

NADINE GORDIMER AFTER APARTHEID

A READING STRATEGY FOR THE 1990s

by

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to suggest, by selective example, a method of interpreting Gordimer's fiction from a 'post-Apartheid' perspective. My hypothesis is that Gordimer's own comments in her key lecture of 1982, "Living in the Interregnum", reflect not only her practice in the years of struggle politics, but suggest a yearning for a time beyond struggle, when the civil imaginary might again become a major subject. She claims that she has continually felt a tension in her practice as writer between her responsibility to 'national' testimony, her "necessary gesture" to the history of which she was indelibly a part, and her responsibility to the integrity of the individual experience, her "essential gesture" to novelistic truth.

In arguing for a modification of what has almost become the standard political evaluation of Gordimer, my study returns the emphasis to a revindicated humanism, a critical approach that, by implication, questions the continuing appropriateness of anti-humanist ideology critique at a time in South Africa that requires reconstitutions of people's lives. The shift in reading for which I argue, in consequence, validates the 'individual' above the 'typical', the 'meditative' above the ideologically-determined 'statement', 'showing' above 'telling'. I do not wish to deny the value of a previous decade's readings of the novels as conditioned by their specific historical context. The philosophical concept of social psychology and the stylistic accent on neo-thematism employed in this thesis are not meant to separate the personal conviction from the public demand. Rather, I intend to return attention to a contemplative field of human process and choice that, I shall suggest, has remained a constant feature of Gordimer's achievement. My return to the text does not attempt to establish textual autonomy; the act of interpretation acknowledges that meaning changes in different conditions of critical reception.

My study is not a comprehensive survey of Gordimer's *oeuvre*. It focuses on certain works as illustrative of the overall argument. After an Introduction of general principles, Chapter One focuses on two novels from politically 'overdetermined' times to show that, even in the 'years of emergency', Gordimer's commitment to personal lives and destinies had significantly informed her national narratives. Chapter Two turns to two novels from less 'determined' times as further evidence of Gordimer's abiding interest in the inner landscapes behind social terrains. Having proposed a critical return to the 'ordinary' concerns of the 'civil imaginary', the study concludes by suggesting that the times in the 1990s are ready for a new look at the most intensely lyrical aspects of Gordimer's art: her short stories.

The specific examples culminate, at the end of each chapter, in brief observations as to how the reading strategy might apply to other works in Gordimer's achievement, as well as to an 'interior' as opposed to an 'exterior' accent in South African fiction as a whole.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my own original work.

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INTRODUCTION

This study poses and attempts an answer to the question as to whether, after Apartheid, Nadine Gordimer's preoccupations in her fiction may retain interest and significance. The question is a pertinent one, given that South Africa is moving beyond what Derrida, in referring to this country in 1985, called "this concentration of world history" (297). As racial issues become more tangential than in the past, it is possible that literature, to quote Ndebele, will dwell less on "obscene social exhibitionism" and move from "the highly dramatic, highly demonstrative forms" of literary representation to more "ordinary" concerns (1991a: 37). The question as to whether Gordimer's work will be of less relevance to South African life in the 1990s is, of course, a complicated one, particularly since she established her reputation during forty years of Apartheid as a spokesperson against racial oppression. To summarise: as Gordimer, the novelist, was a 'conscience of the time' under Apartheid, what is her position as a writer now that South Africa seeks to give substance to the notion of a civil society?

Closely linked to the trajectory of her career is the fact that Apartheid began to be institutionalised in 1948, when the National Party government came to power and embarked on its programme of race-related legislation. Gordimer's first book of fiction, the collection of stories *Face to Face*, appeared in 1949. Since then, she has published eleven novels and eleven volumes of short stories, in which she has chronicled the life of a racially 'deformed' society: a society that, notwithstanding, she has consistently refused to leave. Her target has

been the political, intellectual and moral condition of the privileged white middle class, in which her emphasis has been not on the Afrikaner, but on the English-speaking suburbanite. Even in the novels *A Guest of Honour* (1970) and *A Sport of Nature* (1987), which focus on events outside South Africa, she places whites, in Africa, in a situation that is paradigmatic of transitions from white to black rule. In consequence, the South African experience is identifiable as a continuing subtext in the narratives. With the demise of Apartheid in 1990, Gordimer attempted, in *None to Accompany Me* (1994), to offer the first post-1990 novel. The success of her shift 'beyond Apartheid' will be considered in the course of this study.

In novels such as *The Conservationist* (1974), *Burger's Daughter* (1979), and *July's People* (1981), Gordimer struck the representative, almost prophetic, voice of South Africa's painful interregnum (a term she borrowed from Gramsci). She charted the climate of intolerance, injustice and cruelty that had characterised the 1970s and 1980s. It is in her depictions of the upward drive of increasingly urbanised and cynical whites that Gordimer, in contrasting scenes, begins to make the key point that whites, as a separate and oligarchical group, have no future in South Africa, while blacks are about to move back into the mainstream in post-Apartheid society.

I have deliberately used the term 'representative' of her characteristic tones. It is upon this concept that Clingman based his influential study *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside* (1986), in which he makes the crucial point that, while Gordimer gives us the emotional contours of people living amid large historical events, she is also 'written' by the history of which she is a part. Despite her considerable novelistic imagination, she is overdetermined and limited in her writerly freedom. The approach was

apposite for the times: behind Clingman's method lies the general move from a New Critical discourse about the autonomy of art to the various forms of structuralist Marxism – a hermeneutics of suspicion being a recurrent characteristic – that would dominate the critical climate of the 1970s and 1980s in South Africa and abroad. Given large-scale political activities in South Africa – the rise of Black Consciousness (BC), Soweto 1976, the revival of ANC pressure under the guise of the United Democratic Front (UDF), the State of Emergency (1985, 1986), the collapse of National Party hegemony – it seemed appropriate to regard the historical event as having the right to dictate the fiction. It is possible, for example, to trace the events of novels like *The Conservationist* and *Burger's Daughter* to actual happenings reported in newspapers. I shall keep to the fore the question of the relationship of artistic autonomy to the demands of the society.

It is no surprise that critical studies of the recent past, such as Wagner's (1994), should also have adopted the 'deconstructive' approach. While Wagner's study challenges Clingman's emphasis on the political event, she confirms a view of Gordimer as tightly confined to a context. The intricacies and ambiguities that Wagner claims to have found in Gordimer, for example, are not regarded as enriching, but as severely constricting the individual's freedom of choice. In Wagner's study, Gordimer is depicted as trapped in the middle-class codes of the white suburbanites who form the subjects of her novels. And it was characteristic of the 'politics/ art' criticism of the last decade that, in defending Gordimer's novelistic imagination against Adam's (1983) charge of sociological 'untruth', Morphet (1985) should have approved not her control over all facets of her artistic response, but the truths that spill out 'against the grain' of the novelist's conscious social intention. Morphet does not deny that the novelist is 'written by history'; but, to a greater degree than Clingman,

he grants Gordimer the percipience of her illuminating refractions: a potential for reconstitution within the world of deconstruction.

Interestingly, the tension of political crisis was identified by Gordimer herself in 1982, in her address from the public platform in a key statement about the novelist's living in times of crisis and transition: "Living in the Interregnum" (1989; 1983) is a kind of literary manifesto in which Gordimer refers to the "global state of interregnum" (262) and the "greater interregnum of human hopes and spirit" (281), both of which reflect the general international confusion of the late 1970s and early 1980s. 'The global interregnum', like its specifically South African counterpart, has the artist caught in trepidation between insecure structures and values. Identifying two competing responsibilities, that of the writer in opposition to Apartheid and of the writer who shapes the raw material of life, Gordimer acknowledges that political imperatives may overwhelm the art object. Nonetheless, she endorses artistic integrity as distinct from political affiliation. The novelist cannot avoid commitment to a just social cause: at certain points of history, this will be the "necessary gesture". The "essential gesture" remains the truth to human consciousness in its subjectivities and complexities. The choices are not simple, however, and Gordimer's defence of the novelist reveals the pressures of her role as national spokesperson: "I admit that I am, indeed, determined to find my place 'in history' while still referring as a writer to the values that are beyond history. I shall never give them up." (1989: 278).

While warning against black self-pity and white guilt, Gordimer committed herself, a white writer, to a future in Africa: "*How* to offer it is our preoccupation ... how to offer *one's self*" (1989: 264). Declaring herself disillusioned with liberalism and converted to

radicalism, she still subscribed to liberalism's prized notion of individual responsiveness. She found Black Consciousness (BC) anathema to her commitment to non-racialism, but was prepared to understand the drive in BC to side-line even whites like herself who had deliberately bequeathed themselves to black history. The writer ultimately bears a dual responsibility to self and community:

the writer's 'enterprise' – his work – is his 'essential gesture as a social being' ... created in the common lot of language, that essential gesture is individual; and with it the writer quits the commune of the corpus; but with it he enters the commonalty of society, the world of other beings who are not writers. (1989: 286)

In turning a post-Apartheid lens on Gordimer, my purpose is to deny neither the contextual constraints of the previous four decades, nor the critical methods that were appropriate to a time in which history, as J. M. Coetzee puts it, threatened to obliterate the allegorical act of fiction (1988: 2). It was a time of 'necessary gestures', in which debate tended towards Manichaean alternatives. According to both BC and Marxism, for example, liberalism had little to do with the integrity of the individual life, but a great deal to do with unfair racial privileges and capitalist exploitation. While it was understandable that the public-spirited Gordimer should have denied her own liberal predilections, it was equally understandable that she should have expressed ambiguities about the long-standing affinities between liberal principles and the artist's commitment to personal, as opposed to group, destinies. It was also understandable that, given the dichotomy of black solidarity and white oppression, Gordimer, in bequeathing herself to black history, should have begun to regard her own unwillingness to enter the skins of her black characters as a sign of moral integrity.

