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THE FEMALE CHARACTER AND THE THEME OF IDENTITY: A STUDY IN THE FICTION OF NADINE GORDIMER AND BESSIE HEAD

by

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Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
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Abstract

This study focuses on the portrayal of the female character and the theme of identity in the fiction of Nadine Gordimer and Bessie Head. While Gordimer sets most of her novels and short stories in South Africa, Head sets hers in Botswana, where she lives in exile. Both authors show that categorization by race, ethnicity and sex plays a central role in the determination of identity among their characters. They also concur that this categorization causes alienation and estrangement. The oppression and prejudice which often accompany it invariably dehumanize both the victim and the perpetrator. While the demeaning treatment accorded to the victim undermines her self-image, prejudice impairs the perpetrator's ability to exercise moral judgement. The inherent antagonism between oppressed and oppressor distances them both from each other's humanity and ultimately distorts their perceptions of themselves and each other.

The study focuses primarily on female characters because their problems of identity are more complex than those of male characters. Gordimer and Head show that women are relegated to second-class status within their own racial or ethnic categories. However, male characters are also discussed, but only where the issues

affecting them present the plight of people in general. This applies particularly to Gordimer's fiction in which racial differences are shown to overshadow those of gender. While Head does not discuss the racial and ethnic factors extensively, concentrating on problems between men and women in Botswana, Gordimer continually analyses the racial issue in South Africa. She shows its complexity and examines attempts made by liberals and revolutionaries to deal with it.

Chapters 1 and 2 discuss character and identity in connection with the themes of alienation and estrangement. Chapter 3 examines Gordimer's criticism of the inadequacy of liberalism. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on her evaluation of revolutionary commitment and its effect on the individual.

Although Head criticizes the South African political system, she does not portray any characters who attempt to change it. Generally considering politics to be exclusive in its interests she shies away from it and asserts her commitment to humanity as a whole. Chapter 6 discusses this kind of commitment in relation to the theme of self-affirmation. This chapter also shows how both Head and Gordimer present nature and the physical environment as mediums of self-affirmation. For these are unaffected by the problem of categorization by race, ethnicity and sex.

Acknowledgements

I am thankful to Professor Rowland Smith for his encouragement, assistance and invaluable supervision. And I am grateful to him for permitting me to refer to his articles on Nadine Gordimer and Bessie Head, some of which I had the privilege of reading before they were published. I am also thankful to Professor Bruce Stovel and Professor Andy Wainwright for their very constructive advice and suggestions. I also wish to thank Leslie Adamson for her efficient typing services. For the funding of my Ph.D. programme at Dalhousie University, I am indebted to the Canadian Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan.

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I explore the portrayal of the female character and the theme of identity in the fiction of two distinguished South African writers, Nadine Gordimer and Bessie Head. The central issue is categorization by race, ethnicity and sex, which both authors present as determining identity among their characters. While Gordimer sets most of her novels and short stories in South Africa, Head sets hers in Botswana, where she lives in exile.

I have chosen Nadine Gordimer and Bessie Head for my study because I believe that they are among the few English-language South African writers whose works best depict the female character and her sense of self. These two authors differ in approach, as they also differ in setting. And it is these differences that facilitate a balanced study of the issues that affect their characters, not only as women but as people in Southern Africa, a region where the inhabitants are of diverse racial, ethnic, cultural and political backgrounds.

Gordimer and Head best lend themselves to my kind of study because, unlike most South African writers, they lay emphasis on the effect of the environment on the character and do not set out to enunciate political messages of any kind. The major difference between the two authors, in

this regard, is in their attitudes toward politics. Gordimer, without being political, acknowledges politics as an important part of the environment and mirrors it in her fiction. Although Head recognizes the influence of politics on people she abstains from discussing political systems in her works. Instead, she preoccupies herself with problems of individual self-fulfilment in rural communities. In this, Head differs not only from Gordimer and other South African writers, but also from most African writers on the continent.

In the context of South Africa Gordimer's works are very rewarding to study because they reflect all the major issues that have preoccupied English-language writers in the Republic.[1] Although Head deals mostly with Botswana, her fiction remains a part of mainstream South African literature. Despite the differences between her concerns and those of her fellow exiles, she always writes from the position of a South African in exile. This position is indicated by her interest in the themes of cultural adaptation and assimilation.

This study is primarily literary; therefore the analysis and conclusions reached are based solely on the characters and situations depicted in the fiction. My approach is thematic, not developmental. Hence I do not discuss the books in order of publication nor do I trace the development of the two authors' literary visions and techniques. Also, since my primary interest is in the

fiction, not in the writers as individuals, I give autobiographical information only where it highlights issues depicted in the works themselves.

I do not attempt to discuss Gordimer's A Guest of Honour, one of her major novels, simply because its setting in an imaginary black-ruled state and the issues it addresses are beyond the scope of this study. Instead I concentrate on all her other novels set in South Africa and on all of Head's books. Out of Gordimer's large body of short stories I discuss only those directly relevant to the central concerns of the study.

Gordimer and Head concur that categorization by race, ethnicity and sex causes alienation and estrangement. In Chapter 1 I introduce this argument in a general way, focusing on the differences in manner of presentation between the two authors. In chapter 2 I develop the argument by discussing the dehumanizing effects of categorization by race, ethnicity and sex. Here, I observe that this categorization is often accompanied by prejudice and oppression, which invariably debase both victim and perpetrator. The degrading treatment given to the victim undermines his self-image, causing him to lose his sense of his own worth as a human being. And prejudice impairs the perpetrator's ability to exercise moral judgement. The inevitable antagonism between oppressed and oppressor makes it impossible for them both to recognize and appreciate each other's humanity. Consequently their perception

of themselves and each other become distorted and fixed.

While Head does not discuss the racial and ethnic factors extensively, concentrating on problems between men and women in Botswana, Gordimer continually analyses the racial problem in South Africa. She shows its complexity and depicts the various attempts that have been made to deal with it. In Chapters 3, 4 and 5, I focus on Gordimer's depiction of these attempts and do not discuss Head's fiction. For, although Head is critical of the South African political system, she does not portray any characters who make similar attempts at dealing with the problem in question. She also abstains from depicting modern Botswana politics in her fiction.

My discussion in these three chapters centres on Burger's Daughter, Gordimer's major novel on politics in South Africa, though I make references to her other works. The inadequacy of liberal attempts at dealing with South Africa's racial problems is the main subject of Chapter 3. Here, I discuss Gordimer's criticism of the simplistic nature of liberal assumptions: most liberals reject racism but evade the political source of the issue. Their peaceful methods of changing society are rendered futile by a powerful establishment determined to maintain its policies of racial separation.

In Chapters 4 and 5 I focus on Gordimer's examination of the alternative to liberalism, namely, revolutionary politics that aim at transforming the whole society.

This alternative necessitates absolute commitment to the cause of social justice. Through the perspective of Rosa Burger, daughter of a prominent revolutionary leader who has died in prison, the author shows how this commitment involves a process of disregarding fulfilment in the present and waiting to live in a better society in the future. In Chapter 4 I deal specifically with Rosa's critical examination of this kind of commitment and its self-denying ethics. I also discuss the heroine's decision to disown her politically-charged identity as Lionel Burger's daughter, which she sees as having compromised her individuality. Rosa's actual attempt at leading an uncommitted life, and her eventual inability to do so form the main topic of Chapter 5. When she tries to reject her parents' commitment she finds herself in a morally untenable situation. An uncommitted life in South Africa entails a total disregarding of the misery of others. In the end, this dilemma enables Rosa to appreciate the nobility of her parents. She realizes that a high sense of social responsibility motivated their attempts at changing the society into a just one.

In Chapter 6, I discuss the way Gordimer and Head depict the landscape in relation to their characters' senses of self. Both authors show that nature and the physical environment are untainted by racial, ethnic or sexual politics. Characters who identify themselves with these constants are better able to affirm themselves.

The identification enables them to realize their affinity to others, and to appreciate their place in society. I concentrate on Head's fiction in this Chapter, and refer to Gordimer's works only for purposes of comparison. Head frequently depicts the physical environment in connection with the themes of adaptation and assimilation, which are not major issues in Gordimer's works. Most of Head's central characters are South African refugees who strive to take root in their new Botswana environment.

My study focuses primarily on female characters because their problems of identity are more complex than are those of male characters. Both Gordimer and Head show that women are relegated to second-class status within their own racial or ethnic categories. By studying the women's complex situations, I hope to bring into focus a more complete picture of the issue of identity. Since Head concentrates on the problems of women in Botswana, her fiction is my primary source of information on the subject. The overriding problem of racial categorization overshadows the woman question in Gordimer's fiction. However, I also discuss male characters, but only where the issues affecting them present the plight of people in general (and thus also of women): the racial question is a case in point. For in South Africa, an individual is black or white first, and male or female last. As Gordimer herself puts it, "the white man and the white woman have much more in common than the white woman and the black

woman, despite their difference in sex. Similarly, the black man and the black woman have much more in common than the black man and the white man .... The basis of color cuts right through the sisterhood or brotherhood of sex."[2]

Introduction

Footnotes

[1]For my appreciation of Gordimer's fiction in the context of South African English-language literature, I am indebted to the following articles by Rowland Smith: "Allan Quartermain to Rosa Burger: Violence in South African Fiction," World Literature Written in English," vol. 22, no. 2 (Autumn, 1983), pp. 171-182; "The Johannesburg Genre," Exile and Tradition, Ed. Rowland Smith, (London: Longman, 1976), pp. 116-131; "The Seventies and After: The Inner View in White, English-language Fiction." Olive Schreiner and After: Essays on Southern African Literature in Honour of Guy Butler. Edited by Malvern Van Wyk Smith and Don Maclennan. Cape Town: David Philip, 1983, pp. 196-204; and "The Whites: English Language Literature and Politics in South Africa," Unpublished paper.

[2]Quoted in Robert Boyers, et al., "A Conversation with Nadine Gordimer," Salmagundi, no. 62 (Winter, 1984), p. 19.

CHAPTER 1

ASPECTS OF IDENTITY

Nadine Gordimer frequently discusses the problem of identity in her essays; mostly with reference to the role of the writer in society. In her view, the "writer is the creative consciousness of [his] society,"[1] and as such he draws on the life around him for his work. In order for him to function effectively, the range of his experiences must be as wide as possible. Above all, he must have a cultural identity. Here, Gordimer observes: "Professor Harry Levin has defined cultural identity as 'nothing more nor less than the mean between selfhood and otherness, between our respect for ourselves and our relationship with our fellow men and women.'"[2] In the light of this definition, Gordimer points out the difficulties confronting literature in a society where the writer is limited to identifying with only his racial category:

> The dilemma of a literature in a multiracial society, where the law effectively prevents any real identification of the writer with his society as a whole, so that ultimately he can identify only with his colour, distorts this mean irreparably. And cultural identity is the ground on which the exploration of self in the imaginative writer makes a national literature.[3]

In a 1972 appendix to the 1961 essay, "The Novel and the Nation in South Africa," Gordimer retracts an assertion she had previously made on the white writer's ability to write a novel featuring authentic black characters:

> The changes in life in South Africa since 1961 would lead me to quarrel with one statement I made confidently at the time of writing my essay. I remark there that "there is little reason why a straightforward novel of events in which the protagonists are black men should not be written just as authentically by a white writer as a black one. Just so long as he makes it his business to know the social forces that shape his protagonists ... etc." I now believe that Georg Lukacs is right when he says that a writer, in imaginative creation and the intuition that comes with it, cannot go beyond the potential of his own experience. That potential is very wide; but living in a society that has been compartmentalized as South Africa's has been under the colour bar, the writer's potential has unscalable limitations. There are some aspects of a black man's life that have been put impossibly beyond the white man's potential experience, and the same applies to the black man and some aspects of a white man's experience. Both can write of the fringe society in which black and white are 'known', in a meaningful sense to one another; but there are areas from which, by iron circumstance, each in turn finds himself shut out, even intuitively, to their mutual loss as writers.[4]

When people are reduced to identifying with only the colour of their skins, the meaning of their humanity is severely impaired. Not only is it impaired in relation to other races, but also with regard to themselves as individual people with distinct personal identities. This is the problem Gordimer consistently analyses in her fiction. There, the issues descend from the theoretical

heights of the writer's role in society, and enter the hard world of individual people grappling with the ever-puzzling question of who they are.

Ethnic origin is, in effect, the equivalent of race in Botswana, where most of Bessie Head's work is set. In both societies, intense racial and ethnic consciousness characterize the people's senses of identity. Effectually, all are conditioned to see themselves, first, as members of particular racial or ethnic categories, and view themselves as human beings last.

Both authors portray how complicated a woman's situation is in these hierarchical societies: even within her own racial or ethnic category she is relegated to second-class status. Head discusses this problem more directly and frequently than does Gordimer. In one instance outside her fiction, Gordimer mentions it in passing; significantly, she equates sexual oppression with all other forms of oppression. The occasion is a discussion of Olive Schreiner's The Story of an African Farm:

> The freedom that Lyndall, one of the two central characters, burns for — it is not freedom from the colour bar, but freedom for women in an age when independence for women was an issue. But what does it matter? All oppressions are the same in their effect on the oppressed, and what she suffers is valid for all who suffer a man-imposed limit on the scope of their minds and bodies, [and] is of the nature of such suffering itself.[5]

The concept of women's second-class status serves to justify whatever limitations "on the scope of their minds and bodies" the establishment may wish to impose on them. A more glaring example of this kind of limitation obtains in South Africa where an individual's material, economic, political and social opportunities are rigidly determined by the colour of his skin. (The Masarwa in Botswana, too, are deprived of privileges because of their ethnicity, but Head does not portray this as part of government policy.)

The best description of how the racial question pervades all areas of life in South Africa is given by Gordimer herself. Here her focus is again the writer and his society. After outlining the historical relationship between political forces, human experience, and literature, she observes:

> ... all that is and has been written by South Africans is profoundly influenced, at the deepest and least-controlled level of consciousness, by the politics of race. All writers everywhere—even those like Joyce who can't bear to live in their own countries, or those like Jean Genet who live outside the pale of their country's laws—are shaped by their own particular society reflecting a particular political situation. Yet there is no country in the western world where the daily enactment of the law reflects politics as intimately and blatantly as in South Africa. There is no country in the western world where the creative imagination, whatever it seizes upon, finds the focus of even the most private event set in the overall social determination of racial laws.[6]

It is by subjecting private life to the "social determination of racial laws" that the South African polity causes fragmentation of identity. For in such circumstances the private cannot have a validity of its own, uncompromised by public regulation and restriction. A fulfilling sense of self necessitates a balanced interaction between the private and the public.

A sexual hierarchy also causes personal fragmentation, as it entails the subordination of the woman's humanity to public definition of her destiny. Both Gordimer and Head further show that the roles, housewife and mother, mainly serve public purposes which overshadow a woman's individuality.

Although Gordimer and Head, for the most part, share these concerns, they differ markedly in their artistic presentations of them. While Gordimer's criticism of both the racial/ethnic and sexual hierarchies, plus all they stand for, is usually implied, Head's condemnation of them is often stated. Gordimer's technique enables her to maintain a high degree of objectivity. But while this objectivity is a powerful artistic asset, it often makes the author appear too detached from the issues she deals with, and makes her vulnerable to the charge that she is cold and dehumanized. For instance, Dennis Brutus has written:

> ... there is in her, the kind of impersonality you find in a microscope. She does not herself react to feeling. In her books even the emotional relationships are forced, are conjured up, are synthetic.
>
> Though Nadine Gordimer would say that she is condemning South African society for being dehumanized, I would say that Nadine Gordimer .... is also the standing, the living example of how dehumanized South African society has become ... that an artist like this lacks warmth, lacks feeling, but can observe with a detachment, with the coldness of a machine. There is in her, herself, no warmth and feeling.[7]

This assessment is evidently heavy-handed. The author's personal temperament and character cannot be conclusively deduced from her art. Ursula Laredo's response to this criticism, in fact, correctly points to the artistic merit of Gordimer's objective technique: "it is precisely this quality, the ability to remain detached, to view her characters and the situations in which they are involved from more than one point of view, that is one of Miss Gordimer's great strengths."[8] She rightly adds: "Moreover, because she observes closely, and is not bound by preconceptions about character and motivation, she has been able to do far more than many white South Africans in her presentation of black characters."[9] Indeed, Ezekiel Mphahlele comments that Gordimer's depiction of black characters is "efficient and does not lack precision."[10] But above all, Gordimer's unrelenting exposure of all falsehoods, hypocrisies, and absurdities rampant in her society attests to her sincerity of purpose and genuine

compassion for the oppressed.

The author's own views on literature and literary style show how misleading it is to draw conclusions about her character from her fiction. These views appear in the introduction to her collection of short stories, Some Monday for Sure:

> Stories and novels are works of the imagination; they embody—implicitly—psychological, sociological and political truths. These often are not representative of the personal point of view of the writer himself; in fact, he must set himself to be a kind of medium through which the attitudes of the society he lives in come to light.[11]

When Gordimer proceeds to relate this statement to the nature and concerns of her short stories, the reader quickly adds her novels to the list of the fiction which embodies and illustrates the author's view of literary concerns and technique:

> [My] stories reflect the attitudes of various kinds of whites towards blacks in South Africa, and sometimes the attitudes of blacks towards whites, and various relationships between black and white, but rarely my own attitudes, for the simple reason that these would too often represent the exception and not the rule. Few of the white people in my stories belong to that group of white South Africans who visualize and accept freedom for South Africa in terms of a black majority government elected by unqualified franchise. I do.[12]

Later in the introduction, the author mentions a technique she often employs in her stories, which she also uses frequently in her novels. She draws attention to this technique while referring to the stories, "The African Magician" and "The Bridegroom." According to her, both stories depict "the average white man and woman's lack of consciousness of, or fear of, an unacknowledged friendship with blacks, and their emotional dependency upon them." And she adds that "My approach in these stories, as in very many others, is that of irony. In fact, I would say that in general, in my stories, my approach as a short story writer is the ironical one, and that it represents the writer's unconscious selection of the approach best suited to his material."[13] This literary approach stands Gordimer in very good stead in her incessant exposure of the absurdities within the segregated South African society. Indeed, the bulk of her fiction mirrors a world in which the legislated separations are immediately contradicted by the various peoples' inherent dependency upon one another. For instance, the white society which she portrays has an order, pattern and predictability which rest, to an appreciable extent, on the existence of blacks who perform menial tasks in various spheres of life. More often than not, in the background of the white community, there are black house servants, maids and nannies; garden and shop "boys"; milk, bread, and newspaper delivery "boys," as well as black

labourers of various kinds. For most of the whites, being served, attended to, waited on, by all non-white people composes the normal order of things. And any deviation from this pattern, in the order of things, causes disorientation in those whites who believe in its necessity to exist. Similarly, most of the non-whites who appear as either servants, labourers or ordinary peasants, in these works, look at this pattern as an established fact in the normal scheme of things. Any change in it also disorients them.

In contrast to this ironical and detached presentation of the problem, Bessie Head directly states the inhumanity of racial and ethnic discrimination. For example, in Maru, when discussing the persecution of Margaret Cadmore, the Masarwa young woman, she writes:

> Before the white man became universally disliked for his mental outlook [the abuse of the Bushmen] was there. The white man found only too many people who looked different. That was all that outraged the receivers of his discrimination .... And if the white man thought that Asians were a low, filthy nation, Asians could still smile with relief—at least, they were not Africans. And if the white man thought Africans were a low, filthy nation, Africans in Southern Africa could still smile—at least, they were not Bushmen. They all have their monsters. You just have to look different from them, the way the facial features of a Sudra or Tamil do not resemble the facial features of a high caste Hindu, then seemingly anything can be said and done to you as your other appearance reduces you to the status of a non-human being.[14]

According to Jean Marquard, Bessie Head "acknowledges, as a defect in her writing, a tendency to hold 'an intense moral view.' Her second novel, Maru, is, in her estimation, flawed by a didactic narrative tone."[15] Then she quotes the author singling out A Question of Power as not flawed in this way:

Notably, Jean Marquard also uses Head's indictment of Batswana tribal prejudice to minimize the weight of her criticism of South African racism. After noting some of the concerns the author shares with other African writers, she says:

> Bessie Head may be distinguished from other African writers in at least two respects. In the first place she does not idealize the African past and in the second she resists facile polarities, emphasizing personal rather than political motives for tensions between victim and oppressor. She moves beyond the stereotype of white oppressing black to show, particularly in Maru, systems of privilege and discrimination working solely within black society.[16]

In other words, she is—according to Marquard—as critical of tribal Botswana as she is condemnatory of white supremacist South Africa. This is a very misleading suggestion. Head criticizes only aspects of Batswana society, whereas she indicts all that the apartheid state represents. Furthermore, the South African exiles featured in her work —Makhaya, When Rain Clouds Gather, and Elizabeth, A Question of Power— rediscover themselves in Botswana,

something they could not do in their homeland. They are able to surmount their initial difficulties because the society is not as rigidly fragmented as the one south-east of the border. And the tribal prejudice against the Masarwa which is strongly condemned in Maru is at no point shown to be sanctioned by the government. In addition, Head balances her criticism of Botswana society with unstinting praise of some of its features. There is nothing she praises about South Africa.

Marquard herself quotes Head praising Botswana and expressing her dislike for South Africa. The context is the author's comment on the personal reasons why she left her land of birth:

> Life has its ridiculous aspects. What really precipitated my move out of South Africa was the break-up of my marriage. I was offered a primary school teaching post in Botswana. I had nothing else and I accepted. In the process I was forced to renounce my South African citizenship and become a stateless person. This was not a blow to me. I did not care. I didn't like the country. I have liked Botswana very much although I have got nothing out of loving a country that didn't want me. Nobody here cares a particular damn if you like them or not. As far as a writer is concerned, you look a bit above mankind and mankind's prejudices and mankind's narrowness. What was important to me about Botswana was that there was a freer society here. I was fortunate enough to trace those roots of freedom. The people here have never ever experienced white oppression in the way that other Southern African peoples have experienced it. Traditions established over the past 100 years show that there was a different way of dealing with black people here than there had been in the rest of Southern Africa. I very quickly absorbed this atmosphere which was absolutely essential for my

> type of writing. Botswana's historical development is far greater than the nation itself.[17]

Clearly, this greater "historical development" serves to give the country a stable national identity, which would have been impossible had Botswana experienced the South African type of colonialism.

By contrast, Gordimer argues that South Africa itself has no national identity. That is the case because the society does not have all of "the forces of cohesion" upon which the identity can be built:

> Reinhold Niebuhr, in his book Nations and Empires, makes a list of the forces of cohesion necessary to this identity. They are "common language and a sense of ethnic kinship, geographic unity and contiguity, a common historical experience, and a frame of political thought, a common area of economic mutuality, and, sometimes, the fear of a common foe."[18]

South Africa does not have all of these forces because of politics; it is "political facts that make it impossible for South Africans to produce [a national] super-identity at the present time ... [In fact], never, at any time in the 400 years of recorded history in South Africa—not even in time of war with other nations—have [they] been able to produce that super-identity as a nation."[19] In Gordimer's view:

> Of [the] eight cohesive forces [necessary for national identity] the people of South Africa can claim only two—geographic unity and contiguity and a common area of economic mutuality. We have no common language, and we have, of course, no ethnic kinship, but, on the contrary, a constant redefinition of quite ancient ethnic differences. Our common historical experience is not one of fighting together but against one another—white man against black, Afrikaner against Englishman. We have no common frame of political thought, but a clash of bitterly opposed ideologies. As for fear of a common foe—the foe we fear is each other: the black man the political and economic domination of the white, the white man the black man's outnumbering him, and outbidding him for the world's support. It has never yet been possible for one of us to say, "I'm a South African" as any American, for example, white, black or yellow, may say "I'm an American."[20]

In her fiction, Gordimer vividly depicts this national fragmentation and shows how it is reflected in individual people who cannot escape its corrupting influence. Elisabeth Gerver pertinently points to this influence when she writes: "Nadine Gordimer's first novel, The Lying Days (1953), depicts the circumscribed world of South African political life which inevitably corrupts and limits all those who live within it."[21] Most of her works, in fact, portray this circumscribed world and its pernicious effects. The systematic inculcation of racial consciousness is the most obvious corrupting influence of the country's politics. For instance, in The Lying Days, the heroine, Helen Shaw, observes that in South Africa whites are taught, from childhood, to deny blacks their humanity. She makes this observation as she describes the development

of her own moral and political consciousness through the influence of her young liberal friends in Johannesburg:

> Among these people with whom I moved, the last great barrier was not down in the practical sense. How could it be? But it was coming down in our heads .... And even when it was achieved in the mind, in the moral sense and the sense of dignity, there remained the confusing pull of habit and use as well as the actual legal confines.
>
> We were all like sleepers, coming awake from a long lull of acceptance. I know that I, who for all my childhood had lived surrounded by natives who simply attended our lives in one function or another ... found with a real consciousness of strangeness and wonderment that I was beginning to think of them as individually human. They had passed before me almost as remote if not as interesting as animals in a zoo.[22]

Helen's "consciousness of strangeness and wonderment," at "beginning to think of [blacks] as individually human," becomes understandable when she proceeds to describe her society's process of systematic dehumanization of the blacks:

> ... as a general rule, emotion was denied them and personal relationships were suspect ... they were casually denied love, jealousy, concern; everything that made us human. They were also denied entertainment ... friendship ... and personal pride: we children would be called out to be amused by the sight of the servant going out dressed in her Sunday best—In fact they were denied everything that made our human state pleasant. And we white children had grown up innocently accepting and perpetuating this until now, when slowly we began to turn on ourselves, slowly we began to unravel what was tightly knit in us, to change the capacity of our hearts, the

> cast of our sense of humour, the limits of our respect. It was as painful and confusing as the attempt to change what has grown up with the flesh always is.
>
> (pp. 143-144)

Through subtle artistry, Gordimer depicts the complexity of the problem. Not only does she make Helen describe white South Africa's active dehumanization of blacks, but she also reveals, through the heroine's own moral dilemma, the alienating effect of racial prejudice within the hearts and minds of its perpetrators. When Head describes, in Maru, the way in which Batswana children learn ethnic contempt for the Masarwa people, she plainly states: "Children learnt it from their parents. Their parents spat on the ground as a member of a filthy, low nation passed by. Children went a little further. They spat on you. They pinched you. They danced a wild jiggle, with the tin cans rattling: 'Bushman! Low Breed! Bastard!'" (pp. 10-11). It is only later in the novel, when she presents Margaret's troubled interaction with the society, that the author dramatizes the double-edged effect of this ethnic prejudice.

Both Head and Gordimer expose the basically materialistic and political motives for ethnic and racial prejudice. When one section of society decrees that others are naturally inferior, it assures and sanctifies the preservation of privilege and power in its hands. The

economic and political arrangement resulting from the categorization of people further entrenches already existing racial and ethnic estrangement. With an unrelenting sense of irony, Gordimer analyses this problem specifically in July's People. Maureen's interaction with July is primarily structured along the relationship of white missus and black servant. This relationship persists in the village despite the fact that, there, they are both outside the environment in which the relationship originated. While July clings to his identity as servant, Maureen and her husband hold on to some of their masterly prerogatives; yet they all know that, in the village, July is the man with real power and authority.

Just as the roles of master and servant are affected by the changed material and social circumstances, so are those of husband and wife between Bam and Maureen. Gordimer makes it clear that the change causes profound estrangement between the dispossessed and beleaguered couple. Maureen's troubled questions about Bam's dislocated identity involve her own relationship to it:

> ... what was he here, an architect lying on a bed in a mud hut, a man without a vehicle. It was not that she thought of him with disgust—what right had she, occupying the same mud hut—but that she had gone on a long trip and left him behind in the master bedroom: what was here, with her, was some botched imagining of his presence in circumstances outside those the marriage was contracted for.[23]

Maureen only identifies with the Bam who was, metaphorically speaking, left behind in their former, affluent life, because it is that Bam who, by virtue of his status and power, held together a world that was familiar to her. The social and material aspects of that status and power were central and integral parts of her image of him as husband. Without those aspects, Bam is as alien to Maureen as the village in which they are marooned is unfamiliar to both of them.

In his essay, "Masters and Servants: Nadine Gordimer's July's People and the Themes of her Fiction," Rowland Smith rightly points out that:

> Discovering who they are in their elemental bush life is difficult for both adult Smales. Maureen ceases to recognise in Bam the traits of the suburban architect. At one point she has "a single throb of impulse" to "go over to the man and sink against, embrace him, touch someone recollected, not the one who persisted in his name, occasionally supplying meat, catching fish for people" (p. 93). And Bam finds himself thinking of his bush wife as "her," rather than Maureen:
>
> > Her, not "Maureen." Not "his wife." The presence in the mud hut, mute with an activity of being, of sense of self he could not follow because here there were no familiar areas in which it could be visualized moving, no familiar entities that could be shaping it. With "her" there was no undersurface of recognition; only moments of finding each other out.[24] (p. 105)

Smith's own comments on Maureen's changed circumstances explain Bam's lost sense of who she is:

> The material props of her life have ... been stripped from her in the bush ....
>
> Relations with July are only part of Maureen's crisis of identity. Her appearance, interests, sexuality have all changed substantially in her new existence as a white bourgeois peasant.[25]

Gordimer takes great care to show Maureen's estrangement from the physical environment itself. Here, the heroine is confronted with a world of virtual anonymity, a place where the ordinary routine of life contrasts sharply with her accustomed one of high social profile in white suburban South Africa. While many things distance man from the bare realities of elemental existence in the white world, Maureen notices that, in the village, man virtually merges with his environment, to which he is intimately connected in the cycle of life and death.

Maureen's dilemma gains additional significance when it is seen in the light of Gordimer's presentation of the close association of marriage with public role-playing in The Lying Days. Noting her mother's view of the routine of married life, the heroine, Helen, says: "My mother ... accepted marriage and motherhood as a social rather than a mysterious personal relationship. Wives and husbands and children and the comfortable small plan of duties they owed to one another—for her, this was what living was" (p. 28). Clearly, "the comfortable small plan of duties they owed to one another" is not confined to the domestic environment alone, for as Helen

consistently observes, by virtue of being Mrs. G.P. Shaw, her mother occupies a specific position in the mining community's social and public hierarchy. This point is emphasized by the community newspaper's reference to her as "popular or hardworking Mrs. Shaw, wife of our Assistant Secretary"(pp. 20-21). In other words, the designation "Mrs. Shaw" denotes, among other things, the public and social activities she engages in, befitting the notch she occupies as the Assistant Secretary's wife. It is this kind of codified existence, to which personal and private aspects of self are subordinated, that Ludi dismisses as "the narrowest, most mechanical, unrewarding existence you could think of in any nightmare" (p. 43). The fact that the community's sense of status and hierarchy pervades various areas of life becomes clear when Ludi specifies its occupational, official, racial and social dimensions:

> Grubbing under the earth in the dark to produce something entirely useless, and coming up after eight hours to take your place in the damned cast-iron sacred hierarchy of the Mine, grinning and bowing all the way to the godly Manager on top, and being grinned and bowed at by everyone below you—not that there ever was anyone below me, except the blacks and it's no privilege to sit on them since anyone can.
>
> You drink in the pubs together and you play tennis on Saturdays together and you go to dances organized by the ladies. You live by courtesy of the Mine, for the Mine, in the Mine. And to hell with Jack so long as I'm all right, so long as my promotion's coming. And I'll grin at the

> Underground Manager and I'll slap the shift boss on the back.
>
> (p. 44)

Besides the fact that no genuine human contact can occur in this kind of atmosphere, the codified nature of social interaction is fundamentally inimical to individual freedom and personal vitality. Helen, too, is made to see herself in terms of the social and public notch she occupies in the community:

> I too had my place, the place of the secretary's daughter (my father had been promoted at last), in the hierarchy that divided the Mine Manager and his wife (tall in a clinging skirt, an exiled Mrs. Dalloway) giving the prizes in a certain order of rigid gradations from the busy small woman in the flowered apron stationed at the tea urn—wife of a burly shift boss called Mackie.
>
> (pp. 28-29)

The patriarchal bias in the community's hierarchical structure is self-evident. It is with unfailing consistency that women are referred to as either "the secretary's daughter," "wife of a burly shift boss," Manager's wife, or "Mrs. Shaw, wife of our Assistant Secretary," to name only some of the male-centred terms of identification employed by the author.

The patriarchal bias in the white South Africa portrayed by Gordimer is also seen in the black world depicted in her fiction, as well as in that of Head's works. In that world, the public and the social have emphatic

importance, but with a difference. The majority of African women who appear in the works of both authors only partly derive their sense of identity from their husbands. While the husband remains the head of the family, economic conditions frequently place the burden of administering the family on the wife. More often than not the man spends much time away from home working for wages in the white areas of South Africa. This situation is a direct reflection of the peculiar South African political economy, according to which blacks can enter white areas only as workers, and not as residents with their families. The migrant labour system which evolved out of this arrangement affects not only blacks within the country, but also others throughout Southern Africa who go to the Republic to work.

One of the several consequences of the obligatory wife-husband separation is a development, in the woman, of a sense of self-reliance. She also adapts to a distinctive cycle of life, which is unlike the one enjoyed by the average white housewife depicted in Gordimer's fiction. The difference between Head and Gordimer, in their portrayal of the black woman's lot, is again one of manner and style.

In July's People, Gordimer presents Martha, the wife of the Smales' "servant," as a woman who has been so used to her husband's absence that when he is at home she addresses him as if he were still away; he had worked in Johannesburg for fifteen years with only occasional leaves

in between. Placing Martha's case in its proper context Gordimer writes:

> Most of the women of child bearing age had husbands who spent their lives in those cities the women had never seen. There was a set of conventions for talking about this. The man had written or had not written, the money had arrived or was late this month, he had changed his job, he was working in "another place." Was there anyone, some other woman whose man had perhaps worked there, someone to whom the name of yet another town none of the women had ever seen was familiar?
>
> (p. 83).

The author's tone in this passage is consistently sympathetic without being overtly so. The strength of the technique is consolidated when she proceeds to outline the unique cycle of life which is compelled upon these women by forces greater than themselves:

> Across the seasons was laid the diurnal one of being without a man; it overlaid sowing and harvesting, rainy summers and dry winters, and at different times, although at roughly the same intervals for all, changed for each for the short season when her man came home. For that season, although she worked and lived among the others as usual, the woman was not within the same stage of the cycle maintained for all by imperatives that outdid the authority of nature. The sun rises, the moon sets; the money must come, the man must go.
>
> (p. 83).

By objectively presenting a detailed account of the women's lives of almost perpetual matrimonial loneliness,

the author makes the painful nature of the situation poignantly clear. Implicitly, she condemns the social and economic system which imposes this kind of unnatural existence on the women. And again by mere description of the situation, Gordimer evokes the women's stoicism, capacity for endurance, and sense of self-reliance.

When Head depicts a similar situation in her novel, When Rain Clouds Gather, she passionately points to these remarkable qualities. Just like Martha, the women in this novel have to endure a life of matrimonial loneliness. But most of their men are not shown as going to work in South Africa, although, in reality, the Batswana male population is as ravaged by the migrant labour system as are the male populations of the country's neighbours. As Cecil Abrahams has commented, Bessie Head conspicuously avoids dealing with South African issues directly, in her work.[26] She confines her attention to the problems of subsistence living, and tribal friction, within rural Botswana. The men in When Rain Clouds Gather, instead of trekking south for wage employment, go to distant cattle posts to graze cattle. They stay there for most of the year searching for pasture in the drought-ridden environment. The women stay behind to tend the households and till the land. Hence, when the English agricultural instructor, Gilbert, decides to launch a tobacco-growing project, as an income earner, it is the women who are mobilized to work on it. As she describes the volunteers'

excitement, the author comments:

> It was always like this. Any little thing was an adventure. They were capable of pitching themselves into the hardest, most sustained labor with perhaps the same joy that society women in other parts of the world experience when they organize fetes or tea parties. No men worked harder than Batswana women, for the whole burden of providing food for big families rested with them.[27]

There is nothing understated in this almost eulogistic commentary on the lonely women's patience, stoicism, and self-reliance. Their industriousness is formidable:

> It was their sticks that thrashed the corn at harvesting time and their winnowing baskets that filled the air for miles and miles around with the dust of husks, and they often, in addition to broadcasting the seed when the early rains fell, took over the tasks of the men and also plowed the land with the oxen. (p. 106).

One other distinguishing characteristic of the black women portrayed by Head and Gordimer is their tenacious belief in the personal and social importance of marriage. For example, in Occasion for Loving, Gordimer shows how Clara's view of herself as Gideon's wife remains unchanged by their long separation. He had initially sent her away to live with relatives when it looked as if he would go overseas to study. When the authorities refused to give him a passport, he could not go, and lost the scholarship.

While he continued to stay in Johannesburg, the wife remained where he had sent her. After her lengthy stay there, Gideon learns from his brother-in-law that she is prepared to return to him. As he moves along the sordid street of his squalid home location, he is fascinated and alarmed at the woman's persistent regard of him as her husband:

> Isolation rose higher in him every minute, a drug beginning to take effect at the extremities; it was his defence, but it was also alarming. From it he saw, fascinated, that she did not think it impossible to regard as "husband" a man she had lost touch with three years ago; she accepted what any housegirl or cook accepted—that a black woman cannot expect to live permanently with her man and children; she must shift about and live where and how poverty and powerlessness allow. He might have been an indentured labourer, away from home for long periods out of necessity. Three year's absence had no significance for her so far as the validity of marriage was concerned.[28]

In the absence of personal validation of her marriage, Clara holds on to her status as Gideon's wife as a social form around which to orient herself.

Although Gordimer shows the importance of marriage to such black women as Clara, she does not indicate her personal views on its centrality to a woman's identity. Head, on the other hand, asserts with varying degrees of emphasis that marriage and family are socially and personally crucial to a woman's sense of self. And she

critically notes that most men and some women, in Botswana, have lost touch with both marriage and family. Because these institutions symbolize and facilitate meaningful relationships between men and women, their breakdown indicates a fundamental form of human alienation. The author sees the breakdown as a product of cultural conflict between modernity and tradition. The concern with this conflict, and its effects on tribal society, places Head's work solidly within the mainstream of African literature. In his review article on the author's Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind, Rowland Smith succinctly points to Head's affinity, in her thematic concerns, to the other writers on the continent:

> Problems of adaptation to modern ways, the authenticity of ancient village life and customs, a sense of loss when the fragmented demands of the present are compared with communal claims of the past, these are all themes of much contemporary African fiction and they reflect the anxieties of newly won independence from colonial rule. Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind is not fiction and yet it embodies most of these themes.[29]

In this book, Head appreciates the traditional values which stabilized tribal society, among the Bamangwato, before they were undermined by colonial influence. She traces the demise of those values upon which marriage and family were founded to Khama's Christian reforms in the period 1875-1923. Admittedly, she praises others of

the Chief's reforms, and commends him for saving Botswana from South African-style colonialism. Nevertheless, she sees his Christianity as having destroyed the old ways and left the people rootless:

> Khama's contribution to the community is not easily defined. He was too vast and rich a personality. I speculated deeply on his absolute commitment to Christianity because it was the basis for all his social reforms .... The traditions and taboos which all tribal people adhere to, I tend to regard as a kind of external discipline—rules of law and conduct created for people by generations of ancestors. People do not have to think about whether these disciplines are compassionate or not—they merely comply with all the rules. When I think of Khama's conversion to Christianity and his imposition of it on the tribe as a whole—it more or less forced him to modify or abolish all the ancient customs of his people, thus stripping them of certain securities which tradition offered. If his acceptance of Christianity was an individual and moral choice, then it meant that he carved out a new road for the tribe—the discipline which people now had to impose on themselves was internal and private. People might not have realized this, and this might account for the almost complete breakdown of family life in Bamangwato country, which under traditional custom was essential for the survival of the tribe.[30]

Head points to polygamy and bride price as some of the important customs Khama abolished. In traditional society, marriage and family life were anchored in these customs:

> Polygamy was for nation-building. That was one of its major advantages. Another advantage was that it assured every woman in the society of a husband, and that she was performing her reproductive functions under fairly secure circum-

> stances .... Perhaps more central to the security of family life was the tradition of bogadi, the bride price or the offering of a gift of cattle by a man to his wife's family at the time of marriage. It was a marriage contract and without it there was no marriage. All the children born out of the house of bogadi were recognized as legitimate .... Of the five principal tribes in the country only the Bamangwato and Batawana have abandoned the bogadi tradition, and there seems to be nothing to bridge the ill-defined gap between one way of life and another. No one seems to know what the right sort of relationship between men and women should be, that would be sacred and of mutual benefit.[31]

But despite this lost sense of direction, Head and most of her female characters still believe in the importance of marriage.

