest, mowing the lawn. The bare legs and the strong arms that carried things for us, moved furniture. The black man that I must never be left alone with in the house. No one explained why, but it didn’t matter. I used to feel, at night, when I turned my back to the dark passage and bent to wash my

face in the bathroom, that someone was coming up behind me. Who was it, do you think? And how many more little white girls are there for whom the very first man was a black man? The very first man, the man of the sex phantasies . . .”  
(p. 253)

Gordimer now makes explicit the sexual nature of the hot, unwanted knowledge of *The Lying Days*. And at the end of the novel Jessie Stillwell stands in shame on behalf of all white women, not for Ann’s sexual love of Gideon but for her final betrayal of him. Gordimer thus throws into clearer focus the complex links between race and sex, and women’s part in the complexity, by stressing both the pre-rational attraction against which the white man, the colonial Prospero, reacts, and woman’s obedience to his strictures. Interestingly, Gordimer exposes an area that Shulamith Firestone seems to shy from, despite her attempt to go deeper into the connection between sex and racism “than anyone has cared to go”:<sup>36</sup> Firestone discusses the connection between white women and black men primarily in terms of “a clear-cut polarization of feelings in white women” between “a vicarious identification with the black man [and] a hysterical (but inauthentic) racism” (p. 110), the latter stemming from “the precariousness of her own class(less) situation” (p. 110), being an attempt to “merge completely into the powerful egos of their [white] men” (p. 109). She spends less time on “the white woman’s frequent identification with the black man personally” (p. 109), and does not expand into the sexual.

While something of the same guilt as expressed by Jessie Stillwell may be expressed by Mary Turner in Doris Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing*, where she tempts the black ‘houseboy’ to ‘rape’ her *and* kill her in one final act, this attraction and betrayal between white woman and black man seems to be an area unexplored in South African fiction. The sex act between white female and black male is rare enough: Jillian Becker’s presentation of it in *The Virgins* (1976), a pleasurable, trivial moment between two adolescents trying out sex for the first time together, without much guilt, without much moral fanfare (beyond the hint that Annie is making use of an ‘inferior’) was sufficient to get the book banned. More common in South African literature is sex between white male and black female, the recurrence of which theme seems partly explicable in terms of the need to explore the equation between sexual and racial oppression. The husband in Olive Schreiner’s *From Man to Man*, to take an early example, is the more negatively viewed for his ‘colonisation’ of the body of one of the domestic servants; his wife tries to repair this wrong by adopting the offspring and bringing her up, within the terms of the mental set of the time, as ‘one of the

family'. Her duty is to expiate the sin of the white man. Various writers have tried to cure this aspect of colonial sin by having their male characters fall in love with women of colour — William Plomer's Turbott Wolfe 'simply' falls in love with Nhliziyombi.

After *Occasion for Loving* Gordimer too diverts her attention to the male oppressor's act of 'love' with the female oppressed: in *A World of Strangers* she provides an oblique comment on the apparent innocence of such an act. Much like Turbott Wolfe, Toby Hood first declaims, "I want to live! I want to see people who interest me and amuse me, black, white, or any colour. I want to take care of my own relationships with men and women who come into my life, and let the abstractions of race and politics go hang" (p. 36). Later, after she has him discover — through Anna Louw, through Steven Sithole, through Cecil Rowe — that politics inevitably intrudes into personal relationships, Gordimer cannot have him act upon the suggestion by his friend Steven that he "interest him[self] in a nice African girl" (p. 215) and thereby consummate, as it were, his Africanist sympathies, for he would, one assumes, then become the self that he has lately begun to reject, the colonial figure mistakenly reflected in the eyes of an old man in the township who says, with a concupiscent grin, "'Morning, baas', for what could I have come for but sex?" (p. 162).

By the 1960s Gordimer had apparently decided to channel her discussion of the connection between racism and sexism into what is for her and for other South African writers a fairly well-trodden area, the metaphorical link, on the ground of 'oppression', of the two concepts. (The concepts are referred to here in their most generalised sense as umbrella concepts, incorporating, besides oppression, such things as exploitation, patronisation, and so on.) The image of woman, to which clings the implications of oppression, is of course used in a variety of metaphors by a variety of writers. In "Rain-Queen", which Gordimer has said is "about corruption. Of a child by grown-ups",<sup>37</sup> Gordimer uses a female child as the available image. Woman is as easily used as a sign of racial oppression. A man's domination over women is quite congruent with his domination over blacks, and illustrates the thesis, popularised by Frantz Fanon, that in "Europe and in every country characterised as civilising or civilised, the family is a miniature of the nation . . . There is no disproportion between the life of the family and the life of the nation."<sup>38</sup>

In *The Conservationist* Mehring's attitude towards women is returned to again and again as a means of characterising him as racially exploitative and as incapable of seeing other (black) human beings in other than functional terms: "what's the reason we go after [women] — she was pretty. She had a

smashing figure. —” (p. 71), he says to his son about his mother; “there’s a special pleasure in having a woman you’ve paid” (p. 71), he says to Antonia. Through Mehring’s relationship with Antonia, Gordimer highlights another ‘special pleasure’ that males feel, and thus puts power into sex and, by implication, sex into power. As the intelligent Mehring himself records, “It is in opposition (the disputed territory of argument, the battle for self definition that goes on beneath the words) that attraction lies, with a woman like that. It’s there . . . that intimacy takes place” (p. 95); and, the thoughts given more brutally now, though with an uneasy hesitancy: “The flirtatious sneer in her voice unexpectedly gave him an erection. (Even then, perhaps? . . . the beginning of these — inappropriate — reactions now, being pecked on the cheek by some child he’s known since she was in napkins)” (p. 64). Pauline Smith makes the same connections in *The Beadle* and “The Miller” — Mintje’s tears fill the miller with exultation, as does “the quick rise and fall of her bosom” — implicitly though not explicitly in service of a racial theme.<sup>39</sup>