She moved sharply away from the creation of the fully explored black figures that we find in the earlier novels, *A World of Strangers* (1958) and *Occasion for Loving* (1963), to the guttural voices of the farm workers in *The Conservationist* (1974) and to the barely communicating retainer, July, in *July's People* (1981). At the same time, such a retreat from the full range of character depiction has consequences for the national dimension of Gordimer's literary canvases. My intention, to reiterate, is not to deny the difficult conditions under which Gordimer has written her novels; or to deny the influence of those conditions on her fiction. I wish, nevertheless, to reconsider her work from the perspective of a critical project somewhat different from that which occupied critics in the art/ politics debates of the previous decade. Gordimer herself seems to suggest the need for a 'post-Apartheid' project in a statement she made recently in her lecture to the Pan African Writers' Association in Ghana:

For writers, the drama of individual and personal relations was largely suppressed in themselves, and, when indulged in, by their societies as trivial in comparison with the great shared traumas of the liberation struggle, now surfaces. ... So we have lost the status of what one might call national engagement And I ask myself and you: do we writers seek, need that status, the writer as politician, as statesperson? Is it not thrust upon us, as a patriotic duty outside the particular gifts we have to offer? As the cultural arm of liberation struggles, we met the demands of our time in that era. That was our national status. We have yet to be recognised with a status commensurate with respect for the primacy of the well-earned role of *writer-as-writer* in the post-colonial era. (1997: 17)

* * *

My project, as I have suggested, has as its key consideration a reading of Gordimer 'after the end of Apartheid', in a climate of longing for a return to civilian times. This does not imply that critics such as Clingman and Wagner have necessarily been mistaken in their assessment of Gordimer or that the historical saturation in which they wrote obscured what was obviously embedded in Gordimer's texts. Rather, I shall suggest that the return to relative normality in the larger South African society may permit the critic to return in fresh ways to less politically dramatic aspects of Gordimer's fiction: elements which, even in the highly charged atmosphere of the interregnum in the 1970s and 1980s, never entirely vanished from her texts. I shall contend that such a tension identifies the integrity of the novelist who is seriously committed to public issues at the same time as she has remained more concerned with complex individual lives than even she herself has felt able to acknowledge.

I wish to permit Gordimer a greater command of her own story and her own autonomy than Clingman, Wagner or Morphet was prepared to do. If this may be interpreted as a revindicated humanism, it is not merely a return to an older style of Leavisianism or New Critical criticism, in which context was reduced to a scenic back-drop and characters transcended history in their pursuit of so-called eternal verities. I do not wish to underplay the fact, for example, that Rosa Burger inherits the responsibilities of being Burger's daughter. In granting Rosa a greater sense of self, I shall not pursue Newman's astute insights into the predominant demands of gender (1988). Instead, I intend to remind readers that Rosa emerges as a complex being, constantly negotiating between her 'public' South African identity and her wish to be a freer person in a world more variegated than that summarised by the South African public sphere. It is a scenario in which social pressures sometimes have

to be forcibly resisted in the process of individual maturation, of living and loving in the 'decontextualised' life: a potential that all people, even South Africans in activist circles, presumably require to form their personalities. By concentrating on the overdetermined scenes, like the one in which Rosa witnesses a black man whip a donkey, at the expense of the sunlit interlude in the Mediterranean, one is in danger of neglecting a 'balance' in the novel. This is not to say that the sequences abroad should be permitted to blunt Rosa's relationship with the abrasive politics of the local condition.

Starting from the hypothesis that politically less severe times could encourage a reconsideration of relationships between the public and the private experience, the study seeks its revindicated humanism in the intersections of previously separate categories: liberalism is required to rediscover its individual integrity; Marxism is required to return to the deep humanism of Marx's ideals; Black Consciousness is required to return to Biko's early lesson, that beyond the struggle there was the hope of democratic non-racialism. Such a reconstitutive, as opposed to a deconstructive, endeavour has several further consequences for the critical project. Interpretations which proceed from it are likely to give greater emphasis than ideology critique to matters of character, theme, authorial point of view and, I have mentioned above, the overall 'balance' or design of the narrative. But a return to stylistics should not result in form superseding content. The storm rushing in from the Mozambique channel in *The Conservationist* and symbolically sweeping away the dead white order, for example, does not cancel the power of Mehring's arguments throughout the novel about a pragmatic business involvement in any South African future. Neither need the storm be regarded, as in the historicist approach, to be Gordimer's desperate resort to symbol because she cannot resolve the particular and realistic matter of political transfer in the

epochal thrust of her own narrative. A novelistic device, in short, need not be seen as authorial 'bad faith'.

What I shall suggest is that Gordimer's voice enters her texts in more richly ambiguous forms than was often perceived by the criticism of the 1970s and 1980s. We may take as an example the oft-repeated attack, initially led by Dennis Brutus, that Gordimer's characteristic attitude and style is one of "coldness". Gordimer's 'coldness', 'detachment' and 'impersonality' are seen by Brutus to be associated with the general dehumanisation of the South African society:

Gordimer is the living example of how dehumanised 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. (1969: 97)

It is, however, possible to arrive at another judgement: in her 'detachment' from the members of a corrupt community, Gordimer paradoxically reveals a strong attachment to the love of justice amid oppression. Considered in this way, detachment and cynicism do not necessarily obscure a respect for those who have suffered under Apartheid. "Love" is understood, accordingly, as "an open [as opposed to a closed] approach to human change" (Lifton 1961: 463): an approach which may take the form of sceptical hesitation, cold silences and omissions, or what Clingman calls "methodical doubt" (1986: 105). Ironically, Gordimer's very scepticism is a sign of her responsible opposition to the absurdities of the society in which she lives and must analyse.

The matter of Gordimer's 'detachment' is just one instance of the necessary shifts of interpretation I wish to pursue against the background of a changing society in South Africa. In suggesting a revindicated humanism as a positive criterion of the critical project, I am influenced both by the specific South African situation after Apartheid and by the international counterpart at the end of the Cold War. Comments by Ndebele (1991) and Sachs (1991) in South Africa anticipate and influence my direction. In his criticism of protest fiction (1984) Ndebele wished to restore to black people a complex humanity in politically stark and polarised times. In the 1990s, his now well-worn phrase, "rediscovery of the ordinary", may be seen to extend its significance beyond its original focus on black humanity behind the slogans of struggle. Rather, 'the ordinary' suggests a mode of imagination that is not curtailed by the spectacular political event. As Ndebele phrased the matter, "social imagination" expresses freedom from "the laws of perception that have characterised Apartheid society", in other words, freedom from "the epistemological structures of oppression" (1991b: 65) that entrap both the oppressor and the oppressed. Ndebele's concept of the "social imagination" is strongly echoed in Albie Sachs's term "cultural imagination". Sachs, we remember, called for a ban on the phrase "culture [as] a weapon of struggle", suggesting a non-instrumental view of art that avoids the dangers of "the multiple ghettos of the Apartheid imagination" (1991: 19).

Such observations are summarised in the overriding term, "the civil imaginary": a term appropriate not only to South Africa in the 1990s but to the international condition, as many countries in Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe struggle away from totalitarian systems towards the institutions of democratic life. The term 'civil imaginary', coined by During (1990), serves my purpose of referring, beyond the totalitarian condition, to the

dialogic intricacies of 'decentralised' thought and behaviour. During uses the term in an attempt to draw a parallel between post-revolutionary/ counter-revolutionary times and the postcolonial condition: life on the peripheries of the metropole. The concept has many correspondences, however, in current metropolitan thought, as an indication of the widespread international preoccupation with normalisations of social conditions in the aftermath of severely restrictive political climates. Castoriadis in "The Imagined Institution of Society" (1984) talks about the related concept of "the social imaginary"; Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1983) sees the nation-state as an "imagined community"; Clifford in *The Predicament of Culture* (1981) conceives of culture as "intensely believed"; Ricoeur in *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (1986) considers the "social or cultural imagination" as the common source of both ideology and utopia.

What informs the civil imaginary is a desire to re-integrate the private and the public, especially in societies seeking to recover trust in everyday life, including its routines and institutions. (It is pertinent that in *None to Accompany Me* (1994) human achievement is measured against the obligation to operate within the family and outside it, in the work place.) Hannah Arendt, for example, has questioned the value of divorcing the 'social' from the 'private'. In *The Human Condition* (1958: 213-15) she shows that the social is private by nature, while the private cannot exclude one's socio-political involvements. Roland Barthes also believes that "one must naturally understand the political in its deeper meaning, as describing the whole of human relations in their real structure, in their power of making the world" (1972: 143). The problematic relationship between the individual and the community has preoccupied philosophical debates from Hegel to MacIntyre (1981), Sandel (1983), Walzer (1983), and Taylor (1989). It is a preoccupation of Western thought to which South

Africans are probably now more sympathetic than when the overwhelming problem of Apartheid dominated the national psyche. (Apartheid was, of course, an attempt to subordinate, in ethnic terms, the individual to the group.)

In the search for a concept and language of re-integration, Fromm's school of social psychology provides a useful model: it is an interdisciplinary approach to existential issues, a contextualised essentialism, which denies the need for extreme positions, either 'radical individualist' (psychological inwardness) or 'social radical' (history from the outside). As Fromm puts it:

We believe that man is primarily a social being, and not as Freud assumes, primarily self-sufficient and only secondarily in need of others in order to satisfy his instinctual needs. In this sense, we believe that individual psychology is fundamentally social psychology ... the psychology of interpersonal relationships. (1985: 247)

Such re-integration of the social and the psychological is alien to the Manichaean language of the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in South Africa, but it is necessary to a reconsideration of the concepts 'commitment and freedom', 'individual choice', 'morality as a private act' and, broadly, the truth of fiction. It is interesting, indeed, that several influential thinkers and critics with pronounced 'Third World' commitments have emerged from what might be referred to as a dialectical consideration of the psychological in the social. Sartre, Memmi, Memmi and Senghor, like Fromm, cut across psychology, philosophy, sociology and history. In their analyses and understandings they arrive at the conclusion that Freud and Marx, the symbolic oppositions in the West, cannot, in the colonies of the world, be neatly separated. As Fanon argues in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1990; 1961), a treatise that was highly

regarded by BC in South Africa, psychological liberation from colonial denigration is a prerequisite of social freedom.

Gordimer herself has consistently avoided relegating Marx and Freud to opposing schemas of sense-making. As her various writings suggest (1995), she shares basic tenets of the two thinkers' systems: she embraces what Freud calls the art of doubting (this is what Clingman refers to as methodical doubt) while she subscribes to Marx's scepticism concerning social illusions. At the same time, she believes in the liberating force of truth which, as Marx claimed, led to social change and, as Freud claimed, led to individual change. With the individual destiny and the communal destiny combining within her artistic commitment, Gordimer regards her art and her *self* as the justification of her citizenry, an expression of the will to liberate human beings from the chains of both private and public illusions. Such liberation – as I have suggested – endows Gordimer's scepticism with qualities of 'love'.