The emotional turmoil experienced by Paulina Sebeso, in When Rain Clouds Gather, clearly shows Head's view that a woman needs a husband and a stable family life in order to feel socially and personally fulfilled. Reporting the impact of Makhaya, the young South African refugee, on Paulina's troubled heart and mind, she writes:

> [She] gazed thoughtfully into the fire. It had surprised her when [he] had inquired about her [little girl]. Batswana men no longer cared about children. In fact, a love affair resulting in pregnancy was one sure way of driving a man away, and it was a country of fatherless children now. Perhaps, she thought, this man still had tribal customs which forced him to care about children. Every protection for women was breaking down and being replaced by nothing.
>
> (pp. 119-120)

The tone of self-pity characterizing Paulina's thoughts, in these lines, takes on a pathetically mournful dimension when Head proceeds to report the troubled woman's lament on the condition of women in the society:

> And there was something so deeply wrong in the way a woman had to live, holding herself together with her back bone, because, no matter to which side a woman might turn, there was this trap of loneliness. Most women had come to take it for granted, entertaining themselves with casual lovers. Most women with fatherless children thought nothing of sending a small boy out to a lonely cattle post to herd cattle to add to the family income. But then, such women expected life to give them nothing. And if you felt the strain of such a life, all the way down your spine, surely it meant that you were just holding on until such a time as a miracle occurred. And how many miracles an ordinary woman needed these days. Paulina sighed bitterly and deeply .... Who was she after all to imagine that such a strange and complex man like Makhaya would love her?
>
> (p. 120)

The fact that Paulina experiences emotional and spiritual revitalization when Makhaya ultimately marries her indicates Head's belief in the importance of marriage and family to a woman's sense of self. She reiterates this belief in the stories, "Jacob: The Story of a Faith-Healing Priest," "The Special One," and "Hunting."[32] In all these stories, the female protagonists do not lose faith in the sanctity of marriage, despite suffering repeated abuse and betrayal at the hands of men. When they finally get married to truthful men they feel personally

and socially affirmed.

The male abuse and betrayal these women suffer is symptomatic of another facet of the general breakdown of family life set off by the advent of Christianity. According to Head, the imposition of monogamy on the society mostly succeeded in producing an irresponsible male type, with no sense of family commitment:

> Marriage in the church certainly struck the final death-blow to polygamy but the immense amount of change and strain people have endured seems unfortunately to have struck a death-blow to the male. He ceased to be the head of the family, and his place has been taken by a gay, dizzy character on a permanent round of drink and women, full of shoddy values and without any sense of responsibility for the children he so haphazardly procreates.[33]

A similar image of the irresponsible male is presented by an eighteen-year old unwed mother whom Head interviewed. Here, a new angle is shown: the modern judiciary itself fails to protect women from the abuses of such males. As she recounts how she acquired her illegitimate child, the young girl states how the law did nothing effective to get her boyfriend to shoulder his responsibility: "It was an accident," she says of her early pregnancy, "but I found out what happens to girls who become pregnant—there is no help for them, not even from the law."[34] Head herself goes to the extent of suggesting that the modern law actually works in favour of the men. For example, in

When Rain Clouds Gather, she writes: "It was as though a whole society had connived at producing a race of degenerate men by stressing their superiority in the law and overlooking how it affected them as individuals" (p. 94). In a 1978 interview with Betty Fradkin, she reiterated this criticism of the modern judiciary. According to her, a woman stands a better chance of receiving fair treatment from a traditional judicial forum than from the modern one:

> The woman with an education and property feels threatened by discriminatory laws, and will not want to appeal to the courts. The ordinary woman, whose complaint will go to the chief's court, does better. The chief may treat her as fairly as a man who comes before him .... The old tribal society was disciplined sexually, for both men and women. Now there is a breakdown of family life, much promiscuity, much illegitimacy. If values are transmitted it is by the grannies, not the mothers. Polygamy died out at the turn of the century when Christianity was widely accepted. Today the men rationalize their promiscuity by saying, "It is in the African blood."[35]

In When Rain Clouds Gather, Head's embittered view that the sexual hierarchy is backward and irrational is explicit even when she presents it through Makhaya's mind. The author employs the young refugee's disgust with a Motswana woman at the border crossing who orders her granddaughter to sell sex to him to express essentially her own dissatisfaction with the general condition

in the society:

> He had sisters at home, one almost the same age as the child and some a few years older. But he was the eldest in the family and according to custom he had to be addressed as "Buti," which means "Elder Brother," and treated with exaggerated respect. As soon as his father died he made many changes in the home, foremost of which was that his sisters should address him by his first name and associate with him as equals and friends. When his mother had protested he had merely said, "Why should men be brought up with a false sense of superiority over women? People can respect me if they wish, but only if I earn it."
>
> (pp. 15-16)

In The Lying Days, Gordimer presents the same issue through Helen. The heroine's criticism of the patriarchally-biased structure of the Mine community shows through the veil of her matter-of-fact description:

> I accepted the outward everyday semblance of adult life, the men father-familiar yet creatures respected and allowed ununderstandable tastes of their own; ministered to because they were the providers and entitled to affection from their own families; women the friends, the co-workers, the companions, busy with one another in the conduct of every hour of the day.
>
> (p. 28)

The men's elevated status is reinforced by their actual remoteness from the women's domestic world. Helen repeatedly describes her father and other men in the community as identifying themselves with professional and managerial responsibilities, while Mrs. Shaw and her

female counterparts are shown to be mostly preoccupied with domestic ones. A perfectly good example of this presentation occurs at one of the Atherton parties, where the women discuss domestic matters while seated in a group apart from the men who discuss managerial issues:

> [The men] stood around sipping at cut-crystal glasses with a rose design, but the women were not offered anything. They drank only at sundowner time.
>
> The discrimination was not obvious or awkward because the women had grouped themselves apart from the men all evening. I, of course, was with them, sitting on a small spindly chair .... One or two took out their knitting; the hostess had a decorated felt bag from which came the fourth of a set of tapestry chair covers she was working. The others exclaimed that they wished they'd brought their knitting, or the hem of a child's dress that had to be done by hand. That reminded another of a new way of hemming she had read about in a magazine.
>
> Sitting on the delicate chair, I heard again all the warm buzz of talk that had surrounded my childhood .... Their talk flowed over me, flowed over me, all evening; one after the other, peppermint comfits dissolved in my mouth.
>
> When at last we rose to leave, I spoke to the men for the first time, although through the evening I had heard snatches of their talk, drifting across the path of my wondering attention. Mine gossip, it had been; and the shares they had been tipped off to buy in the Group's newly opened Free State gold fields; and—hotly argued—the selection of the team to represent the Mine at an inter-provincial bowling tournament in Natal.
>
> (pp. 283-284)

It is important to note that although Gordimer and Head criticize sexual and racial hierarchies, they both acknowledge the fact that the characters derive their

senses of self, fragmented as they are, from these hierarchies. Because the society has conditioned July to believe in his public role as a servant, he functions "best" as such. Outside their roles as master and missus, Bam and Maureen suffer massive dislocation of identity.

The various social and public roles create a sense of order, pattern, and predictability which facilitate interaction between the characters and the reality around them. In Gordimer's The Late Bourgeois World, Liz, who is disturbed by memories of her dead former husband, attempts to regain her lost equilibrium by engaging herself in the domestic task of mending her son's toy baboon. This attempt is further illustrated by her contemplation that, one day, she ought to put in an album what are left of the son's pictures (others having fallen victim to police raids): "Sticking Bobo's pictures into an album and recording the dates on and places where they were taken suddenly seemed enthusiastically possible, just as if the kind of life in which one does this sort of thing would fly into place around us with the act."[36] Being a divorcee and a professional woman, Liz has lost contact with the social and personal pattern of life enjoyed by the average middle-class wife and mother in her society.

Indeed not all of Gordimer's white female characters are just housewives. In fact most of them derive an additional sense of self from professional work they do

outside their domestic environments. Maureen's nostalgic recollection of the fact that she used to have her own office work, back in the city, indicates the importance of that work to her original sense of self. Gordimer illustrates the same point in Occasion for Loving, where she presents Jessie as being worried about the life of professional idleness that she may have to lead after handing over, to a black man, her job as secretary for African musicians and entertainers. In Head's novel, Maru, Margaret's teaching job is one of the central sources of the much maligned woman's sense of identity. Until she is later openly insulted by her pupils in class, for being a Masarwa, this occupation provides her with a stable point of personal orientation. Furthermore, it is her only point of meaningful contact with a prejudiced and hostile society.

Nevertheless, when too much emphasis is placed on external factors in a character's identity, she is distanced from the vital reality of her inner sense of self. When she is primarily defined in terms of her social roles as a professional woman, or a house-wife; and if she is classified according to her economic status as either a white bourgeois woman, or a black peasant one; and worst of all, if the character is merely categorised according to the colour of her skin, she is differentiated so rigidly and simplistically that the areas of common humanity which she shares with other people are fundamentally obscured

and disregarded. Very subtly, both Gordimer and Head point to these areas of shared humanity, and thus effectively expose the artificiality and fallaciousness of differentiating people in terms of external factors such as those mentioned.

Chapter 1

Footnotes

[1]Nadine Gordimer, "Literature and Politics in South Africa," Southern Review, vol. VII, no. 3 (November, 1974), p. 219.

[2]Gordimer, "Literature and Politics," p. 226.

[3]Gordimer, "Literature and Politics," p. 226.

[4]Nadine Gordimer, "The Novel and the Nation in South Africa," African Writers on African Writing, ed. G.D. Killam (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 52.

[5]Gordimer, "The Novel and the Nation," p. 49.

[6]Gordimer, "Literature and Politics," pp. 205-206.

[7]Dennis Brutus, "Protest against Apartheid," Protest and Conflict in African Literature (London: Heinemann, 1969), p. 97. Quoted in Ursula Laredo, "African Mosaic: The Novels of Nadine Gordimer," Journal of Commonwealth Literature, vol. VIII, no. 1 (June, 1973), p. 43.

[8]Laredo, "African Mosaic," p. 44.

[9]Laredo, "African Mosaic," p. 44.

[10]Ezekiel Mphahlele, The African Image (London: Faber, 1962), p. 148. Quoted in Laredo, "African Mosaic," p. 44.

[11]Nadine Gordimer, Introduction, Some Monday For Sure (London: Heinemann, 1976), np.

[12]Gordimer, Introduction, Some Monday, np.

[13]Gordimer, Introduction, Some Monday, np.

[14]Bessie Head, Maru (London: Victor Gollancz, 1971), p. 10.

[15]Jean Marquard, "Bessie Head: Exile and Community in Southern Africa," London Magazine, vol. 18, no. 9 (December 1978), p. 53.

[16]Marquard, "Bessie Head," p. 55.

[17]Quoted in Marquard, "Bessie Head," pp. 51-52.

[18]Gordimer, "The Novel and the Nation," p. 34.

[19]Gordimer, "The Novel and the Nation," p. 34.

[20]Gordimer, "The Novel and the Nation," p. 34.

[21]Elisabeth Gerver, "Women Revolutionaries in the Novels of Nadine Gordimer and Doris Lessing," World Literature Written in English, vol. 17, no. 1 (April, 1978), p. 39.

[22]Nadine Gordimer, The Lying Days (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953), p. 143. All other references are incorporated in the text.

[23]Nadine Gordimer, July's People (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1981), p. 98.

[24]Rowland Smith, "Masters and Servants: Nadine Gordimer's July's People and the Themes of her Fiction," Salmagundi, no. 62 (Winter, 1984), pp. 102-103.

[25]Smith, "Masters and Servants," p. 103.

[26]Cecil A. Abrahams, "The Tyranny of Place: The Context of Bessie Head's Fiction," World Literature Written in English, vol. 17, no. 1 (April, 1978), pp. 22-29.

[27]Bessie Head, When Rain Clouds Gather (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), pp. 105-106. All other references are incorporated in the text.

[28]Nadine Gordimer, Occasion For Loving (New York: Viking, 1963), p. 183. All other references are incorporated in the text.

[29]Rowland Smith, rev. of Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind, by Bessie Head, World Literature Written in English, vol. 21, no. 3 (Autumn, 1982), p. 542.

[30]Bessie Head, Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind (London: Heinemann, 1981), pp. xiv-xv.

[31]Head, Serowe, p. 59.

[32]These short stories are in Bessie Head, The Collector of Treasurers (London: Heinemann, 1977), pp. 19-36, 81-86, 104-109.

[33]Head, Serowe, p. 60.

[34]Head, Serowe, p. 64.

[35]Quoted in Betty McGinnis Fradkin, "Conversations with Bessie," World Literature Written in English, vol. 17, no. 2 (November, 1978), p. 431.

[36]Nadine Gordimer, The Late Bourgeois World (New York: Viking, 1966), p. 93.

CHAPTER 2

ALIENATION AND ESTRANGEMENT

Racial and ethnic categorizations of people limit all views of their humanity. While Gordimer's fiction depicts the racial problem as it obtains in South Africa, Head portrays its ethnic counterpart in Botswana. Such categorization conditions all to see themselves first as members of particular racial and ethnic groups, and view themselves as human beings last, thereby causing fragmentation of identity.

Both Gordimer and Head portray how complicated a woman's situation is in these hierarchical societies: even within her own racial or ethnic category she is relegated to second-class status. A sexual hierarchy also causes personal fragmentation, as it entails the subordination of the woman's humanity to her public role. Gordimer and Head show that these roles, housewife and mother, overshadow a woman's individuality.

The discussion in Chapter 1 has mostly touched on these problems in general terms. The present chapter purports to pursue the topic by focusing on specific situations, and examining the dehumanizing effects of categorization by race, ethnicity, sex and role. The oppression

and prejudice that accompany these categorizations are major factors in the dehumanization process.

In the works of both Head and Gordimer, it is evident that oppression and prejudice dehumanize both the victim and the perpetrator. To put it in the words of Gordimer herself: "any form of slavery degrades oppressor as well as oppressed."[1] First, the demeaning treatment accorded to the victim impairs his sense of his own worth as a human being. Second, the intrinsic antagonism between oppressed and oppressor distances them both from each other's humanity. Third, prejudice inevitably corrupts its perpetrator by reducing his ability to exercise moral judgement. In the final analysis, people's perceptions of themselves and others become distorted and fixed.

The subordination of the private self to public role-playing has similarly dehumanizing effects on the role-players themselves. This is because by placing emphasis on the individual's public role to the disregard of his private being, he is objectified and dissociated from himself. The master-servant relationship depicted in Gordimer's July's People, and the close association of marriage with public and social values, already mentioned, are cases in point.

In Gordimer's fiction the determination of white South Africans to create an exclusively European community in an African environment is shown not only to disconnect them from the blacks, but to estrange them from the land

itself.

Margaret Cadmore in Head's Maru is one of the major characters whose sense of self-worth has been undermined by ethnic prejudice and oppression. Since most of Gordimer's central characters are white South Africans, her fiction primarily examines the effects of racism on people who occupy the privileged side of the colour-bar. Therefore with the exception of July, in July's People, her work provides very few major psychological studies of the victims of prejudice equivalent to Head's Margaret in Maru, or Elizabeth in A Question of Power.[2]

Margaret's impaired sense of self-worth is first manifested when she falls in love with Moleka, a local administrator. Although she believes that he loves her too, she tells herself that: "He will never approach me, because I am a Masarwa."[3] Head comments that this kind of self-devaluation "was something her whole way of life had prepared her for. Love and happiness had always been a little bit far away from life as other people lived it" (p. 94). In spite of her having been brought up and educated by white missionaries, "There was no one in later life who did not hesitate to tell [Margaret] that she was a Bushman, mixed breed, half breed, low breed or bastard" (pp. 15-16). Consequently, she began to wonder about herself and her place in society: "It was when she started going to the mission school that she slowly became aware that something was wrong with her relationship to the

world. She was the kind of child who was slightly pinched under the seat, and next to whom no one wanted to sit" (p. 17). Inevitably, this physical abuse and isolation indicated the other people's rejection of her as a fellow human being. In the course of time she stoically resigned herself to the demeaning status of a social reject. As Head puts it: "The young girl had no confusion of heart, only the experience of being permanently unwanted by society in general." (p. 94)

To Margaret, her fellow-teacher, Dikeledi, enjoys a place in society which is the exact opposite of hers. As the daughter of a chief, Dikeledi belongs to the ruling aristocracy and has respectability and power. Ironically, both of them are in love with the same man without knowing of their rivalry. To compound the irony, Margaret derives some peace of mind from the mere belief that Moleka loves her too, whereas his promiscuousness is a source of constant emotional turmoil to his real lover, Dikeledi. When the chief's daughter cries over her tribulations in Margaret's presence, the latter cannot understand it at all. What could possibly make cry a lady who seemingly has everything in society?

Margaret's resignation to the circumstances of her own life is so complete that even the love-sick Dikeledi notices the tranquillity it enables her to enjoy: "I wish I was like you, Margaret .... You look as though you could live like this for ever. You look as

though you don't want anyone or anything except this library, the painting you are doing now and your school work. I feel so restless. Sometimes I could just rush out of this village, forever" (p. 114). Margaret's response confirms the unfulfilling nature of her tranquillity and reflects her impaired sense of her own worth as a human being. She abstains from disclosing the secret source of her peace of mind, fearing that it might arouse ethnic contempt in her upper-class colleague: "Any other woman would have said: 'I am peaceful because Moleka loves me.' But then she was not any other woman. She was a Masarwa. She thought Dikeledi would reply: 'Don't be silly. Moleka can't possibly love you. You are a Masarwa and he's ...'" (p. 114). Therefore she just says: "I am peaceful because I have nothing and I want nothing" (p. 114).

Ultimately, the isolated existence to which social rejection makes her acquiesce reduces her significance in the village to the level of obscurity. Living in her isolated little house at the hill-top Margaret watches the rhythm of village life as an outsider:

> In the distance a village proceeded with its own life but she knew not what it was—who married, who died, who gave birth to children— ....She was not a part of it and belonged nowhere. In fact, so quiet and insignificant were her movements that the people of Dilepe village almost forgot that there was such a thing as a Masarwa teacher. Now and then she caught their eye on

> her way to the shops or to school. They would laugh a bit, turn to each other and say: "There goes the friend of [redacted] stress Dikeledi." She had no life outside those words.
>
> (p. 93)

It is only when Maru defies his society and marries her that Margaret's human worth is affirmed and fulfilled.

In A Question of Power, Head presents a situation where racist dehumanization of the heroine, Elizabeth, undermines her sense of self-worth so deeply that she suffers a mental breakdown.[4] Being an off-spring of a white woman and a black man, Elizabeth is defined as a "coloured" according to South African law. "Like all other coloured South Africans, Elizabeth is regarded as a queer specimen of humanity who does not belong to either the white or black race."[5] The dehumanizing effect of this obsession with race is best pointed to by Elizabeth herself: "In South Africa she had been rigidly classified Coloured. There was no escape from it to the simple joy of being a human being with a personality. There wasn't any escape like that for anyone in South Africa. They were races, not people."[6]

She attempts to escape from that confinement by going to Botswana. But the attempt proves to be futile because her view of herself has already been distorted by the apartheid ideology of her native land. Having been differentiated as a "coloured," she finds it hard to fit in among the "authentic" blacks of Motabeng village where

she settles. The failure to fit in exacerbates her initial sense of being a racial oddity, causing emotional and psychological suffering that culminates in mental breakdown. The process toward that breakdown is marked by a series of hallucinations and nightmares, dominated by visions of evil.[7] Acts of perverse sexuality, committed by a character called Dan, are the most recurrent form of evil she sees. Head makes it clear that these sexual horrors stem from the heroine's stigmatized identity. "Since coloured people are the product of mixed procreative relationships between whites and blacks in a racist South African society where sexual relationships between whites and blacks are outlawed, the progeny of such sexual encounters carry a life-long stigma of illegitimacy."[8] It is this "stigma of illegitimacy" that transforms itself into the nightmares of perverse sexuality and tortures her mind. Hence, her repeatedly expressed view of herself as a "half-breed" (p. 104), a "mixed breed" (p. 147), and not "genuinely African" (p. 159). By virtue of this view, Elizabeth sees herself not only as a racial impurity, but as an inferior.[9] In addition, her sensitivity to the fact that she does not speak any indigenous African language makes her feel more estranged from the villagers around her. It also accentuates her helpless sense of personal inadequacy:

> It wasn't my fault ... I am not a tribal African. If I had been, I would have known the exact truth about Sello, whether he was good or bad. There aren't any secrets among tribal Africans. I was shut out from the everyday affairs of this world. Dan knew and treaded on my ignorance. He did more. He struck me such terrible blows, the pain made me lose my mind.
>
> (p. 145)

Not surprisingly, Dan keeps harping on her racial complex. In one of Elizabeth's hallucinations he turns on a record inside her mind which keeps saying: "Dog, filth, the Africans will eat you to death. Dog, filth, the Africans will eat you to death" (p. 46).

During his sexual exploits, in which the heroine does not participate, Dan keeps telling her that she is sexually inadequate because she is a "coloured." For example he says that Miss Sewing Machine, one of his grotesque women, "can go with a man the whole night and feel no ill-effects the next day, provided you stimulate her properly" (p. 127). He adds: "You are inferior as a Coloured. You haven't got what that girl has got" (p. 127). Effectually, Dan's persistent racial persecution of Elizabeth not only makes her feel inadequate, but leads her to view herself as a social reject, which is reminiscent of Margaret's reaction in Maru. In the final analysis, Dan is a psychological projection of the South African society from which she attempts to escape. In that society, the rejection she was to experience in later

life began as soon as she was born. In the tearful words of her foster-mother:

> It's such a sad story .... It caused so much trouble and [your mother's] family was frightened by the behaviour of the grandmother [who insisted on seeing you]. My husband worked on the child welfare committee, and your case came up again and again. 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 women on the committee said: "What can we do with this child? Its mother is white." My husband came home that night and asked me to take you. I agreed.[10] (p. 17)

Significantly, Elizabeth first learns of her unfortunate origin from a heartless and prejudiced principal of the mission school where she was sent at the age of thirteen: "We have a full docket on you. You must be very careful. Your mother was insane. If you're not careful you'll get insane just like your mother. Your mother was a white woman. They had to lock her up, as she was having a child by the stable boy who was a native" (p. 16). This sense of victimization can only emphasize the young woman's self-image as an outcast.

The irrationality of the principal's treatment of Elizabeth shows how prejudice degrades the perpetrator as well as the victim. In the young girl's eyes, the woman

because of her mindless cruelty, ceases to be a fellow human being and becomes an agent of her suffering, an object of fear and hatred. In the nightmares, Dan, who symbolizes South African society, is more of an apparition of evil than a man.

A better example of how a perpetrator of suffering loses his humanity in the eyes of his victim occurs in Maru. Dikeledi notes that social contact almost always makes Margaret defensive. This is because experience has taught her to expect only the worst from other people in relation to herself: "If anyone approached [her], she slowly raised her hand as if to ward off a blow. Sometimes she winced, but the raised hand was always there as though she expected only blows from people" (p. 71). It is this lost sense of the other people's humanity that inhibits the development and free expression of her own personality. She is forced to project an attenuated self-image which is not true to her inner vitality and human worth. According to Dikeledi's perceptive observation: "There was something else funny about [Margaret]. She was a shadow behind which lived another personality of great vigour and vitality. She raised her hand to hide this second image from sight, but the two constantly tripped up each other" (p. 71).

An important example of Margaret's conditioned fear of people and society is seen when she first enters the world as an independent working woman. On the day she

goes to Dilepe for her teaching appointment she is uncertain about how to respond to the generosity of heart shown by the truck driver who gives her a ride to the village. He offers to drive her right up to the school itself, and at a restaurant he insists that the waiters give her top-quality service. Noticing her unease with him and his manner, the driver reassuringly tells her: "You must not be so afraid of the world, Mistress ... People can't harm you" (p. 22). Commenting on Margaret's overwhelmed reaction to these kind words, the author writes: "There it shot out again, one single abrupt tear from one eye. Was that really true? Did many people behave like him, so spontaneous in their kindness? They ate in silence" (p. 22). The young woman's doubts are proved correct. She is later abused at the school after she discloses her ethnic identity to the principal, who initially mistakes her for a "coloured." When she boldly tells him that she is a Masarwa, she becomes a thing to him. At the same time he becomes inhuman in his attitude toward her. In shocked confusion, the principal cannot wait to inform the education supervisor of his horrifying discovery:

> The whole day he fretted. School closed just past noon. The office of the education supervisor was a stone's throw from the school. Usually they sat chatting over three or four cups of tea. Today, the list of beginners seemed endless. He kept noting out of the corner of his eye that the Masarwa (she was no

> longer a human being) seemed to be extra-ordinarily friendly with Dikeledi, who in his eyes was royalty of royalty. Should he warn Dikeledi that she was talking to "it"? "It" surely had all the appearance of a Coloured. (p. 40)

When the principal finally manages to see the education supervisor, and tells him about what he calls "some chicanery," he refers to Margaret in an objectified manner, thereby negating her humanity: "I have a Masarwa on my staff" (p. 41). The supervisor, in predictable shock, swiftly checks the application list for the woman's identity. To his chagrin: "There was no requirement for a person to define his tribe or race." Completely annoyed, he complains: "They are going to blame me ... I only look at qualifications. She was top of the class the whole way through. How the hell did she get in? God, Pete, this is a mess" (p. 41).

Pete's inability to see Margaret as a fellow human being is such that he cannot understand her voluntary disclosure of her true ethnic identity. As if to crown his own concomitant debasement, he arranges for a public humiliation of Margaret at the hands of her own pupils.

Since most of Gordimer's characters are liberals who consciously reject racism, Cecil Rowe in A World of Strangers is one of her few whites who blindly subscribe to racial prejudice. Like the people who reject Head's Margaret and Elizabeth, Cecil too becomes a victim of her

own dehumanized attitude toward blacks. Exemplifying this attitude is her incomprehension of Toby's friendship with them. When he explains to her his affection for Sitole, "She look[s] down at her hands" and says: "You know, I can't imagine it—I mean, a black man next to me at table, talking to me like anyone else. The idea of touching their hands—".[11] Describing her gesture, Toby observes: "Her hand came out in the imaginary experiment and hesitated, wavered back" (p. 251). This sense of physical revulsion at the idea of touching a black hand underscores Cecil's estrangement from the black people's humanity. This estrangement is first seen when she asks Toby: "And they seem like other people to you?" (p. 250). She asks the question in reaction to his assertion that his closest friends in the country are black. Clinching the matter is Toby's comment that explaining his affection for Sitole was embarrassing because it was like "trying to make comprehensible a liking for the company of snakes or chimpanzees" (pp. 250-251).

Cecil's dismissive attitude toward blacks is earlier shown to be ambivalent. When witnessing a black man's suffering she is almost able to recognize her own spiritual anguish. Yet she refuses to acknowledge consciously her human affinity to the man. The black man who is high on drugs cries in the street near Cecil's flat on Christmas Eve. The young woman's immediate reaction is to assume a position of authority, ordering black by-standers

to call a doctor. She also asks Toby whether they should call the police. But her other actions reveal an instinctive sense of empathy with the man. She makes some coffee for him, and as Toby observes: "Cecil never took her eyes off him; when he panted, her hand flew to her breast, when he sobbed, her mouth twitched" (pp. 189-190). When she and Toby return to the flat, "Cecil kept going" from the living room where they "could not hear the man" "to the bathroom, where [they] could" (p. 190). While there, "She sat on the edge of the bath and shushed me as if she must hear what there was to hear ..." (p. 190). Then placing the man's suffering in its broad context of human estrangement, Toby says:

> His was an unspeakable anguish of alienation, lostness, the howling of the wolf of the soul in a waste. The ghastly ritual went on: tearing anxiety of pacing and panting, climax of sobs, then panting again ...
>
> It was all the cries we do not cry, all the howls we do not howl, all the bloody furies in our hearts that are never, must never be, let loose. Even I was afraid, hearing it; not of the man, but of a stir of recognition in myself. We sat in a kind of shameful fascination, and did not look at each other. She was tight-lipped, her long hands were clenched on themselves, the spikes of both blood-red thumbnails folded back on the fists.
>
> The sobs died; whistled away like a wind in a broken, empty place. There was a roaring cry that brought tears to attention in Cecil's eyes turned fiercely to me.
>
> (pp. 189-190)

The tears in the young woman's eyes indicate her unconscious identification with the man, thereby exposing the irrationality of her conscious attitude toward blacks in general, an attitude which precludes human considerations wherever interaction between blacks and whites is concerned.

Even in her attitude toward her maid, Eveline, Cecil exhibits no conscious awareness of the human bond between them. In this relationship Gordimer presents the paradoxical dependency of the missus on her servant. Eveline looks after both Cecil and her child. Although Cecil is not aware of it, the maid is also "her friend and protector, and, breezily unconscious of this role, [stands] between her and the realities of her existence" (p. 158).

By pointing to the unacknowledged human bond between Cecil and the blacks around her, Gordimer displays her untiring search for hidden truths. This approach reflects her view that nothing is exactly what it seems in South Africa.[12] Blacks may appear subhuman to Cecil's conscious perception of them; but beyond that there are areas of the human condition she shares with them that cannot be denied even by her prejudice. When Gordimer focuses on the liberal whites who consciously reject prejudice and accept blacks as their fellow human beings she reveals other hidden truths. Here, she exposes the simplistic nature of the liberal attitudes and assumptions, showing that the systematic inculcation of prejudice into one's mind from

childhood is so effective that one remains scarred by it long after one has renounced it as irrational and evil. In Occasion for Loving, Jessie Stilwell discovers that, despite her enlightened convictions, her perceptions of blacks are still tainted. Telling Gideon of her irrational failure to view as ordinary his inter-racial affair with Boaz Davis's wife, she says:

> I didn't think I'd ever have to give this business another thought. I believed it was all settled, once and for all, long ago. It's the truth, the rational truth that a love affair like yours is the same as any other. But you haven't come to the truth while it's still only the rational truth. You've got to be a bit more honest than that. Do you know what I think while I look at you and Ann? Do you? I remember what was left out when I settled the race business once and for all. I remember the black man who rubbed the floor round my feet when I was twelve and fourteen. 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.[13]

In other words, in spite of her rational acceptance of the full humanity of the black man, Jessie's irrational image of him is fundamentally based on both his menial public roles and his sexuality. To compound the demeaning and dehumanizing effect of those roles, Jessie the child was emotionally conditioned to view the black man as an object

of fear from which she had to maintain a personal distance.

Proceeding to draw the parallel between this conflict within herself and Boaz's own dilemma, Jessie says that in spite of his liberal convictions Boaz still views Gideon as not man enough for him to confront. Later, while discussing the matter with her husband, the heroine agrees that Gideon is not, cannot and will not be a man until he is free. Illustrative of Gideon's position, and that of other blacks in South Africa, are the terms "boy" and "girl" as used by conservative whites to denote black men and women. Gordimer's own explanation of the implications of these terms and why she uses them in her earlier fiction is invaluable to the reader's understanding of how blacks are degraded in that society. While specifically referring to the occurrence of these terms in the short stories compiled in Some Monday For Sure, the author places the usage of the terms in their historical context:

> Making this selection of only thirteen stories from the five short story collections I have published in twenty-five years, I find that the changing subject-matter and even the changing vocabulary in these books reflect the changes in relationships between black and white over these decades, against the background of political events. This came about subconsciously in my work. The very early stories, "Ah, Woe Is Me", "Six Feet of The Country," are about master-servant relationships. They reveal the shameful impotence of paternalism. The use of terms "boy" and "girl" for adult men and women, who were black and doing menial jobs, for example,

> occurs in these stories because this was—and is, though less often, now—the way in which whites in Africa expressed their view of Africans as "children"—irresponsible inferiors.[14]

July's People is the major work in which Gordimer examines at length, the master-servant relationship, vividly exposing "the shameful impotence of paternalism." She shows the incongruous attempt by a white family, the Smales, to have a servant, July, and at the same time reject the "view of Africans as 'children'—irresponsible inferiors." The author specifically focuses on the way Maureen Smales and July perceive each other in relation to themselves. Immediately evident is the absence of human interest in the perceptions and Maureen's painful recognition of it. The recognition is painful because, previous to the reversal of their fortunes, she and her husband had deluded themselves that there existed personal connection and human understanding between them and their servant, whereas in reality they only existed to him as masters and he to them as servant, nothing more. Maureen is able to recognize this truth in the village because the persistence of the relationship there poignantly exposes the psychological damage it had inflicted on them all. Despite the changed circumstances of revolutionary war, the identities of the white family and their black servant are fixed.[15]

Initially, Maureen is not fully aware of the implications of their status as white overlords. It is when July insistently refuses to relate to them in any other than the base economic terms predicated by the roles of master and servant that she apprehends their estrangement from each other as people: His persistent presentation of himself as a kind of economic possession of the white family is pregnant with heavy irony which does not escape Maureen's notice. Their confrontation over July's unauthorized custody of the car keys is a case in point:

> —I'm work for you. Me, I'm your boy, always I'm have the keys of your house. Every night I take that keys with me in my room, when you go away on holiday, I'm lock up everything ... it's me I've got the key for all your things isn't it—[16]

Apart from the fact that July, in the village, is no longer the Smales' boy, the irony of his self-presentation as such is intensified by the not very obvious point that the situation in their previous world was one of mutual possession. The inherent inter-dependence between the servant and his employers made them his people as much as he was theirs, although this fact was never acknowledged or recognized by either party. Nevertheless July is aware of the incongruity between being given virtual custody over the Smales' possessions in the city, whenever they went away, and their present resentment of his keeping

their car-keys in a place where he is overtly the man in charge.

Illustrative of July's fixed view of himself as a servant of the Smales family is the fact that he expects to be paid at the end of the month. This expectation turns Maureen's initial frustration with his intransigence into a sense of personal insult and affront:

> —Pay you!—She glowed and flashed. He continued a kind of fastidious pretence of insensitivity to a coarse and boring assault.—You know we can pay you what you used to get, but we can't pay you for—
> —African people like money.—The insult of refusing to meet her on any but the lowest category of understanding.
> —You know quite well what I mean.... For what's happened. It's different here. You're not a servant.
> —I'm the boy for your house, isn't it—He made a show of claiming a due.
>
> (p. 71)

July's "show of claiming a due," and his refusal "to meet her on any but the lowest category of understanding," are quite in keeping with the roles of servant and mistress upon which his initial relationship with Maureen was based.

In addition to her unease with July's clinging to the servant status, Maureen is particularly troubled by his insistent reference to himself as her "boy," a term pregnant with racial contempt:

> Your boy who work for you. There in town you are trusting your boy for fifteen years...—The absurd "boy" fell upon her in strokes neither appropriate nor to be dodged. Where had he picked up the weapon? The shift boss had used it; the word was never used in her house; she priggishly shamed and exposed others who spoke it in her presence. She had challenged it in the mouths of white shopkeepers and even policemen.
>
> (pp. 69-70)

Here the author further illustrates the impotence of liberal patronage in the environment where July and Maureen interacted before the Smales' fortunes suffered a reversal. The heroine's rejection of the term "boy" did not neutralize the fact that, by virtue of being her servant, July was in all practical terms her "boy," and she was his mistress. As "boy" and mistress the rules of interaction were clear.

However, July sees himself as a servant only in relation to the Smales. For in the village, his sense of himself as a man is entirely independent of that status and of Maureen's view of his human worth. It is here that the heroine realizes how blinkered her perception of him was. In order to sustain an image of the servant as a respectable and honest man, as opposed to that of an untrustworthy "irresponsible inferior," she had consistently turned a blind eye to whatever misdeeds he committed that might have tarnished the image. Maureen attains to this realization toward the end of the novel. Specifically, this occurs at the point where exasperation at being

accused of stealing her things causes July to speak in his own language. It is also at this point that Maureen recognizes the extent to which his limited English not only impeded real human communication between them, but also added to his debasement as a man:

> —You—He spread his knees and put an open hand on each. Suddenly he began to talk at her in his own language, his face flickering powerfully. The heavy cadences surrounded her .... She understood although she knew no word. Understood everything: what he had had to be, how she had covered up to herself for him, in order for him to be her idea of him. But for himself—to be intelligent, honest, dignified for her was nothing; his measure as a man was taken elsewhere and by others. She was not his mother, his wife, his sister, his friend, his people.
>
> (p. 152)

To emphasize the point that Maureen did not ever enjoy any relation with July rooted in human contact or personal connection, the author presents him as reverting to English when he refers to public events in the cold and impersonal world of black and white:

> He spoke in English what belonged in English: —Daniel he's go with those ones like in town. He's join.—The verb, unqualified, did for every kind of commitment: to a burial society, a hire purchase agreement, their thumbprints put to a labour contract for the mines or sugar plantations. —I don't know— Maybe he's need a gun for that.—He leaned back, done with her.
>
> (p. 152)

While July can reassert his ignored human dignity, Maureen and Bam find it hard to rediscover themselves once they have been dislodged from their position of power and privilege. Gordimer makes it clear that the social and material props of their roles as husband and wife impeded their knowledge and appreciation of each other as ordinary private human beings. Hence she presents their mutual estrangement in a vivid context of their new material poverty and social powerlessness. Maureen is seen to be constantly preoccupied with various details of her family's dispossessed condition. Together with her husband, she is acutely concerned about July's unauthorized use of their vehicle; hence the confrontation with him over the issue. Maureen, being more perceptive than Bam, sees July's action as symbolizing the entire process of dispossession which began the moment the revolutionary war forced them to flee the city. When she returns the keys to him, after keeping them overnight following one of the confrontations, she symbolically acquiesces in the process. Concurrent with this process is the growing distance between Maureen and Bam. In this regard it is significant that when she notes her estrangement from her husband, she recollects their past matrimonial intimacies in a manner that stresses the social and material context in which the intimacies were enjoyed. As they fail to comment on the radio describing the crisis in urban areas, the author begins her presentation by

commenting on how easy it was for them to communicate with each other in the previous environment:

> She used sometimes to answer him outlandishly, out of sarcasm, when he suggested she might do something it was beyond question—by nature and intelligence—for her to have done. Now don't let slip to Parkinson I don't intend to go to the meeting because I've no intention of voting mmh.—Oh I've already had a good chat with Sandra about it, just to be sure he'll get to hear.
>
> This kind of repartee belonged to the deviousness natural to surburban life. In the master bedroom, sometimes it ended in brief coldness and irritation, sometimes in teasing, kisses, and love-making of a variety suggested by the opportunities of the room and its rituals ... (p. 89).

In the village Maureen and Bam fail to communicate with each other because the alien environment has fractured their sense of themselves and of each other. Maureen's failure to read the only book she brought with her indicates the massive dislocation of identity she has suffered as a result of their reversed fortunes:

> [The] transport of a novel, the false awareness of being within another time, place and life that was the pleasure of reading, for her, was not possible. She <u>was</u> in another time, place, consciousness; it pressed in upon her and filled her as someone's breath fills a balloon's shape. She was already not what she was. No fiction could compete with what she was finding she did not know, could not have imagined or discovered through imagination.
>
> (p. 29)

Maureen "was already not what she was" because the present image of herself as an impoverished white villager is incongruous with her past self as the affluent suburban wife of an architect. The reduced circumstances are not commensurate with the accustomed station of Mrs. Smales. Gordimer ironically emphasizes the heroine's dislocation of identity by repeatedly referring to her by her full name—Maureen Smales—after Bam has despondently resigned himself to his dispossessed and powerless condition. Notably, Gordimer first makes the reference soon after Bam's total emasculation has been symbolized by the loss of his gun. The man's reduced stature becomes self-evident when the author juxtaposes his prostrate figure, helpless, on the bed in the hut, with Maureen's assumption of initiative, going to ask July about the missing g[illegible]. Failing to do anything about the crisis,

> [Bam] lay down on his back, on that bed, the way he habitually did; and at once suddenly rolled onto his face, as the father had never done before his sons.
>
> They looked to their mother but her expression was closed to them.
>
> She looked down on this man who had nothing, now. There was before these children something much worse than the sight of [the drunk village] women's broad backsides, squatting [and urinating just a few feet away from where others were drinking].

And noting the distraught woman's trip to see July, the author writes:

> Maureen Smales—the name, the authority that signed his pass every month—came back to the gumba-gumba gathering to look for July. For Mwawate. He was not there; they were used to her, they took no more notice of her than of the dogs and children who hung around the drinkers' mysterious animation, quarrel—some happiness and resentful sadness.
>
> (p. 146)

By reducing Maureen's significance, in the eyes of the villagers, to the same level as that of dogs and children, Gordimer effectively undercuts whatever semblance of authority may be in the heroine's intention to have July account for the lost gun. And by changing the reference to him from July to Mwawate, a name that embodies his real identity as a man among his people, the author exposes Maureen's unwitting presumption in approaching him as the servant, the "boy" who could always be required to give an explanation for anything that went wrong within their domestic domain.

Ultimately, not only did the social and material props of their relationship impede personal connection between Bam and Maureen, they also warped their views of themselves. Overemphasis on public role-playing stunts the development of an individual's self-awareness.