Gordimer’s analysis of colonial domination in sexual terms involves the utilisation of female images also in relation to the land, again quite a standard literary practice, in order to illustrate control and ownership; “underfoot [the lucerne leaves] give out now and then a sweetish whiff of summer — breath from the mouth of a cow, or the mouth of a warm sleepy woman turned to in the morning” (C, p. 9). Indeed, the extremely close connection between racial and sexual domination is emphasised in one of the concluding images of the novel. When Mehring has sex with the woman that he’s picked up at the side of the road, it is now the turn of the subsidiary subject of the metaphor to become the principal subject:<sup>40</sup> “The grain of the skin is gigantic, muddy and coarse. A moon surface. Grey-brown with layers of muck that don’t cover the blemishes” (p. 246).

Whereas one might simply suggest that Gordimer is using the images available to her as a realist writer who accepts that women are oppressed, the transposition of principal and subsidiary subjects in her metaphor indicates that she is reasserting, for polemical purposes, the image of woman as oppressed being; putting it before our eyes as a literal, crucial and unpleasant fact. Besides the number of occasions in her fiction in which sexual oppression stands for racial oppression, there are also a number in which the primary purpose of the story seems to be to document sexual oppression, to assert sexism as the principal subject. The marital direction of “Six Feet of the Country” and “The Train from Rhodesia” is of particular interest, since in both these stories it is through awareness of the

husband's racially dubious behaviour that the women come to a realisation about the nature of their marriages: in "The Train from Rhodesia" the young woman's vision is cleared; she comes to see the wooden lion that is the object of her husband's bargaining as "something different" now (NPL, p. 54) and at the end of the story will turn her back on her husband, thus identifying with the exploited black man:

a weariness, a tastelessness, the discovery of a void made her hands slacken their grip, atrophy emptily, as if the hour was not worth their grasp. She was feeling like this again. *She had thought it was something to do with singleness, with being alone and belonging too much to herself.* (p.55, my emphasis)

Perception also changes for the farmer's wife in "Six Feet of the Country". The story deals with a man who stands in a paternalistic relation to his black labourers and who is the only recourse they have against a hostile white world; his refusal to assume responsibility for them stuns Lericé, his wife, into "standing in the middle of a room as people do when they are shortly to leave on a journey, looking searchingly about her at the most familiar objects as if she had never seen them before" (NPL, p. 73). In this story such moments are habitual, reminding us of Gordimer's phrase, quoted earlier in this paper, "females on a treadmill".

"Six Feet of the Country" has made absolutely clear the comparable position of women and blacks: there is a common bond between them, and thus between racism and sexism. When the farmer complains about how much time he has to spend trying to help Petrus get back the corpse from the police, he notices that Lericé and Petrus "both kept their eyes turned on me as I spoke, and, oddly, for those moments they looked exactly alike, though it sounds impossible . . ." (p. 77). "The Bridegroom" also deals with the metaphorical link between racial and sexual exploitation. The story presents an evening in the life of a young white Afrikaner at a road camp, the white 'boss' among a group of labourers and entirely dependent on them for his physical needs, for luxuries, for emotional needs. His attitude towards Piet, who cooks his food and generally looks after him, is, as the title suggests, a pointer to his attitude towards his future wife, but if there is any uneasiness in him and in his fiancée's family about the marriage it is placed squarely on the other people among whom the newly-weds must live: "He had had a hard time, trying to overcome the prejudice of the girl's parents against the sort of life he could offer her . . . alone with him in a road camp, 'surrounded by a gang of kaffirs all day', as her mother had said" (NPL, p. 184). Interestingly, Gordimer does not dramatise the relationship between white male and female in any way other than this: that is, she presents only the racism half of the metaphor (which acts, as the title suggests, as subsidiary subject, 'organizing' our perception, as Max Black

would say): the other half is as clear to us as readers of Gordimer as the other half of the *carpe diem* theme was clear to readers of Herrick's "To Dianeme", to use an example from a very different culture. This story comes after "Six Feet of the Country" and "The Train from Rhodesia", which have prepared us for the psychological link between sexism and racism, making the racism half of the metaphor explicit, and asserting from it something about the relationship between man and wife.

"An Intruder" can stand as the final illustration of Gordimer's exploration of the metaphorical relation between racial and sexual oppression. The story focuses primarily on the courtship and marriage between a young woman, Marie, and her several-times-divorced husband, James. James is initially characterised by his patronising behaviour towards his fiancée, his "little marmoset, [his] rabbit-nose, little teenage doll" (NPL, p. 380), quite clearly a preliminary signal of his essentially vicious character. The only hint that this sexist relationship stands in metaphorical relation to other social relations is Marie's distaste for the "thick mesh burglar-proofing over the windows" (p. 381), an image which creates the link between the racial situation 'outside' and the corresponding situation 'inside'. The story provides an answer to Marie's question, "What are all these people afraid of?" (p. 381). As in "The Life of the Imagination", the answer is that they are afraid of what they themselves create, images with a terrible truth that emerge out of repression.