Gordimer's reintegration of the psychological and the social has allowed me in this study to align myself with a broad humanist tradition. Liberalism, accordingly, is not discarded, but is understood in terms of its best potential: integrity, awareness, rationality, the interrogative spirit. In South Africa over the previous two decades, in contrast, liberalism has tended to be circumscribed by its enemies. Its opponents have been, on the one hand, Afrikaner Calvinism with its rigid rejection of individual free will and, on the other, Marxism in conjunction with BC, in which liberalism was charged with erasing the material conditions of class and race while courting white economic privilege. (See Butler (1987) and Simkins (1987) for the relevant debates.) My reclamation, however, concerns liberalism's testing of

the individual experience. As Simkins says, "the important liberal conclusion is not a generalised suspicion of grand theory but an insistence that all social theories, grand or small, need to be tested" (1987: 11). Its need to keep institutions under civil control is the social equivalent of the psychological concept of 'the art of doubting', as outlined above in relation to Gordimer's inquisitive spirit. The emphasis is not on individualism, but on responsibility for one's conduct. Or, as Simkins puts it in his important re-evaluation of liberalism in South Africa:

[individualism] consists of self-cultivation, self-confidence, and self-expression. Self-cultivation involves a conscious effort to consider one's rights and duties as citizen and to acquire the knowledge to define and exercise these ... [S]elf-confidence refers to the ability to make judgements on one's own, based on one's own understanding, and to maintain these judgements, even in the face of opposition. ... And self-expression means putting into practice and carrying one's arguments where they need to go. Experience gained here feeds back into self-cultivation. (1987:10)

Such practices have not been held in high esteem in South African society; neither has the emphasis been valued particularly highly in the literary criticism that set out to displace the focus on textual interpretation. Yet these are aspects of 'self-love/ self-realisation' that are central to the concept of social psychology. Integrity and self-esteem should not be confused with "narcissism [which] is an overcompensation for the basic lack of self-love" (Fromm 1985;1942: 100). Without 'self-love' there is neither responsible social interdependence nor mature engagement with the 'other'.

This recuperation of individual integrity helps to remind us that there has always been not only a local, but an international field of interest in Gordimer: a field that, while not

forgetting her role as conscience against Apartheid, was prepared to appreciate and integrate several aspects of her fictional art that, in politically burdensome times, were often neglected. If the challenges of humanism have tended to be caricatured as élitist, or even naive, in South Africa of the struggle years, there is evidence, particularly among critics abroad, of a continuing interest in a wider and more inclusive interpretation of Gordimer than was usually sanctioned by ideology critique. As Engle says, such critics "can find more elasticity and generosity ... [and can] see their moments of political rigour as salutary rather than personally coercive" (1995: 12). Cooke's study, for example, emphasises Gordimer's 'private landscapes' in their effect on the "liberation of children from unusually possessive mothers" (1985: 10) while Newman (1988) considers that gender issues as factors of conditioning have been neglected by both Clingman and Cooke: she attempts to restore "an awareness of the relation of genre to gender" (1988: 17). Several other critics have, in the 1990s, also investigated insights into wider human experiences. In an aptly titled study, Ettin (1993) calls our attention to a Gordimer whose "literary commitments" actually lead to a "betrayal of the body politic". Another important study by a non-South African is that of Head (1994), in which a poststructuralist approach emphasises textual reflexivity rather than contextual demands.

I mention these critics not so as to encourage any separation of the local from the international, but to prepare the way in my study for interpreting Gordimer in a role beyond that of anti-Apartheid spokesperson. If the approach wishes to prise her loose from context, however, it does not wish to entangle her in labyrinths of discourse. As a useful mid-way station between the demands of rhetoric and the demands of reference, the recent revival of thematics, or neo-thematism, anticipates the revindicated humanism I have mentioned. It does

not, however, sacrifice those suspicious readings of the subtext that have sought to dispel the pre-eminence of an earlier 'naive reader'. Neo-thematism began attracting attention in the mid-1980s, in reaction to the anti-humanism of the deconstructive approach. As Pavel puts it, "by the mid-eighties formalism, whether new-critical, semiotic, or poststructuralist, was under attack, and attention to the thematic content of the literary texts revived" (1993: 124). To follow the argument of Pavel and Bremond in their suggestively titled joint article "The End of an Anathema" (quoted by Sollors 1993: XIV), a recovery of empiricism in literary practice and, by implication, in human affairs was philosophically akin to a recovery of the human being as a responsible agent of its own behaviour.

Such responsible agents are likely to vindicate their individual selves in action and choice: as psychological, as well as social characters. The proof of their being would be revealed in the 'plot' of their stories. This is not a mere restatement of a set of Aristotelian characteristics, however, but an admission, after structuralism, that the rhetorical and the empirical both depend for interpretative significance on the discursive arrangement of a narrative order in which human agency reveals itself. The subject of the action is both free and constrained. The 'end of an anathema', that is, the anathema of naive empirical discourse, signals the return of character in action in ways meant to shift interest from people with no centres of being – those whose personalities unravel themselves in ever-receding signifiers – to characters in whom we can invest some responsibility for their choices. When Sollors titles his recent volume *The Return of Thematic Criticism* (1993), we should not expect to encounter 'experience' as simply a description of what is self-evidently *there* and knowable.

A reinterpretation of Gordimer's novels as concerned with the lives of characters in society, therefore, does not deny the shaping force of ideology. Neither does it avoid the fact that Gordimer may use theme and character as 'devices' to convey – even at times to support – her political convictions. We are reminded anew, however, that fiction in its conventions of truth-telling is distinguished not only by its representation of, and insight into, human 'experience', but that experience itself embodies a conceptual attitude to life: the value resides in individual conduct.

The general point is that the present time – after Apartheid, after the end of the Cold War – is conducive to a reconsideration of the cluster of concepts that in a climate of struggle in life and art defined the oppositions of 'private' and 'public' response and responsibility. Such reconsiderations need not confine themselves, of course, to the Western terminology I have used in my Introduction so far, but should consider also the emphasis in African humanism on a sense of healthy interaction between community and self. Commenting on the relationship between one's capacity for self-realisation and interpersonal relationships, Shutte says that

this development is presented in three stages: from the basic capacity for self-consciousness and self-determination that makes us persons, through increasing self-knowledge and self-affirmation, to a progressively greater ability for self-transcendence and self-donation in our relationships with others. ... Individual freedom and community with others need not be seen as opposed, but only on condition that one understands the way in which persons transcend the realm of the merely material. (1993: 10)

According to such modifications of dualistic categories, Gordimer need not be regarded as simply the liberal who became a radical; rather, she could be regarded as the liberal who

continued to respect individual acts of commitment to justice and, at the same time, a radical in her 'methodical' refusal to be satisfied with positions held outside the most testing analysis. She need not be seen as an African novelist writing for the West, or as a Western novelist transporting African concepts to metropolitan readers in forms of nineteenth-century realism. Her switches between bourgeois individualism and Lukacsian typification do not merely imply shifts in political purpose. Perhaps Gordimer has, at one time or another, occupied all of these categorisations. The point is, however, that new intersections between 'Africa' and 'the West' require new critical perceptions. What I propose is a 'counter-chronological' reading strategy: one that, without neglecting her voice as national novelist (her 'necessary gesture'), identifies her more intimate civil imagination (her 'essential gesture').

* * *

The term, 'counter-chronological reading strategy', should signal that this study is not a literary-historical overview of Gordimer's development as a writer of fiction. Instead of beginning with her first collection of stories, *Face to Face* (1949), I select her later, political novels as central to her reputation and end by suggesting that the most neglected aspect of Gordimer's achievement, her short stories, is perhaps in particular need of re-assessment after Apartheid. It is in the stories that Gordimer tends to preserve the more private, even lyrical spaces that, as national spokesperson, she increasingly marginalises in her novels. I do not intend to consider a sample of the stories in a simple, private/ public opposition to the novels, but will reinforce the general thesis of my study that Gordimer's commitments to inner and outer 'histories', or indeed inner and outer biographies, have never been truly separable.

Neither should her narrative techniques be seen easily to separate the individual character from the typical character, nor the affiliation to causes from the integrity to values. In revisiting, in Chapter Three, the early volume *The Soft Voice of the Serpent* (1952), I make a case for a renewed interest in Gordimer's early work which, at the height of political crisis, has tended to be marginalised as 'liberal' and, according to the dichotomies of the times, as self-indulgent and non-political. While the later volume, *Jump* (1991), to which I shall refer, certainly veers towards the public, it is not denuded of personal contours; conversely, while *The Soft Voice of the Serpent* may have emphasised the inner life, the South African social landscape is ever-present in acts of individual resistance to oppression. Possibly the height of Gordimer's art as a short-story writer occurred just prior to the crisis in politics in the early 1970s that turned her increasingly to the larger spaces of the novel. In conclusion, I shall revisit not only *The Soft Voice of the Serpent*, but suggest briefly the intricate accord of necessary and essential gestures in her mature short fiction.

As preparation for such a conclusion, I shall look, in Chapter One, at two of Gordimer's novels from the 'spectacular' years of the 1970s and 1980s, *Burger's Daughter* (1979) and *My Son's Story* (1990). These works will be employed as test-cases of the thematic tension in Gordimer between allegiance to political commitment and allegiance to individual freedom. It is in such issues, in her novels of the political landscape, that Gordimer has secured her international reputation. But the object of comparing these two politically representative works, as I have suggested, will be to qualify the predominant way in which Gordimer has been interpreted as the national conscience. Without discarding the political lens, I shall attend to the more personal choices her characters, even in near-revolutionary times, have had to take into account in the responses of their entire humanity. What governs

this particular comparison is a common concern in the novels with the extreme demands made on individuals by a totalising political situation, one in which underground activity creates its own code of loyalties and decisions, while exerting its effects on the relationship between affiliation and personal integrity. I shall suggest that it is precisely the tension in these two novels between the politically symbolic and the intricate individual life that should guarantee their continuing interest in the 1990s.