It is through Helen's confrontations with her mother, in The Lying Days, that Gordimer exposes the personally impoverishing nature of the older woman's tenacious belief in the importance of the social and the public. The quarrel which is precipitated by Helen's suggestion that

the family give accommodation to Mary Seswayo is the most significant of those confrontations. By using the quarrel as an occasion for airing all her grievances against the independent-minded daughter, Mrs. Shaw reveals the narrowness of her publicly-oriented vision of things. And by accusing the father of being too tolerant toward Helen, when he suggests that it is improper to quarrel at dinner, she implies that her own authority suffers impairment and confinement within the domestic situation: "Of course, you let her do as she likes. And grumble to me afterward. Well I won't have it. I've had enough."[17]

Mrs. Shaw's concern for personally impoverishing social considerations becomes self-evident when she proceeds to elaborate on her grievances against Helen:

> "I don't know her friends and their ways and I don't want to. Nobody's good enough for my daughter here. How do you think it looks, her keeping herself aloof from the Mine, never wanting to do the things other young people do? I'm ashamed, always making excuses—" She stopped, breathing hard at us. But once it was released, all that she had not said for months, all the reserve of her cold silences, her purposeful ignoring, could not be checked.
> (p. 172)

With amazing consistency, the disgruntled woman points her accusing finger at Helen's aloof individuality. It does not occur to her that what Helen thinks of herself is as important (if not more so) as what society thinks of her. The specific details Mrs. Shaw gives in her

charges against Helen are nothing else but a pathetic illustration of her own enslavement to the code of social conformity:

> "What do you think people think about you? The girls you went to school with, you won't look at. Of course not. They're content with their jobs and the decent people they've known since they were children. And I have to have Mrs. Tatchett saying to me, What's wrong with Basil? —Yes, I'm telling you, she came to me the other day and asked me straight out, and I admire her for it. What's wrong with my Basil, she said, that Helen stayed at home rather than go to the Halloween dance with him and she never came to the cocktail party we had for his graduation? After all, he goes to the University the same as she does, why doesn't she consider him good enough?"
>
> (p. 173.)

The social categorization of people denoted by such insipid phrases as "decent people" and "good enough" clearly shows the impoverishing nature of the ready-made modes of conduct Mrs. Shaw and her counterparts believe in. To quote Helen herself, "The only reason why one should be friendly with anyone is because they're good enough" (p. 173). And as far as they are concerned Helen's friend Joel is not good enough because of his Jewish origin and humble social background. The naked prejudice with which the mother denounces the young girl's association with the boy destroys whatever modicum of credibility her conception of goodness and decency may, at first glance, appear to have:

> "No, you like to roll in the mud. Anything so long as it's not what any other reasonable person likes. You'd rather be seen running ... about with the son of a Jew from the native stores, that's much nicer, someone brought up among all the dirt and the kaffirs. He must be a finer person, of course, than anyone decently brought up by people of our own standing."
>
> (p. 173)

The confining and stifling nature of Mrs. Shaw's idea of a person "decently brought up by people of our own standing" is effectively exposed by Helen's statement as to why she prefers Joel's friendship to the company of any of the other boys on the Mine:

> "Why? ... Because he's alive, that's why. Because he's a real, live, thinking human being who's making his own life instead of taking it ready-made like all your precious little darlings of sons on the Mine."
>
> (p. 173)

In a further illustration of the elder Shaws' distance from genuine human relationships, the author presents them as also giving primacy to social status and family background when considering whom their daughter ought to marry. Without bothering to find out how Helen really feels about her dating partner, Charles Bessemer, the two parents grade him as suitable for her to marry; he has the right status and background: "he [is] a Protestant Gentile, like themselves, and in addition, a doctor" (p. 163).

Alongside this limited way of thinking is their one-track conception of the nature and aim of male-female relations. As Helen observes,

> the principles of [my parents'] code of behaviour toward young men, [which typified those of the whole community], were entirely sexual, the elders of the tribe measuring the daughter's choice of mates against the background of her own home, the young male assessing the worth of the family and consequently the girl whom he was considering. This was the way it was always done on the Mine and in Atherton in general, where as soon as a young man became interested in a girl, and long before there was any talk of marriage, he was taken about everywhere with the family, to cinemas and social gatherings, so that if and by the time marriage resulted, he was already inculcated in the kind of life the girl's family had led and which, without question, he would be expected to lead with her, trooping off as ants go to set up another ant heap exactly like the one they have left. (pp. 162-163).

In The Late Bourgeois World, Gordimer expresses again her criticism of this parochial attitude toward marriage in particular and human relationships in general. In this novel, the protagonist, Liz, recollects how happy her parents were when she married into an M.P.'s family, and how they were later disappointed when Max did not live up to their image of an M.P.'s son. She also reflects on her in-laws' own belief in what is public, by virtue of which they undervalued the place of anything private among themselves. Recalling Max's indecorous political speech at his sister's wedding, Liz notes that the son's

participation in the Defiance Campaign did not constitute "a valid rift between" him and the parents, for his "part in that had been hushed up."[18] Making the point clearer, Liz comments:

> Only public injury counts, with them. In one of those twists of an ancient code degenerating far from its source that is characteristic of a civilization brought over the sea and kept in moth balls, the Van Den Sandts interpret honour as something that exists in the eyes of others; you can do each other to death, in private: shame or pain come only from what leaks out. (p. 33)

Indeed, even their attitude toward the wedding itself, and toward Max as a participant in it, reveals their belief in the public event.

> A daughter's wedding to a suitable candidate was a public occasion ... and the bride's only brother was a traditional participant in the jocular clannish emotionalism of the celebration. Therefore Max lost all other identity; the Van Den Sandts insisted that he must propose a toast to Queenie and her bridegroom. (p. 33)

In keeping with their obsessive sense of public decorum, the Van Den Sandts and their guests do not openly register any feelings of embarrassment when Max, quite inappropriately, turns the wedding toast into a cliché-ridden political speech about white injustice towards blacks.

Not surprisingly Liz rejects her former in-laws' belief in the public and the social. She also concludes that because of the emphasis on role-playing, conventional marriage undermines a woman's individuality. In The Lying Days, Helen reaches a similar conclusion.

In the black world depicted by both Gordimer and Head, there are virtually no characters who view marriage as detrimental to a woman's sense of self. The harsh economic and social realities faced by the women preclude this kind of intellectual analysis of marriage and family life. In the almost perennial absence of the men from home, marriage and motherhood are among the most vital sources of identity for women. Their virtually fatherless children are a crucial part of the semblance of family life around which they organize their existence. Both Gordimer and Head portray the remarkable sense of self reliance with which these women endure their lives of matrimonial loneliness. But an important point which Gordimer does not address when she depicts the black world is the moral effect of that kind of life. Head, on the other hand, chiefly preoccupies herself with this problem when she deals with the plight of rural Batswana women. According to her, the cultural breakdown caused by the migrant labour system, working together with the incursion of western cultural elements into the society, has undermined marriage and the family. This breakdown has led to the destruction of traditional moral values. While men run loose, women

bear the brunt of the chaos as they have to rear fatherless children on their own. The women's dilemma is compounded by a lack of adequate protection from the law.[19]

Through Paulina's dilemma, in When Rain Clouds Gather, Head shows the moral problems faced by women in Golema Mmidi, where stable male-female relationships are almost non-existent:

> So intense was [Paulina's need for emotional fulfilment] that it had made her very sensitive to men, especially the type of man most likely to fulfil it. It was only an equally blind and intense desire to own and possess a man to herself that prevented her from having any lovers, and this latter need always asserted itself over her physical desires.[20]

Paulina's possessive attitude and sense of personal dignity cannot be of much practical use in a society where sexual promiscuity is the rule rather than the exception:

> In a society like this, which man cared to be owned and possessed when there were so many women freely available? And even all the excessive love-making was purposeless, aimless just like tipping everything into an awful cesspit where no one really cared to take a second look. And Paulina was too proud a woman to be treated like a cesspit. But she wasn't sure either of anything morally definite. In fact the word "moral" was really meaningless to her. She simply wanted a man who wasn't a free-for-all. No doubt, the other women longed for this too because intense bloody battles often raged between women over men, and yet, perversely, they always set themselves up for sale to the first bidder who

> already had so many different materials in his shop that he was simply bored to death by the display.
>
> (pp. 112-113)

The sewer imagery employed in this passage effectively evokes the author's, as well as Paulina's, sense of moral disgust at the sexual intemperance rampant in the society. The marketplace terminology used with reference to the general question of male-female interaction forcefully depicts the debased and dehumanized nature of that interaction. Also, the presentation of women as inexhaustible commodities for sale points to an important factor: the perennial absence of most of the men from home which, by creating a numerical imbalance between the sexes, aggravates the moral problems confronting the women.[21] While the abundance of women undermines the need for commitment to monogamous relationships on the men's part, it also causes estrangement among the women themselves as they compete for the few available men. In the end members of both genders simply lead lives of sexual licence which are not fulfilling. Interestingly enough, while Head frequently presents the African man as the chief villain in the breakdown of family life, two of her interviewees in Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind state that the women actively contribute to the problem.[22]

Gordimer presents South African whites as suffering from cultural alienation of their own. This alienation, too, has colonial roots; it results from the whites' attempt to carve out an exclusively European community in an environment that is inherently African. Their wholesale parodying of European social and cultural values as portrayed in A World of Strangers illustrates this attempt. Cecil Rowe and her party-going crowd, for instance, take to such high-brow hobbies as horse-riding and classical art appreciation, among others, in spite of the fact that they neither like nor understand them. Indeed Toby, the narrating character, describes the Alexanders' High House circle as practising out-moded Edwardian social and cultural values which are miserably out of joint with their setting and time. The fact that this Eurocentric mode of existence disconnects the whites from their African environment is pointed to in The Lying Days; here, the heroine, Helen, tells of the cultural disorientation she experienced because of the foreign books she had to read in her childhood.[23] Both at home and at school, she was made to read novels that were about British characters, social life, and cultural values which were alien to her and the world she saw around her:

> I had never read a book in which I myself was recognizable; in which there was a "girl" like Anna who did the housework and the cooking and called the mother and father Missus and Baas;

> in which the children ate and lived closely with their parents and played in the lounge and went to the bioscope.
>
> (p. 10)

Instead of providing her with an affirmative point of personal reference by reflecting her own world, the books she read depicted a fantasyland whose inhabitants she could only envy but never belong with:

> To me, brought up into the life of a South African mine, stories of children living the ordinary domestic adventures of the upper-middle class English family—which was the only one that existed for children's books published in England in the thirties—were weird and exotic enough. Nannies in uniform, governesses and ponies, nurseries and play-rooms and snow fights—all these commonplaces of European childhood were as unknown and therefore as immediately enviable as the life of princesses in legendary castles to the English children for whom the books were written.
>
> (p. 10)

Helen's sense of estrangement from her own country of birth is accentuated when, for the first time, she visits the poverty-stricken and squalid black section of the Mine community, which contrasts sharply with the affluent white quarters to which she belongs:

> Yet now as I stood in this unfamiliar part of my own world knowing and flatly accepting it as the real world because it was ugly and did not exist in books (if this was the beginning of disillusion, it was also the beginning of

> Colonialism: the identification of the unattainable distant with the beautiful, the substitution of "overseas" for "fairyland") I felt for the first time something of the tingling fascination of the gingerbread house before Hansel and Gretel, anonymous, nobody's children, in the woods.
>
> (p. 10)

This visit not only makes Helen feel more alienated from her own environment, it also makes her realize the fact that there are two South Africas in the same country divided along racial lines. While one is privileged the other is deprived of almost everything that goes to make life comfortable.

As the author proceeds to scrutinize the matter, she makes it clear that while the transplanted European identity automatically stresses the white community's foreignness to the environment, the dispossessed blacks always have an irrevocable sense of belonging to the land. She makes this assertion most eloquently in The Conservationist where the mining magnet and industrialist, Mehring, feels insecure on his own farm, and at the same time enviously observes the natural ease with which his rugged employees feel at one with the place.[24] One morning he watches, from his bedroom window, "the arrival of women and old men who have been taken on by Jacobus [the foreman] to come from the location to weed."[25] With intense fascination he notes the familiarity and easy harmony with which the workers set about their duties: "So that's how

work gets going on the place. Everyone takes his time, nobody's developing ulcers out here, you've got to grant them that" (pp. 172-173). After watching some more, Mehring exclaims: "Oh my God. What a crime to wake up morning after morning in that flat [in the city]. Never mind the huge firm bed and the good coffee" (p. 174). In other words, the impersonality of his routinized urban life is thrown into vivid focus, through contradistinction, by the natural ease and emotional vitality the workers evince in relation to each other and to the farm. His rare visits to the place only intensify the feelings of personal distance from it which already plague him because of his sense of foreignness to the land. Hence he feels like a stranger on his own premises every time he visits the farm. Connected with Mehring's sense of insecurity and feelings of being foreign is his paranoia that the blacks are silently questioning his possession of the place. He feels their eyes all over him even when they appear to be ignoring him. Hence he finds consolation and reassurance in moments of total solitude, during which he feels at one with the land. For instance, he wakes up on a New Year's day and finds that there is nobody around: "There is absolutely no one. It's his own place. No eyes keep watch on him" (p. 200). Mehring does not hide his obsessive envy of the blacks' natural sense of belonging to the land. His consciousness of this tends to heighten his own feelings of being an alien and of impermanence. When he considers

pulling down their shacks for rebuilding he anticipates their discontentment about it: "There'll be dissatisfaction because they were here when he came, they were squatting God knows how long before he bought the place and they'll expect to have their grandchildren squatting after he is gone" (p. 192). He also imagines what they think of him and his son: "He and his son with woman's hair came and went away, leaving nothing, taking nothing; the farmhouse was empty" (p. 164). Mehring's frequent and prolonged absences from the farm also dramatize his detachment from it. Jacobus is practically the one who runs the place. The result of the storm is to juxtapose his sense of impermanence on the farm with the sense of belonging to it enjoyed by the workers. That is why he is disturbed by the order to which Jacobus restores the place after the storm:

> We think something is happen ...—and everything was kept in order, everything was maintained more or less as usual, as far as they know. They were ready for the next white man. If it were not to be me, it would have been someone else. The next buyer. Perhaps they thought I was dead. They know another one will always come. They would take off their hats at the graveside as they'd take them off to greet the new one.—We think something is happen.—But it can only happen to me. They have been there all the time and they will continue to be there. They have nothing and they have nothing to lose.
>
> (p. 246)

Ironically enough, the workers are totally unaware of this morbid sense of estrangement and impermanence: As far as they are concerned he is their keeper, and once he dies his son will inherit the place. For example, when Mehring tells Jacobus that the newly planted trees take a very long time to mature, the foreman replies: "Well, is all right. Is all right, when Terry can get them, when he can get marry and bring them nice for his wife, his little children" (p. 211).

In addition to the problem of feeling like a foreigner, Mehring's sense of rootlessness, vis-à-vis the land is accentuated by the basically materialistic nature of his relationship to the farm. The element of possession in the relationship undermines any emotional or spiritual connection with the land he may wish to effect. Ultimately, Mehring realizes that his money cannot buy him everything. In contrast to his situation, the black workers do not have to assert their belonging to the place. Although he materially owns the farm, he cannot do so emotionally and spiritually. And while the blacks are materially impoverished, their emotional and spiritual connection to the land cannot be bought away from them. Mehring makes the impermanence of his material connection to it poignant when he says: "They know another [buyer] will always come." The only way he can thwart that other buyer is through ancestral connection, which he desires. It is this desire that causes Mehring's repeated attempts

to forge a sense of belonging to his farm by identifying with the unknown black man buried on it. He sees the dead man as a symbol of absolute contact with the land. His frequent visits to the place where the man is buried indicate the attempt to identify with him. Through that identification Mehring contemplates his own death which he hopes will place him in a position of permanent possession of the farm. On one of the visits the contemplation is vivid and sombre: "He has been sitting so still he has the fanciful feeling that so long as he does not move the farm is as it is when he is not there. He's at one with it as an ancestor at one with his own earth. He is there and he is not there" (p. 154). But this ancestral connection is closed to him, and he knows it. Even if he were to be buried there, as he wishes, he could not have an ancestral significance because of his being a foreigner. The blacks have an ancestral connection with the land by virtue of being its indigenous inhabitants. The fact that generations and generations of their relatives lived and died on this land is at the heart of their emotional and spiritual connection with it. The spiritual dimension lies in the belief that through that land the living and the dead commune with each other as members of the same "eternal" family. Hence, when the dead man is finally given proper burial, Gordimer describes him as having come home at last. The initial lack of proper burial denies him entry into the family circle because his humanity is

negated and the ancestral powers are insulted. The police just dump him away like a piece of rubbish. Even Mehring realizes this irreverence, but only after the storm has dug out his remains in symbolic demonstration of ancestral wrath: "If those boere bastards had done what they should, it would never have been there. They couldn't even see to it that a proper hole was made. Scratch the ground and kick back a bit of earth over the thing like a cat covering its business" (p. 234).

Significantly, after the dead man has been restored to the "eternal" family, Gordimer accords to him and his fellow blacks all the things Mehring desires: continuity and permanence, absolute contact with and belonging to the land:

> The one whom the farm had received had no name. He had no family but their women wept a little for him. There was no child of his present but their children were there to live after him. They had put him away to rest, at last; he had come back. He took possession of this earth, theirs; one of them.
>
> (p. 252)

Some critics see these lines as Gordimer's prophecy on the eventual political repossession of South Africa by blacks.[26] The author's statements elsewhere do lend credence to this view.[27] However, she makes it clear in her fiction that the problems in the Republic are so complex that they defy easy optimism and wishful thinking. This

is illustrated by her repeated criticism of liberal attempts to deal with the problems. Invariably Gordimer criticizes liberals by pointing to their simplistic assumptions, the inherent inadequacy of their methods and, in some cases, to the questionable nature of their motives. The inadequacy of a liberal response to racist policies is the subject of Chapter 3.

Chapter 2

Footnotes

[1]Gordimer, "Literature and Politics," p. 208.

[2]The absence of major black characters in Gordimer's early fiction is explained by her belief that racial separation, in South Africa, makes it impossible for people to know each other well enough to be able to portray convincingly life on the other side of the colour-line: "... this compartmentalisation of society works both ways. The black writer is extremely limited in his presentation of white characters—witness the frequency with which his are no more than cardboard or caricature. What he cannot know about the white man's life because of those large areas of the white man's experience he is excluded from by law, he supplies out of fantasy distorted by resentment at the exclusion ..... In the work of white writers, you get the same gap in experience compensated for by the projection of emotions about blacks into the creation of a black typology. Guilt is the prevailing emotion there, and it produces cardboard and unconscious caricature just as resentment does .... Speaking for myself, I have felt relatively at ease and fairly confident dealing with black characters in those novels of mine concerned with the "fringe" black-white society that briefly flourished among black and white intellectuals and artists in the late fifties and sixties. I am aware that I could not attempt to write a novel from the "inside" centring on the lives, say, of some of the Zulus' worker-clans with a strong tribal base who recently have been involved in the huge strikes in Natal." See Gordimer, "Literature and Politics," p. 225.

[3]Head, Maru, p. 94. All other references are incorporated in the text.

[4]A Question of Power is an autobiographical novel. Therefore, it is interesting to note Head's own comments on its technical quality and thematic concerns: "... in A Question of Power the work-out is .... subtle—the whole process of break-down and destruction is outlined there. A person in the grip of such a process has very little to say. I felt that I had overcome that tendency in me to moral preachiness. The question is left so open.

There is a line that forms the title of the book—if the things of the soul are really a question of power then anyone in possession of power of the spirit could be Lucifer. That is, I might, in my essence then symbolize Satan. I'd lost, in A Question of Power, the certainty of my own goodness. The novel was written under pressure. I was alarmed. If you feel that you have moved into another world where no human decencies are observed and basically you are a normal, decent human being, there is this high alarm. The book was written with that high alarm." Quoted in Marquard, "Bessie Head: Exile and Community in Southern Africa," p. 53.

[5]Abrahams, "The Tyranny of Place: The Context of Bessie Head's Fiction," p. 25.

[6]Bessie Head, A Question of Power (London: Heinemann, 1974), p. 44. All other references are incorporated in the text.

[7]Roberta Rubenstein interprets these visitations as "projections of madness" which, during three years of suffering, "multiply, confronting Elizabeth in tortuous visions with her own evil nature: spiritual poverty, lack of compassion, dislike of Africans, hidden sexuality, pride, racial impurity" (rev. of A Question of Power, by Bessie Head, The New Republic, April 27, 1974, pp. 30-31). After pointing out the political roots of the heroine's problem, she asserts: "The policy of apartheid is the symbolically larger form of Elizabeth's condition: as a coloured alien, she is cut off from both white and black, both tribal and western identities" (rev. of A Question of Power, p. 31). While the second part of the assertion is correct, the first one suffers from the problem of mistaken emphasis and focus. To present apartheid as a symbol of Elizabeth's condition is to obscure its literal and central place in her situation. If anything, the heroine's fragmented personality is the symbolic form of her fragmented society. It is also wrong of Rubenstein to present Elizabeth as being confronted with "visions of her own evil nature." This implies that Elizabeth is inherently evil, whereas she has merely been led, by the system, to doubt her own human worth and goodness. Literally speaking, apartheid is the source of the young woman's condition; therefore it is its evil nature that warrants emphasis, not her spiritual state.

[8]Abrahams, "The Tyranny of Place," p. 24.

[9]Gordimer's views on the inevitability of self-hatred in a racist society give credence to Elizabeth's low opinion of herself as a human being. They appear in her article, "White Proctorship and Black Disinvolvement," Reality, November, 1971. Here she focuses on the way blacks were susceptible to self-hate when legalized victimization of them intensified in the sixties after their political movements were outlawed: "Without the cohesion of a political identity and leadership, simply doing what one's told, moving when one's bid, working where the law says one's restricted to — all these conditions are imposed because of the colour of one's face: in the end, one must come to look askance at that face when one meets it in the glass of a passing shop window. It is to blame for all one endures. In the end, the shameful situation of blacks creates a shame of being black. Not to be white is to be taken over by the Hegelian condition of 'existing for others.' One can say of Africans, Indians and Coloureds as Jean-Paul Sartre did of the victims of anti-semitism, that they feel they have 'allowed themselves to become poisoned by other people's opinion of them and live in fear that their actions should not conform to this'"(p. 15).

[10]Further indicating the autobiographical nature of A Question of Power is the fact that the circumstances of Head's own birth are similar to those of Elizabeth's. In a 1978 interview conducted by Jean Marquard, the author candidly told of her mixed-race origin and the horrors it inevitably invoked. Just like her fictional self-portrait, she was born of a white woman in a South African mental hospital. Locating her misfortune within its peculiar environment, Head observed: "I feel that, with a situation like we have in South Africa, there must be a lot of people who have tragic circumstances surrounding their birth. When there are so many artificial barriers set between the races, people being people are going to try to break through those artificial barriers. As far as my mother was concerned, she was from a Scottish family but born in South Africa. The family owned race horses which they entered for the Durban July handicap and they kept black men in the stables to groom, exercise and clean the horses. My mother, for some reasons of her own, was attracted to one of the grooms who looked after the race horses and in that way she acquired me. After she had taken up an association with him her family had her committed, I was initially handed over to a white family for adoption, that is, an Afrikaner boer family. After a week I was returned, since they said the baby appeared to be black and they could not accept a baby like this." Quoted in Jean Marquard, "Bessie Head: Exile and Community in

Southern Africa," p. 49. Marquard adds that Head "was [later] given to coloured foster parents who had charge of her until she was 13. When her foster mother, who was illiterate and very poor, was no longer considered fit to look after the child, she was placed in an Anglican mission orphanage in Durban where she worked for a high school diploma and did her teacher's training course." "Bessie Head: Exile and Community in Southern Africa," p. 49.

[11] Nadine Gordimer, A World of Strangers (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), p. 251. All other references are incorporated in the text.

[12] Gordimer expresses this view while describing the function of the complex narrative technique employed in Burger's Daughter. She discusses the technique in comparison with that used in The Conservationist. The comparison is apt since, to borrow the words of Stephen Gray, in both novels there is an "increasing exploration of the internal landscapes of character" ("An Interview with Nadine Gordimer," Contemporary Literature, vol. 22, no. 3 [Summer, 1981], p. 265). When asked what her "aesthetic motivation for this" complex approach is the author replies: "In so far as it's aesthetic, it has to do with finding the right means to express what I am discovering. Perhaps it's got more to do with the degree to which we conceal ourselves here. It's part of living in South Africa, having these incredible layers of concealment, and I suppose I've become more and more conscious of them in relation to other people, and even to myself. I've always said, and I still feel, that style is something that is dictated by the subject; it comes about through looking for the right way to deal with a particular subject, or an aspect of a subject. This inner-directed style comes about from the feeling that what we say and do—well, it's only half of what we mean, but in South Africa it's less than half. And this constant shifting of foothold is both in terms of our society—in terms of your own self-respect and your own self-esteem. I want to convey this constant shifting along, on very uncertain and uneven ground." Quoted in Stephen Gray, "An Interview with Nadine Gordimer," p. 265.

[13] Gordimer, Occasion for Loving, pp. 266-267. All other references are incorporated in the text.

[14]Gordimer, Introduction, Some Monday For Sure, np.

Frequently in her earlier work when Africans are not referred to as "boy" or "girl," they are called "natives." The social and political significance of this appellation, as well as that of others related to it, is stated by Gordimer in the Introduction to her Selected Stories (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975). She does this as she comments on the linguistic and thematic changes reflected in the collection: "The chronological order turns out to be an historical one. The change in 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.

"Even the language changes from [one to the other of my books]: 'native' becomes first 'African' then 'Black,' because these usages have been adopted, over three decades, by South Africans of various opinions, often at different stages. For example, the old Afrikaner in 'Abroad' (a recent story) still speaks quite naturally of 'natives,' whereas for English-speaking whites the use of the term 'African' is now general, no longer even indicating, as it would have ten years ago, that the speaker was showing his political colours as liberal if not leftist. The use of the blunt term 'Black' is now the reverse of pejorative or insulting: indeed it is the only one, of all generic words used to denote them, that has not been imposed upon but has been chosen by blacks themselves. (Though not all, in particular older and more conservative people, feel happy with it.) Its adoption by whites has a somewhat left-of-liberal tone, but much more significant is the fact that here whites are following black, not white usage" (pp. 12-13). But as already noted in the respective dilemmas of Jessie and Boaz rational recognition of the blackman's humanity, be it by adopting a dignified term to denote him, or by accepting him as an equal, does not, on its own, overcome the deeply-entrenched problem of racial prejudice.

[15]For further study of this problem see Rowland Smith, "Masters and Servants: Nadine Gordimer's July's People and the Themes of her Fiction," Salmagundi, no. 62 (Winter, 1984), pp. 93-107.

[16]Nadine Gordimer, July's People (Johannesburg: Ravan Press; 1981), p. 69.

[17]Gordimer, The Lying Days, p. 172. All other references are incorporated in the text.

[18]Nadine Gordimer, The Late Bourgeois World (New York: Viking, 1966), p. 33. All other references are incorporated in the text.

[19]As she describes how the law failed to make the father of her illegitimate child shoulder his responsibility, an eighteen-year-old girl Head interviewed shows the traditional legal system to be as inadequate as the modern one. In this, she differs with the author who often presents the traditional judiciary in more favourable light. But she concurs with the author in her views on male moral irresponsibility: "The morals of the men are very loose. Today women are eager to grab men and they appear loose too. A woman might have three or four boyfriends—always in the hope of marriage. One or two of them will father children, but very rarely do they offer marriage. I wish I knew what goes on in the minds of these men. I blame the law for this state of affairs, nothing in the law, either at Kgotla or the police camp, protects a woman. In the case of kgotla, from Chief Tshekedi's time, a ruling was made whereby a woman could claim damages in the form of cattle for the first child only. There is no pressure for damages for the second, third, and so on. So a man knows that if he makes a baby with a woman who already has a child, the Kgotla won't trouble him to pay damages, and from then onwards we women get taken advantage of ...

"Many, many women are now rearing children on their own and it is not a good life. Children see one man after another calling on their mother and they lose all respect for her. Our children run wild, are very cheeky and have become thieves. Most of the thefts which now take place in Serowe are done by small boys. They raid houses for money, cigarettes or food. Theft was never a part of our life: I had a father and I knew what a beating meant for bad behaviour." Quoted in Head, Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind, pp. 64-65.

[20]Head, When Rain Clouds Gather, p. 112. All other references are incorporated in the text.

[21]Notably, one interviewee gives factual credence to the problem of numerical imbalance between the genders which Head depicts in her fiction. Also notable are the economic causes of the imbalance he presents, as well as the less dogmatic nature of his observations on the sources of the general moral chaos: "Men used to love their wives in the old days and women were tough to get. Their parents made tough bargains too. I really don't know what

has caused the breakdown of family life because there are so many factors to consider, but I do know that women no longer regard themselves as a prize that has to be won. They just offer themselves to men, are over-romantic and easily available.

"One of the factors that has to be considered is that we may have a shortage of men here. I am the principal of a primary school and I have noted that the enrolment of girls is always higher than that of boys. My present enrolment is 226 girls to 151 boys. And during colonial times, a lot of men left the country to work in the South African mines. Often, they did not return. If there is really a shortage of men, this anxiety must have communicated itself to women and may in part account for their promiscuous behaviour.

"Another factor to take into account is that today women have found ways of supporting themselves. Many women make a lot of money brewing and selling traditional beer and since they can purchase all their own needs, they feel no need for a husband. It is always difficult to choose between the old days and the freedom we have now. I did not approve of the old tradition whereby a man had to marry a woman ten years younger than himself. He never married his equal." Quoted in Head, Serowe, p. 62.

[22]The school principal mentioned in footnote 21 is one of the interviewees. Another one, seventy years of age, begins with a refusal to blame the present chaos on Khama's reforms: "Our whole society is falling to pieces and I do not blame the breakdown of family life on Khama's abolition of bogadi because we had long lived with the changes Khama made and yet in those days people were afraid to break the law. I blame the evils amongst us on lack of proper leadership. There is no ruler to care for and control the people. Men and women were very self-controlled in the old days because even when customs like bogadi had been abolished, men often preferred to marry very young women. Since a man had only a choice of one wife, he would often have to wait until the age of thirty, without any contact with women until his wife was fully grown. There wasn't any question of the girl becoming pregnant or anything like that. Both the men and women of today have very cheap values. To a woman a man means money and there is no peace in her search for money. She moves from one man to another. And no longer do the men care about the position of being a father—they just chase women. What else do they do but encourage the children to do the same?". Quoted in Head, Serowe, p. 61. Head acknowledges the point that lack of proper leadership has contributed to the present social disorder: "Khama was such a powerful personality that while he was alive, the strength

of his rule was security in itself for people. He was followed almost immediately by Tshekedi Khama, another powerful personality, who upheld all the new Christian traditions established by his father. [After the demise of such leadership] security seemed to crumble like a pack of cards ... and today there is a gaping hole in the fabric of society." Quoted in Head, Serowe, p. 59.

[23]It is illuminating to compare Helen's sense of cultural dislocation to the one Gordimer herself experienced when she too was growing up in South Africa. In response to E.G. Burrows' question on whether "the life and literature of England [was] the principal influence on [her] work," she replied: "From the beginning, my cultural contacts were with England. Although I read books by American writers, I identified myself primarily with England and people in English literature. On the other hand, my life and the country in which I was living — even the seasons are wrong way around with Christmas in midsummer — seemed to set me apart. I felt that I would be eternally outside this rather magical world on the other side of the ocean. It was a long time before I realized that I didn't have to imitate English writers or their way of life, that I could write about my own life which seemed to me so commonplace but, to the rest of the world, extremely exotic." Quoted in E.G. Burrows, "An Interview with Nadine Gordimer," The Michigan Quarterly Review, vol. IX, no. 4 (Fall, 1970), p. 231.

[24]A.E. Voss grossly misrepresents the novel's intention and effect when he writes that there is a suggestion in The Conservationist of shared identity between Mehring and his workers, and by extension between blacks and whites is South Africa. Even his pastoral view of the farming context of the events is misleading; it obscures the bleak mood and tone of the novel: "The foreground action of the story covers about a year—a year that takes its shape from the seasonal movements of the farm's activities: from autumn, shortly after 'the last late cutting,' through ploughing and planting, the season of veld fire, on to Christmas and New Year ... and a great summer flood. The farm's activities and Mehring's relation to and running of them are set against a vivid picture of the life of the African labourers, the household of the local Indian store, the neighbouring Afrikaner farming families. This aspect of the action suggests an image of South Africans sharing a common, though divided land. We are 'us' only to ourselves, to others we are 'them.' But not only do we inhabit a common land, we inhabit each other's imaginations and mythology" (review article, "Nadine Gordimer, The

Conservationist, Jonathan Cape (1974), Reality, vol. 7 (May 1975), p. 16). Gordimer clearly shows that Mehring does not see himself as sharing a common identity with others, black or white. He consistently uses the term "them" to refer to the blacks, intending to project his view that they are a threatening presence on the farm. Neither does he see himself to be in alliance with the other whites to warrant the employment of the term "us." In the larger South African context, this term is not used to denote an all-inclusive national identity, as Voss suggests. In fact, when whites use it they aim to emphasize racial solidarity against the blacks whom, like Mehring, they see as "them," a threatening presence. Christopher Hope makes these usages clear in his article, "Out of the Picture: The Novels of Nadine Gordimer," London Magazine, vol. 15, no. 1 (April/May, 1975): "When I was young I knew that there were three million of US. Now ... it may be nearer six million. The upward movement of the figures is unimportant, for these are magical numbers implanted in the mind of the white child at a tender age and serve to remind him always that WE are outnumbered by THEM. We English-speaking whites, together with the Afrikaners (we counted them with us in this one instance only) were a small white island in a vast black sea which would sweep us all to oblivion sooner or later" (p. 49).

[25]Nadine Gordimer, The Conservationist (New York: The Viking Press, 1975), p. 172. All other references are incorporated in the text.

[26]See Robert J. Green, "Nadine Gordimer: The Politics of Race," World Literature Written in English, vol. 16, no. 2 (November, 1977), p. 258, and P. O'Sheel, "Nadine Gordimer's The Conservationist," WLWE, vol. 14, no. 2 (November, 1975), p. 515.

[27]Stephen Gray, "An Interview with Nadine Gordimer," p. 268. See also Nadine Gordimer, "Introduction," Some Monday For Sure, np. Concluding the essay, Gordimer writes: "I have chosen 'Some Monday For Sure' as the general title story because although written in the Sixties, and despite the ironies of a political refugee's life that the story recounts, the certainty of the title remains valid: some perfectly ordinary day, for sure, black South Africans will free themselves and rule themselves" (np).

CHAPTER 3

THE LIBERAL RESPONSE

The dehumanizing effects of categorization by race, ethnicity, and sex have been discussed in Chapter 2 with special focus on the place of prejudice and oppression in the debumanization process. It has been argued that both Head and Gordimer show that oppression and prejudice degrade both victim and perpetrator. The demeaning treatment accorded to the victim impairs his sense of his worth as a human being, while prejudice inevitably corrupts the perpetrator by reducing his ability to exercise moral judgement. The intrinsic antagonism between oppressed and oppressor distances them both from each other's humanity, causing them to have fixed and distorted perceptions of themselves and each other.

It has also been briefly mentioned that in Gordimer's fiction, liberal characters reject prejudice but still bear the marks of its corrupting influence. This chapter purports to discuss further the inadequacy of the "liberal" response by focusing on Gordimer's criticism of it.[1] While the discussion is primarily thematic, the author's examination of liberalism is also related to the changing political climate in South Africa as reflected in the fiction. There are some differences between her depiction

of liberalism in the early works and her portrayal of it in the later ones. Remaining constant is her criticism of its political inadequacy. Gordimer criticizes liberals by pointing to their simplistic assumptions, the inherent emptiness of their methods and, in some cases, the questionable nature of their motives. The assumptions are simplistic because they reject racism and at the same time evade dealing with its source, namely "the facts of ... power struggle."[2] Finding it convenient to ignore these facts they attempt to live as if they were in a racially harmonious society, believing that the conflict between blacks and whites can be solved through a mere change of heart on the part of whites. Those liberals who try to face the political reality attempt to change it through "non-military,"[3] non-violent action aimed at pressuring the government into constitutionally creating a just society. In some cases the liberal initiative is rendered inadequate by the element of guilt which makes impossible the effecting of genuine human contact between blacks and whites.

Significantly, the female characters who reject the idea of subordination of women to men also believe in liberal values. Their repudiation of a sexual hierarchy is a logical extension of their denunciation of the racial one. Here too the assumptions are seen to be simplistic. These characters underestimate the deep influence on them of the conservative conventions according to which they are raised.

A simple personal decision to reject these conventions does not invalidate them.

Gordimer's early fiction, mostly set in the fifties, does show that despite its flaws liberalism was at one time a noble option that offered a rallying point for progressive-minded blacks and whites. The author herself indicates this when she mentions how that period of black and white co-operation is reflected in her short stories "Which New Era Would That Be?" and "The Smell of Death and Flowers." She notes that these stories "were written during the heyday of the multiracial dream that possessed some blacks and whites (including myself) during the Fifties, and that found expression in both a variety of personal relationships as well as in non-violent political action in which blacks and whites co-operated."[4] In most of the early works Gordimer shows that the liberal characters really believe in what they do and have a definite sense of purpose. Black and white camaraderie is seen to be genuine. This is not the case with characters in works set in post-Sharpeville South Africa. The author points out that the period after Sharpeville has seen nothing but "increasing fragmentation of South African society,"[5] a phenomenon that has dealt a death-blow to the viability of liberalism as a political option. Comparing her work which deals with this period to that of other South African writers, Gordimer observes: "I think I am the sole example of a South African who has chosen that ... new

theme—the decline of a liberalism, black-and-white, that has proved itself hopelessly inadequate to an historical situation."[6] The liberal characters who are portrayed in her later work do not show the same sense of political purpose and do not enjoy the black-and-white camaraderie depicted in the earlier fiction.

Gordimer never questions the validity of the liberal belief in the worth of the individual, regardless of race, and in the integrity of personal relationships. She only points to the inadequacy of the belief in the peculiar South African environment. Racist politics makes the belief useless. Private relationships between blacks and whites cannot change anything. The author comments on her own examination of how futile are these relationships while the balance of power remains unchanged in the Republic: "In Occasion for Loving a young English-woman destroys a black man by indulging in a love affair with him whose flouting of the power of oppressive segregation laws leaves him, once she has gone back to England, exactly where he was: carrying a 'pass' and drinking himself to death in the black ghetto."[7] In the novel itself it is another liberal character, Jessie Stilwell, who awakens to the futility of black-white relationships in that society. To her, the failure of the Gideon and Ann affair proves how everything is subject to political determinism. As long as the power structure was unchanged, the harsh facts of black and white would remain the same. In the heroine's

words: "So long as the law remained unchanged, nothing could bring integrity to personal relationships."[8] Referring to Jessie's and Tom's despondent view of the situation, the author writes: "Even between lovers they had seen blackness count, the personal return inevitably to the social, the private to the political. There was no recess of being, no emotion so private that white privilege did not single you out there" (p. 296). Responding to Tom's comment that at least their friendship with Gideon, and Ann's love for him were in themselves genuine, Jessie points to the practical uselessness of both: "First he couldn't get out on his scholarship because he's black, now he can't stay [with her in the country] because she is white. What's the good of us to him? What's the good of our friendship or her love?" (p. 288).

In the early work, liberalism is seen to have been weakened not only by the fact that personal relationships were compromised by politics, but also because what political action was initiated was still accompanied by a belief in working within the system. This belief was rooted in the moral view that change had to be effected through non-revolutionary, non-violent means. Hence, in the early work Gordimer shows the liberals engaging in well-intentioned social work and non-violent political action in co-operation with blacks. Invariably, she points to the way both approaches to the problems are flawed. While social work becomes misguided paternalism, passive

resistance is rendered futile by increasingly violent state reaction.

The story "Not For Publication" shows a good example of misguided liberal paternalism. Gordimer herself describes it as a story that deals with the ironically destructive "imposition of an image by white upon black."[9] A liberal English woman and a white South African priest try to change a black boy from an illiterate beggar to an educated young man within a very short period of the woman's taking him off the streets of Johannesburg. Gordimer comments: "the irony lies in that it is not an oppressor's image that the well-meaning white priest and white liberal fighter for the black cause press upon the young black genius, but it proves destructive nevertheless." The young boy becomes a cause to them and loses his individuality. They drive him too hard at his studies. Father Audry gets excited about the prospects of the boy becoming the first black boy to receive an open scholarship: "—what a triumph that would be, for the boy, for the school, for all the African boys who were considered fit only for the inferior standard of 'Bantu education'! Perhaps this beggar child from the streets of Johannesburg might even become the first black South African to be a Rhodes Scholar."[10] Father Audry and the English lady consequently fail to see the boy's frustration with their good intentions, which he does not understand. In complete disenchantment he ultimately runs away from them.