Gordimer's interest here is on the relations between men and women, the 'inside' (sexual) psychology that matches in some way the 'outside' (racial) reality. Possibly there is a suggestion here that the 'inside' creates or determines the 'outside', as seems to occur more obviously in *The Conservationist*, where the author's use of image and narrative situation speaks of how psychology controls reality. Through Mehring's dominating point of view much of the 'reality' is remembered rather than given 'objective' reality via an authorial medium; it is presented as already acted upon by Mehring's dominating consciousness, his skewed perceptions. His repression of the image from the world in which he is *not* in absolute control destroys him: its final mocking surfacing cued by the body of the woman he would normally have paid for, would normally have controlled.

Once one speaks of sexism *determining* racism, one accepts that the connection between the two is no longer simply a metaphorical one, but reaches the level of the literal: racism as a consequence of sexism. That Gordimer would subscribe to such a view is supported also by her presentation of Mehring's son: the 'androgynous' adolescent, free from gender, free from racism. Clearly such a view places a significance on

sexism that we have not up till now acknowledged, though it has been hinted at, and takes one into a feminist domain, where Gordimer would assert, along with a social critic like Firestone, that “racism is sexism extended” (1971, p. 108).

But what is particularly remarkable about “An Intruder” in these terms is that Gordimer, quite explicitly, suddenly draws back from the final feminist assertion that the story has progressively moved towards, and that is initially signalled by the characterisation of James as an extremely unpleasant male chauvinist. From the beginning of the story Gordimer invites us to see Marie’s innocence as sexual frustration or repression: the “small slow smile that men brought to her face without her knowing why” (NPL, p. 378) is very soon explained as a sign of “appalling sexual desire” which Marie has to repress “like a child bottling up tears” (p. 379) and which is not satisfied by “all the strange things” that James teaches her to do and that “she would not have guessed were lovemaking at all” (p. 380). Just as Marie’s body becomes the vehicle for James’s obscenities, so does her mind:

“What do you think you’d call me if we were divorced?” [she asks, suddenly fearful of the insults he piles on the past wives he once presumably loved.]

“You . . .” He took Marie’s head between his hands and smoothed back the hair from her temples, kissing her as if trying with his lips the feel of a piece of velvet. “What could anyone say about you.” When he released her she said, going deep pink from the ledges of her small collar-bones to her black eyes, all pupil: “That sugar-tit tart.” The vocabulary was his all right, coming out in her soft, slow voice. He was enchanted, picked her up, carried her round the room. “Teenage-doll! Marmoset-angel! I’ll have to wash your mouth out with soap and water!” (p. 382)

Because Gordimer sets up so close a connection between husband and wife, and because of the various reminders of Marie’s oppression and repression, the reader has developed two expectations, not mutually exclusive, by the time of the story’s climax: one, that Marie will continue to be the agent for James’s violence and ugliness, and, two, that there will have developed in her a strong need to express rage, not on behalf of James but against him. The climax of the story negates neither of these two possibilities. Marie goes into the kitchen early one Sunday morning to see it in disarray, as if vandals had been there. Even the white muslin curtains “were ripped to shreds” (p. 384). In the bathroom her cosmetics are spilt, and her underwear

“arranged in an obscene collage with intimate objects of toilet” (p. 385); the living room mess is even more significant:

On each of the three divisions of the sofa cushions there was a little pile, an offering. One was a slime of contraceptive jelly with hair-combings — hers — that must have been taken from the wastepaper basket in the bedroom; the other was toothpaste and razor blades; the third was a mucous of half-rotted vegetable matter — peelings, tea leaves, dregs — the intestines of the dustbin. (p. 385)

Largely because of the nature of the imagery, any reader familiar with the pattern in literature written by women in which a maddened self emerges on behalf of the ‘feminine’ docile self would immediately slot this story into that tradition, a tradition created by such diverse pieces of fiction as Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Emily Dickinson’s “The Soul has Bandaged moments —”,<sup>41</sup> and which, to come closer to home, generates the violence in Doris Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing* and, perhaps, Pauline Smith’s “The Schoolmaster”, where the male acts of violence may be read as surrogate enactments of woman’s rage. Yet Gordimer, who has up till now encouraged such a reading of “An Intruder”, suddenly dismisses the feminist possibility:

“Did either of us go into the living room before we went to bed?” [James asks Marie] — For of course he didn’t remember a thing until he woke and found she had flung herself on him terrified.  
 “No. I told you. I went into the living room to get a bottle of lime juice, I went into all the rooms,” she repeated in her soft, slow, reasonable voice; and this time, while she was speaking, she began to know what else he would never *remember*, something so simple that she had missed it. (p. 386, my emphasis)

Had Gordimer used a word other than “remember” or had she located that word in a passage of free indirect style, it would be possible to keep reading the story as being about the enactment of a woman’s suppressed rage. But now, finally, the feminist ‘intruder’ is kept out, repressed; the story settles back into the Gordimer canon of stories about dual responsibilities, male and female, for violence. Gordimer very firmly presents the couple as a unit: James generates ugliness and Marie hides it, just as she hides the hideous burglar bars with white, frilly curtains. In her is manifest the “frilly mind” function that Gordimer introduced in *The Late Bourgeois World*, whereby Mrs Van Den Sandt puts a “frilly cover over everything; the lavatory seat, her mind —” (p. 33).