Having returned the ‘ordinary’ textures to the novels of spectacular times, I shall continue to argue in Chapter Two for a renewed interest in ‘civil spaces’ in both Gordimer’s latest and earliest novels, *None to Accompany Me* (1994) and *The Lying Days* (1953). In looking at ‘underdetermined times’, a term I shall use to indicate relatively more relaxed political conditions, I pose the question of ‘whither after Apartheid?’ The novels offer several illuminating comparisons, one of which is Gordimer’s treatment of her two protagonists: the youthful Helen Shaw and the mature Vera Stark. Gordimer’s own ‘biography’ – I shall suggest – partly shapes the way her character creations are presented in the two novels, as well as in attitudes to living in South Africa in the years before Apartheid tightened its grip, and then in the years immediately after its demise. In making a case for a renewed interest in the earlier Gordimer, I refute, as I have indicated, the tendency in current Gordimer criticism to remain caught in the polarities of the political years. These polarities were encouraged perhaps unwittingly by Gordimer herself, in her refusal of the label ‘liberal’ and her assertion that ‘liberal’ times had given way entirely to radical times.

An intention that threads its way through the thesis is that of investigating boundaries: between the later and the earlier fiction, between novels and short stories, between the public

and the private. The attempt is to modify several concepts that enjoyed pre-eminence in the years of struggle. To repeat an earlier claim, one of the concepts that needs rethinking is individualism in its connotation of self-expression. My objective will be to illustrate the fact that individual acts of opposition, in their 'psychology' of contemplation, cannot be neatly separated from social or political consequences. I intend to point to the ordering and control of reality as pursued through states of complex awareness and relentless truth-seeking, both of which reveal themselves in Gordimer's depiction of neglected individual and private acts of political engagement. This should provide a useful complementary perspective to that of Gordimer's public image.

While each chapter selects particular books as 'case studies' for the overall critical project, the return of Gordimer to the civil imaginary, I conclude the chapters by extending the particular approaches to brief considerations of the remainder of Gordimer's work. The recovery of the 'private' in the public world of *Burger's Daughter*, for example, may be seen, according to similar shifts of critical emphasis, to have parallels in other novels of the spectacular moment such as *The Conservationist* (1974), *July's People* (1981) and *A Sport of Nature* (1987). Similarly, a return to *The Lying Days* may encourage new interest in novels like *A World of Strangers* (1958), *Occasion for Loving* (1963), *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966) and *A Guest of Honour* (1970). To return Gordimer in a counter-chronological method to her intimate art of short story writing, we need to begin in the extraordinary years of the interregnum, with the all-subsuming underground of *Burger's Daughter*.

1. THE NOVEL OF THE POLITICAL UNDERGROUND

Burger's Daughter and My Son's Story

Burger's Daughter (1979) was written in the Black Consciousness decade and was informed not only by the spirit of black identity in the debate of the time, but by the cataclysmic events of the 1970s that reached their climax in the Soweto uprising of 1976. *My Son's Story* (1990) seems a less 'spectacular' novel, which may suggest something of the more optimistic public temper after the unbannings in 1990. Yet the novel was obviously planned before the unbannings, which took most of South Africa by surprise. On reflection, the fact that *My Son's Story*, like *Burger's Daughter*, utilises the underground as motif reminds us that it too bears the marks of overdetermined times, in its case the years of the state of emergency in the late 1980s. Ironically, there seems to be a greater pessimism about the future and the possibilities for real transformation in *My Son's Story* than in *Burger's Daughter*, the latter having been written at a time of revolutionary enthusiasm. By the time of *My Son's Story*, revolution had lost its narrow and focused trajectory.

In dealing as they do with acute choices between social commitment and individual freedom – the poles of tension in Gordimer's response to life and art – the two novels may act as test-cases for the evaluation of the relationship between her 'necessary' and her 'essential' gestures. In overdetermined times, such choices create a high emotional and intellectual voltage in a writer, sparking off daring ideas and pushing at the limits of

conventional logic. Of the two novels, *Burger's Daughter* integrates more completely the virtues of a politics of ideas with those of a metaphysical problematic. Its status as a political novel has prompted Boyers (1985) to include it in a comprehensive study of major contemporary political novels, while the quality of its ideas has been noted in the authoritative *Pelican Guide to English Literature*:

Nadine Gordimer's handling of political and philosophical argument among her characters – European and African – is something unique in the modern English novel; not only in particular scenes but in her fundamental interests, she has brought the novel of ideas back into English literature, filling a place that had been vacant in living memory. (Taubmann 1984: 241)

Although *Burger's Daughter* has been acknowledged as an important novel of ideas, commentary has not tended to dwell on its intellectual contribution; neither has commentary concerned itself greatly with the more 'private' insights of the novel. Rather, critics have wished to follow Gordimer's own stated admiration for Lukacsian typicality or political representativeness (Gordimer 1970: 229) and have focused, in consequence, on the tenets of national narrative: in this case, on the time of the ascendancy of Black Consciousness. Although she understands the historical necessity of BC, Gordimer, as I mentioned in the Introduction, is decidedly uncomfortable with Black exclusiveness as it threatened her own earlier non-racial ideals (see her essay "What Being a South African Means to Me", 1977). Her non-racial ideals were those of the liberation struggle as espoused by the ANC-aligned forces of the 1950s and symbolised in figures such as Braam Fischer and, of course, Nelson Mandela. In fact, soon after the publication of the novel, Gordimer was attacked by Black Consciousness writers at the 1982 Botswana conference on Culture and Resistance. The accusation was directed against all those whites, including Gordimer, who having remained

in the country rather than having gone into exile, had benefited from Apartheid by virtue of the colour of their skin. The national narrative, of which the story of Lionel Burger's activism is a part, can be seen in *Burger's Daughter* as a fairly intricate means of reconnecting the present times of the 1970s to an older tradition of non-racial, democratic political activity, which characterised the Defiance Campaign of 1952. As has been noted, the figure of Lionel Burger – the saintly man of principle – has affinities with Braam Fischer, the Afrikaner who dissociated himself from his own *volk* to align himself with the oppositional politics of the South African Communist Party.

The recognition of this 'national narrative' attracted immediate attention to *Burger's Daughter*, in the form of both international acclaim and banning in South Africa. Nonetheless, the saga of its banning and unbanning, described in *What Happened to "Burger's Daughter"* (1980b), did not prevent the negative response of *The African Communist* (Z.N. 1979: 100-101). The reviewer considered Gordimer's treatment of the radical left to be disparaging in tone and inaccurate in matters of detail. What *The African Communist* perhaps recognised, but did not articulate, was an ambiguity in Gordimer's depiction of the national matter of revolution. It is a point central to my analysis of both *Burger's Daughter* and *My Son's Story*.

The national narrative in *Burger's Daughter* is in many ways qualified by a personal narrative, the traumatic evolution of Rosa Burger's identity. The daughter of Lionel Burger, a medical doctor who had put his whole life at the service of the black cause, Rosa, after her father's death in prison, is left to explore alone the complexity of her own life. So far, Rosa has led a 'simplified' life, in which the political struggle for which her father stood has been

foregrounded at the expense of any form of meaningful private life. Gordimer shows Rosa in various landscapes in both Europe and South Africa, where her political identifications are burdensome to a young woman attempting to understand herself in the personal commitments of love, friendship and self-esteem. Rosa begins to realise fully the psychological scars she owes to her political upbringing.

In the national political arena of the late 1970s, when the novel appeared, the story of Rosa tended to be understood by readers in terms of the public surroundings in which the Burger family conducted its life. Here, it is the figure of Lionel Burger who, though physically absent, hovers like a presence in the novel. To some extent, Gordimer's purpose is to show that Rosa *is* Burger's daughter. She also moves behind the symbolic political scenes, however, to chart Rosa's complex resistances to her apparent destiny as her father's daughter. I shall suggest that even the symbolic-political scenes – Lionel Burger's trial, for example, or Rosa's confrontation with the BC-aligned Baasie – are more ambiguously constructed than critical commentary has tended to suggest. My concern will be to recover several 'private' aspects of the novel in an attempt to qualify the status of *Burger's Daughter* as national allegory and restore to the narrative its intricate civil times and places. The world outside South Africa, for example, is not meant to represent an apolitical escape from the immediacy of political life, but a set of new circumstances in which Rosa assesses her own behaviour in her search for self-awareness.

Published eleven years after *Burger's Daughter*, *My Son's Story* (1990) has attracted less controversy. Like the earlier novel, it has sufficient investment in the public world – the protagonists are clearly influenced by the politics of the 1980s – to permit a 'national'

interpretation. Unlike *Burger's Daughter*, however, national allegory does not finally strike us as an appropriate model of narrative. The difference resides in the relationship of the private life and public obligations. In *My Son's Story* the family intrudes into and, to some extent, defeats the public world, even as the family is torn apart. The action revolves around Sonny in his extra-marital affair with the white woman Hannah, an affair that transports the family man into the underground world of resistance politics. The affair serves as a vivid symbol of an individual life divided between two kinds of loyalty, as well as between different engagements in the private and the public domains. Sonny collapses under the strain: he is stripped of political leadership, his marriage disintegrates, and his mistress finally leaves him for another human rights cause.

It is the private that is foregrounded, and in the temper of the political spectacular that in the late 1980s and early 1990s continued to govern critical response, the novel received relatively little attention. It seems to have caught critics in a state of confusion. As one South African critic noted at the time of the novel's publication,

the millennium has not arrived; the mystique of the promised new age has evaporated in the confusion and mediocrity of its fumbled beginnings; the ANC and other resistance organisations have taken on human dimensions, many of which were better cloaked in mystery. (MacKenzie 1990: 8)

Critics outside of South Africa were clearly more generous towards Gordimer's focus on the vulnerability of heroes living in the midst of confused and turbulent times. Somewhat fancifully comparing Sonny's profile to that of Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr, a *New York Times* reviewer said: "the heart and soul of this brilliantly suggestive and knowing novel is its courageous exploration of ... the conceits and deceits that inform the

lives not only of ordinary people but of those whom the rest of us invest with ... majesty and awe" (Coles 1990: 20). Another critic welcomed Gordimer's victory over her "internal censors", and appreciated her tense relationship with BC and the social roles of white South Africans. Quoting Caroline Heilbrun's perception of internal censorship in Virginia Woolf, Greenstein says:

My Son's Story marks the beginning of a sea-change in Nadine Gordimer's writing, perhaps as dramatic as the transformation ... in Virginia Woolf's late work. ... '[Woolf] became another person in her fifties' by prevailing over internal censors which had prohibited her art to 'say the unacceptable'. (1993: 204).