In The Lying Days, Gordimer exposes the futility of liberal social action with an even wider scope. Here, the work is seen to be completely within the system. Helen's boyfriend, Paul, works with a Welfare Department that deals with problems faced by blacks. As an extension of the work, Paul engages in other politically-oriented duties in co-operation with blacks. Helen, who is initially enthusiastic about both dimensions of the work, eventually becomes disillusioned when its futility dawns on her. Compounding her problem is the fact that Paul himself does not completely believe in his work. He has little faith in it because he knows the inadequacy of "Welfare" in the face of what it purports to address:

> Most of the time Paul came home very late and very tired. Out of the official work of the Department had grown a whole extension of activity that almost doubled it; the impatience of people like Paul with the inadequacy, sometimes the total unsuitability, of what the Department offered the African townships made them try to supply something of what was missing, out of themselves. It was impossible, for anyone who saw the Africans as men and women with the same wants and hopes as anyone else, to be satisfied to hand out food or clothes or money to those who lacked the basic necessities, and ignore all those other nagging and endless and less easily satisfied needs that showed everywhere, in every street and every face. Nothing to do, nowhere to go, no hope of change. The young boys kicking a stone along the gutter because they have no ball and know no game. The schoolteachers and young clerks borrowing books from the little library (a charity handout of the discarded books of white people) and reading in the paper of the plays they can never see, the concerts they can never hear.[11]

The black passive demonstration with which Paul is associated through his political activities ends by being violently crushed by the police. Having witnessed the violence first-hand — the police senselessly shoot an unarmed black man right before her eyes — Helen is finally convinced of the formidable and uncompromising nature of the racist political system.

Indeed in all the fiction where Gordimer depicts peaceful political action engaged in by liberals in the fifties and early sixties, its noble idealism is immediately contrasted with the harsh reality that renders it futile. Nevertheless, she presents liberalism and the action it inspired as an option that was then still available despite its flaws. In "The Smell of Death and Flowers," the emphasis is on the nobility of the young white woman's involvement in the multi-racial demonstration that ends in her arrest. Gordimer herself describes the twenty-five year-old girl as "experiencing her generation's equivalent of religious ecstasy in the comradeship of passive resistance action in the company of blacks."[12] The climax of the experience occurs at the moment of her arrest, a moment at which she fully apprehends the helplessness of blacks at the hands of white authority:

> ... as the policeman came to her, and she spelled out her name for him, she looked up and saw the faces of the African onlookers who stood nearest her. Two men, a small boy, and a woman, dressed in ill-matched cast-offs of European clothing,

> which hung upon them without meaning, like coats spread on bushes, were looking at her. When she looked back, they met her gaze. And she felt, suddenly, not nothing but what they were feeling, at the sight of her, a white girl, taken—incomprehensibly, as they themselves were used to being taken—under the force of white men's wills, which dispensed and withdrew life, which imprisoned and set free, fed or starved, like God himself.[13]

This prompt arrest cancels out the practical value of the young woman's political action.

In the short story, "A Chip of Glass Ruby," an Indian woman political organizer also ends up in jail for being involved in a multi-racial campaign against pass laws. The nobility of her cause and her strong sense of purpose are not diminished by the inevitable incarceration. Bamjee, her non-political husband, does not understand why, as an Indian who does not have to carry a pass, she should suffer on behalf of blacks. The woman's daughter explains her actions by pointing to her all-encompassing love for others. Using as an example the fact that even while in detention the mother remembers Bamjee's birthday, to his further incomprehension of her selflessness, the young girl says: "It's because she doesn't want anybody to be left out. It's because she always remembers; remembers everything—people without somewhere to live, hungry kids, boys who can't get educated—remembers all the time. That's how Ma is."[14] But here too the woman's love for others and her political action are rendered practically

futile by the arrest.

By the early seventies, this endemic state violence against peaceful change is shown to have rendered liberalism not only politically untenable, but also historically irrelevant. In the work which features this period, Gordimer shows that liberalism is no longer a politically viable option. She notes how this impasse is presented in the stories, "Open House" and "Africa Emergent." In her own words, these stories:

> ... reflect, accurately, the early Seventies, the period after the banning of black mass movements and the left-wing black-and-white movements in the Sixties, when liberalism both black and white could be seen to have outlived both its usefulness and its betrayal of the ideals it believed it stood for.[15]

In "Open House" a liberal white woman most of whose political friends are in jail organizes a meeting between a visiting American journalist and a group of blacks. The journalist is looking for a black perspective on the country's political situation. But the blacks he meets are phoney and opportunistic. The ones he ought to meet are either in prison or underground. The white woman being aware of this warns him not to "be taken in" by them as they have been corrupted by the system: "You mustn't be taken in .... You must understand. Because the corruption is real. Even they've become what they are because things

are the way they are. Being phony [sic] is being corrupted by the situation ... and that's real enough. We're made out of that."[16] These particular blacks disown anything political and are only interested in achieving their materialistic aims within the system. In "Africa Emergent" Gordimer portrays another feature of the times, betrayal of sense of trust in a society "where trust becomes a commodity on sale to the police."[17] The narrating character, a liberal white man, observes that people only believe in the political credibility of a black man when he gets imprisoned. He makes the observation with reference to a black friend of his who is suspected of being a police spy because he remains free after most of his associates are jailed: "... we have reached the stage where if a man is black, literate, has 'political' friends and white friends, and a passport, he must be considered a police spy. I was sick with myself ... I believed it, too. There is only one way for a man like that to prove himself, so far as we are concerned: he must be in prison" (p. 246). After the man is finally put in detention, the narrator expresses sarcastic satisfaction: "... we know where he is now; inside. In solitary most of the time ... And so we white friends can purge ourselves of the shame of rumours. We can be pure again. We are satisfied at last. He's in prison. He's proved himself, hasn't he?" (p. 248).

The best example of this betrayal is seen in The Late Bourgeois World where Max, a white liberal turned saboteur, becomes a state witness against his associates after being arrested on treason charges. The book, which presents the story in flashback form, begins with news of his suicide. His former wife, Liz, concludes that inability to live with his betrayal is the reason why Max decided to drown himself. In all three works—"Open House," "Africa Emergent" and The Late Bourgeois World—political association between blacks and whites is shown to be not only impracticable, but also dangerous. Genuine political activity having gone underground, whatever liberal black and white contact Gordimer depicts in these and other later works smacks of social routine, without any sense of unified purpose. In terms of personal connection, blacks and whites are shown to be further apart from each other than they ever are in the earlier fiction. Significantly, one of Gordimer's least sympathetic analyses of liberalism occurs in Burger's Daughter, where the revolutionary context of the action emphasizes both liberalism's political inadequacy and its historical irrelevancy. The occasion of the analysis is the multi-racial gathering the anachronistic liberal, Flora Donaldson, organizes at her house. Appropriately, the gathering is seen through the eyes of Rosa Burger, daughter of Lionel Burger, a left-wing political leader who has died in prison.

Rosa's undisguised skepticism as regards the adequacy of the Flora Donaldson gathering is evident even in the way she portrays some of its prominent participants. She details their social positions and occupations with a cynicism that throws into doubt their commitment to the issues they purport to address. First, there is the black business woman "Mrs. Mkhonza.[who] is often 'featured' in the women's pages of white newspapers as an example of what black people can achieve despite their disadvantages. She is one of the rare black petty capitalists ... who somehow manages to circumvent some of the laws that prevent blacks from trading on a scale that makes white tycoons."[18] Then there is the white woman lawyer who "is consultant to an advice bureau dealing mainly with coloured women, squatters, [and] indigents" (p. 198). In Rosa's view, this woman's "smugness of ... appearance was perhaps a defence against the self-defeating nature of the good work she did. In such company no one has the bad taste to point out this common characteristic of 'working within the system'" (p. 198). To enhance the multi-racial complexion of the party, there is an Indian woman lawyer who exchanges "a few professional anecdotes" with the white woman, talking about the existence of "laws' ... in Natal, whereby an Indian husband could have his wife imprisoned for adultery" (p. 198). She describes such laws as:

> A relic of the days when labourers imported from Gujerati were indentured to work in the sugar-cane fields, a perpetuation of the image of the South African Indian as eternally a foreigner in the country of his birth, living by mores that set his behaviour patterns apart.
> (p. 198)

Flora's own involvement in the organization of the gathering not only smacks of mere social routine, but is conspicuously out-of-joint with the times:

> Flora still manages to have these 1960s mixed lunch parties although it must be difficult to find blacks, now, who will come to them ....
>
> The general theme of conversation and the current preoccupation of Flora were the same. Mrs. Eunice Harwood wanted to make black and white women aware of such rights as they had, over their children, their property and their person, for a start; Mrs. Daphne Mkhonza was not only an economically-emancipated black, she was a black woman beating white businessmen with their own marked cards. In her mood of political ecumenism, Flora no doubt saw engagement in a struggle for black rights as a natural extension of the limits of the woman lawyer's scrupulously constitutional commitment, and Mama Mkhonza's recruitment to the system ... as a raid upon it. The current ground of common cause was women's liberation.
> (pp. 198-199)

Through Rosa's point of view, the author notes that there is no real, meaningful point of contact between the black and white women gathered at the meeting. Their radically different social, economic and material backgrounds make it impossible for them to comprehend the others' problems. The lack of a unified sense of purpose displayed at the

assembly demonstrates the lack of real contact between the participants. Among the principal speakers are the white woman lawyer, a black social welfare officer, the Indian woman lawyer who "spoke about uplift and sisterhood" and an old white woman "with the queenly coy patience of an old charity chairwoman" (p. 202). Rosa adds: "The old white woman's crusade turned out to be road safety in which 'our Bantu women must pull together with us'" (p. 202). Following her speech another white woman stood up and "asked passionately that the meeting be a 'Courtesy Year to promote understanding between the races. She had her slogan ready, SMILE AND SAY THANKS" (pp. 202-203). The "half-hearted" "groan of approval" (p. 203) this plea elicits from the majority of the participants is immediately silenced by a radical young white woman who introduces the dreaded political dimension into the discussion. Peremptorily dismissing the last speaker, she asks:

> —Thank you for what? Maybe the lady has plenty to thank for. But was the object of action for women to make black women "thankful" for the hovels they lived in, the menial jobs their men did, the inferior education their children got? Thankful for the humiliation dealt out to them by white women living privileged, protected lives, who had the vote and made the laws—
> (p. 203.)

Predictably, neither the black women nor the white welcome the speech. Rosa observes that as the young radical proceeds "three black girls in jeans who had only just come in got up and walked out as if they had come to the wrong place" (p. 203). A white woman from the audience "thrust up an arm for permission to speak—We don't need to bring politics into the fellowship of women. —Applause from the group with whom she sat" (p. 203).

The apolitical nature of some of the proposed topics, the conflict between white liberal and radical attitudes toward politically sensitive issues, the black girls' apathetic behaviour, these are all illustrations of the absence of meaningful communication and unified sense of purpose among the assembled women. Finally, the "back-door" mentality of the older black women clinches the matter: not only does it underscore the differences in perspective between black and white, but illustrates the entrenched psychological, social, and economic distance between the two races. Commenting on the attitude of the women toward the stir caused by the radical white girl's speech, Rosa says:

> Black matrons ignored both the white girl and black girls .... They responded only to the sort of housewives' league white ladies who stuck to health services and 'commodity price rises in the family budget' as practical problems that were women's lot, like menstruation, and did not relate them to any other circumstances. The black ladies' fear of drawing attention as

> 'agitators' and the white ladies' determination to have 'nothing to do' with the politics that determined the problems they were talking about, made a warmth that would last until the teacup cooled. Dressed in their best, one after another, black women in wigs and two-piece dresses pleaded, were complaining, opportuning for the crèches, orphans, blind, crippled or aged of their 'place'. They asked for 'old' toys and furniture, 'old' braille typewriters, 'old' building material. They had come through the front door but the logic was still of the back door. They didn't believe they could get anything but what was cast-off; they didn't, any of them, believe there was anything else to be had from white women, it was all they were good for. (p. 203)

There is another significant difference between the black women themselves, a difference that further shows the inherent inadequacy of Flora Donaldson's liberal gathering. Distinct from the apathetic black girls and the pleading "matrons," there are a number of very poor black women who sit through the meeting saying nothing, completely at a loss as to its purpose. Rosa focuses on one of them next to whom she is seated: "... in her doek with Thursday church badges pinned on it, a piece cut out of her left shoe to ease a bunion, a cardigan smelling of coal-smoke and a shopping bag stuffed with newspaper parcels" (p. 204). This old woman and others like her "listened to no one; were there; offered only their existence, as acknowledgment of speakers, listeners and the meaning of the gathering. It was enough. They didn't know why they were there" (p. 204). In conclusion, Rosa comments:

> ... no matter how much Flora protests the common possession of vaginas, wombs and breasts, the bearing of children and awful compulsive love of them—the silent old blacks still dressed like respectable servants on a day off, although they were sitting in Flora's room, these were everything Flora's meeting was not succeeding to be about. The cosmetic perfumes of the middle-class white and black ladies and the coal-smoke and vaginal odours of old poor black women—I shifted on the hard chair, a deep breath in Flora's living-room took this draught inside me.
> (pp. 203-204)

Later, when Rosa drives one of the middle-class black ladies to her home location, she sees another reality which Flora's meeting failed to be about: a sordid and squalid place of habitation "in one of those undefined areas between black men's hostels and the mine-dumps on the outskirts of the city" (p. 206). The incongruity between the lady's respectable deportment and the forbidding nature of the place leads Rosa to wonder whether it is really her home location: "Perhaps she didn't really live there—she looked much too respectable for this sort of den existing on the sale of sex and drink to factory workers and railway-yard labourers. It's impossible to say; for Flora's white women to imagine where on earth they come from, these neat black ladies they meet in Flora's house" (p. 206).

The liberalism of some of Gordimer's characters in both the earlier and later works is not only rendered inadequate by political forces, but is also deeply flawed by personal factors. In The Late Bourgeois World, Max's betrayal of his cause and associates is in keeping with

his basically egocentric conception of reality. His liberal activities were more of a personal crusade than they were products of real understanding of people and the problems they faced. His ex-wife, Liz, recollects that: "When he was given a job he would always take it a stage beyond what he had been told was its intended limit. If (he was working on the news-sheet) he were asked to write a leader along certain lines, he would pursue the given conclusion further."[19] She adds that he was always dissatisfied with working with fellow white liberals because it made him feel shut out of the real scene of action, among the blacks: "A febrile impatience came from the sense that was always in him of being, in the end, whatever was done when working with white people like himself, outside the Locations and prisons and work gangs and overcrowded trains that held the heart of things" (p. 54). Yet despite this political zealousness and enthusiasm, Max had no real knowledge and understanding of other people. Liz attributes this flaw to his family background. Because of the protected and indulgent upbringing he received Max never established vital connection with others:

> Max was unable to be aware of anyone's needs but his own. My mother once called this inability "horrible selfishness"; whereas it was the irreversible training of his background that she had admired so much, and that she saw him as a crazy deviate from. Driven to school and home again by

> the chauffeur every day, and then shut out of the rooms where the grownups were at their meeting and parties, at the Van Den Sandts he was ministered to like a prince in a tower. Even poverty didn't release him; and we were poor enough. He had the fanatic's few needs, and expected that they should be answered. He bought a pair of shoes or books or brandy on credit and was arrogantly angry when we were asked to pay; or assumed that I would deal with the shops. Max simply did not know what it was to live with others; he knew all the rest of us as he knew Raskolnikov and Emma Bovary, Dr. Copeland and Torless, shut up reading alone in his room on the farm. He would sit for hours analysing a man's troubles and attitudes with good insight and a compound of curiosity and sympathy, but he would not notice that the man was exhausted; nor would he remember that the man had mentioned that he had to catch a train home at a certain time.
>
> (p. 52)

With such an impaired sense of others it is only logical that he put his interests above those of his cause and associates once his personal safety was at stake.

However, Liz observes that his faults notwithstanding, Max was distinguished from other white liberals by the fact that he never had feelings of racial guilt. Paradoxical as it may sound, he had genuinely wanted to love and come close to blacks although his view of reality was basically egocentric:

> Some of the white people I know want the blacks' innocence; that innocence, even in corruption, of the status of victim; but not Max. And everyone knows those whites who want to be allowed to "love" the blacks out of guilt; and those who want to be allowed to "love" them as an aberration, a distinction. Max wasn't any of these. He wanted

> to come close; and in this country the people—with all the huddled warmth of the phrase—are black.
>
> (p. 59)

But the sadness of it all is that his skin became an inescapable trap in the attempt to get close to blacks: "Set aside with whites, even his own chosen kind, he was still left out, he experienced the isolation of his childhood become the isolation of his colour" (pp. 59-60). Liz emphasizes this sympathetic appraisal of Max's failed liberalism by commenting, to her son Bobo, that he had gone after the right things, though maybe in the wrong way. She adds that Max "wasn't content to leave bad things the way they [were]," and it is better to have failed trying to change them than not to have tried at all (p. 19). In the end, nevertheless, the task was too great for him; and after the betrayal, Max could not face himself, hence the suicide.

In contrast to Max's guiltless attempt to reform his society, Liz helplessly acknowledges her identification with the hypocritical whites who advise the franchiseless blacks that "the decent way to bring about change is by constitutional means" (p. 67). It is when she sees herself among a complacent and self-righteous shopping crowd that she notes her complicity, by accident of birth, with the system that showers all privileges on whites and denies them to blacks:

> Home-made bombs have not shaken the ground under their feet, nor have the riots, the marches, the shootings of a few years back, though like all decent people, they deplore the inhumanity of violence, and, reserving the right of constitutional action to themselves alone, commend it to others as the only decent way to achieve change—should one want such a thing.
>
> I too have my package of pork fillets and my chair in the sun; you would not know me from the others. We are all still alive and the cars are crawling impatiently one behind the other.
>
> (p. 32)

The sarcastic tone in this passage clearly indicates Liz's helpless sense of guilt at being a part of the very situation she dislikes and criticizes.

Where the characters are plagued with guilt, their good intentions are severely compromised. The need to expiate that guilt becomes the central motive of the liberal actions, not "the necessity for one human being to help another," nor the simple need to effect "cold justice."[20] Some of the liberal characters depicted in Gordimer's early work show an awareness of how compromised are their positions. This self-knowledge inevitably leads them to despair of their causes. In The Lying Days, Gordimer examines the problem by focusing on the development of the heroine's moral consciousness. She vividly depicts the various stages of Helen's journey from childhood, through adolescence to young womanhood. Central to that journey is the evolution of her attitude toward blacks from the early stages in which she does not view them as real people to the later ones in which she is

shocked into an awareness of their humanity. It is that awareness that causes in her feelings of guilt and remorse:

> Ever since I had begun to see the natives all around not as furniture, trees, or the casual landmarks of a road through which my life was passing, but as faces; the faces of old men, of girls, of children; ever since they had stepped up all around me, as they do, silently, at some point in the life of every white person who lives in South Africa, something had been working in me. The slow corrosive guilt, a guilt personal and inherited, amorphous as the sea and particular as the tone of your own voice, which, admitted or denied, is in all white South Africans. The Nationalist farmers who kicked and beat their convict African laborers had it and it was in me. Like an obscure pain we can't confess we clutch to it this counterirritant, or that. One pretense is kinder than another, that is all. With kicks and curses you may keep the guilt at a distance, with a show of the tenderness of my own skin, I may clasp it like a hair. (p. 191)

The self-knowledge and cynicism which characterize Helen's attitude and tone in this passage recur in various instances where she records her attempts to acknowledge the humanity of the blacks. The heroine's uneasy interaction with Mary Seswayo is a case in point. Despite her wish to befriend the black girl, guilt makes Helen fear that she does not know how to talk to her without sounding patronizing. Mary, too, feels disoriented by the other's friendly overtures. Having been conditioned to relate with each other in primarily frictional terms, the two young women find it difficult to see and accept each other

as ordinary people. Guilt causes Helen to try too hard in her attempts to be friendly; the victim's mentality of fear and persecution places Mary on the defensive.

One of the best instances in which the author presents the heroine's cynical self-knowledge occurs as Helen tells Mary of her parents' rejection of the suggestion that they give the black girl accommodation. When Mary says "I'm sorry ...," in expression of her regret that she had been the source of misunderstanding between Helen and her parents, the heroine responds:

> "You don't have to be. I'm not." I wanted her to say: I hate your saintliness. Don't be saintly. But we were not equal enough for that; for all my striving to rid myself of what was between us, I did not respect her; accept her enough to be able to quarrel with her. I still made a special consideration of her for that. (p. 184)

Helen's inability to quarrel with Mary is paralleled by Boaz's failure to confront Gideon over the latter's affair with his wife in Occasion for Loving. It is not only because Boaz does not see Gideon as man enough to quarrel with, but also because he feels guilty about confronting a black man. In either case Boaz's integrity is compromised. As Jessie Stilwell puts it: "... he's so afraid of taking advantage of Gideon's skin that he ends up taking advantage of it anyway by refusing to treat him like any other man" (p. 288). With despair Jessie also

notes how Boaz's view of the affair itself has been warped by the racist system, one that brainwashes people to prevent them from believing in the integrity of personal relationships. Taking Boaz's anxiety over the public consequences of the Gideon and Ann affair as a case in point, she reflects:

> How impossible, how unfair for Boaz that the time should come in a situation like his when the one thing that matters—the reality—gets flung aside by something external and irrelevant. A line in a statute book has more authority than the claims of one man's love or another's. All claims of natural feeling are overridden alike by a line in a statute book that takes no account of humanness, that recognizes neither love nor respect nor jealousy nor rivalry nor compassion nor hate—nor any human attitude whatever where there are black and white together. What Boaz felt toward Ann; what Gideon felt toward Ann; what Ann felt about Boaz; what she felt for Gideon—all this that was real and rooted in life was void before the clumsy words that reduced the delicacy and towering complexity of living to a race theory. It was not a matter of being a man or a woman, with a mind and a sex, a body and a spirit—it was a matter of qualifying for a licence to make use of these things with which you happened to be born. It was all a routine matter, like the brass dog-tag put away in a cupboard or the third-party-risk insurance disc stuck on the car's windscreen every year.
>
> (pp. 227-228)

Jessie's full apprehension of how racist laws absolutely exclude human considerations where black and white interaction is in question leads her to despair of her own liberalism. Still discussing the failure of Gideon's affair with Ann, the heroine and her husband "came again

and again to the stony silence of facts they had set their lives against. They believed in the integrity of personal relations against the distortion of laws and society. What stronger and more proudly personal bond was there than love?" (p. 296). Realizing the inadequacy of their liberal values in the face of an intractable political reality, Tom Stilwell concludes that the only alternative is violent action against the system. But displaying a typical liberal attitude toward that kind of action, he shies away from the alternative, saying that maybe Jessie is the one with enough resolve to embrace it: "The Stilwells' code of behaviour toward people was definitive, like their marriage; they could not change it. But they saw that it was a failure, in danger of humbug. Tom began to think there would be more sense in blowing up a power station; but it would be Jessie who would help someone to do it, perhaps, in time" (p. 297). The impasse on which the novel ends suggests that Jessie too might not be willing to engage in this type of political action. The cooling of her affection for Gideon after he insults her indicates that the black and white intimacy necessary for this level of commitment has been lost. Highlighting the point is the fact that just before he insults her, Jessie experiences a genuine sense of personal connection with Gideon. After the unfortunate incident things are never the same again. In the words of the narrator: "They continued to meet in a friendly fashion, sometimes in the

Lucky Star, occasionally at the houses of friends, but the sense of his place in the Stilwells' life and theirs in his, that she felt that night, never came again. So long as Gideon did not remember, Jessie could not forget" (p. 308).

The Late Bourgeois World is a logical follow-up to Occasion for Loving, as it depicts a world in which Tom's speculative conclusion that violent action might be a more sensible alternative to liberalism has become a reality with the rise of sabotage operations in which Liz's former husband, Max, is abortively involved. His other speculation that maybe Jessie would be the one to assist someone in such operations is formulated into a real proposition when a black friend of Liz's asks for her assistance in clandestine funding arrangements for a banned political organization with which he works. This request becomes the ultimate yardstick for the meaning of their friendship. To quote Gordimer herself: "In The Late Bourgeois World the real test of black-white friendship is arrived at when the black friend assumes the credit of friendship to the extent of asking the white friend to risk a prison sentence by bringing money illegally into the country for a black underground movement."[21] Further exemplifying the liberal reluctance to engage in action outside the confines of passive resistance within the system, Liz procrastinates on whether or not to do what Luke Fokase, the friend, has asked:[22]

> Why on earth should I do such a thing?
>
> It seems to me that the answer is simply the bank account. I can't explain; but there is the bank account. That's good enough; as when Bobo used to answer a question about his behaviour with the single word: "Because." Am I going into politics again, then? And if so, what kind? But I can't be bothered with this sort of thing, it's irrelevant. The bank account is there. It can probably be used for this purpose .... Luke knows what he wants, and he knows who it is he must get it from. Of course he's right. A sympathetic white woman hasn't got anything to offer him— except the footing she keeps in the good old white Reserve of banks and privileges.
>
> (p. 119)

It is no longer a question of whether or not blacks and whites can take occasions for loving, but one of choice between taking decisive action outside the law or shying away from such an action. More striking than Liz's hesitancy in the face of this new kind of choice is her intense fear of the risks involved in undertaking the clandestine operation. As she turns the matter over and over in her mind, she observes: "I've been lying awake a long time, now. There is no clock in the room since the red travelling clock that Bobo gave me went out of order, but the slow, even beats of my heart repeat to me, like a clock; afraid, alive, afraid, alive, afraid, alive ..." (p. 120).

In later works this fear of arrest and incarceration causes the liberal characters to adopt either of two escapist solutions: physical flight as the case is with Mehring's former lover in The Conservationist, or absolute evasion of political issues as observed in the Flora Donaldson gathering in Burger's Daughter. Both solutions expose the limits of liberal commitment to social change in South Africa. Notably, in these novels the liberal characters no longer occupy centre-stage. While the materialistic conservationism of Mehring is the central theme in The Conservationist, the left-wing politics of the Burger family are the main subject of Burger's Daughter.

The Conservationist is a perfect prelude to Burger's Daughter with regard to Gordimer's examination of the place of liberalism in South Africa and its darkening political mood. In this novel the author finally buries liberalism as a viable political option and sets the stage for her analysis of the revolutionary alternative in the latter work. Dramatizing the burial is the liberal character's flight to England. To emphasize her political irrelevancy, Gordimer presents her through the dismissive recollections of her reactionary former lover, Mehring. Through his point of view the reader learns of the various charges of moral irresponsibility Antonia had levelled at the conservationist before she fled the country. With a sharp sense of irony Mehring dismisses each of the charges by pointing to her naiveté and

hypocrisy. He makes one of his most damaging criticisms when he juxtaposes her liberal grandstanding with her fear of arrest which precipitated the flight. He notes the ironical fact that in order to save herself from the vindictive establishment she employed his material power and privilege, the very things she used to despise. When the chips were down all the high-sounding words against injustice in general came to nothing:

> What percentage of the world is suffering? How long can we go on getting away scot free? When the aristocrats were caught up in the Terror, did they recognize: it's come to us. Did the Jews of Germany think: it's our turn. Soon, in this generation or the next, it must be our turn to starve and suffer.[23]

His retrospective answer is simple: "Why not? And did you think my respectable company lawyer, defending the just cause of your jolly parties with blacks, your posters discovering injustice as if you'd invented it—did you think he could save you from that?" (p. 42). It is the position of privilege, which he seeks to conserve, that enables Mehring to have a "respectable company lawyer" who can help her. The absence of substance in her moralistic position accentuates the sense of Antonia's naiveté. This is mostly when her position is seen in contrast with the pragmatic, though morally irresponsible, one of Mehring's.

It is his shrewdness that enables Mehring to notice the element of hypocrisy behind Antonia's liberalism. He observes that when he once took her to his farm, "She showed no interest in the house" on it; but commented: "If I had your money, I'd buy it and leave it just as it is" (p. 64). The wishful thinking in this comment suggests that she envied Mehring for his money. If that is indeed correct it can be argued that personal frustration was part of what motivated her anti-capitalist liberalism. In other words, she would have liked to be a Mehring, too. The fact that she was not outraged her and filled her with a sense of deprivation. Furthermore, to say that if she had his money she would buy the farm "and leave it just as it is" is to display both economic naivety and social irresponsibility. If Mehring is morally poorer than she is he, at least, believes in something that is of practical relevance to the blacks. His obsession with material development leads him to have a farm that provides them with menial jobs, which would be non-existent on hers. Mehring's only mistake is to use such jobs and the other basic things in his argument against the call for justice. But even when she eloquently attacks his mechanistic conception of development and change, his rebuttals do have more substance than her political statements:

> 'Development'—one great big wonderful all-purpose god of a machine, eh, Supperjuggernaut that's going to make it all all right, put everything right if we just get the finance for it. The money and the know-how machine. Isn't that it, with you? The politics are of no concern. The ideology doesn't matter a damn. The poor devils don't know what's good for them anyway. That's how you justify what you condone—... No dirty hands or compromised minds .... Neither dirty Commie nor capitalist pig. It's all going to be decided by computer—look no hands! Change is something programmed, not aspired to. No struggle between human beings. That'd be too smelly and too close.
>
> (pp. 75-76)

His response to this is simply: "The farm to justify its existence and that of those who work on it must be a going concern. These are the facts" (p. 76).

The woman's selfish envy of Mehring and his type becomes undoubtedly clear when she says: "I want to change the world but keep bits of it the way I like it for myself. If I had your money ..." (p. 65). Mehring's reaction to this statement is justifiably contemptuous and self-righteous:

> That is why you will never change the world or have my money. Wherever she's landed up, marching on embassies, enjoying heroic tussles with nice London bobbies who don't even carry a gun .... What was it her kind always said—I love my country deeply and I am heart-broken at having to leave. But the highly respectable company lawyers employed and the contacts with the British government implored for a foreign passport to get away.
>
> (p. 65)

Flight as a solution to problems is a recurrent theme in Gordimer's fiction, both early and later.[24] What differs is the exact nature of the problems the characters run away from. In all the instances, flight becomes the ultimate expression of the character's failure to face up to the challenges of her professed values. In as early a work as The Lying Days the heroine decides to leave South Africa for England after she has lost faith in her liberal ideals. Unlike Antonia in The Conservationist, Helen does not run because of fear of arrest, she attempts to run away from her own disillusionment. Importantly, Helen's liberalism involves a rejection of both racial prejudice and the subordination of women to men. Hence after being merely critical of her society's subscription to these conventions, she leaves her parents' home and goes to live on her own in Johannesburg.

According to Helen, the Atherton Mine community and her home are citadels of the racial, cultural and social myopia she can no longer tolerate. It is therefore only by disassociating herself from them that she can achieve a fulfilment of her own liberal and personally affirmative values. Significantly, Helen's decision to leave home and the community is immediately precipitated by the quarrel with her parents over her association with Joel, and her suggestion that the family give accommodation to Mary Seswayo. To the elder Shaws, while the association with the Jewish boy is unacceptable, the idea of having in their

house a black girl in the capacity of anybody other than a servant is absolutely outrageous. As Helen contemplates the decision to get out of this claustrophobic environment, it is with great excitement that she looks forward to her new liberated life. Intensifying her excitement is the fact that the young people, John and Jenny Marcus, with whom Joel suggests she could share a flat, also believe in liberal values. In Helen's own words,

> I wanted to telephone Joel again to tell him to be sure the Marcuses made no arrangement with anyone else in the meantime. I was trembling with excited urgency to have it all decided at once. For at the mention of the Marcuses, something lifted in me; I felt that there I might be about to come out free at last; free of the staleness and hypocrisy of a narrow, stiflingly conventional life. I would get out of it as palpably as an over-elaborate dress that had pampered me too long.
>
> (p. 177)

Helen also rejects the conventional images of marriage, husband and wife which obtain in the world of her parents. Both Helen and her boyfriend, Paul, whom she first meets at the Marcuses, are opposed to the idea of any woman making a career out of marriage. At the same time, they agree that a man and a woman who are in love are justified to live together in complete intimacy, as they themselves do for some time. Referring to their discussion of the matter, Helen says:

> When we talked about the kind of life we should live together I would say: "I want to live with you in the greatest possible intimacy." I said it with a deep earnest satisfaction that was at the same time apprehensive, lying back on the pillow and looking at him. And I do not know that I knew exactly what it was that I meant; though I knew what it was that I did not mean. I did not want to belong to the women's camp, while my husband belonged to the men's camp. I did not want to sit talking to women of things that "did not interest" men, while he sat with the men talking of things that "did not interest" women. I did not want him to be a scapegoat, hidden behind a newspaper: "I'll have to ask my husband," "I don't know what my husband will think"—as if he were a kind of human reference work, a statute book on which the state of the household internally and in relation to society was based.
>
> (p. 228)

The genuineness of Helen's objection to these images of husband, wife, and family life is illustrated by the fact that as soon as she ceases to believe in the efficacy of Paul's social and political activities, she becomes emotionally estranged from him and abandons her plans to marry him. Throughout their period of harmony, common belief and interest in liberal activities are an integral part of Helen's relationship with Paul. Having lost faith in them, Helen finds that she can no longer communicate with Paul; not only intellectually, but spiritually and emotionally as well. In her view, to persist in the relationship is to risk the loss of her individuality, for she would have to do one of two things: keep her mouth shut, or become a mere carbon-copy of her partner's personality and views. Disturbing to her is the later

discovery that Jenny Marcus, her original model of an independent-minded woman, had become a victim of the second alternative:

> Jenny, this first woman I had ever known who had kept her own identity, and left that of her husband uncrushed—now so enamored of her reproductive processes that she habitually mouthed John's opinions rather than allow the interruption of thinking out her own; had apparently shelved as thankfully as any shop-girl leaving the cheese counter for the escape of marriage, the stage designing in which she had once been so passionately interested; and preserved her radical views in suburban moth balls.
>
> (p. 289)

However, while in Johannesburg, Helen realizes that, in spite of her liberal values, she is still trapped in the very conventional attitudes and beliefs she has renounced. Her failure to rid herself completely of racial prejudice has been noted earlier in the discussion. On the question of traditional morality, she is troubled by the fact that she is living with Paul outside wedlock, and that she has not told her parents about it. When the boyfriend laughs the matter off, she comments:

> For him the consciousness of being answerable to one's parents for one's moral actions was something he could not conceive of in me, even something slightly ridiculous; for to him I was an adult woman, answerable only to her own integrity. When he had gone I felt ashamed and disgusted with myself for being less than this. I had the horrible feeling that the Mine had

> laid a hand on me again; Atherton had gleefully claimed me as one of its own, lacking the moral courage to be anything else.
>
> (p. 231)

In other words, Helen still belongs to, and is claimed by, the same world she has detached herself from. Her awareness of the paradox becomes more acute after she tells the parents about her city life and she is denounced for it. From that point onwards, till she decides to leave the country, Helen suffers from a severe conflict of identity. The one side of her which still believes in the conventional views of public morality constantly collides with the other one which espouses the new morality of the free independent woman. Helen herself best expresses the alienating effect of this conflict. Attributing her failure to attend Joel's graduation to the problem, she says:

> I had wanted to go to your graduation, I really had <u>wanted</u> to very badly, and yet I didn't go. There was nothing to stop me. But I didn't go. I forgot. It seemed to me that some other person had forgotten. Myself—but some other person. And I felt I didn't know who I was—bewildered. Of course you didn't know, but I'd had a ghastly scene in Atherton with my mother the Sunday before. Over Paul. Over living with Paul. And all the time coming back to Johannesburg in the train, I had managed to fight the-the <u>feeling</u> of this scene—the things it made me feel, I mean—with the thought that the person who felt these things was no longer me; the real me was the one with Paul. I was flying back to her. And when I got back and found that for Paul this <u>really was so</u>—he discounted my Atherton self—he

> laughed at the scene as if it had been something that couldn't have touched me—I understood at once that it had. That creature in Atherton shouting at her mother was me. It all switched round horribly, and the person who lived with Paul only thought she was real. I slept and pushed it away, the way one does, and then meeting you like that the next day started it all up again, only worse. There was another twist. How can I put it? I subdivided again. I saw this smiling, nodding, gaping, oblivious creature talking to you, apologizing with insulting graciousness for something that couldn't be apologized for. Something that had nothing whatever to do with her. It belonged to the person she had supplanted. That's the only word for it. Supplanted, that's what I felt. And then that person seemed to me to be me, a creature come to life again with such distress at what had been done and left undone in her name.
>
> (p. 322)

As she proceeds to admit, it is the failure to reconcile the warring selves in her that ultimately prompts Helen to leave the country, and go for a vacation in Europe. By physically detaching herself from the environment to which her kind of conflict is peculiar, the heroine hopes to get some sense of bearing. But before she leaves, she realizes that her experience has been a disillusioning one, and she is the better for it. Consequently, she commits herself to returning to the country to face the problems, this time without any form of self-deception:

> My mind was working with great practicalness, and I thought to myself: Now it's all right. I'm not practicing any sort of self-deception any longer. And I'm not running away. Whatever it was I was running away from—the risk of love? the guilt of being white? the danger

> of putting ideals into practice?—I'm not running away from now because I know I'm coming back here.
>
> I was twenty-four and my hands were trembling with the strong satisfaction of having accepted disillusion as a beginning rather than an end: the last and most enduring illusion; the phoenix illusion that makes life always possible.
>
> (p. 340)

In The Late Bourgeois World, while Liz echoes Helen's rejection of the conventional images of the woman, marriage, and family life, she finds herself faced with an intellectual, emotional and social dilemma. Her conscious rejection of the conventions is at odds with her conditioned attitude toward them. The uncertainty with which she reflects on whether or not she will ever remarry indicates this ambivalence in her: "I don't think I'll marry again. But I catch myself speaking of Max as my 'first husband'; which sounds as if I expect to have another. Well, at thirty, one can't be too sure of what one may still do" (p. 43). Compounding her problem is the fact that the notions upon which she was raised of what a woman's destiny should be are incongruous with her present mode of existence. To put it in her own words:

> At eighteen I was quite sure, of course. I would be married and have a baby. This future had come out to meet me as expected, though perhaps sooner. Max might not have been the man according to specifications, but the situation, deep in my subconscious, matched the pattern I'd been given to go by. The concept of marriage as shelter remained with me, even

> if it were only to be shelter from parents and their ways. There, whatever the walls were made of, I should live a woman's life, which was?—a life lived among women like my mother, attached to a man like my father. But the trouble is that there are no more men like my father—in the sense that the sort of man my father is, doesn't represent to me, in my world, what it did to my mother in hers. I was brought up to live among women, as middle-class women with their shopping and social and household concerns comfortably do, but I have to live among men. Most of what there was to learn from my family and background has turned out to be hopelessly obsolete for me.
>
> (p. 43)

While Helen's refusal to be relegated to the exclusively women's camp results from intellectual conviction, Liz's situation is a product of professional necessity. As a professional woman she has broken into traditionally male-dominated terrain.

The failure of Liz and Helen to rid themselves of the confining influence of their society's conventions aptly reflects the failure of their liberal politics themselves. In Burger's Daughter, Gordimer examines the alternative to liberalism, revolutionary politics that aim at overhauling the entire society. This alternative entails total commitment to the cause of social justice. The next chapter focuses on how this kind of commitment affects the individual.

Chapter 3

Footnotes

[1] In this chapter the terms "liberal" and "liberalism" are used in the broadest senses possible, and do not in any way refer to the South African Liberal Party or any of its policies.

Gordimer's criticism of the inadequacy of the liberal response to racism reflects a political position. And it is worth noting Alan Paton's argument that liberals and liberalism cannot be assessed in terms of their political success or failure because the values they represent transcend politics. Beginning with an acknowledgement of the apparent failure of his own efforts to change his society, he writes: "I could have made better use of my life, but I did try hard to do one thing. That was to persuade White South Africa to share its power, for reasons of justice and survival. My efforts do not appear outwardly to have been successful. There are two things to be said about that. The first is that one does not uphold love, justice and mercy in order to be successful, but because it has to be done. The second is that one has no means of measuring. One is no more than a worker in a kind of apostolic succession. All one can say is that one has had some noble predecessors, contemporaries and successors. That is why I hold in contempt those young White radicals who sneer at liberals and liberalism. Who were their mentors? If it had not been for the Jabavus, Marquards, Hoernlés, they would have been in darkness until now. One cannot measure past labours in terms of present demands. One expects Black power to sneer at White liberals. After all White power has done it for generations. But if Black power meets White power in headlong confrontation, and there are no Black liberals and White liberals around, then God help South Africa. Liberalism is more than politics. It is humanity, tolerance, and love of justice. South Africa has no future without them, least of all White South Africa." See Alan Paton, Knocking on the Door: Shorter Writings, Selected and edited by Colin Gardner (Cape Town: David Philip, 1975), p. 258.

[2] Gordimer, "Literature and Politics," p. 214.

[3] Gordimer, "Literature and Politics," p. 214.

[4]Gordimer, Introduction, Some Monday For Sure, np.