Gordimer's withdrawal comes as a surprise given the apparent run of her feminist sympathies: the creation of a context in which sexism is presented as a social fact and is even seen as a source of racism; the representation of the texture of women's lives; the polemical use of metaphor as a validation of ordinary domestic experience ("the warmth of body that brought out the smell of khaki as the warmth of the iron brings up the odour of a fabric" (LD, p. 42)); a concern with issues such as women's sexuality; the sympathetic presentation of women as open to new awareness, as intuitive beings. "An Intruder" functions for us as an objectification of Gordimer's own statements that she is not a feminist; what remains to be answered is why she has chosen to speak of herself and to create herself in these terms.

The answer has already been hinted at in the fiction. Gordimer's non-feminist stance stems clearly from its South African context, from her lack of ease at being a woman who is also a white South African. When a Johannesburg newspaper offered her the title "Woman of the Year" in 1976 she declined, saying that "The only candidates are surely Winnie Mandela, who came out of house arrest to stand between the police and the schoolchildren and be imprisoned, or any one of the black township women who have walked beside their marching children, carrying water to wash the tear gas from their eyes".<sup>42</sup> The previous year she had refused an invitation to a Woman's Conference in Grahamstown because "all the women in the country do not enjoy the same rights".<sup>43</sup> What she is talking about is not simply the superior claim of black women to feminist struggles, but the insignificance of feminism in South Africa: "the woman issue withers in comparison with the issue of the voteless, powerless state of South African blacks, irrespective of sex. It was bizarre then . . . as now . . . to regard a campaign for women's rights — black or white — as relevant",<sup>44</sup> she says in 1980 of Olive Schreiner's feminism, and the following year adds, "I am not a feminist, except insofar as I carry, still, the tattered banner of full human rights for all human beings" (1981, p. 1).

Her attitude towards white South African women emerges particularly clearly and severely in a comment that she made last year, during the time when there was discussion in parliament about the conscription of women. Gordimer went on record as saying that white women should be treated no differently from white men in this respect: "South African women helped to bring into power a white minority government which has brought the country into a state of war. Women have got what they deserve — what they asked for".<sup>45</sup> While the intent of such a statement might well have been to jolt women into public dissociation from inter-racial warfare — she has also recently raised a question regarding the submission of liberal whites to army

call-up (1983, p. 24) — the statement also reminds us of her severe treatment of white women in some of her fiction. “Happy Event” contrasts the ‘right’ of a white South African woman to have an abortion so that she can enjoy a luxury holiday, with the ‘criminal act’ of the black woman who gets rid of a baby for her own economic survival, a baby who may or may not have died on its own. The white woman could not be more harshly judged: the gentle voice that she on one occasion assumes towards Lena, the domestic servant, is drowned by her irritation at getting her feet wet when she has to go out to her room; the ‘gift’ of the cheap blue satin nightgown is seen exactly for what it is — Ella Plaistow getting rid of the garment that she wore in the nursing home and “somehow felt she didn’t want to wear again” (p. 110). “Happy Event” stands in testimony to the overriding effect of racist vision on an attempt by one (white) woman to empathise with another (black), and on the attempt by one (black) woman to call upon another (white) for help (a call that is symbolised by the use of the nightgown as protective wrap for the baby), and stands in ironic contrast to the moments elsewhere in Gordimer’s fiction where a white female like Helen Shaw recognises a gender-commonality with a black female like Mary Setswayo. Racism is stronger than the reaction against sexism.

If one is to accept, with Adrienne Rich, that women are not responsible for the power that men have asserted over slaves but “have been impressed into its service, not only as the marriage-property and creature-objects of white men, but as their active and passive instruments”,<sup>46</sup> one should note that “Happy Event” stresses this instrumentality to such an extent that one loses sight of the *source* of racism. So, although Gordimer has quite clearly accepted the comparable position of women and blacks, identifying and even validating the sympathetic bond caused by the commonality of oppression, she also treats the notion with irony at other moments in her fiction. Moreover, there are also occasions when she seems to subvert this particular commonality. First of all, she asserts the metaphorical relation between sexism and racism but makes the apparent common ground dependency rather than oppression, and thus is somewhat less sympathetic towards white women. This dependency-connection is briefly hinted at in *July’s People*, for instance, where Maureen’s mother’s husband is referred to as “My Jim” and her servant as “Our Jim” (p. 31), and is made clearer in such a story as “Enemies” where Alfred, ‘houseboy’ to the white woman, Clara Hansen, does many of the sort of things for her that a husband does for a woman, so that when an elderly woman dies on the train that Mrs Hansen is travelling on she sends Alfred the kind of telegram she would send to a husband — ““It was not me”” (NPL, p. 106) — imagining

that the bond of sympathy that dependency is usually based on is there for Alfred too.

Secondly, Gordimer invalidates the metaphorical connection between racism and sexism on the very grounds on which she has at other times seemed to validate it. At various points in her fiction the identity of the oppression suffered by blacks and that suffered by white women is vehemently rejected by the black male characters. The sympathetic attitude that the “progressive young woman in disguise” adopts towards Steven Sithole in *A World of Strangers* is suddenly abhorrent to him when he sees it become nothing beyond the charm of a beautiful woman, appealing to him on those very terms that bind her to him: “he saw the girl, saw the feathers of her charm all spread out in complacent display” (p. 173), and publicly, if subtly, insults her by refusing her the reciprocal male response. In other words, he rejects that system of ideas in which racism and sexism stand in some sort of analogy to each other, an analogy that would be felt as of spiritual benefit to the white woman.