Perhaps the comparison, however, is not entirely unjustified. *My Son's Story* is not what one could unproblematically call 'a private novel'. Despite a foregrounding of the private life, the novel deals with "the conspiracy of silence" and "the loss of absolutes" (Kohler 1991: 4-5), that in retrospect seem appropriate to the end of Apartheid. Gordimer devotes effort to observing life lived on the edge in highly charged political times; she is concerned with forms of escapism, survival, excitement and evasion, all of which characterise her perception of people in political crisis.

Despite differences between the two works under discussion in this chapter, there are reasons why the novels should be subjected to analytical comparison. The novels have a common motif: the political underground, of which the spirit is expressed in melodramatic words and action, as affecting the ordinary processes of personal growth and consciousness. South African society is seen as imprisoned in the values of absolutes; the private life,

accordingly, is constricted by public impositions. In considering the political underground as a key explanatory trope, I am alluding to Gordimer's comment in her essay "Living in the Interregnum" (1989;1983), in which she reveals the tension, paradox, even conflict between her need for political commitment and her need for artistic integrity. As I have said, this tension has not been sufficiently investigated in the criticism of her work.

Critics have nonetheless utilised the poles of public and private lives as the bases of their approaches. In his suggestively subtitled book *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: Private Lives/ Public Landscapes* (1985), Cooke's main interest lies in investigating the liberation of children from overpowering parents. In *Burger's Daughter*, for example, it is Rosa's liberation from her revolutionary family that Cooke finds most illuminating. The private and public, as Boyers (1985) sees them, are interconnected: he looks at the "nexal bonding" between individual and collective expressions of power (1985: 133). Sex, the private expression of power, is 'nexally bonded' to political activity, which is its public expression. In this equation, the self becomes for Boyers a "self-as-agent" (1985: 121) of change. Clingman (1986) is interested in Rosa's personal liberation only in so far as the effects have socio-political resonances. For Newman the private is an aspect of sexual and racist politics, and her focus is on the power of growing self-awareness (1988). Pajalich scrutinises the tension between "individual and community, self and other" (1991: 319- 336) within Gordimer's gradual liberation from the legacy of colonial literature. Ettin (1993) focuses on issues of confidence and betrayal, negotiations of power and the debilitating effects the body politic has on private lives. At the private level, Apartheid is considered to be the institutionalised codification of individual tendencies of oppression and segregation. Wagner (1994) looks at Gordimer's interest in family values in order to point to the author's deep-

seated attachment to middle-class suburban values: the angry young protagonists in Gordimer's novels eventually give up their rebellion against their parents' generation and espouse, with a difference, the latter's belief system. Head (1994) finds two interrelated themes in Gordimer: the politics of the body, through which Gordimer challenges racial prejudices among individuals, and preoccupations with spaces as a form of social control.

None of these monographs, however, has focused on the underground as the motif of political overdetermination: a motif which – we shall see – is crucial to both *Burger's Daughter* and *My Son's Story*. As I indicated in the Introduction, Gordimer understands the need for political change while simultaneously making visible the tribute that the process exacts from individual lives. In mentioning the underground, one might be tempted to take at face value Gordimer's statement in 1965 that she is "a romantic struggling with reality" (1990i;1965: 41). One should, however, be cautious when decoding this formulation. She is certainly a writer whose deep understanding of the times accepts the importance of idealism as a 'necessary gesture'; but to confuse this necessity with romanticism is to confuse didacticism with an oversimplified reading of reality. I tend to agree with Wagner when she notes that Gordimer's "tendency to romanticise, idealise and mythologise both the revolutionary process and the lives and attitudes of those working to realise it ... is a corollary of the didactic element in [her] moral stance" (1994: 66). To put it differently, Gordimer understands the necessity for change and for the revolutionary enthusiasm that must accompany it. This does not mean, however, that she is a naive enthusiast herself. The apparently thematic paradox is reinforced in a narrative technique that permits both authorial intrusion and the ironical detachment of free, indirect speech.

I shall consider first the consequences of revolutionary commitment, or enthusiasm, in the novels; secondly, I shall assess the totality of political involvement contrasting it with the seeds of doubt that I see as ever present. Thirdly, I shall focus on the meditative processes and move away from critiques of absolutes. These meditative areas of the texts have too often been neglected in analyses of Gordimer's work.

* * *

Lionel Burger and Sonny are the romantic revolutionary figures who, in representing different phases of political engagement, become figures within the national narrative. As a hero of underground politics, Lionel Burger captures the attention of various characters: Rosa, Conrad, Katya, Baasie, the Swedish journalist, Chabaliere, whose observations and accounts range from admiration to scepticism. The heroic element is at its strongest when Burger, as anti-Apartheid fighter, is speaking for himself at his own trial. This particular scene arouses in the reader pity and fear, the classical responses to the fate of the doomed hero pushing at his own limits and risking his life in the name of a noble cause. It is one of Gordimer's concentrated single scenes – what I have referred to as a symbolic-political scene – which has been noted by Taubmann as exemplary of the novelist's method: "Her work concentrates on a single subject, Africa; and is most powerful in single, exemplary scenes – *anagnorisis* scenes, revealing and destroying false assumptions" (1984: 239).

The elevated status of the trial scene is complicated by Gordimer's use of ironical qualification. Burger is presented, in general, by a voice of apparently objective observation as an extraordinarily compassionate man, a Marxist and, in symbolic fashion, a Christian. He

professes "the compassion of the Son of Man" (25), a compassion he feels for both whites and blacks. Burger's "Christ-like compassion" (23) – the religious imagery is insistent – is also suggested in the way he deals at his trial with the old schoolteacher who betrays him. Although registering that he has been betrayed, "he wasn't disgusted" (23). Gordimer permits Burger's character to understand the frailty of other human beings in a crisis-ridden society. Nevertheless, Burger remains firm when it comes to the problem of overcoming racism. As he states in his testimony (his direct speech as his personal authority in the third-person narrative):

... this court has found me guilty on all counts. If I have ever been certain of anything in my life, it is that I acted according to my conscience on all counts. I would be guilty only if I were innocent of working to destroy racism in my country. (27)

The spectators at the trial are hypnotised by Burger's self-possession. There are moments of electrified silence, followed by passionate outbursts from African supporters: "Amandhla! Awethu! Amandhla! Awethu!" (28). A British observer, referring to his sentence of "life imprisonment" is heard to say: "And here life means life" (28).

The spirit of enthusiasm and unreserved admiration for the hero continues after the trial, at Theo's place, where the scene is reminiscent of the apostles' gathering after Jesus' crucifixion:

There was bravado and sentiment in the confidence of the room full of people at Theo's, that they were behaving as Lionel Burger would expect, as he would do himself in their situation. That was how they saw themselves.

Strong emotion – faith? – has different ways of being manifested among the different disciplines within which people order their behaviour. (33)

The Christian allusions continue to predominate on such occasions. The reminder, however, that Lionel Burger is not Christ begins to check the reading response. Something in the style begins to suggest over-statement. When Rosa questions the quality of loyalty displayed by her father's followers, one is tempted to re-visit the text and attend more closely to Gordimer's method. I shall return to the fact that Burger's trial is actually focalised not only as heroic, but in more ambiguous ways through the eyes of one of the members in the gallery: the sceptical Conrad. What I wish to emphasise here is that the third-person narrator is equally ambiguous: the very depiction of Burger as a saint smacks too much of perfection in a society of extreme political complication. As a result, the idealism undercuts its own utter certainties. It is important that we grant Burger, the revolutionary, our admiration; at the same time, it is important that we do not lose sight of Burger, father of Rosa, whose absolute involvement in revolutionary causes will be felt as a heavy burden of responsibility by his daughter in her attempt to break the bonds of her conditioning and find her own role as a person. (Interestingly, a similar complication of necessary and essential gestures would provide the thematic core of *Every Secret Thing* (1997), Gillian Slovo's autobiographical novel on the relationship between daughters and parents in a politically revolutionary family.) The complication of necessary and essential gestures is embodied in the meaning and method of the novel.

Although there are no moments of unquestioned heroism in *My Son's Story*, Sonny, like Lionel Burger, lives out his story in the world of the political underground. Whereas

Burger's vision of the underground is shown as pure in its absolute commitment, Sonny's underground almost assumes the romance of an escape from the dreariness of everyday life. Just as Burger's underground intrudes its heroism on others as burdensome to their lives, so Sonny's underground spills around him in ways destructive to others. In both novels – the former looks towards the large event of Soweto 1976, the latter recollects an earlier heroic time in the multiple cruelties of the emergency – the underground plays almost a character role: the psychological and social space that affects personality, perspective and destiny. Gordimer understands this space and the attraction of what has been termed "the cult of enthusiasm", which usually reflects the fundamental "human hope of rejuvenating transformation" (Lifton 1961: 392, 333).

Such types of space and their treatment within literary texts have spurred the imagination of many thinkers. In more recent years the concept and the condition have become the object of the philosophy of science. As the philosopher Gaston Bachelard shows in *The Poetics of Space* (1969), there is an interconnection between our various configurations of space. Combining the rationality of the material imagination with the ontology of the poetic imagination, Bachelard shows space to range from "felicitous" to "hostile", and the human psyche to be influenced by that realm. The space one inhabits is seen as the concentrated expression of one's entire psyche; one becomes the space one inhabits (1969: 137). Developing ideas from Bachelard's seminal book, Ioan Davies (1990) investigates the complex relationship between the 'universe' of the prison underground and the literary response to it. In Gordimer's case, she manages to capture the spirit of 'overdetermined' circumstances, or, to quote Davies, of "total incarceration" and the "incarcerated imagination" (1990: 8, 16). As Harlow (1987) has pointed out as well, this

'hostile space' as the locus of 'the incarcerated imagination' extends well beyond the prison space proper, and begins to define the parameters of oppositional discourses in a broad social sense. I deem it important to emphasise the matter of space because I shall focus in this chapter on the labyrinthine nature of the underground either as prison space or as a network of political activism at both the psychological and symbolic level. The underground lends focus to the extreme social condition not only as entrapment but as the spur to transformation: in the desperate place new possibilities of human motivation may be discovered. Psychologically, it has been interpreted as "the place of transformation, where the destructive tendencies of nature are overcome" (Chetwynd 1982: 256). The revolutionary underground is, by implication, the space where revolutions not only destroy those infected by enthusiasm, but provoke forms of organisation and conduct designed to overthrow the old order. In an analogical sense, we may transfer Lionel's space to his daughter's field of consciousness: revolutionary influence is for Rosa the antithesis which forces upon her the drive for a synthesis of her self.