[5]Gordimer, "The Novel and the Nation," p. 50.

[6]Gordimer, "The Novel and the Nation," p. 51.

[7]Gordimer, "Literature and Politics," p. 215.

[8]Gordimer, Occasion For Loving, p. 296. All other references are incorporated in the text.

[9]Gordimer, Introduction, Some Monday For Sure, np.

[10]Nadine Gordimer, "Not for Publication," Not For Publication and Other Stories (New York: Viking, 1965), pp. 14-15.

[11]Gordimer, The Lying Days, pp. 240-241. All other references are incorporated in the text.

[12]Gordimer, Introduction, Some Monday For Sure, np.

[13]Nadine Gordimer, "The Smell of Death and Flowers," Six Feet of the Country (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), pp. 240-241.

[14]Nadine Gordimer, "A Chip of Glass Ruby," Not For Publication and Other Stories, p. 127.

[15]Gordimer, Introduction, Some Monday For Sure, np.

[16]Nadine Gordimer, "Open House," Livingstone's Companions (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), p. 150.

[17]Nadine Gordimer, "Africa Emergent," Livingstone's Companions, p. 246.

[18]Nadine Gordimer, Burger's Daughter (London: Jonathan Cape, 1979), p. 197. All other references are incorporated in the text.

[19]Gordimer, The Late Bourgeois World, p. 53. All other references are incorporated in the text.

[20]Gordimer, "The Novel and the Nation," p. 47.

[21]Gordimer, "Literature and Politics," p. 215.

[22]Surprisingly enough, some critics see Liz in The Late Bourgeois World as having decided to commit herself to revolutionary activity. Elisabeth Gerver and Kenneth Parker confidently assert that Liz agrees to assist Luke in his underground political activities by receiving money illegally from abroad. Yet Gordimer makes it clear that the heroine commits herself to nothing. In fact the novel ends with her manifesting fearful awareness of the risks involved in such a commitment and leaves it unclear what she may do next. For the other point of view, see Elisabeth Gerver, "Women Revolutionaries in the Novels of Nadine Gordimer and Doris Lessing," World Literature Written in English, vol. 17, no. 1 (April, 1978), p. 42 and Kenneth Parker, "Nadine Gordimer and the Pitfalls of Liberalism," The South African Novel in English: Essays in Criticism and Society, ed. Kenneth Parker (New York: Africana, 1978), p. 129.

[23]Gordimer, The Conservationist, p. 42.

[24]For a more comprehensive discussion of this theme, see Smith, "Masters and Servants," pp. 93-107.

CHAPTER 4

POLITICAL COMMITMENT: THE ETHICS OF LIVING FOR THE FUTURE

Liberal attempts at dealing with South Africa's racial problems have been seen to fail because of their inherent inadequacy. In her criticism of this inadequacy Gordimer has been seen to point mainly to the simplistic nature of liberal assumptions. The assumptions are simplistic because most liberals reject racism but evade the political source of the problem. Their non-violent and non-revolutionary methods of changing society are rendered futile by a state machinery determined to maintain the status quo.

This chapter and the next one focus on Gordimer's examination of the alternative to liberalism, namely, revolutionary politics that aim at overhauling the entire society. This alternative entails total commitment to the cause of social justice. Here Gordimer analyses the effect on the individual of that kind of commitment. She presents the conflict between the individual and the ideals to which that individual dedicates her life. The committed character finds herself doing work that presupposes a process of disregarding fulfilment in the

present and waiting to live in a better political environment in the future. Ultimately her own development as a person becomes impaired.

Interestingly enough, The Lying Days is the first novel in which Gordimer examines, though briefly, the ethics of living for the future.[1] Helen's disillusionment with her liberal ideals is caused by their inadequacy, and partly by the fact that they preclude living in the present. Everything she does with Paul, her boyfriend and fellow liberal, is imbued with the quality of waiting for a better time when they can settle down in life. And Helen rejects this kind of waiting because of its self-denying nature. Compounding her problem is the fact that Paul, too, does not fully believe in his welfare work and political activities; everything becomes engulfed in a cloud of futility. Hence she abandons the ideals and separates from Paul.

The most extensive critique of the ethics of living for the future occurs in Burger's Daughter. But in this novel the characters, the issues and the presentation are more complex than their counterparts in The Lying Days. The heroine, Rosa Burger, is portrayed in so prismatic a way that the totality of her character and the overall nature of her views are best understood through close scrutiny of each of their facets.[2] The same is true of her father, Lionel Burger. Furthermore, unlike Helen and Paul, the revolutionaries portrayed in the novel believe

absolutely in their activities and ideals. And also unlike Helen and Paul, the faithful, as Rosa refers to the revolutionaries, believe in the function of historical processes as the vehicle carrying them all toward the future. They do not only believe and wait, but are also firmly convinced that they have a necessary role to play in the operation of those processes.

The complexity of Rosa's character and views lies in the fact that her attitudes toward herself and the committed are almost contradictory. First, she bitterly criticizes her parents and their associates for the self-denying nature of their commitment. Second, she acknowledges their nobility and high sense of social responsibility. When she takes the latter position, she asserts that her parents and their associates, through their commitment, achieved unprecedented, genuine human contact with one another. Blacks and whites came and worked together in a spirit of true human fellowship, something that had never happened before. And when she criticizes the committed, Rosa presents them as a people who disregarded their own individuality and that of others out of preference for political ideals. In this regard, she presents herself as a victim of her parents' impersonal political activities. Consequently, she seeks to disengage herself from their identity. Cynicism, a sharp sense of irony, and bitter resentment invariably characterise her criticism of her parents and their associates.

But when she acknowledges their nobility, and high sense of social responsibility, her tone is one of awe, at times verging on reverence. She then feels personally inadequate for desiring only to live in the ordinary present.

While this chapter primarily focuses on Rosa's bitter criticism of the ethics of living for the future, the next one essentially discusses the heroine's appreciation of her parents' and their associates' commitment.

Rosa's critical cynicism does not soften when she brings her focus to bear on Lionel Burger himself:

> That Future he was living for until the day he died can be achieved only by black people with the involvement of the small group of white revolutionaries who have solved the contradiction between black consciousness and class consciousness, and qualify to make unconditional common cause with the struggle for full liberation, e.g., a national and social revolution. It is necessary for these few to come into the country secretly or be recruited within it from among the bad risks, romantic journalists and students, as well as the good, the children, lovers and friends of the old guard, and for them to be pinched off between the fingers of the Special Branch one by one, in full possession of their invisible ink, their clandestine funds, their keys (provided by another sort of bad risk) to the offices of prominent financiers with photocopiers.[3]

This acceptance of taking risks in the present is in keeping with the belief of the committed in the supremacy of the ultimate goal: the Future. Individual danger and

inevitable incarceration do not matter, for the individual only counts as a means to an end.

In effect, Gordimer shows that this commitment eventually detracts from its original humanistic motive: the achievement of social justice. The self and others cease to have individual significance beyond their function as cogs in the larger revolutionary machinery. For example, the author shows that, although Rosa acknowledges her parents' nobility, she periodically expresses resentment at their having used her in the furthering of political objectives. In so doing they denied the young woman the opportunity to fulfil her own needs. By employing her as a functionary in matters of political expediency, they compromised her individuality. Her fake engagement to Noel de Witt, while he was in prison, is a case in point. In Rosa's own words: "... my 'engagement' to Noel de Witt was a device to enable him to be kept in touch with when he was in prison" (p. 65). The family decided to make this arrangement since Noel had no one else to visit him, both his parents having been exiled from South Africa. "And his fiancée had the same privileges as a prisoner's wife has—visits, letters and so on" (p. 65). Furthermore, the family reasoning proceeded, the fake engagement would not rouse suspicion as "Noel was one of [Lionel Burger's] known associates ... [and] practically lived with [the family]" (p. 65).

The objectification of Rosa in this arrangement is made clear by the manner in which the heroine describes her self-presentation at the prison:

> Mine is the face and body when Noel sees a woman once a month. If anybody in our house ... understood this nobody took it into account. My mother was alive then. If she saw—realized —and at least she might have considered the possibility—she didn't choose to see.
>
> (p. 66)

The parents' choice not to see the sexual objectification of the daughter in the arrangement is not surprising. It is in keeping with their disregard of personal considerations in favour of political and public ones. And their expectations of each of the girl's visits perfectly reflect this attitude. Beginning with specific focus on her mother, Rosa observes:

> Reading in the car while she waited for me outside the prison, my mother would look up, as she heard me return, with her shrewd anxious, complicit, welcoming expression that awaited me as a little girl when I was released from my first days of school. Had I done well? Here was my support, my reward, and the guarantor to whom I was contracted for my performance. At home, my father, his hands on my shoulders where I sat at table (his way with me, since I had been very small, to caress me like this as he came home from his patients and stood behind my chair for a moment) interrogated about what Noel had managed to convey under the lovey-dovey. Was it true that Jack Schultz had been moved to another section of the prison? Had the politicals been on hunger strike for two days the previous week?
>
> (p. 67)

Rosa gives the arrangement a business-like quality when she refers to her mother as "the guarantor to whom I was contracted for my performance." This quality intensifies the impersonality of the whole arrangement. And her sense of helpless victimization is effectively evoked when she presents herself as being "interrogated" by her father about the information she had gathered. Compounding the problem was the fact that Rosa personally cared about Noel, something the parents never realized. The absence of individual choice in what she did, therefore, conflicted with her valid emotional attachment to the young man:

> . . Every month I was told what must be communicated in the guise of my loving prison letter. At night, sitting up in bed in my old room in that house, smoking cigarettes at that time, not yet eighteen, I rewrote each 500 words again and again. I didn't know, ever, whether I had succeeded in writing with the effect of pretence (for him to read as such) what I really felt about Noel so tenderly and passionately.
>
> (p. 66)

Directly a part of this conflict was the sexual ambiguity in which the impersonal arrangement placed her. While Rosa had to present her objectified sexual image at the prison, no one besides herself knew of the existing real passion within her:

> On the night before the day itself finally arrived I washed my hair; before leaving for the prison I trickled perfume between my breasts and cupped some to rub on my belly and thighs. I chose a dress that showed my legs, or trousers and a shirt that emphasized my femaleness with their sexual ambiguity. Scent me out, sniff my flesh. Find me, receive me. And all this with an unthinking drive of need and instinct that could be called innocent and that you [Conrad] call 'real'. I took a flower with me. Usually the warders would not accept it for him (now and then the sentimentality of one of them for 'sweethearts', or the vicarious sexual stir another got from pandering, would move him to pass the gift). I kept the flower in my lap or twisted the stem in my hand, where Noel could enjoy the sight of the bloom and know it was for him ...
>
> I did ... what was expected. I was not a fake. Once a month I sat as they had sent me to take their messages and receive his, a female presented to him with the smiling mouth, the gazing yet evasive eyes, the breasts drooping a little as she hunched forward, a flower standing for what lies in her lap. We didn't despise prostitutes in that house—our house—we saw them as victims of necessity while certain social orders lasted.
>
> (pp. 66-68)

By referring to herself in the third person, and mentioning prostitutes, in the latter part of the passage, Rosa evokes the sense of her sexual objectification. And her ambiguous situation is stressed, toward the middle of the quotation, by its echoes in the warders' attitudes which comprise the personal and the impersonal, the human and the inhuman. These echoes recur when Rosa contemplates the juxtaposition of Noel's cold prison world with the nearby domestic setting of the warders. Specifically speaking, she describes how, turning away from the forbidding walls of the prison complex, she looked "towards

the warders' houses"; and there she saw "children playing in the small gardens, creaking the rusty chains of swings provided for them" (p. 68). Significantly enough, this innocent, warm, and peaceful sight immediately causes her to think about the natural possibilities that ought to have been actualized between her and Noel, possibilities that are mocked by the make-believe arranged for them, and negated by the young man's confinement:

> Why could not Noel de Witt and I have gone to breed babies from me that would look like him, to grow wattle or tobacco or mealies or anything it was that he wanted to make flourish and couldn't, not so much as a knot of tough grass able to force its way between those walls?
> (p. 68)

The reference to the dehumanized bearing of children reflects Rosa's frustration at the knowledge that the simple life she yearningly mentions is closed to her.

Rosa's resentment of being used as a political functionary by her parents becomes explicit. According to her, it was while living at Conrad's cottage, after her father's imprisonment, that she began the critical re-examination of her inherited identity. Addressing Conrad, she says:

> Alone in the tin cottage with you, when I had nothing more to tell you, when I had shut up, when I didn't interrupt you, when you couldn't get anything out of me, when I wasn't listening, I accused her. I slashed branches in the suburban garden turned rubbish dump where I was

> marooned with you ... I accused him—Lionel Burger, knowing as he did, without question, I would do what had to be done.
>
> (p. 66)

It is not surprising that after her parents' death Rosa extends to their associates her resentment of their treatment of her. For the associates too view her only as Lionel Burger's daughter and expect her actions to reflect that identity. It is to emphasize her resentful and critical attitude toward the associates that Rosa invariably refers to them as "these people" and "the faithful." Effectually, these references detach her from them. As she criticizes the committed, Rosa also makes implicit her resentment of her political identity, one she got by virtue of birth, and not by personal choice. She openly expresses this resentment when Clare Terblanche tries to involve her in underground political activities. Significantly enough, Rosa sees Clare as a mirror-image of herself, for she too inherited a political identity from her parents, Dick and Ivy Terblanche. The only difference between them is that Clare does not see anything wrong with the imposition of parental identity on her. Rosa attempts to make her see that this imposition denies the children the right to develop and have their own identities, for they are made merely to conform to the parents' views, values, and attitudes. The lack of independent and critical perspective in Clare's position

becomes very clear when she attempts to argue against Rosa's observations on the matter. Rosa's comments on Clare's attitude and position point to the similarities between their identity problems:

> I looked at her, inciting us.
> —What conformists: the children of our parents.—
> —Dick and Ivy conformists!—Her face screwed towards me.
> —Not them—us. Did you ever think of that? Other people break away. They live completely different lives. Parents and children don't understand each other—there's nothing to say, between them. Some sort of natural insurance against repetition ... Not us. We live as they lived.—
> —Oh, bourgeois freedoms. It's not possible for us. We want something else. Christ, I don't have to fight poor old Dick and Ivy for it—it doesn't matter if they bug me in plenty of ways, my mother particularly. They want it too.—
> —But were you given a choice? Just think.—
> —Yes ... I suppose if you want to look at it like that .... But no! Rosa!—What choice? Rosa! In this country, under this system, looking at the way the blacks live—What has the choice to do with parents? What else could you choose?—
> (p. 127)

When Rosa proceeds to make explicit her identification with Clare, her critical attitude is replaced by one of understanding, sympathy, and self-knowledge:

> She was excited now, had the gleam of someone who feels she is gaining influence, drew back the unfallen tears through her nose in ugly snorts. It's axiomatic the faults you see in others are often your own; the critical are the self-despising. But this is something different. Not a mote in your eye. That girl whom I pitied, at whom my curiosity was directed,

> so different from me in the 'unimportant' aspects—I watched her as if she were myself. I wanted something from the victim in her and perhaps I got it.
>
> (p. 127)

In this identification with Clare, Rosa notes how the other young woman in her naive political optimism uses her parents' language, and reflects their attitudes. For example, when Rosa points to the inevitability of failure in her and her parents' underground activities, Clare replies: "But Rosa! They've had the worst of it. It'll be different for us. Whatever happens, we're lucky to be born later—"; Rosa simply comments: "—Exactly what your father says" (p. 125).

In the course of the novel Gordimer makes it clear that Rosa, unlike Clare, wishes to disconnect herself from her inherited identity. In other words the heroine would like to have an identity which is independent of her political background and status. The fact that the faithful do not see her as anybody other than Lionel Burger's daughter accentuates her sense of denied individuality. She resentfully comments that, if she presently does not participate in their political activities, the faithful, such as the Terblanches, are confident that she will ultimately come around and assume her responsibilities:

> They are prepared to be patient with me. It's not sympathy, some pallid underwriting of the validity of self-pity they offer. I have had a course of action to follow which involved the life of a man who happened to be my father, just as they themselves have had. The consequences for Dick have been periods of imprisonment with my father; for Ivy, imprisonment because of my father. The course of action I have duly fulfilled, with consequences for me some of which were self-evident, foreseen and accepted, just as theirs were, is part of a continuing process. It is complete only for Lionel Burger; he has done all he had to do and that, in his case, happened to imply a death in prison as part of the process. It does not occur to them that it could be complete for themselves, for me.
>
> It is not so easy to shut oneself off from them—these people.
>
> (p. 113)

It is not just their attitude, viewing her as an extension of Lionel Burger, that Rosa resents; she is also bothered by the awareness that the Terblanches were closer to Lionel than she ever was. This closeness emphasizes the primacy of his political life over the private one. Their shared commitment held him and the Terblanches in a bond that transcended blood ties: "These two people [Ivy and Dick] represent an intimacy with my father greater than mine. They know what even one's own daughter is never told" (p. 113). And in her opinion, the biographer who has been interviewing her about her father "ought to be referred to them, Lionel's—what? Friends, associates—comrades, the biographer will settle for as catch-all, but some new term ought to come into being for what I understood, coming back into their presence. It

goes beyond friendship, beyond association, beyond family relationship—of course" (p. 113).

As she proceeds to criticize the Terblanches' attitude toward her, Rosa cynically says that all they want to do is draw her into their underground political activities; and ironically, this intention, together with their warmth, is ultimately there to send one to prison:

> They will be waiting for me to find out what there is for me to do. How they all cared for each other's children, when we were little! In the enveloping acceptance of Ivy's motherly arms—she feels as if I were her own child—there is expectance, even authority. To her warm breast one can come home again and do as you [Conrad] said I would, go to prison.
>
> (p. 114)

Not only does Rosa criticize the faithful for their attitude toward her, but also for their self-denying political ethics. While living for the future, the committed fail to fulfil their personal needs. Besides her own family, she presents the Terblanches as a case in point. According to her, they are continually engaged in underground political activities. In the process, they live a life of perpetual self-denial and persecution:

> The Terblanches, going from shabby suburb to prison, and back from prison to shabby suburb, growing old and heavy (she) selling cartons of curry, and deaf and scaly-skinned (he) on a pension or charity job from friends—they wait for that day when rumour will gather

> reality, when its effect will be what they predict, as their neighbours (whom they resemble strangely, outwardly) wait to retire to the coast and go fishing. For the Terblanches even holidays ceased to exist years ago. Their outing is the twice-weekly trip to report at the local police station on the way to or from work, as other people have to attend a clinic for control of some chronic infection.
>
> (pp. 109-110)

The disease analogy effectively evokes the sense of abnormality in the Terblanches' form of existence. To emphasize her criticism of this form of life, Rosa cynically supposes that in illness and old age the Terblanches will end up receiving sustenance from some guilt-ridden white philanthropist:

> If they get really old and sick I suppose somebody like Flora—someone fascinated by them, shamed by not living as they have lived—will keep them alive on hand-outs of money she is embarrassed to possess. And Dick and Ivy will take it since neither they nor she have the petit-bourgeois finickness about such things: they because it's not for themselves but for what lives in them, Flora because she does not believe what she possesses has come to her by right.
>
> (p. 110)

The self-denying nature of the Terblanches' commitment to the future is made more clear when Rosa views it in immediate contrast with the material pursuits of the conventional middle-class whites. Admittedly, the conventional whites also take the future into account, but theirs is a future of concrete material benefits that are

solidly rooted in the present. The Terblanches' future, on the other hand, is a nebulous Utopian one without any foundation in the present; its only paradoxical connection with the present is impoverishment and persecution:

> People like Dick and Ivy and Aletta don't understand provision in the way the clients of the man I worked for do—'provision' is a word that comes up continually in the market place of Barry Eckhard's telephone: provision against a fall in the price of gold, provision against inflationary trends, provision for expansion, provision against depression, a predicate stored for sons and sons of sons, daughters and daughters of daughters—stocks, bonds, dividends, debentures. In the pulpits and newspapers of my boss's clients the godless materialism of what they call the communist creed is outlawed; but the Terblanches have laid up no treasures moth or rust will corrupt. For them there is no less than the future in store—the future.
>
> (p. 110)

In keeping with this commitment to the future, Rosa observes, the Terblanches and the other faithful are totally tolerant of past and present failures along the road toward that future:

> There is nothing but failure, until the day the Future is achieved. It is the only success. Others—in specific campaigns with specific objectives, against the pass laws, against forced dispossession of land—would lead to piecemeal reforms. These actions fail one after another, they have failed since before we were born; failures were the events of our childhood, failures are the normal circumstances of our adulthood—[Clare's] parents under house arrest, my father dead in jail, my courting done in the prison visiting room.
>
> (p. 125)

Immediately evident here is the absence of room for personal vitality, individual ambition and self-realization. In order to make poignant the self-denying nature of this commitment to the future, Rosa presents the faithful as submitting their lives to the dictates of ideological precepts:

> In this experience of being crushed on individual issues the masses come, as they can in no other way, to understand that there is no other way: state power must be overthrown. Failure is the accumulated heritage of resistance without which there is no revolution. The chapter [of Lionel Burger's biography currently being written] will be headed by a maxim from Marx which Lionel Burger spoke from the dock before he was sentenced. 'World history would indeed be very easy to make if the struggle were taken up only on condition of infallibly favourable chances.'
>
> (p. 125)

The sense of abstraction evoked by the revolutionary jargon emphasizes the faithful's disconnection from the concrete present.

Perfectly consistent with the disregard of individual considerations is Clare Terblanche's matter-of-fact attitude toward her affair with her friend's husband. It is in the same spirit that she asks Rosa to help her find accommodation for the very friend she is deceiving. According to Rosa's observation the friend matters to Clare only as a colleague in the struggle for the future. Clare's own moral answerability and emotional insecurity

do not count either. Indeed, both the unfaithful husband and the deceived woman will not allow emotional problems to interfere with their revolutionary work. In Rosa's words:

> [The wronged woman] is the daughter of a professor, an associate of my father who fled long ago and teaches in a black country. The professor's hostage to the future: Clare Terblanche will recruit her, if the remark that they 'really get on' doesn't already mean she is coming up from the Cape because the strategy of the present phase requires this. The lover, the husband—he's one of us, too. Jealousy and anguish between the three of them (perhaps the professor's daughter is really coming to try to get back her man?) is something they will know they must not allow to interfere with what they have to do .... Clare Terblanche's pride and guilt at sleeping with the other's man, the temptation of being preferred, the pain of being rejected—who knows how it will resolve itself ...—these will not interfere with the work to be done.
>
> (p. 128)

In order to show the pervasiveness of this disregard for the private and the personal, and its concomitant preference for public ideals, among the faithful, Rosa again focuses on her own family: "It is only people who wallow in the present who submit. My mother didn't, as Lily Letsile demanded, 'fill up that hole' where my brother drowned. The swimming pool remained to give pleasure to other people, black children who had never been into a pool before could be taught to swim there by my father" (p. 128).

Here, the author shows another adverse effect of this kind of political commitment, namely the atrophy of individual vitality and personal sensitivity. While others and the self cease to have significance beyond their place as cogs in the larger revolutionary machinery, so is individual development neglected, conduct and behaviour become codified. Attitudes become rigidified. Gordimer prefigures these views in her earlier fiction where she mostly depicts liberals and the inadequacy of their liberalism. In Occasion For Loving, for example, Jessie Stilwell is shown to be cynical about her own socially committed attitude. The heroine takes, as case in point, her having given accommodation to Boaz and Ann Davis. As she discusses the issue with Gideon Shibalo, Jessie observes that, despite its humanistic motivation, commitment always has the potential to stifle self-realization and personal development:

> A year ago, then, I didn't want Boaz and Ann to come to us. But I didn't do anything to stop it. It was the sort of thing Tom and I have always done. One must be open to one's friends. You've got to get away from the tight little bourgeois family unit. In a country like this, people like us must stick together—we live by the sanctions of our own kind. We haven't any anonymous, impersonal code because the South African 'way of life'

> isn't for us. But what happens to you, yourself ... I don't know. The original impulse toward decency hardens round you and you can't get out. It becomes another convention....
>
> The whole way we live becomes a political gesture above everything else. Well that's part of what I mean—there's no room to develop as a person because any change in yourself might appear to be a defection. And yet if you can't change, can't stretch out, how can you be ready for some new demand on yourself? In time you don't even remember, really, how you arrived at the position you've taken up.[4]

When Gideon asks her what kind of demand she has in mind, she replies: "Well, if you want to live like a human being you've got to keep on proving it. It's not a state automatically conferred upon you because you walk upright on two legs, any more than because you've got a white skin" (p. 257).

A parallel situation obtains in Burger's Daughter where Gordimer portrays the sacrificing of personal needs within the family for the sake of serving others. The case of Rosa and Noel has been noted. In addition, according to the heroine, the Burgers belonged to other people, and other people belonged to them. Addressing Conrad, she says:

> In that house, we children had few exclusive rights with our parents. Taking into account the important difference that I was a female child and so the sexual implications would have been different, I wonder if the sight of my mother with another man—all right under

> another man—would have cracked the shell of containing reality for me, made me recoil entirely into that of internal events, as it did for you? 'I wonder' in the sense that I doubt it; she was Baasie's mother, as well as Tony's and mine, and mother to others from time to time, so perhaps I should not have thought of her and my father, Lionel, as each other's possession. We belonged to other people. I must have accepted that, too, very young, in that house. I became Noel de Witt's girl, if need be.
>
> And other people belonged to us. If my mother had no lover—and although I see I know nothing, nothing about her, I'm sure of this—there were other relationships, not sexual, about which there has been speculation. Even in court. The woman who couldn't meet my father's face, looking so gently, patiently at her ... began as one of my mother's collection of the dispossessed, like Baasie or the old man who lived with us.
>
> (p. 84)

Because of this commitment to other people and public causes, Rosa observes, the parents did not enable her to know them in an exclusively personal way. For example, she says Lionel Burger was something other than her father, the private man. And it is that private man she never really knew although she was always aware of his existence.

Rosa only realizes after his death in prison the full extent to which her father's political commitment distanced him from her. Ironically, his death also makes her feel free of him, but free in a self-alienating way, as she observes:

> To be free is to become almost a stranger to oneself: the nearest I'll ever get to seeing what they saw outside the prison. If I could have seen that I could have seen that other father, the stranger to myself. I seem always to have known of his existence ....
>
> It's true that to me he was also something other than my father. Not just a public persona; many people have that to put on and take off. Not something belonging to the hackneyed formulation of the tracts and manifestos that explain him, for others. His was different. His may have been what he really was. After he was dead—after I left the cottage where I accused him—that persona became something held secret from me. How can I explain that the death of the man—the man in the park was part of the mystery. As he had died, or the fact of his death existed in my presence without having been aware of it, so I lived in my father's presence without knowing its meaning.
>
> (pp. 81-82)

Directly related to this disjointed sense of the father are Rosa's alternate references to him as 'Lionel' and 'my father'. While the former reference connotes the distance between him and her, the latter one evokes the close filial-paternal relationship that was never fully actualized between them.

The young woman observes that even her mother was so politically committed that she was not conscious of her own personal attributes such as beauty and unlimited generosity of heart. Instead, she had a very strong sense of public purpose; illustrative of this are the various hangers-on she kept at their house. Ironically, among those hangers-on was the woman who later betrayed

Lionel Burger. Again addressing herself to Conrad, whom she presents as having criticised her parents' commitment, Rosa says:

> There were things whose existence was not admitted, in that house. Just as your mother's love affairs and the way your father made his money were not, in yours. My parents' was a different kind of collusion. It surprises me to see, looking at photographs, my mother was actually good-looking ....
>
> (p. 82)

As she describes the neglected good-looks, Rosa says they only remind her of the political alertness that always characterized her mother:

> Beautiful eyes. But I see only the interrogatory watchfulness that looked out, looked up at my footsteps displacing the gravel outside my 'fiancé's' jail; the quick flicker of early-warning or go-ahead that went out to my father when she and he were in discussion with the many people who used that house. The lipstick she, in the habit of women of her generation, put on her lips, outlined not the shape of the lips so much as the determined complexity that composed them—a mouth that has learnt to give nothing away when speaking; whose smile comes from the confidence not of attraction but of conviction. I suppose children always think of their mothers as being capable; a rationalization of dependence and trust. She always knew what to do, and did it. The crowds of people who came to her funeral loved her for her kindness; the rationale of her always deciding what action to take, and acting.
>
> (pp. 82-83)

Illustrative of the tenacity of her convictions is the fact that when her son drowned in the swimming-pool, she did not allow personal grief to undermine her sense of public purpose. As noted earlier, she left the pool intact for the enjoyment of her numerous visitors and guests.

This portrait of Rosa's mother is reminiscent of that of Anna Louw, in A World of Strangers. The difference between them is that Anna is a radical but not a revolutionary. She was once a member of the South African Communist Party, but she later rejected it after witnessing Stalinist horrors in Russia. Although she works within the system, she is committed to helping the underprivileged to the extent that she ends up by being arrested on political charges. She works with the Legal Aid Bureau, which, among other things, helps blacks know their rights in legal matters. And her social life involves association with people of various races. A more personal testament to her conviction in racial integration is the fact that she was once married to an Indian from whom she was eventually forced to separate by segregation laws.

The element of self-denial characteristic of the committed in Burger's Daughter is echoed by Anna in her own unique way. Unlike most other whites in Gordimer's fiction, Anna does not have a servant, and she lives in a small house that is marked by its lack of material

opulence. And the house is located in one of the neglected areas of white habitation.

While she does not overtly live for the future like Rosa's mother and the faithful, Anna resembles them in their seriousness of purpose and sense of correctness of manner. Toby, the narrating character, observes that despite her having rejected the Communist Party Anna remains dogmatic in attitude:

> Unlike most ex-Communists I knew in London, Anna had not remained in that state of spiritual convalescence which was as far as they seemed able to recover from loss of faith—but she shared with those who would never be able to put themselves together again, a dogmatism of manner, as old military men never again walk quite like other men. Although she no longer had to believe unquestioningly, she could not shed the air of being always right.[5]

The last comment is reminiscent of Rosa's observations that her mother "always knew what to do, and did it," and that her smile was one that came "from the confidence not of attraction but of conviction." Toby also admits that he finds Anna intimidating, at times. Her measured, ordered and knowing nature makes him uneasy. To stress his point, he states that he is more attracted to the simplicity and wantonness of Cecil Rowe. Testimony to these statements is the fact that when he has sexual contact with Anna her casual and unemotional response makes

him long for Cecil. Through much of the time she retains her knowing attitude, questioning Toby as to whether he believed he could continue to associate himself with blacks and whites and remain uncommitted to either in the process. His first reaction is one of fear:

> I felt suddenly afraid of her, I put out my hand and touched, with the touch of fear, the thing I fled from. I had no desire for her but I kissed her. The rain had stopped as if to listen; the whole night was still. She did not shut her eyes for an instant; every time I opened mine, she was looking at me, as if she were waiting for something to be over, to have done. She went on talking while she took my hand, turned it palm up, then down, then pressed the nails, one by one: "You think you'll keep free, with one foot here and another there, and a look in somewhere else, but even you, even a stranger like you, Toby—you won't keep it up." She stood up and wiped the windowsill dry of the rain that lay on it in a scatter of magnifying lenses, thick and glassy. We were both standing about the room as if the night were breaking up. I thought of Cecil with a flash of longing, but she was like one of those women you imagine before you have ever had a woman. I made love to Anna at last, slowly because I had had so much to drink, and pleasure came to me as if wrung from my grasp. When our excitement was over the rain began again as if it had never stopped ..... My extension of conversation with Anna (that's no polite euphemism—that was exactly what it seemed to be, the moment it was past) had the effect of deepening my interest in Cecil. For weeks, there was a gentle madness for me in the mention of her name; her faults entranced me, an inch of darker colour grown out at the roots of her hair touched me, her laugh ... astonished me, like a secret called aloud.
>
> (pp. 174-175)

Effectually, Anna's manner and attitude show that political commitment has had a rigidifying effect on her individual vitality and emotional spontaneity. Even at parties Anna maintains her rigid correctness of behaviour: For instance, at one multi-racial party, she remains composed and collected while others lose themselves in bacchanalian merry-making. When she agrees to dance with Toby, he comments: "I danced with her; she had the air of distinctness that a sober person has in a room where everyone else's aura is quickened and blurred by euphoria—as if their souls were in motion while hers was still" (p. 85).

Clearly, both Anna and the faithful evince cerebral attitudes toward reality. This is quite in keeping with their unwavering sense of purpose. Indeed, for the faithful, in particular, that sense of purpose is the very heart of their commitment to the future. Here, too, Gordimer shows that, just like commitment *per se*, this cerebral attitude impedes full individual development and self-realization. In this regard, the author presents Rosa Burger, herself, as a major case in point. The heroine's critique of others serves to highlight her own problem. It has been observed that she criticizes the faithful for their self-denial and its effect on their vitality as individuals. But the author also shows that Rosa's own individual vitality and emotional sensitivity, too, were stunted by the values of political commitment.

Because of her background, Rosa's view of reality is also cerebral. Her committed parents conditioned her to value rational certainties more than emotional ones.

In one of their reported conversations, Rosa defends herself against Conrad's charges that she had an abnormal upbringing. According to him, that upbringing inculcated an unusual set of values in her. And these values effectually undermined her sensitivity to simple but fundamental areas of private human experience. Having been conditioned to see value only in political and public issues, she was deprived of the opportunity to develop and learn to appreciate her own emotional impulses. Rosa's rejection of Conrad's critique is later neutralized by the author's validation of it, and by Rosa's own realization of the extent to which her political background stunted her emotional growth, and deadened her sensitivity to the raw reality of pain and suffering. Significantly enough, it is after being confronted with the unexplained death of a man in a park that Rosa awakens to the nature of her problem.

During the reported conversation, Conrad rejects Rosa's assertion that she grew up learning about the world from her parents in the same way that other children do. Interestingly enough, he points to the abnormality of Rosa's background by contrasting it with his own standard of normality: white middle-class. Commenting on the type of associates the Burgers had, he says: "the people

who came to your house weren't there for tea-parties with your mother or bridge evenings with cigars. They weren't your father's golf-playing fellow doctors or ladies your mother went shopping with, ay?—" (p. 50). To specify the unusual nature of the people, and their equally unusual sense of the ordinary and the normal, he adds: "They came together to make a revolution. That was ordinary to you. That—intention. It was ordinary. It was the normal atmosphere in that house—" (p. 50). This observation gains added substance when shortly he outlines the exclusively political events which occasioned either celebration or mourning in the Burger house:

> —What'd you celebrate in your house? The occasions were when somebody got off, not guilty, in a political trial. Leaders came out of prison. A bunch of blacks made a success of a boycott or defied a law. There was a mass protest or a march, a strike ... Those were your nuptials and fiestas. When blacks were shot by the police, when people were detained, when leaders went to jail, when new laws shifted populations you'd never even seen, banned and outlawed people, those were your mournings and wakes. These were the occasions you were taught ... were the real ones, not your own private kicks and poor little ingrown miseries.
>
> (p. 51)

When Rosa attempts to rebut these statements, his response points to the cerebral codification of personal conduct among the committed. After ~~she~~ argues that her family had private occasions of celebration and grief, such as

parties and weddings, on the one hand, and deaths, on the other, Conrad counterargues:

> —But isn't it true—you had your formula for dealing with that [death], too—?...
>
> —Isn't it? A prescribed way to deal with the frail and wayward flesh that gets sick and wasted and drowns. Some people scream and beat their breasts, others try to follow into the next world, table-tapping and so on. Among you, the cause is what can't die. Your mother didn't live to carry it on, others will. It's immortality. If you can accept it. Christian resignation's only one example. A cause more important than an individual is another. The same con, the future in place of the present. Lives you can't live, instead of your own. You didn't cry when your father was sentenced. I saw. People said how brave. Some people say, a cold fish. But it's conditioning, brainwashing: more like a trained seal, maybe.—
>
> (pp. 51-52)

The differences between Conrad and Rosa on the issue of emotional self-expression become very clear in the subsequent interchange. Rosa reflects her cerebral attitude toward reality. While the young man advocates full expression of private feeling, and disregard of public considerations, the heroine looks at the issue from the point of view of utility and purpose. Furthermore, she implicitly suggests that an attitude of resigned stoicism in the face of extreme personal disaster is the only sensible one to adopt. Responding to his critical comment on her failure to cry when her father was sentenced, she asks:

> —What do you do when something terrible happens?—...—What would you do—nothing like that's ever happened to you.—
> —Want to pull the world down round my ears, that's what.—
> —Pretty useless.—
> —I don't give a fuck about what's 'useful'. The will is my own. The emotion's my own. The right to be inconsolable. When I feel, there's no 'we', only 'I'—
>
> (pp. 51-52)

Later, the author herself validates Conrad's observations with regard to the adverse effect the political background had on Rosa's emotional sensitivity. From earliest infancy Rosa was conditioned to accept her parents' eventual imprisonment. And so when it happened, it was part of what she had been taught to believe was ordinary and normal. In Gordimer's own words: "Rosa had been armed very young by her parents against the shock of such contingencies by the assumption that imprisonment was part of the responsibilities of grown-up life, like visiting patients (her father) or going to work each day in town" (p. 54). Once, when she and her brother, Tony, had to go to their aunt's farm while their parents were on trial, Rosa knew a number of significant details about the trial:

> At eight years old Rosa could tell people the name by which the trial, in which her father and mother were two of the accused, was known, the Treason Trial, and explain that they had been refused bail which meant they couldn't come home. Tony (her little brother) perhaps

> did not realize where they were; Auntie Velma encouraged the idea that he was 'on holiday' on the farm—an attitude the parents would not have thought 'correct' and that their daughter, resenting any deviation from her parents' form of trust as a criticism and betrayal of them, tried to counter.
>
> (p. 54)

Clearly, Rosa's sense of correctness of attitude is predominantly cerebral. Because of her conditioning, she did not emotionally apprehend her parents' political suffering. The young girl was secure in her rational understanding of their imprisonment; the incarceration was ordinary and normal, as the parents had taught her to believe it to be. But the aunt, who knew that there was nothing ordinary and normal about imprisonment, tried to shield ~~the~~ younger child from the emotional trauma of knowing about his parents' suffering.

Rosa's cerebral view of her parents' situation, and her defence of their "form of trust," illustrate her belief in the validity of rational certainties. Even suffering can be logically explained and its emotional reality dispelled away by reason. Effectually, adversity can be accepted. But ultimately the death in the park makes Rosa realize that the kind of emotional insulation provided by these certainties had blunted her ability to apprehend those dimensions of reality which do not lend themselves to rational explanations. For the first time in her life, Rosa is shocked into knowing the insufficiency

of all the certainties which comprised her intellectual nourishment in her parents' house. This knowledge makes her state that the death of the man in the park is the first real one to her. This is so because this death cannot be explained away by any rational reasons. In contrast, the deaths of her own loved ones had easily been attributed to rationally understandable causes, hence they never made any shocking impact on her sensibility. While an accident had caused her brother's death, illness and incarceration had claimed both her parents' lives:

> I had seen my brother dead and my mother and father; each time the event itself, so close to me, was obscured from me by sorrow and explained by accident, or imprisonment. It was caused by the chlorinated water ... that I saw pumped from my brother's mouth when he was taken from the pool; by that paralysis that blotted out my mother limb by limb; by the fever that my father smelled of, dying for his beliefs in a prison hospital.
>
> But this death was the mystery itself.
>
> (p. 79)

There was no indication of illness, or incidence of accident to explain the man's death. And society could not be blamed for the death either; for he was neither under political victimization, nor did he cry out for help that was denied him. In Rosa's words:

> He gave no sign of injury, pain or distress, he was not held between the uniformed bodies of custodians, looking out where he could not run, he was not caged in court or cell, or holding out, as a beggar [who] has nothing to present but his stump, a paper for the official stamp that is always denied him. The whole point was that I—we—all of us were exonerated. What could we have done? It was not a matter of help that could be given or withheld. Not a matter of the kiss of life or massaging a heart. Nothing could change the isolation of that man. (p. 78)

Notable here is the evocation of the image of her father trapped in the dock, and of the faceless black man whose existence and destiny have to be validated by the official stamp of white rule. The latter image specifically calls to mind the "pass" which Lionel and his associates fought against, among other things.[6] For both Lionel's and the black man's fates, responsibility is placed squarely on the shoulders of society. Not so with the case of the death in the park. For the first time, Rosa realizes that death is man's ultimate state of privacy and solitude. Emphasizing this solitude and privacy is the fact that this man dies quietly in the middle of normal lunch-hour hubbub of life. And he dies while surrounded by people who, for some time, see absolutely nothing unusual about him. At the same time, Rosa realizes the other truth that, paradoxically, death is also man's common denominator with all humanity and other forms of life. After briefly surveying the vital signals being emitted by the surrounding people, Rosa notes their

transient nature. She effectively does this by juxtaposing those signals of life with the form of actualized mortality in their midst: "But this man who crossed his legs conversationally, whose arms were folded attentively —only his head had nodded off, drooped with the heat or boredom, it could happen to anybody—he carried through the unspeakable act in our presence" (p. 78). To make her point more specific, the heroine adds: "He concluded the digestive cycles and procreative tentatives around him by completing the imperative, the ultimate necessity. We saw and heard nothing" (p. 79).