The same sort of moment is differently detailed in the short story “Which New Era Would That Be?” (Various critics have mentioned that Gordimer seems to practise in a short story what she will later present in a novel; the relation between this story and *A World of Strangers* suggests a more complicated relationship than that.<sup>47</sup>) Jake Alexander’s response to Jennifer Tetzels insistence on equality takes this form:

But these women — oh, Christ! — these women felt as *you* did. They were sure of it. They thought they understood the humiliation of the black man walking the streets only by the permission of a pass written out by a white *person*, and the guilt and swagger of the coloured man light-faced enough to slink, fugitive from his own skin, into the preserves — the cinemas, bars, libraries — marked ‘EUROPEANS ONLY’. Yes, breathless with stout sensitivity, they insisted on walking the whole teeter-totter of the colour line. There was no escaping their understanding. They even insisted on feeling the resentment *you* must feel at their identifying themselves with your feelings...  
(NPL, p. 83, second emphasis mine)

In contrast to Steven Sithole, the (presumably) less intelligent and less articulate Jake Alexander demands mere sexuality as the link between him and Jennifer, “Who the hell wants a woman to look at you honestly, anyway? What has all this to do with a *woman* — with what men and women have for each other in their eyes?” (p. 83), and when Jennifer refuses to grant him that easy sexual response, though with “her beauty, her

strong provocativeness, full on” (p. 86), insisting on shaking hands, speaking in the “clear” voice that invariably alerts one to the women with whom Gordimer seems most in sympathy, and above all going to the length of rejecting the black victim’s viewpoint, Maxie’s story, “to the length of calling [Maxie] a liar to show by frankness how much she respected him” (p. 94), Jake Alexander reacts with male rage and violence:

His eye encountered the chair that he had cleared for Jennifer Tetzl to sit on. Suddenly he kicked it, hard, so that it went flying on to its side. Then, rubbing his big hands together and bursting into loud whistling to accompany an impromptu series of dance steps, he said, “Now, boys!” and as they stirred, he planked the pan down on the ring and turned the gas up till it roared beneath it. (pp. 94-5)

Like Steven Sithole, though in a very different manner, and in one more harshly evaluated by the author, Jake Alexander holds on to the sexist world, holds on to the world from which the women wish to embark in their desire to establish common ground. And the two women are treated as much as *white* women as July insists on treating Maureen Smales in *July’s People*, to her dismay. It is significant, too, that since he does not find Maureen sexually attractive, sexuality can be no weapon for her; she turns instead to blackmail.

As Gardner notes (1982, p. 66), no one doubts white women’s complicity in racism in this country. Yet Gordimer *is* to be commended for illustrating various ways in which South African women participate and benefit by racial oppression, for losing that Eurocentric vision against which a black feminist like Gloria Joseph rails,<sup>48</sup> and for insisting, not on women’s passivity, but on their responsibility.

But the relationship that Gordimer draws between racism and sexism becomes more complicated than this. As already suggested, Gordimer employs the two concepts in metaphorical relation to each other, and her transposition of principal and subsidiary subject is one of the strongest ways in which her fiction belies the minimising of the issue of sexism that occurs in her non-fictional statements. Her occasional fictional hint that the connection between the two ideological systems is a literal and even a casual one, with sexism sometimes as the originator, is more radical than one would expect. The sexism metaphor ‘organises’ (to use Black’s terminology again) our view of racism, and, because of Gordimer’s transposition, so that racism is not invariably the principal subject, the racism metaphor organises our view of sexism. Yet even the metaphorical relation between the two concepts seems occasionally to disturb Gordimer, and some of her

fictional moments stand as reminders that the metaphor is *not* a logical proposition. We are warned that only certain similarities between the two concepts obtain: racism is seen to be like sexism only as long as one is able to evoke what Black calls “a system of associated commonplaces” (p. 40). Black’s thesis is that a metaphor depends upon a set of cultural assumptions about the nature of the concepts employed, “a set of standard beliefs . . . (current platitudes) that are the common possession of the members of some speech community . . . part of a system of ideas, not sharply delineated, and yet sufficiently definite to admit of detailed enumeration” (pp. 40-41). Gordimer draws attention to the *absence* of such cultural unanimity in South Africa in this respect and thus withdraws sympathy from white women.

So keen, in fact, does Gordimer seem to be to correct any tendency in her towards agreement with the Firestone/Millet/Rich thesis that racism stems from sexism that she writes in 1982 a story that subverts this proposition, and at the same time corrects her earlier statements regarding the sexist behaviour of black men, which had been so necessary a fictional device for her at certain points. In “A City of the Dead, A City of the Living”<sup>49</sup> Samson and Nanike Moreke are asked to hide a foreign revolutionary, Shisonka, for a few days until he can get out of the country: he has blown up a police station and the police are searching for him. Nanike is depicted as a house-proud, bourgeois woman, and Shisonka’s entry into her world is disturbing: he wears one earring, not like “the men who came to work on the mines who had earrings, but in both ears — country people. He’s a town person; another one who reads newspapers” (p. 45); he has no children although “everyone has children” (p. 48); he helps her with the washing up, “scrapes the pot and dried everything . . . [though] it’s not man’s work” (p. 49); he “picks up the baby as if it belongs to him” (p. 50). The story ends with Nanike betraying him. She doesn’t know why:

*I get ready to say that to anyone who is going to ask me, but nobody in this house asks. The baby laughs at me while I wash her, stares up while we’re alone in the house and she’s feeding at the breast, and to her I say out loud: I don’t know why.* (p. 52, emphasis in original)

But Gordimer knows why: the man has offered Nanike a non-sexist future, and she doesn’t want it, just as July can’t accept the future offered him. Perhaps the author reasserts the close bond between racism and sexism but now reverses the Firestone thesis, saying, sexism is racism extended; eradicate racism, and sexism goes; perhaps she is simply and finally

invalidating that metaphorical relation altogether, the metaphor that issues from the woman's faulty perceptions. It is significant that the woman who spits in judgement at Nanike Moreke is a prostitute, someone who has most to gain and least to lose from a non-sexist future.

This story is one of the few in which Gordimer focuses exclusively on a black consciousness engaged with itself rather than with a white world (though of course the white world stands in the wings); the first in which she focuses on the political consciousness of a black woman; the first in which she denies that sexism is as inherent in black male culture as in white.<sup>50</sup> In her 1982 James Lecture she made a plea to black South African writers to move beyond "the representation of conditions" that has been so necessary a literary mode for them, and to start detailing "the torturous inner qualities of prescience and perceptions" (1983, p. 25), to use "the thematic life-material that underlines and motivates" (p. 26) the actions of blacks; perhaps Gordimer is writing this story *for* black writers, showing them how they should do for black consciousness what she has tried to do for white. But she has then been less than fair to herself, and to them. The artificiality of the occasion may account for some of the story's atypical features: the different focus, the glorification of a black male revolutionary, the simplification of her normal techniques of presentation of consciousness. But what one misses above all, despite one's memory of occasional unease in the hall of mirrors of Gordimer's fiction, amidst the sets of images that perfidiously reflect one another's obverse, is her characteristic chiaroscuro of irony and didacticism. In this story her 'message' leaps finally out of the shadows, and her irony creeps back into the dark.

#### NOTES

1. T.T. Moyana, "Problems of a Creative Writer in South Africa", in Christopher Heywood, ed., *Aspects of South African Literature* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1976), p. 86. Gordimer said in 1963: "First . . . you leave your mother's house, and later you leave the house of the white race. Since then the fact that I am a white person has strongly affected my writing." John Barkham, "South African: Perplexities, Brutalities, Absurdities", *The Saturday Review*, 46, (12 January 1963).
2. Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 6.
3. Nadine Gordimer, "Living in the Interregnum", *The New York Review*, 20 January 1983, p. 21.
4. The novels by Nadine Gordimer referred to are: *The Lying Days* (1953; rpt. London: Cape, 1978) abbreviated as LD; *A World of Strangers* (1958; rpt. Harmondsworth, Essex: Penguin, 1962), abbreviated as WS; *Occasion for Loving* (1963; rpt. London: Cape, 1978), abbreviated as OL; *The Late Bourgeois World* (London: Gollancz, 1966), abbreviated as LBW; *A Guest of Honour* (New York, 1970; rpt. Harmondsworth, Essex: Penguin, 1973), abbreviated as GH; *The Conservasionist* (London: Cape, 1974),

- abbreviated as C; *Burger's Daughter* (London: Cape, 1979), abbreviated as BD; and *July's People* (Johannesburg: Ravan/Taurus, 1981), abbreviated as JP.
5. Nadine Gordimer, "Relevance and Commitment", a paper delivered at a conference on The State of Art in South Africa, Cape Town, July 1979.
  6. Rowland Smith, "Living for the Future: Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*", *WLE*, 29, 2 (1980), 1.
  7. Stephen Clingman, "History from the Inside: The Novels of Nadine Gordimer". *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 7, 2 (April 1981), 166. Clingman notes her indebtedness to Lukacs' concept 'critical realism'.
  8. Nadine Gordimer, *Selected Stories* (1975; rpt. under title *No Place Like: Selected Stories*, Harmondsworth, Essex: Penguin, 1978), p. 13. All further references in the text are to the Penguin edition, abbreviated as NPL.
  9. She says: "There would have been a different ending . . . without the Soweto riots." Stephen Gray, "An Interview with Nadine Gordimer", *Contemporary Literature*, 22, 3 (1981), 269.
  10. The James Lecture, published as "Living in the Interregnum", 1983.
  11. Paul Rich, "Tradition and Revolt in South African Fiction: The Novels of André Brink, Nadine Gordimer and J M Coetzee", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 9, 1 (April 1982), 60.
  12. Nadine Gordimer quoting Desmond Tutu in *Frontline*, 12, 5 (April 1982); Gordimer, 1983, p. 22.
  13. See Susan Gardner, "'A Story for this Place and Time': An Interview with Nadine Gordimer about *Burger's Daughter*", *Kunapipi*, 3, 1 (1981), 111, where Gordimer accepts Conor Cruise O'Brien's use of religious terminology to describe *Burger's Daughter* even though Gordimer is an atheist.
  14. Nadine Gordimer in Johannes Riis, "Interview with Nadine Gordimer", *Kunapipi*, 2, 1 (1980), 25.
  15. Nadine Gordimer in Marshall Lee, "Nadine Gordimer: The Integrity of a Writer", *The Star (Literary Review)*, 26 June 1971. See also Nadine Gordimer, "South Africa: Towards a Desk-Drawer Literature", *The Classic*, 2, 4 (1968), 66-74.
  16. Gordimer speaks of the feeling "that began to be strong in me about 15 years ago that we are part of the continent first. We should see ourselves as part of the African continent rather than in relation to Europe and the United States." Pat Schwartz, "Gordimer Still Clings to a Sense of Wonder", *Rand Daily Mail*, 24 July 1981.
  17. Nadine Gordimer in Arthur Ravenscroft, "A Writer in South Africa: Nadine Gordimer", *The London Magazine*, 5, 2 (May 1965), 23.
  18. Nadine Gordimer in Diana Cooper-Clark, "The Clash: An Interview with Nadine Gordimer", *The London Magazine*, New Series, 22, 11 (February 1983), 46-47. The 1965 comment is also quoted here.
  19. Michael King suggests some of the ways in which Gordimer's political horizons stretch after 1966 and notes that since then "she has had five novels published and only two collections of short stories". "Race and History in the Stories of Nadine Gordimer", unpublished paper, p. 11.
  20. E M Forster, "What I Believe", in *Two Cheers for Democracy* (London: Arnold, 1951), p. 78. The various (and generally gently ironic) allusions to E M Forster in Gordimer's early work suggest that this was a consciously argued point. Gordimer herself says that "E M Forster influenced my handling of human relationships, and indeed my conception of them" (Ravenscroft, 1965, p. 24). For an analysis of some affinities between Gordimer and Forster see Dorian Haarhoff, "Two Cheers for Socialism: Nadine Gordimer and E.M. Forster," *English in Africa* 9, 1 (1982), 55-64.
  21. To take *The Conservationist* as just one example, there are a variety of details woven into the text that are necessary only for non-South Africans, from "the palms of the small black hands" (p. 8), to "Afrikaans, with all its homely turns of phrase and its