Cooke (1985) has, in fact, offered an in-depth analysis of Gordimer's treatment of space. He argues that her *oeuvre* may be perceived in terms of the landscape informing each work, and that Gordimer has undergone a dramatic change in her treatment of landscapes. Early pieces offer descriptions of the Witwatersrand mining community and of Johannesburg, while in mid-career she starts looking at the veld and, from *A Guest of Honour* onwards, at the African landscape in general. Cooke interprets this direction as an indication of Gordimer's ever-expanding vision of the South African space and its related social conditions. Wagner views Gordimer's landscapes as illuminating "the passionately subjective origins of her disaffection with her world" (1994: 167) while attempting to contextualise

Gordimer in the South African tradition of landscape iconography as the expression of the settler's ambivalent relationship to the new land. Head (1994) also considers Gordimer's spatial perceptions while relying on Foucault's concept of geography and topography; heterotopia is space created through social relations and should be considered as a focus of power, a site of contesting social forces. In the spirit of Foucault, Head reads Gordimer by combining concepts of space with the micropolitics of the body to suggest that Gordimer creates her novelistic landscapes in the spatial grids of Apartheid engineering: an engineering of space in physical (racial) segregation and incarceration. Head concludes:

Clearly, the heterotopias of urban South Africa return us to the micropolitics of the body: heterotopias are places created for individual bodies to resist the organised spaces of incarceration or surveillance and to establish their own spaces of consciousness and freedom. (1994: 31)

As my comments above should suggest, my interpretation of space in the two novels under discussion has, like Head's, been influenced by Foucault's formulation of heterotopia.

Like other space patterns, the structures of the political underground mould thought and social interaction. Within the boundaries of this particular space, revolutionary enthusiasm spreads from the charismatic individual to his/ her group and creates a sense of belonging to a noble cause. "Group identification" in the name of "great togetherness" (Lifton, 1961: 254, 380) has always been one of the many motivating factors of revolutionary engagement. Referring to the same phenomenon, Boyers, as I have indicated, uses the term "nexal bonding", which, he says, "operates in terms of a positive conception according to which one achieves membership in a group by affirming belief in a supreme being or in a set of values genuinely thought to be good" (1985: 133). Through its laws of concealment from

surveillance and the paradoxical phenomenon of "Surveillance surveyed" (Daymond 1984: 164), the political underground offers the fascination of initiation into an exclusive group. First-hand experience of the underground, such as the poet Breyten Breytenbach (1984) obtained, seems to suggest that clandestine political activity has its own fascination. This experience is said to impose vigorous discipline on, and bring about, greater self-confidence in those involved. The political underground is also said to be the ideal locus for generating "loyalty based on rock-bottom mutual needs" while another attraction, Breytenbach claims, is that of going beyond the borders of conventional logic (1984: 81-83).

One of the most alluring aspects of the political maze, as presented by Gordimer in the two novels under discussion, is the sense of belonging to a revolutionary 'extended family': it is a sense of identity through political commitment. The communists in *Burger's Daughter*, for example, regard themselves as belonging "to a close-knit extended family, with obligations not unlike those agreed on by close relationships" (Boyers 1985: 130). Their political ties are felt to be equivalent to familial bonds, and the reader is invited to view the political and private relationships created in this novel as binding, with Lionel Burger in the role of benevolent patriarch. According to Boyers, "Lionel Burger is at once an activist and a patriarch, a sower of the seeds of disorder and a stable centre around which numbers of people gather to discover where they are to go" (1985: 127). It is against such a condition, of course, that his daughter must rebel.

The Burger household with its open-house policy and its symbolically central gathering point of the swimming-pool, stands for the underground maze of political activism. It is "the everyday mythology of that house" (111) with its atmosphere of trust, based on the

bonding effects of concealment and anxiety concerning surveillance, that attracts people to the Burger cell of resistance. They become faithful to their leader as he makes them "fiercely proud of [him]" (32). Burger's "faithful" have come to the point where they seek a substitute for their personal aspirations in Burger's cause. They embrace the cause in a "trance of a common resentment ... [while] celebrat[ing] ... that romance of humiliation by which and from which each in his different way draws strength and anger to revenge it" (158). Since Lionel Burger stands as a patriarch for both his immediate family and his political admirers, there seems to be an interrelatedness between the two groups, the immediate family taking on the characteristics of "the faithful", while the political disciples behave as if they were actually Burger's immediate family. Rosa herself is the best illustration of how the offspring of a revolutionary couple virtually has to accept that "we belonged to other people" (84), as well as the fact that other people belonged to them.

In *My Son's Story* the days of grand heroism, as I have suggested, have begun to recede. Unlike Lionel Burger, Sonny is not a self-confident patriarch. A coloured schoolteacher from the mean suburbs, he does not have Burger's privileged social status. But although he is not a hero of the Burger type, he is a highly self-conscious *individual*, who is not easily diverted from his aspiration to overcome "one-dimensionality", as Marcuse (1991; 1964) would put it. In fact, Cooke's comments upon Gordimer's investing her most accomplished characters with a drive towards attaining cognitive and psychological control over their lives have applicability to Sonny:

attaining full maturity in Gordimer's fictive world requires that [the characters] learn ... to trust in what they know, as well as how they are known

by others. ... this double liberation is the closest thing to the attainment of religious knowledge in Gordimer's fiction. (1985: 15)

Reading world literature was for Sonny

a way out of battered classrooms, the press of Saturday people, the promiscuity of thin-walled houses, and at the same time back into them again with a deeper sense of what life in them might mean. Kafka named what he had no names for. The town whose walls were wandered around by the Saturday people was the Castle. (17)

Sonny's book learning is a symbol of his ambition to go beyond his social status and to find new concepts and words through which to express his ambitions and dreams.

Whereas Lionel Burger is compared to Christ, Sonny is compared to St. Sebastian: "the arrows did not penetrate his sense of self" (1991b: 23). In his search for his own individualism, Sonny values freedom above equality: "Equality was not freedom, it had been only the mistaken yearning to become like the people of the town. And who wanted to become like the very ones feared and hated? Envy was not freedom" (24). Sonny's sense of service to the community is not based, as is that of Burger, on the abstract ideal, but upon his own need for self-respect. The rhetorical note granted to the narrative voice catches the flavour of Sonny's inner voice: "Self-respect! It's been his religion, his godhead. ... his inner signpost, his touchstone" (13).

Such aspirations have little to do with heroism, but involve the individual's application to more concrete tasks. As a schoolteacher, for instance, Sonny commits himself to the education of the future generation. By teaching the pupils how to express themselves

correctly, he offers them a passport to the world beyond the ghetto in which they live. Education is meant to give them equality with whites. Sonny's temperament does not embrace the heady post-Soweto cries of "liberation before education".

If Burger is blinded by his own certainties, Sonny experiences a schism between his own, increasingly confining, forms of commitment. In the home space, he becomes more and more estranged from his family, whom he perceives to be marginal to his political activism: "Why did Aila [his wife] never speak? Why did she never say what he wanted her to say?" (57). In the underground space, his escape from the mundane responsibilities translates into the false glamour of an illicit love-affair. His "needing Hannah" is based on

the sexuality of commitment; for commitment implies danger, and the blind primal instinct is to ensure the species survives in circumstances of danger ...
In this freak displacement, the biological drive of his life, which belonged with his wife and the children he'd begotten, was diverted to his lover. He and Hannah begot no child; the revolutionary movement was to be their survivor. The excitement of their mating was for that. (241 – 42)

Whereas the Burger household almost suffocates Rosa, Sonny's house becomes his space of isolation. Instead of understanding the estranging effects of his double life upon his family, he believes that his family – his 'ordinary' family – cannot share his revolutionary zeal; his family are not involved in his political programme of opposition, and hence his "needing Hannah". The Burger household – except in the incident involving the drowning of Rosa's brother – seems to function benignly on the surface level of family routine. The motif of the illicit love affair in the later novel, however, makes explicit the fact that underground activities cannot be cordoned off from the family space. (I shall pursue this issue

in the next section of the chapter.) Would Sonny have ‘needed’ Hannah had Aila ‘spoken’? In any case, she is forbidden to ‘speak’. In both novels, the underground space, the space of absolutes, the space of heroism and romance, has disastrous effects on the processes of ordinary life. It is ‘ordinariness’, in Rosa Burger and in Sonny’s family, that, in paradoxical contrast to the highly charged atmosphere of political causes, emerges as more complex than the national narratives for which Gordimer has been fêted.

* * *

While it is true that critics have pointed to tensions between the public and the private in Gordimer’s work, the spaces occupied publicly and privately by the characters and perhaps analogously by Gordimer herself have not usually been pursued into the motivations of a psychological universe. But if Gordimer understands the importance of revolutionary involvement, she also understands that overdetermined social times have mental consequences for both individuals and groups of individuals. An implicit question in *Burger’s Daughter* and *My Son’s Story* – indeed, in several of her novels – is: how do characters operate when there is pressure to surrender individual freedom to group dynamics? How do they preserve or redeem their integrity? In seeking to release the novels from the geopolitical setting of their era, one is more freely able to consider, in re-imagined civil times, the psychology of response, not as an alternative to the sociology of response, but as a valid, well-integrated, discourse of opposition to oppressive regimes. It is a form of opposition that has characterised literary life in Eastern Europe, but which in South Africa has tended to be dismissed as escapism, irrelevance or irresponsibility. Gordimer’s own difficulties about essential and necessary gestures are germane to the issue. As Lifton phrases it,

the ethos of psychoanalysis is in direct opposition to that of totalism. Indeed, its painstaking and sympathetic investigations of single human minds place it within the direct tradition of those Western intellectual currents which, historically, have done most to counter totalism: humanism, individualism, and free-thinking scientific inquiry. (1961: 446)

The element that goes beyond the absolutist assumptions of oppressive regimes is what Freud calls *Wissstrieb* or *epistemophilia*, that is, the *desire* to expand one's cognitive limits. Contemporary psychoanalytical literary criticism, with Peter Brooks as a prominent practitioner, while dwelling on the Freudian theory of love and death, looks into the nature of 'desire'. Much like libidinal desire, narrative

desire ... understand[s] origins and the need to find a workable 'truth', an explanation that will overcome narrative resistance and allow the 'plot' – of one's life or one's fiction – to resume its movement into the future and towards its desired end. (1994: 7)

The desired end of narratives is the mastery of reality and temporality through the decoding of the discourses: in this particular case, through the oppressive discourse. According to Brooks, one's "attempts at seeing and knowing are attempts at mastering" (1994: 106).