In the final analysis Rosa realizes that the ideals and certainties which she had learned since childhood never accommodated all aspects of human existence. They never prepared her to recognize, know, and accept the inexorable law of life and death. Having acknowledged that the revolution championed by her parents would change, for the better, all social and material conditions for the deprived, Rosa asks the ultimate question:

> But the change from life to death—what had all the certainties I had [learned] from my father to do with that? When the hunger ended and the Kwashiorkor was wiped out as malaria was in the colonial era, when there were no rents extorted and no privately owned mansions and cosy white bungalows, no white students in contemplative retreat where blacks could not live; when the people owned the means of production of gold, diamonds, uranium, copper and coal, all the mineral riches that had rolled to the bottom of the sack of Africa—one would be left with that.

> Nothing that had served to make us sure of what we were doing and why had anything to do with what was happening one lunchtime while I was in the square. I was left with that. It had been left out. Justice, equality, the brotherhood of man, human dignity—but it will still be there. I looked away everywhere from the bench and saw it still, when—at last—I had seen it once. (p. 80)

This realization of the irrevocability of death leaves Rosa with an intense sense of futility. The simplicity of the answer to the existence of death intensifies her sense of futility and feeling of mortal entrapment: "we die because we live" (p. 79). The phenomenon of death ultimately reduces the ethics of living for the future to absurdity, for the individual life can only be lived in the present. It is this truth that the faithful tenaciously and consistently ignore. And the failures which their commitment has met in the process become, to Rosa, the very embodiment of futility. In spite of the commitment of the faithful, she notes, nothing has changed for the better in the country. As a matter of fact, things have only got worse over the years. Referring to the Terblanches' commitment, as case in point, Rosa asks:

> With what impossible hubris are they living out their lives without the pleasures and precautions of other white people? What have they to show for it—Ivy become a petty shopkeeper, and the blacks still not allowed in the open unions she and my mother worked for, Dick tinkering in his backyard on a Sunday in a white suburb, and the blacks still carrying passes twenty-five

> years after he first campaigned with them against pass laws and went to jail. After all the Dingaan's Day demonstrations (1929, J.B. Marks declared 'Africa belongs to us', a white man shouted 'You lie' and shot Mofutsanyana dead on the platform, 700 blacks arrested; 1930, young Nkosi stabbed to death, Gana Makabeni took his place as C.P. organizer in Durban, 200 black militants banished); all the passive resistance campaigns of the Fifties, the pass-burnings of the Sixties; after all the police assaults, arrests; after Sharpeville; after the trials, detentions, the house arrests, the deaths by torture in prison, the sentences lived through and the sentences being endured while life endures.
>
> (pp. 110-111)

Locating the uncompromising belief in the future in her own family, Rosa observes:

> That future, that house—although my father's house was larger than Dick and Ivy's home-improved bungalow, that house also made provision for no less than the Future. My father left that house with the name-plate of his honourable profession polished on the gate, and went to spend the rest of his life in prison, secure in that future. He's dead, Ivy and Dick are ageing and poor and alive—the only difference.
>
> (p. 111)

The implication here is that although Dick and Ivy are alive, their existence is a form of living death. Rosa can barely conceal her disgust when she proceeds to elaborate on the pathetic nature of the Terblanches' futile belief in the future. She elaborates with reference to Dick's hope, which he had expressed to her in an earlier conversation, that they are going to see the

future as augured by the impending end of white rule in Mozambique, Angola and Rhodesia:

> Dick with those ugly patches on his poor hands said to me like a senile declaration of passion; we are still here to see it. He thought I was overcome at the thought of my father. But I was filled with the need to get away as from something obscene—and afraid to wound him—them by showing it ....
>
> They are still waiting.
>
> (p. 111)

The fact that she actually left Dick, in haste, without verbally reacting to his expression of hope, testifies to her feelings of disgust. Shortly afterwards, preoccupied with memories of her father wasting away in jail, Rosa wonders whether his belief in the future remained intact to the very end: "...even I with my precocious talents for evading warders, comprehension now in full maturity, could not have found the way to ask him—in spite of all these things: do you still believe in the future? The same Future? Just as you always did?" (p. 115). On each visit "I would be aware of nothing except that he was changing in prison, he was getting the look on those faces in old photographs from concentration camps, the motionless aspect, shouldered there between the two warders that accompanied him, of someone who lets himself be presented, identified" (p. 115). Evident here is only an image of helplessness, confinement and physical decay.

Rosa's sense of futility is accentuated by her encounter, at Fats' place, with the black-consciousness young man. She is taken aback by his rejection of white participation in black causes.[7] In effect, this rejection is a negation of what her father had believed in and died for in prison. The shock she experiences at this encounter convinces her in the decision to disconnect herself from her parents' futile commitment and take the path of ordinary individualism. Hence the trip to Europe. But her later confrontation with Baasie, her childhood black foster brother, proves to be more shattering and disillusioning. His rejection of her and reiteration of the black-consciousness position clinch the collapse of Lionel Burger's world of inter-racial fellowship and commitment to the future.

Chapter 4

Footnotes

[1]The phrase "living for the future" recurs in Gordimer's novel, Burger's Daughter, referring to one of the book's motifs. It is also part of the title of an article on the same novel, by Rowland Smith, "Living for the Future: Nadine Gordimer's Burger's Daughter," World Literature Written in English, vol. 19, no. 2, (Autumn 1980), pp. 163-173. I acknowledge the invaluable influence of that article on most of my views on Burger's Daughter in this chapter.

[2]Gordimer has achieved this prismatic effect in her portrayal of Rosa Burger by using, to borrow Stephen Gray's words, "an alternating method of narration, between an exterior, impersonalized narrator and an interior monologue, juxtaposed" ("An Interview with Nadine Gordimer," p. 265). When Gray asks: "Is your intention to strip off exteriors more effectively by this means?" Gordimer's reply confirms the complexity of both the technique and the subject: "It's to get increasingly at what is really there. I suppose it comes about through finding that if you are drilling straight ahead, so to speak, you are constantly slipping and glancing off what is in the person, off the true center of their motivation and the conglomeration of circumstances and inherited attitudes that make up the inner personality. I think the method is almost spelled out and becomes part of the actual book at the beginning of Burger's Daughter, where Rosa says to herself, in a natural kind of way, because she doubts what she is, what is it that they saw when they saw me standing outside the prison? That sums up the method that I've come to use. In order to grasp a subject, you need to use all the means at your disposal: the inner narrative, the outer, the reflection on an individual from other people, even the different possibilities of language, the syntax itself, which take hold of different parts of reality. So in the beginning of Burger's Daughter the high-toned, brave-sounding political prose of the faithful—all the clichés strung together, the set of half-truths along with the truths that go there—is contrasted with the very personal, allusive style of the old interior monologue" ("An Interview with Nadine Gordimer," pp. 265-266). The author adds that "In Burger's Daughter there are two things going—Rosa's conscious analysis, her reasoning approach to her life and to this country, and then there is my exploration as a writer of what she doesn't know

even when she thinks she's finding out" ("An Interview with Nadine Gordimer," p. 266).

[3]Gordimer, Burger's Daughter, p. 126.

[4]Gordimer, Occasion for Loving, p. 256.

[5]Gordimer, A World of Strangers, pp. 173-174.

[6]The total dependency on the pass document of the black man's identity in South Africa is best pointed to by Gordimer herself: "... the pass document is not a book of simple identification but a hateful possession that must be cherished because one cannot live without it." Nadine Gordimer, "Writers in South Africa: The New Black Poets," in Exile and Tradition: Studies in African and Caribbean Literature, ed. Rowland Smith (London: Longman, 1976), pp. 137-138.

[7]Notably, Gordimer endorses the importance of the black-consciousness movement. She asserts that it is historically necessary, though she personally regrets the distancing of whites from blacks which it entails. Reporting the interview in which the author makes these observations, Anne Collins comments "Gordimer is not a liberal seeking the solution to racism and apartheid in some sort of moral sea change in the hearts of white South Africans. She does not believe that whites can 'give' blacks a just society. In the fifties and sixties she did think that she could do something as a white person in the struggle, but South Africa has changed: 'There was so much more contact then between people like myself and blacks in politics than there is now. The estrangement started even before the Soweto riots [when it became a matter of principle for blacks to sever their ties with white sympathizers]. (It really began at the beginning of the seventies with the growth of the black consciousness movement. You see, I'm just thinking now of this old friend of mine I saw on Sunday. There was so much I had to ask him about, so much about the feeling, the mood of blacks, with which I was not au courant. In the fifties I would have known because I would have been part of whatever was evolving. But I can only regret this change from a personal point of view. I think that from a historical point of view and from the point of view of the blacks and their necessity to liberate themselves, it's a good thing. So whites must accept it.'" Quoted from Anne Collins, "South African Journal," City Woman, Winter 1982, p. 23.

CHAPTER 5

LIVING IN THE PRESENT: INDIVIDUALISM AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

In most of her works Gordimer consistently shows that, in South Africa, the present is full of suffering for the majority of the country's people. It is this suffering which she portrays the committed, in Burger's Daughter, as having sought to remove. But the attempt mainly brings about their own suffering. Gordimer also makes it clear that, for any white South African, enjoying an uncommitted existence inescapably involves closing his eyes to the misery of the majority. Ultimately, that kind of individualism becomes morally untenable. The individual who does not succumb to the dehumanizing condition of moral insensitivity is inevitably faced with the problems of guilt and complicity.

In Burger's Daughter, when Rosa tries to escape the self-denying ethics of living for the future, she finds that there is only one alternative available: a life of material ease and total disregard for the misery that ensures it. It is her realization of this dilemma that catalyses the decision to leave South Africa, and enables her to appreciate the nobility of her parents' commitment

and high sense of social responsibility.

To Rosa, the scene in which a black man whips a helpless donkey symbolizes evil in all its forms, the evil that the committed seek to remove. Her inability to know how to react to the scene is yet one more indication of her dilemma, the dilemma of being white, ordinary, and living in the present, in South Africa.

Not surprisingly, Rosa's sense of futility is brought to a head by this scene, which precipitates her trip to Europe. The immediate forms of evil this scene symbolizes to her are human cruelty and suffering. Rosa instantly sees the irony in the scene. The black man, who is here the perpetrator of cruelty, is himself a helpless victim of the atrocities inflicted upon him by the white regime in the country. After describing her initial view of the scene, as she drives home from Flora Donaldson's house, Rosa comments:

> I didn't see the whip. I saw agony. Agony that came from some terrible centre seized within the group of donkey, cart, driver and people behind him. They made a single object that contracted against itself in the desperation of a hideous final energy. Not seeing the whip, I saw the infliction of pain broken away from the will that creates it; broken loose, a force existing of itself, ravishment without the ravisher, torture without the torturer, rampage, pure cruelty gone beyond the control of the humans who have spent thousands of years devising it. The entire ingenuity from thumbscrew and rack to electric shock, the infinite variety and gradation of suffering, by lash, by fear, by hunger, by solitary confinement—the camps, concentration, labour, resettlement,

> the Siberias of snow or sun, the lives of Mandela, Sisulu, Mbeki, Kathrada, Kgosana, gull-picked on the Island, Lionel propped wasting to his skull between two warders, the deaths by questioning, bodies fallen from the height of John Vorster Square, deaths by dehydration, babies degutted by enteritis in 'places' of banishment, the lights beating all night on the faces of those in cells.[1]

Making the terrible significance of the scene poignant is the fact that the donkey did not even cry out in pain. It is with intense horror that Rosa notes the animal's inability to evince that normal reaction to suffering: "Why didn't the donkey give that bestial snort and squeal of excruciation I've heard donkeys give not in pain but in rut?" (p. 208). Then she realizes that, having suffered too much, pain has become its only reality, its inverted normal order of things: "It didn't cry out. It had been beaten and beaten. Pain was no shock, there is no way out of the shafts" (p. 208).

The wizened and impoverished image of the man inflicting the pain compounds the situation. It evokes a sense of his own suffering, and unites him with his victim in a paradoxical bond of existential pain. Rosa empathizes with the suffering so acutely that she reacts physically to it:

> That rag of a black man was old, from the stance of his legs, the scraggle of beard showing under an old hat in a shapeless cone over his face. I rolled to a stop beyond what I saw; the car simply

> fell away from the pressure of my foot and carried me no further. I sat there with my head turned sharply and my shoulder hunched round my neck, huddled to my ears against the blows. And then I put my foot down and drove on wavering drunkenly about the road, pausing to gaze back while the beating still went on, the force there, cart, terrified woman and child, the donkey and man, bucked and bolted zigzag under the whip.
> (pp. 108-109).

Because of her racial consciousness, Rosa fails to stop the black man from beating the donkey; she shies away from playing the role of the white mythus whom the black man would, out of fear, obey: "I had only to turn the car in the empty road and drive up upon that mad frieze against the sunset putting out my eyes .... I had only to career down on that scene with my car and my white authority" (p. 209). The repetition, here, effectively acts out the certainty and absoluteness of that authority. But Rosa concludes that by exercising it, with its predictable effect, she and the black man would be re-enacting the very scene she sought to stop:

> I could have yelled before I even got out, yelled to stop!—and then there I would have been standing, inescapable, fury and right, might, before them, the frightened woman and child and the drunk, brutal man, with my knowledge of how to deliver them over to the police, to have him prosecuted as he deserved and should be, to take away from him the poor suffering possession he maltreated. I could formulate everything they were, as the act I had witnessed; they would have their lives summed up for them officially at last by me, the white woman—the final meaning of a day they had lived I had no knowledge of, a day of

> other appalling things, violence, disasters, urgencies, deprivations which suddenly would become, was nothing but what it had led up to: the man among them beating their donkey. I could have put a stop to it, the misery; at that point I witnessed. What more can one do? That sort of old man, those people, peasants existing the only way they know how, in the 'place' that isn't on the map, they would have been afraid of me. I could have put a stop to it, with them, at no risk to myself. No one would have taken up a stone. I was safe from the whip. I could have stood between them and suffering—the suffering of a donkey.
>
> As soon as I planted myself in front of them it would have become again just that—the pain of a donkey.
>
> (p. 209)

But by not intervening in the situation, Rosa gets trapped in tolerating the continuance of suffering, hence becoming morally guilty too. Appropriately enough, the dilemma causes her to wonder about where, when and how she, as an individual, can meaningfully assist in the alleviation of misery. The problems her parents tried to solve are so complex that whatever she may do—either to assist or detach herself from the deprived—has negative implications. Significantly, Rosa prefaces her examination of the dilemma with a reference to another image of misery, one with which she has personal connection: "I drove on. I don't know at what point to intercede makes sense for me. Every week the woman who comes to clean my flat and wash my clothes brings a child whose make-believe is polishing floors and doing washing" (pp. 209-210). By providing this woman with the menial job, she gets caught

in another trap: she enables her to earn a living, but also perpetuates the image of privileged missus and underprivileged servant. The negative image is accentuated by the little child's identification with her mother's job. Having known nothing better, like the donkey and its pain, her mother's menial form of existence is the child's only reality; it is her inverted normal order of things. When she returns her focus to the black man, Rosa enlarges on her feelings of entrapment caused by the dilemma:

> I drove on because the horrible drunk was black, poor and brutalized. If somebody's going to be brought to account, I am accountable for him, to him, as he is for the donkey. Yet the suffering —while I saw it it was the sum of suffering to me. I didn't do anything. I let him beat the donkey. The man was a black. So a kind of vanity counted for more than feeling; I couldn't bear to see myself—her—Rosa Burger—as one of those whites who care more for animals than people. Since I've been free, I'm free to become one.
> (pp. 209-210)

It is in keeping with this new-found freedom that Rosa uses the passport she has received from the establishment and goes to Europe. This freedom is also manifested in the very act of getting the passport from the system itself, something of which her parents and the faithful would strongly disapprove:

> I went without saying goodbye to Marisa .... If someone did report I'd been at a public meeting with a possible political intention,

> there were no consequences. Nothing and
> nobody stopped me from using that passport.
> After the donkey I couldn't stop myself..
> I don't know how to live in Lionel's country.
> (p. 210)

It is a similar sense of not knowing how to live as an individual in South Africa that precipitates Helen's decision to go to Europe in The Lying Days. But as noted earlier, she realizes that escapism is not a solution to the problem. Hence she resolves to return to her country of birth. Rosa too returns to South Africa after her visit in Europe. It is interesting that Helen's initial decision to break with her country is also punctuated by an incident of symbolic significance. Her break with South Africa is synonymous with her separation from Paul. And the final moment of this separation occurs when she is reminded of her first encounter with him by the rabbit toy Paul brought the day she first saw him. This toy reminds her of an idyllic moment, and the world which that moment brought about for her; by juxtaposition she also remembers the unreality of that idealised world. In the end she is able to apprehend the contrast between the idyllic past and the harsh present.

For both Helen and Rosa, the trip to Europe symbolizes an attempt to re-orient a much troubled sense of self. In Rosa's case it is not only the trip that has this kind of significance; but, as already observed, also the very act of getting a passport from the system her father

fought against. By getting the passport, something other people of her kind would not consider doing, Rosa feels that she is at last asserting her own individuality. The author makes this clear during one of Rosa's interviews with the influential Brandt Vermeulen, among other instances. This is when the heroine explains her present reason for wanting to have a passport. She first mentions that once, when her mother and father were alive, she unsuccessfully tried to get one. Answering Brandt's question about her present need for a passport,

> She seemed to reiterate, simply: —I want to know somewhere else.—But following the reference to Lionel Burger and his wife, he saw that the statement was different; besides, he had heard 'know' instead of 'go': I want to know somewhere else. The mother, the father, their destination, here or anywhere, did not have to be hers. He took a soothing, encouraging tone of one who can agree warmly with a move that has nothing to do with him.—Well, why not—naturally—of course.— (p. 185)

When she asks him: "D'you think you can help me?", the author reveals his unease: "he did not know how to get back onto the plane of soothing empathy without responsibility. She hadn't even given him the conditional 'could'; it was as good as stated: you can help me. More, coming from her: I'm ready to let you" (p. 185).

While in Europe, Rosa witnesses what is impossible in her native land: uncompromised individual freedom. Here, she sees people living unpretentious individual lives, and

enjoying free and spontaneous human contact. It is this kind of individualism Toby Hood, in A World of Strangers, is seen to bring with him from England to South Africa.[2] But the author shows that the South African political environment is not congenial to the exercising of the freedom of association that goes together with his individualism.

Toby's apolitical individualism is partly a rebellion against his politically-conscious parents, and partly a result of genuine belief in the sanctity of the individual. According to him, his mother and father belonged to the British generation which, after the First World War, repudiated and despised the old imperial order. But Toby, being alienated from their anti-establishment stance, identifies more with his grandfather, a member of the despised old guard and a Boer-War hero. He values his personal connection with the old man, and the fact that, in the Boer War, he was on the side of the British.

On the primarily personal level, Toby says he wants to face life using his own power of choice in determining whom to associate with and what to believe in. When he was about to leave England for South Africa, his mother and her friends attempted to give his business trip an added political purpose. They wanted him to get in touch with their political contacts, study the situation in the country and send them information about it. Referring to his refusal to oblige them, he says:

> I told them all that I would be going to Africa as a publisher's agent, to visit bookshops and promote the sale of books. I didn't want to investigate anything; I didn't want to send newsletters home.
>
> I had no intention of becoming what they saw me as, what they, in their own particular brand of salaciousness, envied me the opportunity to become—a voyeur of the world's ills and social perversions. I felt, as I had so often before, an hostility, irritation and resentment that made me want to shout, ridiculously: 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. I want to live! And to hell with you all![3]

Being firmly apolitical, Toby Hood believes in the individual's fighting his own battles to his own personal satisfaction; he believes in being alive to life, rather than in being buried in "the abstractions of race and politics" which may simply end in getting the individual arrested and silenced. Personal affirmation is what matters to Toby.

But one thing Toby does not fully take into account is the fact that the political environment in South Africa compromises and obstructs the realization of this kind of individualism. And his idea of personal choice and affirmation is virtually legislated against. Consequently, as Anna Louw tells him, people in the country have fixed ways of dealing with themselves and each other; they do not readily express their inner feelings, particularly to people they do not know very well, and to those of other

races. Then making specific reference to the people with power, she says: whites in the country are lonely because they "lack a common human identity" (p. 75). While they may not necessarily be in danger, they are always afraid. Theirs is "The loneliness of a powerful minority" (p. 75).

There is no doubt that, despite the hostility of the environment, Toby remains true to his principles. He goes wherever he chooses, and associates with whomever he pleases. In fact, he cherishes his freedom and independence to the point of selfishness. While in South Africa he is a man in the middle of two worlds, neither of which claims him. He seeks the best of both worlds—black and white—and makes sure not to compromise his position in either of them. His decision not to tell Cecil, his white girlfriend, about the blacks he associates himself with is a case in point. Toby also never mentions to his black friends the suburban white crowd he hobnobs with at the Alexanders' High House. Commenting on the fact that outside their relationship Cecil and he have private lives best left unknown to each other, he says:

> I had another life, outside the parenthesis of the time I spent with her; she, too had hers. Each tacitly forwent inquiry into that of the other, because each suspected that the discovery of his own life by the other would make the parenthetic shared relationship impossible. I heard her say, to some people with whom we were having coffee after a cinema, "Toby does a lot of work among the natives." Later, when we were alone, I asked her, "What made you tell the

> Howards that I do a lot of 'work' among natives?" "Well, don't you?" she said, yawning. "I never have," I said. She let it drop; she assumed that anyone who had anything to do with Africans was concerned with charity or uplift, and that was that—she wasn't going to quibble over what she satisfied herself could only be a matter of definition. And I, I left it at that, too. I had had my little flirt with danger by questioning her at all; thankfully, I hadn't had to take it any further.
>
> For I knew that if I told Cecil that my closest friends in Johannesburg were black men, and that I ate with them and slept in their houses, I would lose her. That was the fact of the matter. And I was damned if I was going to lose her.
>
> (p. 155)

Through his middle-of-the-road position, Toby feels at home in a country which is foreign to him; yet the people to whom South Africa is home are strangers to each other.

Toby's individualism has a selfish dimension because while he believes in free association with people, he does not believe in being committed to anyone.[4] This neatly reflects his rejection of political commitment. But during his stay in the country he undergoes a process of re-education. This is particularly the case with regard to the nature of personal connection with others. His close association with Sitole is one of the most important aspects of that process. The intensity with which Sitole's sudden death, in a car accident, disturbs him testifies to his having been personally attached to the man. And this attachment is something he would have hesitated to admit consciously. The casual attitude of Sitole's black "friends" disturbs Toby deeply. Being admirers of the

dead man for his defiant and reckless life they lightheartedly drink to his health "as if his death were another, and the craziest of his exploits." (p. 245). Commenting on the frightening nature of this attitude he acknowledges the genuineness of his own love for him: "Something in their faces when they drank to him made me shudder inwardly; I had only loved him as a man" (p. 245).

The re-educative significance of Steven Sitole's death is more dramatically demonstrated by Toby's immediate withdrawal from the self-indulgent world of his white associates at the Alexanders' High House and subsequent attachment to the family of a black man he had met through his dead friend. The personal connection he establishes with this family enables him to reassemble his identity, long fragmented by the demands of his individualistic pursuit of pleasures in mutually-exclusive camps of a divided society:

> I had not been to the Alexanders' for weeks. I couldn't go there any more, that was all. Steven's death had provided a check, a pause, when the strain of the kind of life I had been living for months broke in upon me. While I had kept going, simply carried along, I had not consciously been aware of the enormous strain of such a way of life, where one set of loyalties and interests made claims in direct conflict with another set, equally strong; where not only did I have to keep my friends physically apart, but could not even speak to one group about the others. I went to Sam's house because there I could sit in silence, the silence of my confusion, and they would not question me.
>
> (p. 246)

Not surprisingly, Toby's original love for an uncommitted kind of life manifests itself again once it occurs to him that his association with Sam and his family might be the beginning of commitment itself. Although he fears the possibility of this being the case he does not repudiate the value of commitment to others. And he implicitly acknowledges the emptiness of the type of existence he has clung to for so long:

> Was I with them, or were they a refuge? Could I give them up? Surrender them and accept the whisky and the jokes round the swimming-pool? Why was it not as simple as giving up The High House?
>
> Within, I started in panic. Suppose theirs—Sam's and Ella's faces—were to be the casual face of destiny that I had known would claim me some day, the innocent unsuspecting involvement to which I would find I had committed myself, nailed the tail on the donkey with my eyes shut, and from which my life would never get free again? Like a neurotic struggling against a cure, I hugged to myself the aimless freedom that had hung about my neck so long. Suppose, when I went back to England, I should find that, for me, reality was left behind in Johannesburg? (p. 246)

Despite the fear, panic and uncertainty Toby finally comes to realize that there is more to human existence than just the pursuit of pure individualism; this, more so in South Africa than anywhere else. Rosa, in Burger's Daughter, attains to a similar kind of realization long before she decides to go to Europe. It is this realization that makes her identity problem very complex.

Throughout the novel Gordimer presents Rosa as gradually recognizing two crucial facts: as much as the self-denying ethics of living for the future are unsatisfactory, so too there is something wrong with satisfying individual pursuits in total disregard of the misery that ensures them. One of the most significant instances of this recognition occurs when the heroine contrasts the politically troubled nature of her family with the ordered and privileged life of conventional whites. She points to the whites she saw on her aunt's farm as case in point. Appropriately enough, these are people she saw when she was there while her parents were in prison. Focusing on her uncle's particular perspective, she notes his complacent sense of material security and stability:

> For the man who had married my father's sister the farm 'Vergenoegd' was God's bounty that was hers by inheritance, mortgage, land, bank loan, and the fruitfulness he made of it, the hotel was his by the sign painted over the entrance naming him as licencee, the bottle store was his by the extension of that licence to off-sales. His sons would inherit by equally unquestioned right; the little boy who played with Tony would make flourish the tobacco, the pyrethrum—whatever the world thinks it needs and will pay for—Noel de Witt would never allow himself to grow.
>
> (p. 72)

The reference to Noel immediately calls to mind the faithful and their self-denying commitment to the future. Rosa focuses on the revolutionaries more closely by noting

the irony that her relatives on the farm already had what her parents and their associates were fighting for: "Peace. Land. Bread" (p. 73). To compound the irony, she observes the fact that her name has conflicting claims on her. One half of it aligns her with Rosa Luxemburg, the other identifies her with her long dead grandmother, Marie Burger. And it is this grandmother's land that her aunt inherited; it is the land on which the uncle evinces a sense of material security and stability. Curiously enough, Rosa observes, while her father often championed her revolutionary namesake, both parents were significantly reticent on the reactionary connection of the name:

> They never told me of it. My father often quoted that other Rosa; although he had no choice but to act the Leninist role of the dominant professional revolutionary, he believed that her faith in elemental mass movement was the ideal approach in a country where the mass of the people were black and the revolutionary elite disproportionately white. But my double given name contained also the claim of MARIE BURGER and her descendants to that order of life, secure in the sanctions of family, church, law—and all these contained in the ultimate sanctions of colour, that was maintained without question on the domain, dorp and farm, where she lay. Peace. Land. Bread. They had these for themselves.
>
> (pp. 72-73)

Rosa then hastens to neutralize any suggestion of longing for this order, security and stability. She immediately becomes cynical and critical of the assumptions of the conventional white family, assumptions which make it fail

to see the suffering of others:

> Even animals have the instinct to turn from suffering. The sense to run away. Perhaps it was an illness not to be able to live one's life the way they [Marie Burger's other descendants] did ... with justice defined in terms of respect for property, innocence defended in their children's privileges, love in their procreation, and care only for each other. A sickness not to be able to ignore that condition of a healthy, ordinary life: other people's suffering.
>
> (p. 73)

The sarcasm sharpens the cutting edge of the critique. And it is noteworthy that Gordimer herself gives authorial validation to this critique. She does so in one instance, among others, of artistic subtlety and craftsmanship. Through juxtaposition of disparate but parallel realities, the author places the order enjoyed by the whites at the farm in its context of black misery. The occasion is the same one used by Rosa. In her own narrative voice, Gordimer describes the life that surrounded Rosa at the farm and makes her points by implication. With every aspect of white privilege she presents its parallel of black deprivation:

> Five weeks after she and her brother had been sent away Rosa sat on Daniel's box while he was busy serving the people who filled the verandah tables from mid-morning on a Saturday. A party of schoolgirls voluptuous in track suits jounced down the main street on their way from a sports meeting. Black women selling mealies sat with babies crawling from under the coloured towels

> they wore as shawls. Farmers whose hats hid their eyes waited for wives and children who trailed and darted in and out of shops, sucking sweets and clutching parcels. Black children coming up behind humble parents were in rags or running barefoot, bundled from above the knees in school uniforms that could be afforded only once in years, so that small boys were tiny within vast clothing and big boys wore burst and almost unrecognizable versions of the same. Young white bloods revved dust under their wheels, car radios streaming snatches of music. Black youths in token imitation of this style—a bicycle with racing handles, a transistor on a shoulder-strap, or merely a certain way of lounging against the pillars of the Greek fish-and-chip shop opposite the hotel—occasionally crossed, making the cars avoid them, to pick up cigarette butts thrown away by the hotel drinkers on the stoep.
>
> (p. 60)

Gordimer concludes the description with a direct reference to the committed, a people whose high sense of social responsibility caused them to seek the removal of this imbalance of white privilege and black deprivation. The shift in focus immediately highlights the contrast between the complacent ease of the white world on the farm and the troubled nature of the revolutionaries' existence, one with constant political persecution as its inverted form of order:

> All this ordered life surrounded, coated, swaddled Rosa; the order of Saturday, the order of family hierarchy, the order of black people out in the street and white people in the shade of the hotel stoep. Its flow contained her, drumming her bare heels on Daniel's box, its voices over her head protected her. Her aunt with the confidential, comedian's smile of a woman with a long prominent jaw was

> suddenly above her.—Guess what? Mommy's coming to fetch you.—...
>
> —And Daddy?—
> —Not just yet, Rosa—
> Charges against her mother had been withdrawn.
> (p. 61)

The author adds that Rosa's father was later released on bail before the long trial, which ended with the court quashing "the indictment against him and sixty other accused out of the ninety-one committed for trial" (p. 61). Such luck was later to run out; his conflict with the system was to culminate in the fatal life imprisonment.

The strong sense of social justice which motivated Lionel Burger's commitment is conspicuously absent from the white world on the farm. Indeed, the whites here are seen as completely lacking human interest in the poverty-ridden blacks around them.

This lack of human interest in the blacks is emphasized by the fact that even among the whites themselves there is virtually no genuine fellow-feeling; connection with each other begins and stops with the sense of duty as defined by blood ties or racial affinity. Hence Lionel Burger's relatives could still come to witness the ending of his last and fateful trial, despite their intense loathing of his political life. In Rosa's words: "[that life] was like an illness no one mentioned, among my father's relatives with whom we stayed when we were little" (p. 71). To stress the disease analogy, she adds:

"An illness that proved fatal: they came to pay their respects when they sat, my aunt and uncle, the good and kind Coen Nels, beside me to hear the life sentence pronounced" (p. 71).

The limited nature of human contact among the conventional whites occurs to Rosa for the first time when she registers the contrast between her deep personal connection with the little black boy Baasie and its shallow equivalent on the farm:

> Tony was so happy helping to cook bricks in a serious mud-pie game with the farm labourers who called him 'little master' (although that was Baasie's name) and playing with half-naked black children who were left behind when he and cousin Kobus run into the farmhouse for milk and cake. I understood quite quickly that Baasie, with whom I lived in that house, couldn't have come here; I understood what Lily meant when she had said he wouldn't like to. I forgot Baasie. It was easy. No one here had a friend, brother, bed-mate, sharer of mother and father like him. Those who owed love and care to each other could be identified by simple rule of family resemblance, from the elders enfeebled by vast flesh or wasting to the infant lying creased in the newly-married couple's pram. I saw it every Saturday, this human family defined by white skin. In the Church to which my aunt drove us on Sunday morning, children clean and pretty, we sat among the white neighbours from farms round about and from the dorp, to whom the predikant said we must do as we would be done by.
>
> (p. 71)

The racial exclusiveness of the church, as indeed of everything else, exposes the hollowness of the predikant's teaching. And the hollowness is accentuated by the fact

that, even among themselves, the whites are to do to others as they "would be done by" out of tribal loyalty, and not mutual affection.

This absence of real personal contact both within and across the racial boundaries makes Rosa realize that a genuine human dimension existed in her parents' world. The realization makes her attitude toward the parents even more complex. While she bitterly criticizes them for sacrificing personal considerations for political ones, Rosa also firmly believes in the nobility of their commitment. She unwaveringly acknowledges that the commitment was based on real concern for the deprived and the suffering. It is only that their method of confronting the problems proved to be costly to their own individual lives.

These conflicting attitudes complicate Rosa's problem of identity. The recognition of her parents' nobility causes in her feelings of personal inadequacy. She sees herself as not capable of measuring up to it. These feelings parallel those of resentment for having not been given a choice in the determining of her identity and destiny.

The complexity of Rosa's attitude toward her parents is evident in one instance, among others, where she contrasts Conrad's escapism with Lionel's revolutionary commitment. She begins by commenting on Conrad's attempt to flee South Africa by means of a home-made boat:

> Only the dove could find you, that's the idea. No claims from the world reach the ark. While you are fleeing, brave young people welcomed by the local newspaper in each foreign port, you scrub the decks in absolution and eat the bread of an innocence you can't assume. Lionel would have explained why. If I do, you will say it's because I'm his daughter, mouthing that spinning wheels and the bran-and-whole-wheat you used to bake in the cottage cannot restore some imaginary paradise of pre-capitalist production.
>
> (p. 130)

When she proceeds to mention Lionel's commitment, she defensively presents him as presumptuous in his taking on a task larger than himself. But this presentation does not detract from her implied awe at the man's formidable courage at assuming such a task. This sense of awe contrasts sharply with the sneering tone she adopts in her depiction of Conrad's escapism. Furthermore, the different public responses to the date of Lionel's death reveal more about the mentalities of the respondents than they reflect on his personal stature and integrity.

> People won't let Lionel die; or his assumption—of knowledge, responsibility shouldered staggeringly to the point of arrogance—won't die with him and let them alone. But the faithful don't commemorate the date of his death, they don't have to; sentiment is for those who don't know what to do next. Flora sends me Spanish irises on William's account at a florist. The man who is writing the biography phones to ask whether I would prefer to change our today's appointment for another day?
>
> (p. 130)

While the attitude of the faithful is typical of their disregard for personal expression of emotion, Flora's gesture exemplifies social and routinized forms of expressing private feeling. The card Rosa receives from her aunt is another of such forms. Indeed this card gains added significance when Rosa presents it as a symbol of the mundane middle-class sense of order and certainty, which implicitly contrasts with Lionel's nebulous and yet noble vision of the future:

> I didn't know one could buy cards for the anniversary of deaths—deckle-edged, gilded, poised, that's certainly the sort of thing you're safe from, cut adrift: the ordering of appropriate responses for all occasions, what you used to call 'consumer love', Conrad. I read the signature first; someone had signed for both: 'Uncle Coen and Auntie Velma' but the correspondent was clearly Auntie Velma alone. She was firmly confident as ever in her concept of feeling towards me, the last of her brother's family. I am always welcome at the farm if I want a quiet rest. She does not ask from what activity, she does not want to know in case it is, as her brother's always was, something she fears and disapproves to the point of inconceivability. It's better that way. She offers neither expectations nor reproach. 'The farm is always there.' She believes that: for ever. The future—it's the same as now. It will be occupied by her children, that's all. Maybe there'll be some improvements; change in automation in the milking sheds, and television, promised soon.
>
> (p. 131)

And most striking is the aunt's ambiguous attitude toward Lionel; mixed with the intense fear and disapproval of his activities is a proud identification with his greatness.

Exemplifying the latter aspect of the attitude is, as Rosa observes, the aunt's attribution of her own daughter's supposed intelligence to the Burger side of the family:

> My cousin, fellow namesake of Ouma Marie Burger, is seeing the world at present. She has a job with the citrus export board and has been sent to the Paris office—isn't that nice? She had to learn French and picked it up very quickly—she has the 'Burger brains of course'. What Aunt Velma has in mind there is quite simply my father. The Nels have never had any difficulty in reconciling pride in belonging to a remarkable family with the certainty that the member who made it so followed wicked and horrifying ideals. Even Uncle Coen is pleased to be known as Lionel Burger's brother-in-law. Whatever my father was to them, it still stalks their consciousness.
>
> (p. 131)

The visit to Fats' house occasions one of Rosa's most eloquent acknowledgements of her parents' high sense of social responsibility and justice and of their genuine belief in human fellowship. A detailed portrait of location life forms the appropriate context for the acknowledgement. As she describes Fats' pathetic emulation of white, middle-class taste in the midst of slum existence, Rosa states that her parents' ideals were based on real knowledge of black misery. They knew the locations and did not base the ideals on mere theoretical notions of the situation. She too owed her familiarity with the problem to personal contact with blacks, a direct result of her being Lionel Burger's daughter:

> The little house into which we were crowded, family relatives, friends and furniture—familiarity placed it for me without thinking, the bigger type of standard two-roomed township house, three rooms and a kitchen, for which people have to be able to afford (Fats I remembered was a boxing promoter) a bribe to an official. The dining-room 'suit', the plastic pouffes, hi-fi equipment, flowered carpet, bar counter, and stools covered in teddy-bear fur were the units of taste established by any furniture superama in the white city.
>
> (p. 150)

This emulation is immediately revelatory of the confinement and deprivation it seeks to elude, yet so much a part of its own character and squalid environment:

> The crowding of one tiny habitation with a job-lot whose desirability is based on a consumer-class idea of luxury without the possibility of middle class space and privacy; the lavish whisky on the table and the pot-holed, unmade street outside the window; the sense all around of the drab imposed orderliness of a military camp that is not challenged by the home-improvement peach trees and licks of pastel paint but only by the swarming pestilence of children and drunks dirtying it, tsotsis, urchins and gangsters terrorizing it—this commonplace of any black township became to me what it is: a 'place'; a position whose contradictions those who impose them don't see, and from which will come a resolution they haven't provided for. The propositions of the faithful that seem so vital to biographical research—I understood them in a way theory doesn't explain, in a way I was deaf to earlier in the afternoon when I was being questioned by my father's biographer. The debate that divided my parents and their associates in a passion whose reality you [Conrad] regard as abstraction far removed from reality; it was based on the fact that they did see. They had always seen. And they believe—Dick and Ivy—they know the resolution and how it will be. Clare still believes; if Lionel lived, if he were to have come out of prison to answer—

> But I can't bring Lionel into being for myself, I can't hear responses I ought, on the evidence of biographical data, to be able to predict. After a year there are new components, now that I have taken apart the whole. I'll never be able to ask my mother, reading her book in the car and hearing my footsteps on the prison gravel, my father opening his arms to Baasie and me in the water, the things I defy them to answer me.
>
> (pp. 150-151)

This juxtaposition of conflicting attitudes toward her parents is yet another indication of the complexity of Rosa's situation. By acknowledging that the parents really saw and knew the hard reality upon which their revolutionary convictions were based, she absolves them from any accusation of political charlatanism. But her sense of having been left with unanswered questions suggests resentment at having been given an identity which entails responsibilities that are too large for her to understand or handle. Rosa makes it clear that personal experience, after the loss of her parents, has contributed to the dislocation of her sense of self. But the experience has never shaken her faith in the integrity of the parents and their associates.