- diminutives comfortingly formed by rounding off a word with a suffix instead of preceding it with an adjective such as 'tiny' or 'little'" (p. 44).
22. This is implicit in Gordimer's comment: "A writer shouldn't be pressed into any kind of orthodoxy — a critics' orthodoxy, a political orthodoxy, a regime's orthodoxy, even the orthodoxy of friendship and loyalty imposed upon him/her by family and friends. The taking of this freedom is both the bravest and the monstrous side of what a writer is. You must give yourself the freedom to write as if you were dead." Diana Cooper-Clark, 1983, p. 58.
  23. See the following extract in Gray, 1981: Nadine Gordimer: "The South African public, normally speaking, doesn't read much modern fiction, never mind contemporary fiction that breaks with the mode of direct narrative. In *The Conservationist* I completely ignored the difficulties of the reader. I've had some complaints" . . . Stephen Gray: "Do you feel that this method [stylistic and rhetorical contrasts in *Burger's Daughter*] is ultimately more liberating for your reader in South Africa . . . ? Nadine Gordimer: "Yes, I think so. It should be. That's what one is trying for" (p. 266).
  24. Stephen Clingman, "Writing in a Fractured Society: The case of Nadine Gordimer", unpublished paper delivered at a Conference on the History and Ideology of Anglo-Saxon Racial Attitudes, c1870-1970, Research Unit on Ethnic Relations, University of Aston in Birmingham, 13-15 September 1982, p. 17; quoting Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature* (London: Methuen, 1950), Chapter 3, who suggests that this listening public is felt as sitting in implicit judgement on the author.
  25. Susan Gardner, "Still Waiting for the Great Feminist Novel: Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*", *Hecate*, 8, 1 (1982), 66, quoting Gordimer's talk to Women in Publishing, Johannesburg, 8 May 1981, entitled "A Note on Women and Literature in South Africa", and published in shortened form as "Women Who Took the Literary Lead", *Rand Daily Mail*, 14 May 1981.
  26. Nadine Gordimer, Introduction to *Selected Stories* (1975); reprinted in the Penguin edition, *No Place Like* (1978), p. 11.
  27. Nadine Gordimer, "A Note on Women and Literature in South Africa", 1981, full unpublished text, p. 2.
  28. Nadine Gordimer, "What Being a South African Means to Me," *South African Outlook* (June 1979), 88.
  29. The importance of the French prostitute is substantiated by Gordimer:
 

One thing I think lots of people have missed — the reason why Rosa goes back to South Africa and, ultimately, to prison. It's not just because she has that terrible midnight telephone call with her former black step-brother, Baasie, and that really brings her nose to nose with reality. It started long before, it started in France, in that village, when she met that woman in the street in her dressing gown, who doesn't know where she is. And it really hits Rosa that you get old, lonely, dotty. That you suffer. That Katya, running from political suffering, has simply postponed what is coming. . . . The alternatives have some horrible sides to them, too.