In attending to the psychological aspects of Gordimer's work, it is necessary to qualify a term that will be used extensively in this section of the study: *totalism*. It belongs to the vocabulary of psychology and should not be confused with the term totalitarianism, since the latter is a political concept. Totalitarianism is used in connection with manifestations of political extremism and refers to violent or manipulative attempts to force political changes on others. Totalism, on the other hand, refers to the individual's potential to impose and/or

accept external pressure for change. It refers to "the inner springs of man's motives to set up or to tolerate societies of [a closed nature]" (Schapiro 1981: 101). Other authors (including Lifton 1961) describe it as "the psychology of the pawn", or of "human zealotry"; in short, the individual's totalist potential is considered to form the basis of the "psychology and the ethics of directed attempts at changing human beings" (1961: 4).

Totalism may be considered as a closed, rather than an open, approach to human change (Schachtel 1959: 75): that is, one aiming at a total and all-embracing control over the human mind. Instead of producing a more receptive attitude towards the world, the closed approach to human change, as evidenced in experiences of personal closure, encourages "a backward step into some form of 'embeddedness', a retreat into doctrinal and organisational exclusiveness, and into all-or-nothing emotional patterns" (Lifton 1961: 436). Similarly, perfectionism – another "all-or-nothing" attitude – is grounded in a belief in absolute value systems, and the premise of one-dimensional logic, as Marcuse aptly points out the phenomenon in the title of his study, *One Dimensional Man*, (1991;1964). Totalism is fundamental to totalitarianism; it is a religion of absolutes, which finds it difficult to reconcile "freedom with the idea of an absolute purpose ... by ... thinking not of men as they are, but as they were meant to be, and would be, given the proper conditions" (Talmon 1960: 20).

Such a tendency to think in absolutes is based on the individual's unconscious aspiration towards oversimplification. As Lifton says, "This kind of emotional relevance [totalism] leads to great oversimplifications" and implicitly to a "grandiose, starkly melodramatic image of the world" (1961: 378). It is a melodramatic universe that is often

peopled by what Oakeshott calls "failed individuals", or "anti-individuals" (1961: 159). There is a static, binary oppositional model of existence and an atomising mentality, in which the part takes precedence over the whole. One extreme of the 'failed-individual syndrome' is represented by the master/ captor/ magic helper; at the other extreme, by the servant/ victim/ pathologically submissive anti-individual. Absolute submission to an unquestioning faith in persons and/or organisations is expressed in a highly concentrated language that is usually filled with clichés or, as Lifton puts it, "The most far-reaching and complex of human problems are compressed into brief, highly reductive, definitive-sounding phrases, easily memorised and easily expressed" (1961: 429). Binary thought is the defining mode: issues are either good or evil, resulting in what Trilling in his study *The Liberal Imagination* condemns as "the language of non-thought", which he considers to be an expression of ideology rather than of thought:

Ideology is not the product of thought; it is the habit or the ritual of showing respect for certain formulas to which, for various reasons having to do with emotional safety, we have very strong ties of whose meaning and consequences in actuality we have no clear understanding. (1970;1951: 284-85)

* * *

In *Burger's Daughter* these abstractions are embodied, as I have suggested, in those who surround Lionel Burger. As I have also suggested, Gordimer, while acknowledging necessary commitment, is somewhat suspicious of totalism. It is to her sceptical hesitations that I wish to re-direct attention. If the re-direction is towards the psychology of response, however, it does not imply a rejection of the social space, and we are reminded accordingly that Marxism, in its search for social coherence or 'totality' (not to be confused with

‘totalism’), has incorporated various influences from different schools of thought in an effort to integrate the notion of structured coherence or totality amid the plurality of appearance. One of its more notable ‘hybridisations’ is that which attempts to integrate social materialism and existentialist thinking, represented most tellingly in the writings of Jean Paul Sartre. Phenomenological Marxism (Maurice Merleau Ponty) and structuralist Marxism (Louis Althusser) are two other important attempts at hybridising the basic Marxist concept of ‘total’ societal engagement with an inner, mental reality. At the opposite end of this aspiration towards a normative totality, lie the various poststructuralist systems of thought. In concepts used by Derrida (1978) such as ‘play of desire’, ‘difference’, ‘displacement’, ‘non-identity’, ‘undecidability’, ‘trace’, ‘supplementarity’, we see a hostility towards the concept of totality. In the indefinite play of a non-totalist reality, "holes" take the place of "wholes", as Derrida playfully announces in *Writing and Difference* (1978: 178). But as Gordimer, I argue, is not a totalist, neither is she a poststructuralist. Her anchor remains human agency. If this has social implications, it also has individual psychological implications.

In rejecting what has been described here as a totalist approach to human change, Gordimer’s is an open approach to effecting change towards a just social order. It is a change that should give the individual a sense of greater self-worth and integrity. Her approach, as we shall see, is characterised by the anti-totalist nature of her underlying premises: liberal pluralism and the acceptance of philosophical insecurity. Her approach to the question of love, even self-love, is not egocentric or narcissistic, and reveals a flexible engagement with reality. What Clingman regards as Gordimer’s exquisite sense of "observation" I intend to regard as ‘awareness’. As I hope to show, this is not just a play on words. In talking of awareness rather than observation, the emphasis shifts from the author’s preoccupation with

socio-political issues to her deep interest in the dynamics of individuals: the need to understand experience, not primarily through observation, but through processes of contemplation. Accordingly, Gordimer's oft-noted detachment, even her self-flagellation, emerges as a form of concern for making truth visible. The radical Cartesian doubt, often referred to by Clingman as Gordimer's "methodical doubt", is evidence of the author's need to go "beyond the chains of illusion" (Fromm 1989;1962). As I suggested in the Introduction, detachment and biting criticism may be interpreted as concealed forms of love and concern for South Africa and South Africans.

To recapitulate, change is crucially important to Gordimer, but it is change by a process of critical engagement with her own sense of authenticity. While understanding the necessary gestures of revolutionary commitment, Gordimer points to dangers in 'the cult of enthusiasm': on the one hand, the attraction of melodrama (Lifton 1961: 378), on the other, its "myth of the hero" and of totalism (Lifton 1961: 287, 290). The main device used by Gordimer to analyse the complexity of revolutionary drama and melodrama is the imagining and depiction of the actions of the revolutionaries' children. It is through the minds of Rosa Burger and Will that Gordimer sets in debate the necessary gestures of the historical moment and the essential gestures that challenge the national narrative.

* * *

In *Burger's Daughter*, as the title indicates, Rosa Burger is the focus of attention. But whereas 'public' interpretation locates her at key moments of her political development – Rosa's assessment of her 'liberal' responses as she witnesses a black man whipping a donkey

– I shall shift the lens towards the ‘private’ interpretation: Rosa treads the path of liberation from the overpowering ethos of her parents to an emancipatory journey that moves her beyond filial dependence, through emotional and geo-physical independence, to a superior kind of psychological integration. It is an integration with her ‘non-political’ fellow-human beings. She challenges her father’s external moral value system in terms of another kind of engagement: the morality of a personal transformation which assumes within it the risks that accompany her own liberatory process. As long as she confines herself to her role as Burger’s daughter, Rosa is totally dependent upon the demands and expectations of her father’s zone of influence. The symbolic locus is the prison space with its labyrinthine rules and political loyalties. The visits she pays her father in prison are an expression of the apparent paradox of the underground, in which political liberation is at the same time a kind of personal constriction:

To be [ideologically] 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. (81)

The estrangement from self is the price a revolutionary has to pay in the name of a dignified social cause. (In *My Son’s Story* Sonny makes a similarly paradoxical statement when he says: "There’s no freedom in working for freedom" (1991b: 96).)

In stepping beyond her father’s zone of influence, Rosa embarks on a journey of self-discovery. The devices Gordimer employs to reveal the multiple perspectives of consciousness beyond totalism have been briefly introduced in my earlier observation of authorial ambiguity operating in the symbolic-political trial scene. It might be worth

elaborating on Gordimer's use of multiple perspectives, for the technique has a thematic parallel.

Rosa's re-interpretation of her *self* is achieved in the novel by Gordimer's use of what could be described as 'agents-of-the-agent', or as Boyers phrases it, "self-as-agent" (1985: 121), that is, our understanding of Rosa's personal life as glimpsed through the responses of the several characters with whom she shares her experiences. Of course, the responses are in turn guided by Gordimer's authorial perspective and her subtle shifts from the author as 'authority' to the author who dissolves into the free indirect speech of a character's consciousness. In addition, we have what Clingman refers to as Gordimer's "quotational gymnastics" (1986: 187). From the epigraph onwards Gordimer makes use of quotations and literary allusions. These range from acknowledged sources to implied references, and cover a wide literary and socio-political field: Turgenev, Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Yeats, Mann, Marx, Hegel, Biko, Slovo, Fanon, Senghor and Nkrumah. Thus, Gordimer creates links between the political reality and the fictional reality that has influenced her writing. As Jacobs has said, Gordimer's "full South African story, she shows, is to be told not only from 'the inside', but also between the texts" (1993: 44). Her quotational gymnastics are a sign of how form has consistently had to be the bearer of historical consciousness. Yet Rosa's growth has to do with the shedding of historical consciousness: the burden of politics begins to thwart the individual response.

Such multiplicity is captured in the symbol of the mirror: "I shall never know," says Rosa. "It's all concocted. I saw – see – that profile in a hand-held mirror directed towards another mirror" (14). We focus on Rosa's thought processes not as self-sufficient, therefore,

but as refracted by various secondary focalisers who are sometimes difficult to distinguish from Rosa Burger, the inheritor of the revolutionary ethos. At the same time, the narrative is filtered mainly through Rosa's consciousness and conscience; we are able to consider, in consequence, all the other voices as agents-of-the-agents, as secondary agents of change, their sole function being to help the protagonist find her own voice in life.