Rosa's emphatic assertion that her parents and their associates had established genuine human contact among themselves, black and white together, is a testament to her unfaltering faith in their integrity. Central to her problem is the fact that the disorienting experience has caused her to lose connection with the sense of

self which was rooted in her parents' world. Conrad's critique of that world is among the sources of the disorientation. Addressing him, Rosa says: "Whatever I was before, you confused me. In the cottage you told me that in that house people didn't know each other; you've proved it to me in what I have found since in places you haven't been, although you are exploring the world" (p. 171). She then immediately dismisses Conrad's presumption about the lack of human contact among the people in Lionel's house:

> But there are things you didn't know; or, to turn your criteria back on yourself, you knew only in the abstract, in the public and impersonal act of reading about them or seeking information, like a white journalist professionally objective and knowledgeable on the 'subject' of a 'black exploiting class'. The creed of that house discounted the Conrad kind of individualism, but in practice discovered and worked out another. This was happening at the interminable meetings and study groups that were the golf matches and club dinners of my father's kind. It was what was wrested from the purges when they denounced and expelled each other for revisionism or lack of discipline or insufficient zeal. It was something they managed to create for themselves even while Comintern agents were sent out to report on their activities and sometimes to destroy these entirely on orders that caused fresh dissension among them, despair and disaffection. It is something that will roll away into a crevice hidden between Lionel's biographer's analysis of the Theory of Internal Colonialism, the Nature of the New State as a Revolutionary Movement, and the resolution of the Problems of the Post-Rivonia Period—the crystal they secreted for themselves out of dogma.
> (pp. 171-172)

Nowhere is Rosa more categorical in her belief that the ideals of her parents and their associates were rooted in genuine human contact than when she proceeds (still addressing Conrad) to say:

> What would you say if you were me? What is to be done? Lionel and his associates found out; whatever the creed means in all the countries where it is being evolved between the 'polar orthodoxies' of China and the Soviet Union' (the biographer's neat turn of phrase), they made a communism for 'local conditions' in this particular one. It was not declared heretic, although I see it contains a heresy of a kind, from the point of view of an outsider's interpretation. Lionel—my mother and father—people in that house, had a connection with blacks that was completely personal. In this way, their communism was the antithesis of anti-individualism. The connection was something no other whites ever had in quite the same way. A connection without reservations on the part of blacks or whites. The political activities and attitudes of that house came from the inside outwards, and blacks in that house where there was no God felt this embrace before the Cross. At last there was nothing between this skin and that. At last nothing between the white man's word and his deed; spluttering the same water together in the swimming-pool, going to prison after the same indictment: it was a human conspiracy, above all other kinds.
>
> (p. 172)

But with her parents gone, and the human world they held together destroyed, Rosa finds herself rootless in a hostile environment and out of touch with her genial past. In her own words:

> I have lost connection. It's only the memory of childhood warmth for me. Marisa says we must 'stick together'. The Terblanches offer me the chance to steal the key of the photocopying room. What is to be done? Lionel and my mother did not stand before Duma Dhladhla and have him say: I don't think about that.
>
> They had the connection because they believed it possible.
>
> (p. 172)

The reference to the black-consciousness young man illustrates the loss of her parents' world. As already mentioned, this young man represents the repudiation of the inter-racial association that existed in that world. The upsurge of the black-consciousness movement makes the environment even more hostile to Rosa, and accentuates her need to establish a new identity. Her sense of lost connection with her parents' world also catalyses the need for an identity that is independent of that world. Hence her decision to obtain a passport from the very system her parents worked against, and also the decision to travel to Europe just like any other white South African. But even in this traitorous act, her deepest respect is for the people associated with her parents' world, the world she seeks to disown:

> After I had taken the passport, after I'd gone—I don't know what they said: the faithful. They would surely never have believed it of me. Perhaps they got out of believing it by substituting the explanation that I had gone on instructions, after all, instructions so daring and secret not even anyone among themselves would know. So my inactivity for so long would

> present them with a purpose they had always hoped for, for my sake. And by what means I had managed to get papers—that was simply a tribute to the lengths a revolutionary must go. I think about what they must be thinking. Listen to me—Conrad, whatever I may have said to you about them, however they may have seemed to me since I have been free of them, they are the ones who matter.
> (p. 195)

In no other novel has Gordimer depicted the kind of unreserved human connection between blacks and whites Rosa says existed among her parents and their associates.

Gordimer also makes it clear that one other reason why Rosa wishes to dissociate herself from her parents' revolutionary world is her sense of individual inadequacy. The identity, Burger's daughter, implies responsibilities she feels she cannot measure up to. Hence she seeks to disconnect herself from it. That identity necessarily makes her exist in the formidable shadow of her father, thereby accentuating her feelings of personal inadequacy. The author demonstrates this problem through the heroine's association with Katya, Lionel's first wife. She presents Rosa as asserting that she went to Katya, in France, because she saw herself in the older woman; she saw a fellow defector from Lionel and his commitment to the future. The man and his vision were too great for the women, who desired to achieve self-realization in the ordinary present. Even Katya's extra-marital relationship with Dick Terblanche was indicative of the woman's ordinary appetites which had no place in her husband's grand

scheme of things. In Rosa's words, addressed to Katya: "You deceived him because you were not of his calibre; it was your revenge for being lesser, poor girl, you were made fully conscious of your shortcomings by his not even noticing the sort of peccadilloes you'd console yourself with .... What else is there for a woman who won't live for the Future?" (pp. 263 and 223-224). Not to sound patronizing, Rosa proceeds to admit her own sense of inadequacy, which explains her decision to visit Katya: "Anyway, if you were to ask me—I didn't come on some pilgrimage, worshipping or iconoclastic, to learn about my father. There must have been some strong reason, though, why I hit with closed eyes upon this house, this French village" (p. 223). And the reason was to learn, from a fellow defector, how to defect from Lionel and his ethics of living for the future: "I wanted to know how to defect from him. The former Katya has managed to be able to write to me, that he was a great man, and yet decide 'there's a whole world' outside what he lived for, what life with him would have been" (pp. 223-224). Gordimer herself identifies the two women with each other through their connection with Lionel Burger. But she makes it clear that the identification goes beyond their common connection with him as a father to one, and a former husband to the other. It is an identification in failure, failure to reconcile individual and immediate desires with his idealistic scheme of things.

Whenever the author presents Katya talking about her life with Lionel she shows her acknowledging the man's greatness and admitting her own sense of inadequacy. For example, the older woman tells Rosa of the early revolutionary enthusiasm she shared with him and of her later failure to maintain it:

> —We were young, all the ideas were so wonderful. You've heard it all before, god knows. But they were. 'We were going to change the world'. When I tell you even now—I could still begin to tremble, my hands ... you know? And I thought that was going to happen! No more hunger, no more pain. But that is the biggest luxury, ah? I must have been a stupid little creature—I was. Unattainable. Not to be achieved in our lifetime; in Lionel's. He understood that. He was prepared for it, don't ask me how.—But if it should be never? What then? I couldn't wait, I can't wait. I don't want to wait. I've always had to live ... I couldn't give it up.
>
> (p. 247)

Significantly enough, Katya's urge to live in the present has an echo in as early a work as The Lying Days. In this novel, Helen also bases her rejection of waiting on the belief that the individual is too finite to live for the future. She gets more convinced in this view after observing the lack of any indication that the society is going to change in the near future. As a matter of fact, the situation is so desperate that to wait for the future is tantamount to waiting for nothing. Then she concludes that only a cataclysmic eventuality is capable of

overhauling the present state of total futility. But the finite nature of human life cannot accommodate such an eventuality; one which may as well occur after the individual candle of existence has flickered out:

> Then there would be no world. Human beings cannot wait for historical processes, I thought with dismay and anger. Then why must we .... But the cry comes out, a head lifted from the preoccupation of confusion—Wait! Please wait! Paul throws himself more and more violently into a job in which he believes less and less. So where does that lead? Where does that find a future? It has only a now; it cancels itself out.
>
> It cancels itself out!—I was afraid of this thought I had stumbled on. I was appalled at the frame of it in words.
>
> (p. 264)

Importantly enough, it is absolute belief in the feasibility of those historical processes that holds together the commitment to the future of the faithful in Burger's Daughter. But the series of failures the faithful have experienced serves to confirm Helen's view that there is no hope in sight. It also confirms Katya's fears, as well as provide a rationale for Rosa's desire to live in the present.

Nevertheless, shortly after that shattering confrontation with her former black foster brother, Rosa returns to South Africa.[5] After the return, she restates her conviction in the nobility of her parents and their associates, a nobility she has admittedly failed to measure

up to by attempting to be an ordinary person. Addressing herself to her father, she says:

> It isn't Baasie—Zwel-in-zima, I must get the stress right—who sent me back here. You won't believe that. Because I'm living like anyone else, and he was the one who said who was I to think we could be different from any other whites. Like anyone else; but the idea started with Brandt Vermeulen. You and my mother and the faithful never limited yourselves to being like anyone else.
>
> (p. 332)

Clearly it is the confrontation with Baasie that sends Rosa back to South Africa. She is humiliated by the role of a guilty white which she plays against his of an embittered black man. Although she attempts to live like an ordinary person, she never imagined that she could be reduced to playing that conventional role. She believes that by virtue of her unique upbringing and training she ought to have understood Baasie's bitterness well enough not to have reacted the way she did. In distress she addresses herself to her father. After referring to a quotation written by him on the possibility of a racially-oriented revolutionary struggle, she says:

> Your biographer quoted that to me for confirmation of a faithful reflection of the point of view. Then why be so — disintegrated, yes; I dissolved in what I heard from him, the acid. Why so humiliated because I had — automatically, not thinking — bobbed up to him with the convention of affection, of casual meetings

> exchanged with the Grosbois, Bobby, Georges and Manolis, Didier — a rubbing of noses brought back from a trip to see Eskimos. What did that matter?
>
> (p. 329)

Admittedly, her casual approach to Baasie had trivialized the deeper childhood connection between them, a connection that transcended the conventional relationship of mere brother and sister. But above all, most negating of that human connection are the antagonistic roles of black and white they play out against each other. Recollecting one of the insulting statements she had hurled at him, Rosa says:

> Is it money you want?
> But those five words that came back most often presented themselves differently from the way they had been coldly thrust at him to wound, to make venal whatever his commitment is. They came back not as the response to the criminal hold-up, but as the wail of buying off not a threat but herself.
> There's nothing unlikely about meeting a man on holiday whom one comes to love, but such a meeting with Baasie — is difficult to bring about. There was no avoiding it, then? In one night we had succeeded in manoeuvring ourselves into the position their history books back home have ready for us — him bitter; me guilty.
>
> (p. 330)

Emphatic of Rosa's feelings of guilt is the fact that, in re-examining the conversation with Baasie, she primarily focuses on what she said and did. When she occasionally refers to his statements and actions, it is

only to accentuate her remorseful self-criticism:

> What was said has been rearranged a hundred times: all the other things I could have said, substituted for what I did say, or at least what I remember having said. How could I have come out with the things I did? Where were they hiding? I don't suppose you could tell me. Or perhaps if I had grown up at a different time, and could have had an open political education, these things would have been dealt with. I could have been helped. Katya was surely ineducable, in that sense. Our Katya —she exaggerates for effect; I would gladly be censured, by you or the others, for being able to say what I did. 'Unless you want to think being black is the [sic] right.' Repelled by him. Hating him so much! Wanting to be loved! — how I disfigured myself. How filthy and ugly, in the bathroom mirror. Debauched. To make defence of you the occasion for trotting out the holier-than-thou accusation — the final craven defence of the kind of people for whom there is going to be no future. If we'd still been children, I might have been throwing stones at him in a tantrum.
>
> (p. 329)

In addition to criticizing herself for having used an inappropriate occasion for defending her father, and for having made the defence in a manner he would have found reprehensible, Rosa also feels guilty for presumptuously accusing Baasie of escapism, paralleling her apolitical presence overseas with his, the nature of which she does not really know:

> I took my statements (I thought of them that way; I had to answer for them, to myself) one by one, I carried them round with me and saw them by daylight, turned over in my hand while I was sitting at my class, or talking softly on the telephone to Paris. How do I know what it

> is he is doing in London? Maybe he goes illegally in and out of South Africa as his father did, on missions I should know he can't own to. 'This kind of talk sounds better from people who are in the country than people like us.' To taunt him by reminding him that he is thousands of miles away from the bush where I thought he might have died fighting; I! To couple his kind of defection with mine, when back home he's a kaffir carrying a pass and even I could live the life of a white lady. With the help of Brandt, I don't suppose it's too late for that.
>
> (pp. 329-330)

By returning to South Africa, Rosa not only salvages her disintegrated sense of self, but reclaims her political heritage which she has attempted to disown. Her ultimate imprisonment is part of that heritage. Before she is imprisoned Rosa observes that while it is possible to defect from political commitment and social responsibility, no one can escape from mutability and mortality, which comprise the ultimate human condition. She makes this observation as she describes a derelict woman she had met in one of the Paris streets:

> I had met a woman in her nightdress wandering in the street. She was like anyone else: Katya, Gaby, Donna; poor thing, a hamster turning her female treadmill. I remember every detail of that street, could walk it with my eyes shut. My sense of sorority was clear. Nothing can be avoided. Ronald Ferguson, 46, ex-miner, died on the park bench while I was busy minding my own business. No one can defect.
>
> (p. 332)

Then placing the observations in their political context, Rosa says "I don't know the ideology: It's about suffering. How to end suffering. And it ends in suffering. Yes, it's strange to live in a country where there are still heroes. Like anyone else, I do what I can. I am teaching them to walk again, at Baragwanath Hospital. They put one foot before the other" (p. 332). In other words, working at the black hospital is her own contribution to the larger attempt to end suffering, an attempt her parents and their associates dedicated their lives to. This effectually signifies Rosa's acceptance of social responsibility, in whatever form, as crucial to the individual's meaningful existence. The elder Burgers' commitment was the highest form of that responsibility.[6]

Chapter 5

Footnotes

[1]Gordimer, Burger's Daughter, p. 208. All other references are incorporated in the text.

[2]Robert Green wrongly assumes that Gordimer's intention in A World of Strangers is to endorse a liberal ideology of personal self-affirmation: ("Nadine Gordimer's A World of Strangers: Strains in South African Liberalism," English Studies in Africa, vol. 22, no. 1 [March 1979], p. 48). Yet, far from endorsing any ideology, Gordimer shows the impossibility of self-fulfilment in a society where private life is rigidly regulated by race laws.

[3]Gordimer, A World of Strangers, pp. 33-34. All other references are incorporated in the text.

[4]Green mistakenly argues that Gordimer's supposed endorsement of a liberal ethic fails because Toby is not shown to be personally committed to anyone. He points to Toby's inability to get emotionally attached to Cecil and Anna as a case in point, presenting it as a weakness in the author's artistic rendering of the man's character: ("Nadine Gordimer's A World of Strangers: Strains in South African Liberalism," p. 50). Clearly Green misses the point. What he sees as an artistic weakness in the portrait of Toby is a definitive feature of his personal ethics. His failure to forge vital relationships with Cecil and Anna is in keeping with his rejection of commitment in general.

[5]Rosa's return to South Africa is inevitable, judging from Gordimer's comments on the committed nature of her position in society: "... she belongs to a segment of society whose prime motivation is their relationship to society; it's the touchstone of their lives. So that, I suppose, sums up how I see it: that you can't opt out altogether. You are either running away from your inevitable place, or you are taking it on. By place I don't mean a predetermined place; your place depends on the role you take in society. But the fact is that you have a role; there's no such thing as an ivory tower—that's a place in itself. You are consciously or unconsciously creating a position in your society." Quoted in Stephen Gray, "An Interview with Nadine Gordimer," p. 267.

[6] In a recently published interview Gordimer endorses Rosa's affirmation of her parents' political commitment by pointing to the transcendental nature of their aims. She does this as she acknowledges the existence in the novel of a profoundly religious perspective she had been unaware of till one critic pointed it out: "To my astonishment and that of those who knew me, [he], writing of Burger's Daughter, said that it was a profoundly religious book. Yet when I really think about the book, I can see that it could be interpreted that way. At one point in the book, Rosa, who is starting out from under a political interpretation of the meaning of life, finds that this interpretation is not quite adequate to the mystery of life. Yet, in the end, she comes to accept her father's attitude towards life and his ideological political stand because she realizes that political commitment is not only about suffering but that it is actually an attempt to end suffering. When I think about the people in Burger's Daughter, I find that what they're trying to do is reorder society in such a way as to do away with as much suffering as possible. The idea of putting your life on the line, and risking suffering, is not only a political but a traditionally Christian idea: first comes suffering, then redemption .... the central idea of Burger's Daughter is transcendence. And though the characters act on behalf of secular goals, one could certainly see their belief in the cause and their ability to transcend immediate difficulties as religious in nature." Quoted in Robert Boyers, et al., "A Conversation with Nadine Gordimer," Salmagundi, no. 62, Winter 1984, p. 4. In the same interview, Gordimer states the value of the novel to her by referring to the real-life people who inspired her into writing it, celebrating their political commitment in South Africa: "For me it's the only novel of mine that has a purpose outside simply writing it. It is for me a kind of homage to that group of early communists" (p. 17).

CHAPTER 6

ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY

When Rosa Burger tries to escape the self-denying ethics of living for the future, she finds that there is only one alternative available: a life of material ease and total disregard for the misery that ensures it. Her realization of this moral dilemma ultimately enables her to appreciate the nobility of her parents' commitment and high sense of social responsibility in attempting to change the society into a just one. She acknowledges that their efforts were based on real concern for the deprived and the suffering. Rosa's own return to South Africa from Europe indicates her reaffirmation of the parents' commitment and social responsibility.

This chapter is a general one examining the way Gordimer and Head portray their physical environments in relation to their characters. Nature and the physical environment are seen to be constants to which all the characters have to react. Perception of connection with these constants invariably facilitates a character's apprehension of his affinity to others and appreciation of his place in the community of man.

In Gordimer's fiction the neutrality of nature acts as a medium within which the character sees himself in relation to others and not in contrast to them, enhancing his release from the confines of his ego. In Head's work the relationship between a character and his environment is more literal. The Batswana rural life she portrays is so intimately connected with the landscape as to be almost a part of it. What is remarkable is the affection with which Head presents the environment and the life that subsists within it with formidable resilience. It is with a similar expression of affection that she depicts the processes of adaptation and assimilation her characters—mostly black South African exiles—undergo in their new communities. In this depiction she emphatically shows that in order to be affirmed the characters must develop a sense of connection with the land and its people and engage in productive interaction with them. This reflects Head's humanistic values, which ultimately motivate her rejection of politics. She sees politics as being frequently at odds with human fellowship and personal fulfilment. In keeping with this position she celebrates love, ordinariness and simplicity as virtues that preclude the desire to have power over others.

In Gordimer's work set in South Africa there is no equivalent to this celebration of love, ordinariness and simplicity. It is only in the European section of Burger's Daughter that the author portrays a world in

which it is possible to be ordinary, simple and to love without being politically compromised.

It is with remarkable skill that Gordimer, in The Late Bourgeois World, transforms a single moment of separate but common relaxation in the sun, enjoyed by Liz and a group of black working men, into a statement on the supremacy of shared humanity. She portrays Liz as recognizing her identification with the men who are merely lying on the grass in the sun at lunch hour when the heroine is also simply lying on her balcony enjoying the same sun. Registering her consciousness of their presence "on the bit of grass above the pavement opposite," Liz observes: "They were black men with their delivery bicycles, or in working overalls. They lay flung down upon the grass, the legends of firms across their backs. They were drinking beer out of the big red cartons, in the sun. We were all in the sun."[1] The centrality of the sun-basking experience in Liz's feeling of kinship with the black men is implied in her statement: "We were all in the sun." The sun knows no racial, sexual, ethnic or social distinctions between people. In this regard, it is significant that Liz goes on to comment on the neutrality of her identification with the men:

> There is a way of being with people that comes only by not knowing names. If you have no particular need of anyone, you find yourself belonging to a company you hadn't been admitted

> to before; I didn't need anybody because I had these people who like myself, would get up and go away in a little while. Without any reason, I felt very much at home.
>
> In spite of everything.
>
> Their talk went on sporadically, in the cadences I know so well, even if I don't understand the words. It was the hour when all flat-dwellers were at lunch and only they had time to lie on the grass, time that had no label attached to it.
>
> (p. 46)

The selfish, egotistic and utilitarian purposes served by the various categorizations of people have been mentioned earlier. And it is worth noting that, in this passage, Liz refers to the time of repose for her and the black men as "time that had no label attached to it." Also significant is her comment that "There is a way of being with people that comes only by not knowing names." As a label, a name defines a person by differentiating him from other people, thereby obscuring his identification with them in the common family of human beings.

Gordimer reiterates her endorsement of the supremacy of shared humanity in The Lying Days at the point where she presents Helen as suddenly realizing that the black university student, Mary Seswayo, is not just a black girl, but also a human being, a woman like herself. And, like Liz with the men in the sun, Helen achieves her recognition of her shared womanhood with Mary when she is tranquil, amidst nature, out in the countryside. As she sits on the rock, beside Joel, she says:

> Everything seemed to sheer off into the space, the emptiness, my mind drained clear. The steady winter sun hunched my shoulders the way the warmth of a low-burning fire does. Then thoughts began to trickle back, unconnected by logic, but by links that I did not inquire or bother to understand. Mary Seswayo at the wash basin: a tingle of feeling toward her; what?—She is a girl, the discovery came, like me. It was not the rather ridiculous statement of an obvious fact but a real discovery, a kind of momentary dissolving of obvious facts, when the timid, grasping, protesting life of my organism spoke out, and I recognized its counterpart in her, beneath the beret and my kindness and her acceptance.[2]

It is the sudden release from a socially-distorted and egoistic sense of self that enables Helen to apprehend the natural connection between her and Mary, on the one hand, and facilitates Liz's identification with the black men, on the other. It is not accidental that the soothing neutrality of nature acts as a medium within which both experiences occur. For nature has no ego problems, it does not assert or question its identity in contradistinction with others. It just lives out its being with pure freedom and in harmony with itself. By virtually merging themselves with the unselfconscious elements of nature—the sun and the bush—Helen and Liz, are able to become their best selves. Through the tranquillity which they experience, they both establish a kind of vital continuity within themselves, and it is this inner vital continuity that enables them to recognize their connection with others external to themselves. In other words,

once they are liberated from the prejudices and other falsehoods with which society has fed their egos, the two women are able to see themselves in relation to other people and reality, not in opposition or contrast to them.

In literal terms, Gordimer suggests, the character's consciousness of nature's permanence has a humbling effect; it heightens her awareness of her own finite existence. While such an awareness further enhances the character's release from the confines of her ego, it can also overwhelm her with a paralysing sense of personal insignificance and futility if her sense of self has already been dislocated by other factors. Maureen Smales, in July's People, for instance, is presented as continually experiencing this sense of personal insignificance and inadequacy whenever she sees herself in juxtaposition with the natural environment around her. In a moment of solitude she contemplates the confining vastness of nature and space in relation to herself and the area of human habitation in the village:

> Beyond the clearing—the settlement of huts, livestock kraals, and the stumped burned-off patches which were the lands—the buttock-fold in the trees indicated the river and that was the end of measured distance. Like clouds, the savannah bush formed and re-formed under the changes of light, moved or gave the impression of being moved past by the travelling eye; silent and ashy green as mould spread and always spreading, rolling out under the sky before her. There were hundreds of tracks used since ancient migrations (never ended; her

> family's was the latest), not seen. There were people, wavering circles of habitation marked by euphorbia and brush hedges, like this one, fungoid fairy rings on grass—not seen. There were cattle cracking through the undergrowth, and the stillness of wild animals—all not to be seen. Space; so confining in its immensity her children did not know it was there.[3]

Man, his activities, and other forms of animal life are so merged with the environment that they are reduced to a state of virtual anonymity.

In Occasion for Loving Gordimer presents man as not only dwarfed by nature in space, but also in time. This is when she depicts Gideon and Ann walking through the veld around Mapulane's home, where they stop over during their attempt to elope. After describing the village's mud huts which were mostly "a mixture of the sort of habitation a man makes out of the materials provided by his surroundings," the author writes:

> Ann and Gideon could not have been further from the world of ordinary appearances, earth covered with tar, space enclosed in concrete, sky framed in steel, that had made the mould of their association. They walked over the veld and already it seemed that this was as it had always been, before anyone came, before the little Bushmen fled this way up to Rhodesia and the black men spread over the country behind them, before the white men rediscovered the copper that the black men had mined and abandoned—not only as it had been, but as it would be when they were all gone again, yellow, black and white.
>
> They did not speak, as if they were walking on their own graveyard.[4]

Implicit in this passage is the most humbling of all aspects of nature, namely, the eternal law of life and death which reduces all individual living things to ephemeral phenomena.

In The Late Bourgeois World, Gordimer presents Liz as noting the awesome irrevocability of this law more explicitly while she visits her sick grandmother at the nursing home. The heroine observes how, in spite of all life-long material comforts and privileges, the old woman could not escape death. After the senile lady suddenly asks Liz: "What happened?' the young woman comments to herself: "She asks now only the questions that are never answered. I can't tell her, you are going to die, that's all. She's had all the things that have been devised to soften life but there doesn't seem to have been anything done to make death more bearable" (p. 77). The old woman's life-long distancing from the harsh realities of nature is plainly pointed out by Liz in her response to Graham's remark that "It's natural to be afraid of death":

> "Maybe. But she's never had to put up with what's natural. Neither grey hairs nor cold weather. It's true—until two or three years ago, when she became senile she hadn't lived through a winter in fifteen years—she flew from winter in England to the summer here, and from winter here to summer in England. But for this, now, nothing helps."
>
> (pp. 87-88)

Interestingly enough, Liz's comments and attitude reveal as much about the grandmother's failure to accept the irrevocability of death as Liz's own. The heroine's failure to acknowledge death in the old woman's presence is emphasized by her sense of personal revulsion at the ever-present smell of mortality in the nursing home as a whole. The firm sound of her footsteps as she walks out of the building takes on a symbolic life-affirming dimension in her consciousness.

The society Head portrays is primarily an agrarian one, faced with all the problems of subsistence living. Since the people's relationship with the land is one of literal economic dependency, human life here is more intimately connected with the physical environment than is the case in the surburban world of Gordimer's fiction.[5] Immediately striking is the affection with which Head portrays the physical environment of Botswana. This affection stems from a feeling of belonging she clearly enjoys in her adopted country. In the short story, "The Green Tree," the narrating character proudly expresses not only his affection for the land and sense of belonging to it, but also the confident knowledge that the land and the little there is on it belong to him and his people. His affirmation is in response to the dismissive attitude of foreigners who are repelled by the country's poverty and arid landscape:

> Many strangers traverse our land these days. They are fugitives from the south fleeing political oppression. They look on our lives with horror and quickly make means to pass on to the paradises of the north. Those who are pressed by circumstances and forced to tarry a while, grumble and complain endlessly. It is just good for them that we are inbred with habits of courtesy, hospitality and kindness. It is good that they do not know the passion we feel for this parched earth. We tolerate strangers because the things we love cannot be touched by them. The powdery dust of the earth, the heat, the cattle with their slow, proud walk—all this has fashioned our way of life. Our women with their tall thin hard bodies can drive a man to depths of passion. All this is ours.[6]

While acknowledging that, in this society, life is virtually at the mercy of nature, Head celebrates man's resilience in the struggle for survival, and exalts the dignity of the human spirit. The bleakness of the environment is always outweighed by the intense joy with which she portrays this resilience and dignity. Notably Head also points to the identification of man with other forms of life in the battle for existence. The literal connection between the Batswana and their cattle is a case in point. Commenting on the exceptional survival ability of both, she focuses on the remarkable Tswana cow:

> No one seems to know of its origin, but everyone knew of its adaptation to the hazards of the local climatic conditions and of its ability to go for long periods without food or water. Man and beast had always lived this way. If there was no food or water for man, then there was

> none for his cattle either. Both were as close to each other as breathing, and it had never been regarded as strange that a man and his cattle lived the same life.[7]

Head singles out a type of rubber plant, appropriately named the "Green Tree," as an example of triumphant vegetative life-form. Against all odds this plant not only survives in the semi-desert environment, but retains its healthy colour all year round. The author celebrates this plant in the short story already referred to, "The Green Tree." Noteworthy is how she gives the plant overt symbolic significance; she directly identifies its struggle with that of man and animal:[8]

> This small hill of my village in Africa abounds with the song of birds. The birds are small and brown and seem bound up in the thick profusion of dark brown branches. The green leaves of the trees are so minute that the eye can hardly see them. Everything that is green in my country is minute and cramped for my country is semi-desert.
>
> From this hill you may think the village below a fertile valley. It is shrouded and hidden in tall greenery. But that greenery is unproductive, contained and drawn into itself, concerned alone with its silent fight for survival. We call it the green tree. It came here as a stranger and quickly adapted itself to the hardness of our life. It needs no water in the earth but draws into itself the moisture of the air for its life. We use it as a hedge. It also protects us from the sand-storms that blow across our desolate and barren land.
>
> If you tell my people that there are countries with hills and hills of green grass where no cattle graze, they will not believe you. Our cattle graze on parched grass that is paper-dry. Our goats eat the torn shreds of wind-scattered

> papers and thrust their mouths into the thorn bushes to nibble at the packed clusters of leaves that look [like] pin-points of stars far flung in the heavens. That is our life. Everything is jealously guarded. Nothing is ever given out. All strength and energy must be contained for the fight to survive tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.
>
> (p. 33)

Head makes no secret of the autobiographical source of her affection for Botswana. The relative political freedom in that country enabled her to achieve self-reintegration after fleeing her fragmented native South Africa. She points this out as she comments on how fortuitously she went to Serowe village: "It was by chance that I came to live in this village. I have lived most of my life in shattered little bits. Somehow, here, the shattered bits began to grow together. There is a sense of wovenness, a wholeness in life here; a feeling of how strange and beautiful people can be—just living."[9]

A close association between the physical environment, sense of community and personal affirmation is evident in all the works where Head depicts exiled characters who like herself seek self-reintegration in their new communities. In these works the characters evince a heightened sensitivity toward the physical environment. Invariably they identify themselves with the environment to the extent that it has a harmonizing effect on their fragmented senses of self.

During his early days in Golema Mmidi village where he settles by chance, Makhaya in When Rain Clouds Gather derives his greatest sense of peace from the physical environment itself. He goes to the same spot in the evening to watch the sunset and its effect on the landscape. The spot happens to be near the home of Paulina Sebeso, the lonely Motswana woman whose heart he kindles with love and later marries in completion of his process of self-affirmation:

> She had her land and home not far from the farm gates. There, directly in the path of the setting sun, Makhaya was in the habit of coming to watch the sunset. Just as at dawn, the sun crept along the ground in gold shafts; so at sundown it retreated quietly as though it were folding into itself the long brilliant fingers of light. As he watched it all in fascination, the pitch black shadows of night seemed to sweep across the land like an engulfing wave. One minute the sun was there, and the next minute it had dropped down behind the horizon, plunging everything into darkness. On intensely cold nights, it threw up a translucent yellow afterglow, full of sparkling crystals, but otherwise it puffed itself out into a thin strip of red light on the horizon. As his eyes became more and more accustomed to the peculiar beauty of Botswana sunsets, he also noticed that the dull green thornbush and the dull brown earth were transformed into autumn shades of warm brown, red, and yellow hues by the setting sun.
> (pp. 78-79)

In A Question of Power Elizabeth parallels the alternate turmoil and tranquillity in her psyche with the operations of summer rain-storms. But she places emphasis on the harmonizing influence of her sensibilities of the

moments of total calm in the summer skies. Her heightened awareness of the environment is accentuated by the way village life is affected by the seasons. The villagers work at the lands during the rainy seasons and stay at home during the dry ones. When they go away to work Elizabeth is left behind in an almost empty village, being a foreigner without her own far-away land to plough. Her solitude becomes conducive to contemplation:

> ... she spent most of the holidays of the rainy season taking long walks across Motabeng village with [her] small boy, absorbed by the sky which had turned itself into a huge back-drop for the swaying, swirling movements of the desert rain. Sometimes the rain fell in soft, glistening streams over the village, shot through with sunlight, and all the roofs of the mud huts changed to pure gold. Sometimes the horizon rain came sweeping over Motabeng in one enormous white-packed cumulus cloud driven by the high wind and suddenly emptied itself in one violent, terrific and deafening roar over the village. It seemed to heighten and deepen the rambling labyrinth of her inner life, which swirled with the subterranean upheavals. In moments of vast, expansive peace like that evening, she liked to imagine that she was gathering all the threads of life together and holding them in her hands.[10]

This stabilizing identification with the physical environment prefigures the manner in which Elizabeth ultimately attains to full self-realization. Through productive interaction with the land and its people as a co-operative gardener she not only achieves self-realization, but effects her own integration into the community from which she has initially been estranged. Hence the

affirmation at the end of the novel: "As she fell asleep, she placed one soft hand over her land. It was a gesture of belonging" (p. 206).

Elizabeth becomes aware of the fulfilling nature of farming early in the novel. While she feels left out when the other villagers go to the lands to work, she also envies them for the satisfying experience of enjoying the fruits of their own labour at harvesting time. She expresses both these feelings one evening upon returning to her hut in a virtually deserted village:

> It was sunset when she arrived back at her hut in the central part of Motabeng .... the area in which she lived was deserted this time of the year. The women of the village were away at their lands, gathering in the summer harvest of corn. They would be back towards the end of the month, and she knew that one of her friends, Thoko, who usually supplied her with tit-bits of village gossip, would bring over a gift of watermelon and pumpkin. Elizabeth had lived for over two rainy seasons in Motabeng and the beginning of the rainy season always seemed a magical time to her. Women gathered up their possessions in a big bundle of cloth, heaved it on top of their heads, slung a hoe over their shoulders and set out with long, firm, determined strides to their lands.
>
> "We are going to plough," they said.
>
> She could only stare after them, wistfully. It was not a part of her life; so many aspects of village life escaped her. And yet, it was one thing to walk into a greengrocer's shop in a town and pick up neatly-wrapped parcels of potatoes, tomatoes and onions; it was another to hold Thoko's pumpkin, which she had produced with her own hands. Who ever cared about farmers in a town? Why, if vegetables came out of a machine, it was one and the same thing to a town dweller. They were just there, ready made. But here, it was Thoko and the ploughing season and one and a half dozen high dramas in a bush life, shrouded in mystery.
>
> (pp. 59-60)

Wishing to share in this productive kind of life Elizabeth "had once asked Thoko if she could accompany her to her lands during the school holidays, to plough" (p. 60). Thoko discouraged her by recounting the various types of hardship involved in the work. Although Elizabeth abandons the idea of going to the bush with Thoko, her sense of fascination with the land and what was produced on it continues to grow. Her sense of connection with the soil and the other life-forms it sustains also intensifies:

> ... a great wonder about the soil and the food it produced had been aroused. The slowly drifting closeness to the soil was increased by living in a mud hut. It was like living with the trees and insects right indoors, because there was no sharp distinction between the circling mud walls of a hut and the earth outside. And the roof always smelt of mouldy grass, and all kinds of insects made their homes in the grass roof and calmly deposited their droppings on the bed, chair, table and floor.
> (pp. 60-61)

The heroine's urban background enables her to notice these earthy details of rural existence which the villagers take for granted as part of their daily life. Evidently in progress here is the process of adaptation, one that most of Head's characters, who are exiles like herself, undergo in their new environments. Invariably the achievement of self-realization for each of these characters is closely tied to this process and to his or her eventual assimilation into the new community. The processes of

adaptation and assimilation are consistently depicted in terms of nature-imagery. One of the most memorable instances of this depiction occurs in A Question of Power, where Elizabeth's acceptance into the African life of Motabeng is compared to the adaptation to Botswana soil of the Cape Gooseberry. She, together with her devoted friend, Kenosi, grows this plant in the co-operative garden: "... a complete stranger, like the Cape Gooseberry settled down and became a part of the village of Motabeng. It loved the hot, dry Botswana summers as they were the replica of the Mediterranean summers of its home in the Cape" (p. 153). In Head's work, by extension the assimilation of the exiled character into her new community parallels the triumphant adaptation, in general, of human, animal and plant life to the parched environment.

In all the instances where this adaptation and assimilation are depicted the author emphasizes the elements of connection and productive interaction with the land and its people. It is only through that interaction and connection that the exiled character attains to self-discovery and personal affirmation. Notably the exiles are individuals who initially feel estranged from other people and wish to have nothing to do with them. In some cases it is this estrangement that leads them to identify only with the world of nature. In the end that identification becomes their very road toward reconciliation with the human community they had rejected. As with Gordimer's

Liz in The Late Bourgeois World and Helen in The Lying Days, Head's characters are enabled to perceive their affinity to others through the sense of connection cultivated by their identification with the physical environment. The sense of belonging derived from this perception enables them to apprehend their own worth in the community of man.

In A Question of Power, when Elizabeth first arrives in Motabeng she refuses to be associated with the African villagers. Her estrangement is a product of her South African background. As a "coloured" that society trained her not to see herself in kinship with black Africans. When she is admitted to a mental hospital following a mental breakdown she screams at one of the attendants: "I'm not an African. Don't you see? I never want to be an African. You bloody well, damn well leave me alone" (p. 181). Yet what finally restores her to health is the heroine's eventual integration into the village community. Through association with the peasant woman, Kenosi, as they work together in the co-operative garden, Elizabeth learns to accept not only the African people, but herself as well. While the production of their own vegetables gives Elizabeth and the other woman a shared sense of accomplishment, her association with Kenosi opens the heroine's eyes to the affirmative influence of ordinary human connection. Above all she realizes that the connection had always been there, only she had chosen to deny it: "She had fallen from the very beginning into the

warm embrace of the brotherhood of man, because when a people wanted everyone to be ordinary it was just another way of saying man loved man" (p. 206).

The hero of Head's first novel, When Rain Clouds Gather, is also a South African whose background has caused him to lose interest in people. Unlike Elizabeth, Makhaya is an "authentic" black with a part urban and part-tribal upbringing. But like her, he leaves South Africa and settles in Botswana seeking personal rediscovery. As he escapes from his native land, Makhaya is described as a man suffering from internal turmoil: "... the inner part of him was a jumble of chaotic discord" (p. 7). The sources of this turmoil are both political and social. He was once imprisoned on political charges. That experience coupled with the degradation of the black man's life in the Republic has led him to lose faith in the concept of human goodness. Utterly disillusioned, he wishes to distance himself from both people and politics. He expresses this wish to the man who gives him shelter at the border: "I just want to step on free ground. I don't care about people. I don't care about anything, not even the white man. I want to feel what it is like to live in a free country and then maybe some of the evils in my life will correct themselves" (p. 10). Dinorego, the kindly old man who first meets Makhaya in Botswana and gives him accommodation, notices the young man's spiritual anguish but cannot understand its origin:

> There were things in Makhaya he would never understand because his own environment was one full of innocence. The terrors of rape, murder, and bloodshed in a city slum, which was Makhaya's background, were quite unknown to Dinorego, but he felt in Makhaya's attitude and utterances a horror of life, and it was as though he was trying to flee this horror and replace it with innocence, trust, and respect. (p. 98)

Like Elizabeth, Makhaya ultimately rediscovers himself and human fellowship through productive interaction with the land and its people. Shortly after his arrival in Golema Mmidi village he becomes an assistant to Gilbert, the English agricultural instructor who is also in search of personal fulfilment. Makhaya assists in the promotion of modern methods of farming and water conservation in the village. Through this involvement he learns of the hardships endured by the Batswana and develops an empathetic connection with them. The severe drought which causes the deaths of many cattle marks the turning point in his attitude toward the people and their environment. The sight of death and devastation on the day he accompanies Gilbert and Paulina to the cattle posts to look for Paulina's son cements his identification with the Batswana:

> From that day Makhaya was to become peculiarly Motswana in his outlook. Coming from a country of green hills and fresh bubbling streams, he was from that day to treasure every green shoot that sprang in this dry place, and he would fear

> to waste even a drop of water. Paulina was the only one who was not deeply perturbed by what she saw. She had lived through times like this before, when the bush was bare and the plowing season delayed indefinitely.
> (p. 160)

A central part of Makhaya's identification with the Batswana is his eventual marriage to Paulina. Appropriately, he begins to appreciate the value of his love for Paulina in particular and of human fellowship in general on the very day he witnesses the devastation caused by drought in the bush. After they find the skeletal remains of a little boy, Makhaya and Paulina only derive courage and strength from each other. Sending off Paulina with Gilbert back to the village, the young man waits at the post for the police to come and examine the dead boy's remains. In the subsequent period of solitude he takes stock of his life and attitudes. In Head's words:

> Makhaya was left alone with the vultures. Surrounded by tragedy and seated in the shade of a ramshackle mud hut in the Botswana bush, he began to see himself. In retrospect he seemed a small-minded man. All his life he had wanted some kind of Utopia, and he had rejected in his mind and heart a world full of ailments and faults. He had run and run away from it all, but now the time had come when he could run and hide no longer and would have to turn round and face all that he had run away from. Loving one woman had brought him to this realization: that it was only people who could bring the real rewards of living, that it was only people who give love and happiness.
> (p. 163)

When Makhaya and Elizabeth acknowledge and endorse the value of love and human fellowship they express Head's own views. It is her belief in "the brotherhood of man" that ultimately motivates the author's rejection of politics, for she sees it as being frequently at odds with human fellowship and personal fulfilment. In interviews she emphatically asserts that she is committed to humanity as a whole, not to just sections of it. According to her, politics is almost always confined to advancing the interests of exclusive groups of people. Worse, it has the tendency to abstract itself from the people it is supposed to serve and to stifle individual development. In perfect reflection of Head's rejection of politics for its inherent exclusiveness, Elizabeth refuses to accept the black power movement when she hears about it from Tom, the young American aid worker:

> I don't like exclusive brotherhoods for black people only .... I've got my concentration elsewhere .... It's on mankind in general, and black people fit in there, not as special freaks and oddities outside the scheme of things, with labels like Black Power or any other rubbish of that kind.
>
> (pp. 132-133)

In an interview conducted by Betty Fradkin, Head emphasized her commitment to humanity. Fradkin reports the author's "impatience with an academic admirer of her work who talks of his concern with 'the artist's need for

freedom'."[11] And she adds that "Bessie will not have her work reduced to such 'fancy things' as she calls them. What she cares about is real freedom, for people, not for artists."[12] Interestingly enough, Head attributes this sense of commitment to her South African background: "South Africa is different from other parts of Africa where the African culture was not crushed. South Africa, with all its horrors, creates international sorts of people. They identify with the problems of mankind in general, rather than their own."[13] According to Fradkin, "Bessie sees Botswana with loving eyes, but clearly."[14] Head's fiction bears out the truth in Fradkin's and in her own observations on the influence of South Africa on its black people.