(Gardner, 1981, p. 111)
  30. Here Gordimer subordinates the feminist point that is stressed in the novel. Gordimer is quoted as saying that although she does not see her women characters as moving towards 'liberated' status, she thinks they "would now feel more confident, more sure of themselves". June Vigor, "The Controversialist", *The Argus*, 16 September 1975, p. 7.
  31. Interpretation of Antonia's character is difficult since we perceive her through Mehring's faulty perceptions. Elisabeth Gerver sees Antonia simply as a self-determining revolutionary woman who finds for herself "a personal vitality in political action which does not need close attachment to a man", and (unconvincingly) explains her affair with Mehring as evidence that she is able to separate physical attraction from revolutionary

- activity, while “*he* is finally unable to free himself from response to African rights that she represents” and thus treats her with contempt. “Women Revolutionaries in the Novels of Nadine Gordimer and Doris Lessing”, *WLWE*, 17, 1 (1978), 43-44. Gordimer, however, suggests that we are not to take Antonia so unequivocally, speaking of “the pretences” that she has (Gray, 1981, p. 267).
32. Carolyn Heilbrun, quoted by Tillie Olson, *Silences* (New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1978), p. 255.
  33. Gordimer had not read Doris Lessing at this stage: “The first part of *Children of Violence*, *Martha Quest*, has some very striking similarities with my first novel, *The Lying Days*, which I wrote at the same time. Not because we influenced each other — I don’t suppose we’d heard of each other, the similarities had to arise . . .” (Riis, 1980, p. 25).
  34. For another heroine who gets her reading matter from men: see Christina Stead, *For Love Alone* (1944). Helen Shaw does take books from Joel, but she has already started reading Donne, Eliot, Auden; Pepys, Smollett, Chekov, Lawrence, Hemingway.
  35. Susan Gardner objects to the uncritical presentation of sexual attractiveness and sexual development in Rosa, and the negative treatment of Clara: Gordimer “offers little threat to patriarchal norms and images” (Gardner, 1982, p. 70); “combatting [sexist clichés] was not her primary concern in *Burger’s Daughter*” (p. 71).
  36. Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970; rpt. New York: Bantam, 1971), p. 107. See Judie Newman, “Prospero’s Complex: Race and Sex in *Burger’s Daughter*”, paper delivered at a Conference on the History and Ideology of Anglo-Saxon Racial Attitudes, c1870-1970, Research Unit on Ethnic Relations, University of Aston in Birmingham, 13-15 September 1982. Newman reads *Burger’s Daughter* in terms of theses promulgated by Mannoni, Fanon, Kovel, among others, about the psychological relation between sexism and racism.
  37. Gordimer in Stephen Gray, “Landmark in Fiction”, *Contrast*, 8, 2 (1973), 83. Not surprisingly, the image comes first:
 

And the whole story came to me from a tiny thing, a saying somebody told me of in the Congo, about eight years before I wrote that story. They told me that when it rained in the afternoons a Congolese would say: Little shower, just time for a girl. And then go off and find some little girl, and the affair lasted just for the hour the rain lasted. And it’s from that germ that that story came. (p. 83)
  38. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, translated by Charles Lam Markmann (1967; rpt. London: Paladin, 1970), p. 100-101.
  39. Pauline Smith, *The Little Karoo* (1930; rpt. Cape Town: Balkema, 1981), p. 57. For an argument that such insights regarding sex and power are ultimately and implicitly used in service of a racial theme, see my paper, “Pauline Smith: A Feminist Map”, delivered at annual conference of AUETSA, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, July 1982.
  40. For these terms and those that follow during the course of this paper concerning metaphor, I am indebted to Max Black, *Models and Metaphors* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1962), Chapter 3.
  41. See Sandra M Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979).
  42. Nadine Gordimer, “Letter from South Africa”, *The New York Review*, 23, 20 (9 December 1976), 10.
  43. Nadine Gordimer, quoted by June Vigor, 1975. It’s interesting to note that many of the occasions on which Gordimer is drawn to make aggressive statements about South African women are when she is being interviewed by women. During the course of her interviews with men she often reminds them that she is a woman writer.

44. Nadine Gordimer, "The Prison-House of Colonialism" [Review of Ruth First and Ann Scott's biography of Olive Schreiner], *The Times Literary Supplement*, 15 August 1980, p. 918.
45. Nadine Gordimer quoted in an anonymous article, "Nadine's View", *Daily Despatch*, 30 March 1982.
46. Adrienne Rich, "Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynophobia (1978)" in *On Lies, Secrets and Silences: Selected Prose, 1966-1978* (New York: Norton, 1979), p. 282.
47. See Michael Wade, Nadine Gordimer, *Modern African Writers* (London: Evans, 1978), pp. 101-107. Clingman, 1982, explores the relation between short story and novel in a more sophisticated way, suggesting that the short story is a "genetic blueprint" for what follows, "not in the sense that it *generates* her future work, but only in that it is the first to embody her more deeply generated compulsion" (p. 16). It would probably be productive to explore the relation between the two in terms of Gordimer's constant need to examine basic situations from different angles, one 'solution' an ironic comment upon another, creating something like the effect created in a hall of mirrors.
48. "The feminist question has never truly embraced Black women". Gloria Joseph, "The Incompatible Ménage à Trois: Marxism, Feminism, and Racism" in Lydia Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution: The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* (London: Pluto, 1981), p. 93.
49. Nadine Gordimer, "A City of the Dead, A City of the Living", *New Yorker*, 5 April 1982, 44-52.
50. There is the hint of such a thesis in *A Guest of Honour* (1970): James Bray refers to the sexist authoritarianism of colonial Africa, which "according to [Wilhelm Reich's] theory, simply doesn't exist in African societies, their sexual life has always been ordered in a way that makes satisfaction available to everyone the moment he's [sic] physically ready . . ." (pp. 437-38); and Shinza protests, among other things, Mweta's sexist and apparently un-African treatment of the female members of PIP (p. 361).