Although none of her works deals exclusively with South Africa, Head's literary concerns and moral vision are influenced by her background. The beliefs which inform her art reflect a reaction against the values created and projected by the apartheid state. Privilege and power, the most exclusive and desirable of commodities in that country, embody most, if not all, of the values Head rejects.[15]

Not only does Head find privilege unacceptable because of its narrowness and exclusiveness, but because it inherently involves the deprivation of the broad mass of the people. It is in this light that, in her fiction, she invariably presents privilege and its bed-fellow,

power, as sources of evil. Elizabeth in A Question of Power is seen to dislike anything associated with power and privilege, including words that denote them:

> The word "important" could make her hair rise up. She wasn't sure if it applied elsewhere, but she was essentially a product of the slums and hovels of South Africa. People there had an unwritten law. They hated any black person among them who was "important". They would say, behind the person's back: "Oh, he thinks he's 'important'," with awful scorn. She had seen too many people despised for self-importance, and it was something drilled into her: be the same as others in heart; just be a person.
> (p. 26)

In keeping with this dislike of "self-importance" the author frequently asserts that virtue lies in ordinariness and simplicity, for these accommodate a broader spectrum of people. Acknowledgement of these virtues is conducive to human fellowship, since they cancel out the need and desire to have power over others. In perfect confirmation of these convictions, Head also told Betty Fradkin that "I have only two themes ... that love is really good ... and ... that it is important to be an ordinary person .... More than anything else I want to be noble."[16] She faithfully reflects these beliefs in her fiction. The rural world of peasants which she repeatedly mirrors is as ordinary as any can be. Its needs, preoccupations and problems are basic.

Not surprisingly Head's most dramatic endorsement of ordinariness and simplicity as virtues involves renunciation of power and affirmation of love. In Maru the hero of the same name abdicates his position as heir to a chieftaincy in favour of marriage to the despised Masarwa woman, Margaret Cadmore. Having done the socially unacceptable, he leaves the village with his wife and retires to a life of peasant farming in a distant countryside. Head explains Maru's bold act by stating that private feeling and connection matter to him more than public duty and social prominence: "He believes his heart and the things in it"[17] (p. 73). However, she gives the act an even greater significance: it not only affirms the humanity of the much-maligned woman, but also that of her down-trodden people:

> When the people of the Masarwa tribe heard about Maru's marriage to one of their own, a door silently opened on the small, dark airless room in which their souls had been shut for a long time. The wind of freedom, which was blowing throughout the world for all people, turned and flowed into the room. As they breathed in the fresh, clean air their humanity awakened. They examined their condition. There was the fetid air, the excreta and the horror of being an oddity of the human race, with half the head of a man and half the body of a donkey. They laughed in an embarrassed way, scratching their heads. How had they fallen into this condition when, indeed, they were as human as everyone else? They started to run out into the sunlight, then they turned and looked at the dark, small room. They said: "We are not going back there."

> People like the Batswana, who did not know that the wind of freedom had also reached people of the Masarwa tribe, were in for an unpleasant surprise because it would be no longer possible to treat Masarwa people in an inhuman way without getting killed yourself.
>
> (pp. 126-127)

In Gordimer's fiction there is no equivalent to Head's celebration of love, ordinariness and simplicity. In her criticism of liberals she points to the inadequacy of their belief in the power of love to end racial prejudice and political oppression. While she shows that power and privilege are sources of the problems in South Africa, she does not renounce politics all together. In fact Gordimer believes that political action is the only solution to those problems. Without political freedom people can never affirm themselves through love or any other form of meaningful human interaction. Evidently it is the relative political freedom prevalent in Botswana that makes Head's values tenable and practicable. Notably the European section of Burger's Daughter mirrors the only world in Gordimer's major fiction where it is possible to be simple and ordinary as well as to love without being compromised in any political way. In this section Rosa is seen to realize for the first time in her life the possibilities of self-fulfilment while living as an ordinary person. Although her heritage of political commitment causes her to return to South Africa, her brief stay in Europe gives her a glimpse of how simple it

is to be both an individual and an intimate member of a community in a free environment. Also notable to Rosa is the easy sense of belonging and rootedness the Europeans enjoy on their land. This sense is comparable to that enjoyed by the Batswana villagers among whom Head's exiled characters settle.

Lionel Burger's first wife, Katya, explains to Rosa how Europeans feel at one with their land, society and history. Echoing Head's sentiments she points to the lack of vital connection between people whose interaction is determined by power. She discusses the place of whites in Africa as a case in point. The two women are relaxing "in the olive grove that was Renoir's garden" when Katya makes the comments:

> Rosa fell asleep and awoke, under a tree that hung a tarnished silver mesh of foliage over its black trunk and her body.—Were they growing here before the house?—[She asks Katya].
>
> —Oh probably before the revolution. If you live in Europe ... things change ... but continuity never seems to break. You don't have to throw the past away. If I'd stayed ... at home, how will they fit in, white people? Their continuity stems from the colonial experience, the white one. When they lose power it'll be cut. Just like that! They've got nothing but their horrible power. Africans will take up their own kind of past the whites never belonged to. Even the Terblanches and Alettas—Our rebellion against the whites was also part of <u>being white</u> ... it was. It was. But here you never really have to start from scratch .... Ah no, it's too much to take on. That's what I love—nobody expects you to be more than you are, you know. That kind of tolerance, I didn't even know it existed—I mean there: if you're not equal

> to facing <u>everything</u>, there ... you're a traitor. To the human cause—justice, humanity, the lot—there's nothing else.—[18]

Rosa's daily contact with people in France confirms Katya's observations about European freedom, sense of rootedness, continuity, and ordinariness of being. Effectually, this contact opens up her awareness to various possibilities about her sense of self, and relationship to others. Rosa's first significant experience of the European sense of historical continuity and freedom occurs when she visits one of France's famous tourist areas:

> I knew from books and talk of people like Flora and William I was in the quarter tourists went to because the nineteenth-century painters and writers whose lives and work have been popularized romantically once lived there. Thousands of students seem to occupy their holes of hotels and haunts now, blondes and gypsies in displayed poverty the poor starve to conceal, going in fishermen's boots or barefoot through the crowds, while back on Uncle Coen's farm people save shoes for Sundays. Girls and men whose time is mine, talking out their lives the way clocks tick, buying tiny cups of coffee for the price of a bag of mealie-meal, drinking wine in the clothes of guerrillas surviving in the bush on a cup of water a day. Dim stairs, tiny bent balconies, endless dove cotes of dormer windows were nearly all dark; everyone in the streets. I walked where they walked, I turned where they turned, taking up the purpose of these or those for a few yards or a block. They met and kissed, kissed and parted, ate thin pancakes made in a booth glaring as a forge, bought papers, paraded for a pick-up. If students play charades, there were surely others wearing the garb playing at being students, and still others wanting to be taken for their idea of models, actors, painters, writers, film directors. Which were the clerks and waiters off

> duty? How could I tell. Only the male prostitutes, painted and haughty enough to thrill and intimidate prospective clients, are plainly what they are: men preserving the sexual insignia of the female, creatures extinct in the preferences of their kind. One went up and down before the cafe where I sat with the drink I bought myself.
> (pp. 231-232)

The fact that Rosa can view the Europeans from a position of detachment and also feel herself easily belonging among them indicates a rare kind of freedom which she never enjoys in her own country of birth. As she resumes her walk down the Paris streets, she reiterates her feeling of oneness with the various people in whose anonymous company she found herself. Focusing on the other spectators in the area where the circus-performer was, Rosa says:

> I was enclosed in this amiable press of strangers, not a mob because they were not brought together by hostility or enthusiasm, but by mild curiosity and a willingness to be entertained. I couldn't easily move on until their interest loosened, but closeness was not claustrophobic. Our heads were in the open air of a melon-green night; buoyed by these people murmuring and giggling in their quick, derisive, flirtatious language, I could look up at the roof-tops and chimney-pots and television aerials so black and sharp and one dimensional they seemed to ring out the note of a metal bar struck and swallowed into the skies of Paris.
> (pp. 232-233)

Rosa's encounter with a black pick-pocket in this scene does not detract from the portrayed sense of European freedom and unselfconscious ease. Instead, it serves to illustrate the damage done to Rosa's consciousness by her racially-troubled society. Instinctively she sees the incident in terms of racial antagonism: the relationship between victim and victimiser becomes to her a reversed enactment of the situation in her own country. Instead of looking at the incident as an isolated one between herself and the thief as individuals, Rosa sees it as a reflection of the racial conflict between blacks and whites in South Africa. She then expresses her own awareness of the discrepancy between the ordinariness of the incident and the symbolic significance she attaches to it:

> If he hadn't been black he might have succeeded in looking like everybody else—sceptically or boredly absorbed in the spectacle of the fire-eater. But the face could not deny the hand in anonymous confusion with like faces. He was what he was. I was what I was, and we had found each other. At least that is how it seemed to me—this ordinary matter of pickpocket and victim, that's all, nothing but a stupid tourist with a bag, deserving to be discovered.
>
> (p. 233)

From time to time Rosa's South African sense of estrangement does undermine her feelings of belonging among the relaxed and easy-going Europeans. Admitting the problem, she says:

> I feel an ass, among these people who know such tactics [of self-concealment, and caution in the face of police surveillance] only in their television *policiers* ... for whom running down to the baker is a sociable act by which everyone knows what time they've got up for breakfast, and whose contact with the police is an exchange of badinage about the inside story of the latest bank hold-up in Nice while they stand together with their midday pernods in Jean-Paul's bar. Out of place; not I, myself—they assume my life is theirs, they've taken me in. But the manner of my coming—it doesn't fit necessity or reality, here. Lionel Burger's first wife. You are not to be found in Madame Bagnelli, their Katya .... For them you're Katya because in a small community of different and sometimes confused European origins mixed with native French, diminutives and adaptations of names are a cosy *lingua franca*.
>
> (p. 235)

However, Rosa's sense of dislocation does not impede her realization of the affirmative possibilities in the enjoyment of politically uncompromised human contact with the Europeans:

> I pipe up from time to time, like a child listening to folk-lore. I am beginning to understand that there is a certain range of possibilities that can occur within the orbit of a particular order of life; they recur in gossip, in close conversations at tables big enough only for elbows in the back of Jean-Paul's bar, in noisy discussions on the terrace of this one's house or that. Vaki—the—Greek went off to South America with the director of a German electronics company he picked up here in the village, on the *place*, Darby witnessed the whole thing and told Donna after the little bitch had disappeared with the Alfa Romeo that had been registered in *his* name, for *her* tax reasons. Didier is straight (I don't know whether by this is meant not bisexual) and although he rightly expects to be treated generously, he's not likely to be a thief—never!—When he goes, he'll just go.—Gaby approves, endorsing Katya.
>
> (p. 238)

Having been tied to a public form of life, these ordinary details of other people's lives become revelatory of a different and fascinating dimension of existence. Most striking to Rosa is the Europeans' openness about their private lives, which contrasts sharply with her conditioned self-guardedness. For example, when she asks the young man, Didier, what he feels about his relationship with the much older woman, Donna, he casually tells her that it does not bother him. Commenting on her own curiosity, Rosa says:

> If I am curious about them, these people, to me it seems they allow me to be so because I am a foreigner. But I see it's that they are not afraid of being found out, the nature of their motives is shared and discussed; because the premise is accepted by everybody: live where it's warm, buy, sell, or take pleasure honestly —that is according to your circumstances. They recognize their only imperatives as dependence on a tight-knotted net of friendship, and dedication to avoiding tax wherever possible while using all the state welfare one can contrive to qualify for—the rebates, allocations, grants and pensions they are always discussing, whether rich or poor.
>
> (pp. 241-242)

Notable here is the absence of political interest in the whole range of concerns discussed by Rosa's European associates.

Shortly after this observation the heroine is surprised to find Didier echoing her own desire to dissociate herself from her father's political identity. He too

wants to be seen independently of his father's identity. And quite notably, he locates the parental identities within their troubled environments. The whole conversation shows the differences in perspective between the European and the South African: the former is committed to nothing beyond the satisfaction of his immediate personal needs; the latter has, in spite of her desire to be otherwise, a strong sense of purpose and commitment vis-à-vis issues beyond her single self. Beginning with the place of white people in Africa and Mauritius, Didier says:

> —Africa is no good for white people any more. Same on the islands. It was okay when I was a kid—
> —I was born there. It's my home.—[Rosa interjects].
> —What does that matter. Where you can live the way you like, that's what counts. We have to forget about it.—
> —My father died in prison there.—
> —You know why we went to Maurice? My father was a collaborator with the Germans and he was sent to prison after the war. People only talk about their families who were in the Resistance. Oh yes. Nobody thought maybe the Germans were going to win—Oh no. Donna makes me swear not to tell anybody! She's from Canada, what does she know about it, can you tell me! I know people whose mothers had their hair shaved off for sleeping with Germans. We have to forget about them. It's not our affair. I'm not my father, eh?
>
> (p. 243)

After the conversation, Rosa again refers to the intimacy, which accommodates the Didier type of individualism among Katya's circle of friends. The reference is addressed to

the whole circle:

> He helped me back into the water, supported by my arm round his neck. There was nothing sexual about the closeness; it was the huddle of the confidences common among all of you, the friends in the village—the divorced women and women widowed, like Madame Bagnelli, by lovers, the old Lesbians and young homosexuals.
>
> (p. 243)

This kind of ordinary harmony among people was hitherto unknown to Rosa. The harmony that existed between her parents and their associates, while genuine, was founded on a powerful sense of political purpose which they all shared.

The best evocation of the ordinary European tranquillity, ease, freedom and security, is made in the scene where the author depicts Katya and Rosa taking an evening walk through the village:

> Katya took Rosa to hear nightingales. They locked the gate but rooms were open behind them, the candles smoked on the littered table. Up on the terrace, they might still have been there, in the warm still night voices hung.
> Down the steep streets with gravity propelling them gently, under street-lamps fluttering pennants of tiny bats, shouldered by the walls of the houses of friends, through lilting staccato-punctuated voices swung about by music coming from the place, whiffs of dog-shit and human urine in Saracen archways, arpeggios of laughter flying in the chatter of knives and dishes from the restaurant where a table of French people sat late under young leaves of a grapevine translucent to the leaping shadows of their gestures .... Past the little villas of the dead with the urns of their

> marble gardens sending out perfume of cut carnations as from the vase in any family living room; the hoof-clatter of linked couples approaching and trotting away on their platform soles, the stertorous swathe cut by motor-cyles, the quiet chirrups of older people wandering the village as at an exhibition of stone, light, doorways fringed with curtains of plastic strips, the faces of curved lions melted by centuries back to the contours of features forming in a foetus. In the remnant of ravine all this familiar element was suddenly gone like torn paper drawn up a flue by the draught of flames. It had lifted away above the flood-lit battlements of that castle domestic as a tame dragon. Katya plunged through littered thickets, some quiet vixen or badger of a woman cunningly co-existing with caravan parks and autoroutes. Rosa strolled this harmless European jungle.
>
> (pp. 260-261)

Rosa's relationship with Bernard Chabalier is the most important event with regard to her emotional awakening. The relationship enables Rosa to enjoy a sense of self that is free from the demands of her political identity as Lionel Burger's daughter. The heroine comments on this freedom as she contemplates the choices open to her by virtue of her private status as Chabalier's mistress:

> There's nothing more private and personal than the life of a mistress, is there? Outwardly, no one even knows we are responsible to each other. Bernard Chabalier's mistress isn't Lionel Burger's daughter; she's certainly not accountable to the Future, she can go off and do good works in Cameroun or contemplate the unicorn in the tapestry forest. "This is the creature that has never been"—he told me a line of poetry about that unicorn, translated from German. A mythical creature. Un paradis inventé.
>
> (pp. 303-304)

The mutually affirmative nature of the intimacy between Rosa and Chabalier is symbolized by their first sexual union. To this union the author ascribes an almost mystical dimension. The sense of self and mutual discovery attendant upon the union is evident in their very act of undressing for the encounter:

> They emerged for each other all at once: they had never seen each other on a beach, the public habituation to all but a genital triangle. He might never have been presented with a woman before, or she a man. Tremendous sweet possibilities of renewal surged between them; to explode in that familiar tender explosion all that has categorized sexuality, from chastity to taboo, illicit licence to sexual freedom. In a drop of saliva there was a whole world. He turned the wet tip of his tongue round the whorl of the navel Didier had said was like that of an orange.
>
> In the heat they had shut out, people were eating in soft clatter, laughter, and odours of food that had been cooked in the same way for so long their smell was the breath of the stone houses. Behind other shutters other people were also making love.
>
> (pp. 277-278)

Through this most private of personal interactions, Rosa and Chabalier also unite with general humanity, and participate in nature's own life-affirmative process.

Later, Rosa re-states the much cherished personal and private nature of the relationship. She does this by implicitly comparing it to the one her parents had made her fake, for political purposes, with Noel de Witt. Rosa also compares, by implication, her mother's role in

the earlier faked relationship to Katya's place in the relationship with Chabalier. Also notable is Katya's consciousness as regards her own sexuality when she is in the presence of the lovers. This consciousness contrasts with the total disregard of personal endowments that Rosa noticed in her committed mother. Addressing her soliloquy about the newly-found love to Kayta, Rosa says:

> I spend less time with you; you understand that sort of priority well. You were the one who said, Chabalier, why go home—stay tonight and we can make an early start in the morning. The little expeditions to show me something of the country are arranged by the two of you, now. ... When the three of us have breakfast together in the sun before he goes off to his work I notice you make up your eyes and brush your hair out of respect for male presence and as an aesthetic delicacy of differentiation from the stage in life of a young woman in perfect lassitude and carelessness of sensuality—I can't help yawning till the tears come to my eyes, thirsty and hungry ... spilling over in affection towards you a bounty I can afford to be generous with. Bernard says to me: I am full of semen for you.—It has nothing to do with passion that had to be learned to deceive prison warders; and you're no real revolutionary waiting to decode my lovey-dovey as I dutifully report it.
>
> (p. 279)

Gordimer also lays much emphasis on the self-contained nature of the private world of love in which Rosa and Chabalier live together. The fact that their affair is uncomplicated by social and public considerations enables them to enjoy an intimacy of highly spontaneous dimensions. At one point, as they discuss the

possibility of together going to work in [redacted] Africa, the author comments on their acceptance of Chabalier's marital status:

> All practical matters were open between them; a wife and two children, a responsibility assumed long ago by a responsible man. The attitude on which Bernard and Rosa's acceptance of this circumstance rested on was based on one of the simple statements of a complex man: —I live among my wife and children—not with them.—
>
> The statement, in turn, seemed to seek an explanation from Rosa she could not give; but in the saying, the burden of it was shifted a little, her shoulder went under it beside his. They had no home but he was living very much with her. The security was almost palpable for him in the vigour and repose of her small body. Resting there, he gained what she had once and many times at the touch-line of her father's chest, warm and sounding with the beat of his heart, in chlorinated water. Her eyes ... moved above his head among trees, passers by and quick glance down—in a private motivation of inner vision as alert and dissimulating as the gaze her mother had been equally unaware of, looking up to see the daughter coming slowly over the gravel from the visit to her 'fiancé' in prison.
>
> The young smooth face spoke out beneath hers; from what he had been and what he was: You are the dearest thing in the world to me.—
>
> (pp. 289-290)

The intimacy Rosa enjoys with Bernard Chabalier derives its most crucial significance from the experience of self-discovery it affords her. Through this love affair Rosa gains awareness of important dimensions of her being which she never before knew existed. For example, she now realizes her own ability to be in a mutually satisfying relationship with a man, a

relationship that had no connection with her being Lionel Burger's daughter. And for the first time, she experiences an uncompromised sense of attachment to a man she loves. The author makes this point clear when she reports the lovers' plans to meet in London. This is when Chabalier leaves Rosa, returning to Paris to rejoin his wife and children:

> It was no parting; it was the beginning of commitment to be exactly that: together. They were no longer one of the affairs of the village. He would telephone her everyday; once again they discussed the best times—she, too, was very good at the connivance of privacies. She did not cry but he was in awe of all she had known in order to learn not to weep; and could not unlearn.
>
> (p. 308)

But breaking through the surface of her conditioned toughness is the expression of truly experienced and appreciated passion:

> —You are the only man I've loved that I have made love with. So I feel you can make everything possible for me.—
> —What things?
>
> Her lips moved to find shapes for the plenitude struck from her rock—pleasure in herself, the innocent boastful confidence of being, the assurance of giving what will be received, accepted without question.
> —I can't say. Things I didn't know about. I find out. Through you.—
>
> (pp. 308-309)

The fact that this sense of self-discovery is mutual becomes clear when Chabalier responds by saying: "—Through me! Oh my darling, I can tell you—sometimes with you I feel I am that child sent out of the room while the adults talk, now grown-up—lived my whole life—out there" (p. 309). Stressing the joy that each generates in the other, the author comments:

> How much his turn of phrase delighted her! They laughed together at him, in Madame Bagnelli's old car that brought them to a stop; to the destination of the day. Laughter became embraces and in a state of bold intoxication with each other, totally assuring, they parted, for a short while—less than two hours later, from Charles de Gaulle airport where he had just landed, Bernard Chabalier, having found some excuse to get away for a few minutes from whoever it was (Christine with or without children, aged mother) who had met him, telephoned Rosa Burger. He said it this time with blunt wonder: You are the dearest thing in the world to me. She cried in some unrecognized emotion, another aspect of joy; a strange experience.
>
> (p. 309)

Rosa's discovery of true passion points to a very important aspect of her self-realization as a woman. The emotionally inhibiting nature of her intensely cerebral upbringing has earlier been discussed. However, it has also been observed that the confrontation with Baasie brings to an end Rosa's enjoyment of a private life in Europe. Shortly after the incident she returns to South Africa where she reaffirms the political commitment of her parents. But before she returns to the Republic Rosa

accepts the inevitability of the antagonism between her and her former foster black brother. There has been too much failure in the attempt of the committed to change the society for the two young people to be otherwise. She adds that there is only one hope for the possibility of lasting human fellowship for the likes of her and Baasie, namely the transformation of the political environment. In this regard, she acknowledges her father's vision: "But at least you know; you still know—there is only one end to the succession of necessary failures. Only one success; the life, unlike his or mine, that makes it all the way to the only rendezvous that matters, the victory where there will be room for all" (p. 330).

Chapter 6

Footnotes

[1]Gordimer, The Late Bourgeois World, p. 46. All other references are incorporated in the text.

[2]Gordimer, The Lying Days, p. 125.

[3]Gordimer, July's People, p. 26.

[4]Gordimer, Occasion for Loving, p. 242.

[5]The pattern of life in Serowe, for example is literally tied to the rhythm of nature; social and economic activities are almost completely determined by such elemental factors as climate, weather and seasons. In the introduction to her Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind, Head writes of her adopted village: "People do so much subsistence living here and so much mud living; for Serowe is, on the whole, a sprawling village of mud huts. Women's hands build and smooth mud huts and mud courtyards and decorate the walls of the mud courtyards with intricate patterns. Then the fierce November and December thunder storms sweep away all the beautiful patterns. At the right season for this work, the mud patterns will be built up again. There seems to be little confusion on the surface of life. Women just go on having babies and families sit around the outdoor fires at night chattering in quiet tones. The majority, who are the poor, survive on little. It has been like this for ages and ages—this flat continuity of life; this strength of holding on and living with the barest necessities.

"Serowe is a traditional African village with its times and seasons for everything; the season of ploughing, the season of weedings, the season for repairing huts and courtyards and for observing the old moral taboos. In the traditional sense, it is not really a place of employment but almost one of rest. The work areas are at the lands and cattle-posts miles away. When people are in Serowe from about June to October or November, they are resting after the summer harvest and preparing for the next rainy season. During this resting period weddings take place, huts and courtyards are repaired. Most Serowans have three different homes; one in Serowe, one at the lands

where they plough, one at the cattle-post where they keep their cattle. They move from home to home all the time. I have lived in a village ward which was totally deserted during the ploughing season. We are likely to keep this basic pattern of life for a long time." See: Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind, pp. x-xi.

[6]Bessie Head, "The Green Tree," Transition, vol. 4, no. 16, 1964, p. 33.

[7]Head, When Rain Clouds Gather, p. 147. All other references are incorporated in the text.

[8]Kolawole Ogungbesan criticizes the way Head depicts her environment in Botswana. He comments that as a result of her exile status, the author sees the environment through the idealizing eyes of a foreigner, eager for acceptance in the new land. Consequently, she "often dwells too long on ... trivia ..." He adds that the author uses the "green tree" as a symbol of her own transplantation from South Africa to Botswana, and of her successful adaptation to the new place. While the latter observations are correct, Ogungbesan's critical remarks are too heavy-handed and unacceptable. To quote him in full:

"Miss Head may like to believe that like the green tree, she has come as a stranger to Botswana and quickly adapted herself to the hard life, life drawing sustenance, like the peasants, from her parched environment. But her manner of describing her environment, like a European tourist visiting Africa for the first time, shows that her integration into rural Botswana is not yet complete. She writes of Botswana in the manner of a desperately grateful visitor from a country where people are not allowed to take roots even in the most fertile soil; in her adopted home, she exults at having been given the opportunity to dig her roots into the sands of the semi arid land." (Kolawole Ogungbesan, "The Cape Gooseberry Also Grows in Botswana: Alienation and Commitment in the Writings of Bessie Head," Journal of African Studies, vol. 6, no. 4, [Winter, 1979-1980], p. 210). Ogungbesan fails to appreciate the author's vivid evocation of the dignity with which man, animal and plant persist in their respective struggles for survival. The dignity is rooted in the sense of belonging which they evince; the land may not have much to offer, but the little it has is unquestionably theirs.

[9]Head, Serowe, p. x. Significantly enough, this statement on her personal reintegration also appears in her 1978 interview conducted by Fradkin. Here, the author explicitly locates her previously fragmented self in its native environment of apartheid: "in South Africa, all my life I lived in shattered little bits. All those bits began to grow together here ... I have a peace against which all the turmoil is worked out!" ("Conversations with Bessie," p. 429).

[10]Head, A Question of Power, p. 61. All other references are incorporated in the text.

[11]Fradkin, "Conversations with Bessie," p. 429.

[12]Fradkin, p. 429.

[13]Fradkin, p. 429.

[14]Fradkin, p. 428.

[15]In the same interview conducted by Betty Fradkin, Head expresses disapproval at an unnamed black South African writer who had been admitted to the privileged white world: "Privilege in South Africa is set up as the one bone a lot of dogs have to scramble for. A few of the elect among black people would be let 'in' on the game. It is terribly difficult to get 'in.' If we all have to aspire to get 'in' to the white world can you imagine how long it is going to take and even then you are never sure you are going to qualify? My revulsion for that particular sort of black person is simply because I have always belonged to the scum edge of life where the broad mass of the people are. There, the view is so big and cheerful that you can clearly see that people don't want the exclusive sort of thing but the whole big wide universe to dream in. So, you don't concentrate on that single, solitary rare bone, but try to create as many new worlds as you can so that there can be as much as possible available for all the people and their hopes and dreams." ("Conversations with Bessie," p. 443).

[16]Fradkin, p. 433.

[17]Head, Maru, p. 73. All other references are incorporated in the text.

[18]Gordimer, Burger's Daughter, pp. 249-250. All other references are incorporated in the text.

CONCLUSION

The literary significance of the issues discussed in this study cannot be assessed adequately without considering Gordimer's conception of the nature and function of art itself. I subscribe to her view that art, particularly in Africa, has to be about human experience, and that its purpose must be to enable the reader to gain self-knowledge. She expresses this view in response to "one of the new group of French writers, Nathalie Sarraute" who argues that the modern novel must be "cleare[d] of the device of 'characters' that obscures its true business, which is to bring the minds of writer and reader to grapple with each other."[1] According to Sarraute, the reader "has been 'learning about too many things'" with regard to "the trappings of 'character'."[2] Admitting that Sarraute's observations may be true of French society, a society "with a great cultural tradition," Gordimer comments:

> In South Africa, in Africa generally, the reader knows perilously little about himself or his feelings. We have a great deal to learn about ourselves, and the novelist, along with the poet, playwright, composer and painter, must teach us. We look to them to give us the background of self-knowledge that we may be able to take for granted.[3]

Proceeding to assert that "the 'pure' novel of the imagination ... cannot be expected to flourish in Africa yet," she observes: "We are still at the stage of trying to read ourselves by outward signs. To get at our souls, it may still be necessary to find out how we do our monthly accounts."[4]

It is in this context that character and the theme of identity are central concerns in the fiction of Gordimer and Head. Consequently, in this study it has been necessary to analyse the factors that the authors present as determining character and identity in the environments they portray. In my discussion of Gordimer's works I have dwelt on the factor of race not only because it is the most important one in defining the identity of people in South Africa, but also because it impinges on the author's literary consciousness. It is an unavoidable part of the human experience on which her creative imagination draws. Gordimer herself better explains the centrality of the race "question" in her society:

> The greatest single factor in the making of our mores in South Africa was and is and will be the colour question. Whether it's the old question of what the whites are going to do about the blacks or the new question of what the blacks are going to do about the whites or the hopeful question of how to set about letting the whole thing go and living together, it still is the question. It's far more than a matter of prejudice or discrimination or conflict of loyalties— all things you can take or leave alone: we have built a morality on it. We have gone even

> deeper: we have created our own sense of sin and our own form of tragedy. We have added hazards of our own to man's fate, and to save his soul he must wrestle not only with the usual lust, greed and pride, but also with a set of demons marked "made in South Africa."[5]

Gordimer firmly believes that because "the politics of race" are so central to human experience in South Africa, they cannot be overlooked in any truthful portrayal of characters who live in that society. "What else can an honest writer do but draw on the life around him? His work becomes implicitly political. I'm not talking about propagandists; I'm talking about writers who really care about the truth, the sincerity, and the integrity of their writing."[6] The author convincingly demonstrates this belief in her fiction. With unwavering consistency she shows how individual people are affected by the political situation in the society. An individual's material, economic and social opportunities in the Republic are rigidly determined by the colour of his skin, causing him to have a warped view of himself and others. It is recognition of the fragmenting effect of this situation that leads Gordimer to endorse political action as the only solution to the problems confronting her characters. Without changing "the politics of race" people can never affirm themselves in any way. Hence her criticism of liberals for their political inadequacy, and tribute to the committed for their high sense of social

responsibility.

Although the Masarwa in Head's Botswana are deprived of privileges because of their ethnicity, nowhere does the author present this as part of a political structure that would require overhauling in order to restore social justice. Indeed it has been observed that the relative political freedom Head enjoys in Botswana makes tenable and practicable her renunciation of political systems and celebration of humanity in general. That aside, cultural fragmentation and its effect on men and women (as well as the problems of adaptation and self-fulfilment) come through as the more pressing issues in the peasant communities she features in her fiction. The breakdown of family life among the Bamangwato represents what Head sees as the chief source of personal dislocation for men and women. Alongside her depiction of this issue is her condemnation of the victimization of women at the hands of men in the society. The concept of a sexual hierarchy occurs in Gordimer's early fiction mainly as a side issue that is immediately overshadowed by the more overriding facts of racial politics.

Although Gordimer considers the woman question to be relatively unimportant in South Africa, she recognizes its existence on both sides of the colour-bar. In a recent interview, she dismisses white women who agitate for Women's Liberation in the Republic, not because their grievances do not exist but because they are insignificant

when compared to the problems faced by black women:

> Women's Liberation is, I think, a farce in South Africa. It's a bit ridiculous when you see white girls at the University campaigning for Women's Liberation because they're kicked out of some fraternity-type club or because they can't get into bars the way men do. Who cares? A black woman has got things to worry about much more serious than these piffling issues. White women have the vote; no black, male or female, has. White women have many more rights than black women. Black women are concerned with such basic things as being entitled to own a house, or continuing to live in their house in a black ghetto when their husbands divorce them or die. Until just last year, a black woman had no right to have a house in her name, so if her man walked out on her she had to quickly marry somebody else in order to stay in her home.[7]

Gordimer adds that it is only in a politically liberated South Africa that the Women's Liberation cause will have a credible position. Expanding on her acknowledgement that black women are accorded second-class treatment on their own side of the colour-line, Gordimer adds that they too will have to fight against male domination after the present political issues are resolved. She makes this statement in response to Jordan Elgrably's question: "You seem to look forward to a day when black women will have the luxury of becoming feminists as well. When you say that they will become militant and fight, do you mean that they will fight against black men?"[8] Her answer: "Against their own men, yes, because many are very much

exploited by them."[9] Significantly enough, Gordimer explains how the present political system caters for the exploitation. She does this by describing a situation that is reminiscent of what happens to July and his wife Martha in July's People:

> But at present [black women] see [their predicament] in the broader light: a consequence of the exploitation by whites. A common position in South Africa is one where a man living in one of the homelands ... will be recruited there for the mines or by a large construction company, to come and work for a year on a project. When that project is over, perhaps he'll get another job in the same industry, and he'll be granted permission to continue living in town; he's wanted as a unit of labor. He will not get permission to bring his wife and family. So the woman remains stuck away in the country. As time goes by he will find another woman and will probably have children by her. And then he'll have this conflict of loyalties: to whom shall he send the money he earns? Will he send it home, or contribute to the household of the woman he's shacked up with? That woman in the country is being exploited by the male because she's literally left carrying the baby; she's left to work the bit of land, bring up children, alone. Often the man disappears altogether. Now where does the blame lie?[10]

Head's fiction throws valuable light on the issues raised by Gordimer, particularly with reference to the abuse of black women at the hands of their own men. For the society she depicts is completely black-ruled, without the political and racial problems of South Africa. Although Head attributes the problems of women in Botswana to cultural fragmentation, a legacy of colonialism, she

admits that even in traditional society, women were dominated by men. While that society was stabilized by traditional customs and values, now no longer in existence, women remained second-class citizens. Commenting on this situation in the title story of her volume, The Collector of Treasures, she writes:

> When the laws of the ancestors are examined, they appear on the whole to have been vast, external disciplines for the good of the society as a whole, with little attention given to individual preferences and needs. The ancestors made so many errors and one of the most bitter-making things was that they relegated to men a superior position in the tribe, while women were regarded, in a congenital sense, as being an inferior form of human life. To this day, women still suffered from all the calamities that befall an inferior form of human life.[11]

Some of the customs that gave women family security in traditional society affected women's rights. Bride-price, for instance, gave the husband rights over "all the children a woman might bear in her lifetime, irrespective of whether another man other than [him] might have fathered [them]. It also had undertones of a sale-bargain, as if women were merely a marketable commodity."[12]

It is through this comparative study of the woman question as presented in the fiction of Head and Gordimer that I have attempted to bring into focus a composite image of the female character in all its complexity.

I accept the premise that art draws on and is about human experience, and believe the issues discussed in this study are legitimate subjects of literary enquiry. For these are the major issues affecting men and women, black and white, Batswana and Masarwa in Southern Africa. The fiction of Gordimer and Head also fulfils the instructional function delineated by Gordimer. Questions of character and identity transcend regional boundaries. Despite differences in emphasis and focus both authors enable the reader to recognize and appreciate the fact that character and identity are products of the inescapable interaction between the internal world of self and the external one of others and things. Even in relationships between people of different races, ethnic groups and genders, due cognizance has to be given to the necessary interplay between the personal and the social, the private and the public, the spiritual and the physical.

The fiction of Gordimer and Head does not derive its literary value solely from the topical nature of the authors' concerns but from their ability to render those concerns in art with a vividness that enables the reader to apprehend them in all their complexity. Such an ability reflects Gordimer's belief that "all art is an attempt to make a private order out of the chaos in life, whether you're a painter or a musician or a writer."[13] It is that order that enables the reader to understand the human experience the writers seek to

portray.

Gordimer asserts that true art instructs not by propaganda but by illumination. Whatever values the artist believes in have to be an organic part of his work, not part of a separate message imposed on it. Writing specifically about commitment and the novelist in South Africa, a society with "a number of things to be committed to," she comments:

> The novelist writes about what sense he makes of life; his own commitment to one group or another enters his novel as part of, sometimes the deepest part of, the sense he makes of life. If, on the other hand, the commitment enters the novel not as part of the writer's own conception of the grand design, but as an attempt to persuade other people — then the book is not a novel but propaganda with a story. For the novel does not say, "This is what you must do" but "This is what I have seen and heard and understood."[14]

The works of both Gordimer and Head demonstrate this conception of the novel.

Because of the thematic nature of this study there has been little room for adequate comment on the quality of the writing in the fiction of Gordimer and Head. While both are accomplished writers, Gordimer is seen to be more artistically versatile, her published books are almost four times as many as Head's.

Although the themes and issues are recurrent in the works of both authors, in each they are presented from different angles, revealing new dimensions. These changes also reflect the complexity of the issues themselves. Gordimer moves from straightforward narrative in The Lying Days and other early works to the combined use of interior monologue, authorial narrative and flashback in such later works as The Conservationist and Burger's Daughter. While the first method is appropriate in rendering the relatively clear-cut situations portrayed in the earlier works, the latter better lends itself to the probing of the increasingly complex social forces that affect and shape the identities of the characters portrayed in the later fiction. Head's comparatively small body of published works reflects a similar movement from simpler forms of narrative technique to more complex ones. A topic that warrants further study is the relationship between these stylistic changes and the way the authors perceive their concerns, as well as the nature of those concerns. Gordimer makes very interesting comments on the changes in artistic vision and narrative technique in her own work. She comments on an earlier review by her of Wole Soyinka's autobiography in which she praises him for his eye for "precise, concrete detail":

> It's significant detail that brings any imaginative work alive, whatever the medium. If you can't see things freshly, if you can't build up through significant detail, then I think you fall into cliché, not only in the use of words and phrases, but even in form. That fresh eye is the most valuable thing in the world for any writer. When I look at my early stories, there's a freshness about them, there's a sensuous sensibility that I think you only have when you're very young; after that you go on to analyzing your characters, you go on to narrative strength. But first you've got to have that fresh eye with which to see the world .... I see in myself the tendency to lose it as one gets older. I don't think that in my later work I've got that vividness quite to the extent that I had it, though I may have gained other strengths. I have lost that freshness because I've seen everything too often.[15]

Asked "What other strengths [she] would say [she had] gained," the author replies:

> Well first of all, I think that narrative was often weak in my early work. I've always been interested in literature that was held together by what I think of as invisible stitches or invisible connections. But when attempting a complex novel, like A Guest of Honour or Burger's Daughter, one can't depend solely on that kind of intuitive observation. So in order to develop complex themes you have got to develop narrative strength. Perhaps that's a compensation then: a little of the one went and I gained with the other.[16]

It would be rewarding to pursue these observations in a developmental study of Gordimer's fiction. Of additional interest would be an examination of whether Head's fiction reveals similar tendencies.

Although the specific issues Gordimer and Head deal with are peculiar to the environments they depict, their preoccupation with character and the theme of identity places their fiction in the mainstream of world literature. By examining the factors that determine senses of self in Southern Africa they join the ranks of other committed artists who have "inquire[d] into individual human nature"[17] and the forces that shape it.

Conclusion

Footnotes

[1]Gordimer, "The Novel and The Nation," p. 37.

[2]Gordimer, "The Novel and The Nation," p. 37.

[3]Gordimer, "The Novel and The Nation," p. 37.

[4]Gordimer, "The Novel and The Nation," p. 37.

[5]Gordimer, "The Novel and The Nation," p. 39.

[6]Quoted in Burrows, "An Interview with Nadine Gordimer," p. 233.

[7]Quoted in Boyers et al., "A Conversation with Nadine Gordimer," p. 20.

[8]Quoted in Boyers, "A Conversation," p. 20.

[9]Quoted in Boyers, "A Conversation," p. 20.

[10]Quoted in Boyers, "A Conversation," pp. 20-21.

[11]Head, The Collector of Treasures, p. 92.

[12]Head, Serowe, pp. 59-60.

[13]Quoted in Boyers, "A Conversation," p. 27.

[14]Gordimer, "The Novel and The Nation," p. 38.

[15]Quoted in Boyers, "A Conversation," p. 12.

[16]Quoted in Boyers, "A Conversation," p. 12.

[17]Vida E. Marković, Introduction, in his The Changing Face: Disintegration of Personality in the Twentieth-Century British Novel, 1900-1950 (London: Feffer and Simmons, 1970), p. xvii.

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