An important perspective – a 'critique' of revolutionary enthusiasm – is provided by Conrad, the prototypical liberated man of the 1960s, whose name is probably meant to suggest that of Joseph Conrad, the author of the psychological abyss. Depicted as Rosa's spiritual twin, Conrad is able to utter words and thoughts that are taboo to Rosa's political conditioning in the world of her father's commitments. Ironically, their sexual relationship lasts only until both of them are capable of articulating the deep, almost incestuous, closeness between them. Rosa tells Conrad: "And you know we had stopped making love together months before I left, aware that it had become incest" (70). Conrad talks to Rosa about his Oedipus complex, thus opening Rosa's eyes to the Electra complex behind the necessary gesture of her being Burger's daughter. Whereas the relationship between Rosa and her father may be described as 'incestuous' in terms of Rosa's emotional dependence on the father figure, Conrad's teenage existence has been marred by his knowledge that his mother had had two lovers: "What does Oedipus do about two rivals?" (44), he ponders. Rosa feels similarly oppressed by her father's moral commitment. It is only on his death that she realises the relief of her liberating herself from him. Her words, "Now you are free", are repeated twice in the novel (40, 62) and are addressed to Conrad: "It came to me when I was with you; it came to me from being with you" (40).

There is a similar obsessiveness in both Conrad and Rosa about the opposite-sex parent/child relationship. The offspring's liberation is dependent on the parent's death. Emotional dependence can only be overcome once the bond to the powerful, charismatic parent has been broken. It is only after her psychological liberation from her father that Rosa becomes empowered, as Newman recognises, to go beyond projection and embark on the adventure of self-scrutiny. As Newman poses the problem:

Which version of Rosa do we accept? That of a white woman who is part of a racist society and who can address a 'You' who exists only in her own projections? Or that of a woman confronting and correcting a stereotyped image and painfully learning to address herself to a world of other autonomous beings? (1988: 74)

Rosa's rebellion against Lionel, the rebel, is at the same time a gesture of sexual assertion. It is her liberation from the bonds of a prolonged childhood and her entry into womanhood: "In order to assert her adult autonomy, Rosa can rebel only against another rebel" (Newman 1988: 75).

Interestingly, the bond of dependency between parent and child is transformed into one between closely connected children. Whereas the parental relationship has led to Rosa's psychological and social constriction, her relationship with Conrad is characterised by highly articulate self-expression. Conrad provides Rosa with a good listening ear, and represents her need for an audience to her thoughts: "One is never talking to oneself, always one is addressed to someone" (16). Conrad may be regarded as an embodiment of Rosa's need to connect to her deeper self: the deep consciousness and conscience within her. Thus Gordimer utilises Conrad as one of Rosa's many inner voices. Shortly after Conrad disappears at sea

– as I suggested earlier on, his image is reminiscent of Joseph Conrad's Decoud, who sinks out of the moral and social hurly-burly of material life – Rosa engages in an inner dialogue in which she expresses her fusion of mental planes: "The yacht was never found. I may have been talking to a dead man: only to myself" (210).

Just as Conrad dies in an indescribable nowhere, without boundaries, so he had lived: without boundaries or commitments of a societal nature. He had conducted his relationship with Rosa where it "was safe and cosy as a child's playhouse and sexually arousing as a lovers' hideout. It was nowhere" (21). Conrad inhabits a space, prior to dying in a space that resembles his deeper self: amorphous, open-ended, committed to nothing but its own inclination. Within the design of the novel, it is from this 'non-committed' space and through Conrad's non-political eyes that the stature of the committed Lionel Burger is placed under qualificatory scrutiny. More precisely, it is through conversations between Rosa and Conrad, or else through Rosa's own inner dialogues with Conrad, that Lionel Burger emerges for the reader as a more complex point of reference than a liberation hero to whom one is expected to pay unqualified obeisance. It is the perspective through which Gordimer casts doubts on total ideology, which has little time or concern for the personal challenges of Rosa's young womanhood.

But Lionel Burger must still retain our admiration, qualified though it is, as the man of just causes. Accordingly, Conrad's gaze, while recognising the danger of political commitments excluding other areas of the surrounding life, must simultaneously be critically 'placed' in its lack of social involvements: Conrad is depicted as a voyeur who is morbidly attracted to those who are different from himself, while he hesitates to reach out. As Rosa

intuits: "you never got beyond fascination with the people around Lionel Burger's swimming-pool; you never jumped in and trusted yourself to him, like Baasie or me, or drowned, like Tony" (117).

In the trial scene, to which I have briefly referred, Conrad the voyeur is compared to a Chinese mandarin who watches the proceedings through non-committal eyes (23). It is significant that he is introduced as a character in the very scene in which Burger's trial holds central attention. Occasionally Gordimer, subtly shifting her narrator's voice from observation to character-specific intrusion, makes remarks such as: "But this boy [Conrad] was of interest to no one; let him look at them all if the spectacle intrigued him: revolutionaries at play, a sight like the secret mating of whales" (17).

At such a moment the trial scene veers towards being focalised through Conrad's somewhat sceptical view of political commitment. Behind the impression of third-person impartiality, we detect Conrad's subjective impressions ("revolutionaries at play"). This is the man of easy sophistication judging revolutionary commitment. It is from such a point of view that the figure of Lionel Burger at his own trial may be touched by Gordimer's sceptical hesitation, her 'methodical doubt'. At the same time, Conrad's lack of real conviction reminds us, in contrast, of Lionel Burger's moral investment.

But the ambiguity persists. In his determination to continue fighting, Burger declares: "I say with Luther: Here I stand. *Ich kann nicht anders*" (26). While one cannot but admire this stance, the allusion to Luther deserves consideration. In his book *Young Man Luther* (1959), Erik Erikson questions the moral integrity of Martin Luther's absolutist world view,

his asceticism and self-abnegation, on the grounds that they were based on an exaggerated belief in the intrinsic evil of man's nature. Luther's firm conviction was that it was one's duty to purge sinfulness in absolute dedication to an ideal, that is, to a cause outside of the self. Dedicated to his ideal of fighting racial injustice, Lionel Burger dies in prison as a martyr. As he disappears into the realm of his convictions, there are many around him who find it increasingly "strange to live in a country where there are still heroes" (100), or who no longer "know how to live in Lionel's country" (210).

Almost as he is granted heroic status, Burger is seen by his daughter and ex-wife as characterised by rigidity. (The narrator, as I am arguing, guides her readers towards the qualificatory picture.) At the end of the court scene we are not quite certain whether we are able to give entire assent to the political hero or whether we are to recognise simultaneously someone whose political commitment is in danger of subsuming other kinds of responsiveness, which may blind Burger to his stifling influence on those around him. It is a good illustration of the tension in Gordimer between the necessity for political commitment and the struggle to retain a more traditional view of novelistic art: she shifts from the typicality of the public icon to an individualism that de-emphasises the society as the motor force of history. In this process she begins to restore to human beings the complexities of personality traits that may be returned to visibility and value in 'civilian time'. This has large consequences for our understanding of the novel *Burger's Daughter*: we are forced to realise that the book is very importantly about private life. In fundamental ways, it is about the father/daughter relationship within family situations.

It is Lionel Burger's 'totalism' which makes the Conrads of the world wary of full-bodied revolutionary commitment. Rather than goal-oriented, the Conrads are process-oriented; in place of the anxiety of utopia, they internalise the tension between destruction and creation and focus on the only two realities that seem to matter to them: 'sex and death'. By having Rosa distribute her loyalties between her father and Conrad, Gordimer – in free indirect speech – guides us to Rosa's sympathy for her father while at the same time placing him in an ironic light. What we begin to perceive is that Gordimer employs *eros* and *thanatos* as symbols of the most intimate of human experiences in Rosa's development as a woman. While I shall return to this issue, it is important to note early intimations of sex and death at the very beginning of the novel, in the scene where Rosa endures her menstrual cramps while standing in front of the prison gates. The prison/ tomb/ womb parallelism is suggestive of the dialectic between the public and the private as spaces of confinement and overdetermination which – as Conrad has it – operate according to the laws of creation and destruction.

The second important agent in Rosa's life is Baasie, who as a child, had access to the Burger household and swimming-pool: a politically symbolic access dependent on his being a black child adopted by the white revolutionary family. As an adult, he questions Rosa in accusatory tones as to what could have constituted a childhood bond. Just as she has deep and distorting bonds with both her father and Conrad, so she is tied in difficult commitments to Baasie. In pondering her link to Conrad, Rosa considers her

intimacy of self-engrossment [with Baasie] ... accepting each other's encroachments as the law of the litter, treating each other's dirt as our own ... And you [Conrad] know we had stopped making love together months before I left, aware that it had become incest. (70)

The implications of psychological incest, as archetypal symbolism, represent a phenomenon in which

youth and maturity are juxtaposed, endlessly transforming each other, but also the masculine and the feminine, making a fourway opposition. Incest is the image of the reconciliation of this fourway conflict, but it can be understood as an inward incest, taking place at the core of life; more real than the physical act, not less. (Chetwynd 1982: 270)

I draw attention to this issue because the dimensions of "reconciliation" and "transformation" in incest are significant in Rosa's relationship with her father, as well as with Conrad and with Baasie. One may interpret the main story as a concern not with political transformation, but with Rosa's love-hate relationship to her father. Trying to reconcile the conditioning of her youth and young adulthood – she is the product of several religious and social determinants, even taboos – Rosa manages to transform her mental landscape beyond the clasp of her father's world. In becoming Conrad's lover, she is in danger of succumbing to another emotionally dependent involvement, but learns, with the help of Conrad's non-political view, to articulate her repressed anxieties and dissatisfactions with being 'Burger's daughter'. Conrad helps her speak the previously unspeakable aspects of her overdetermined personality. His inquisitive mind also helps her shift the focus of her responses to Baasie, from that of white guilt faced with black consciousness (the political reading), to that of an abstract incestuous involvement: a childish attempt at reconciling herself with the Other. As Conrad says: "When you were five years old you were afraid of the dark together. You crept into one bed" (139). The fact that the adult Baasie is far from grateful for his period of residence within the Burger household suggests his particular rebellion against political activities where the leadership was exclusively white.

Although it is primarily for the liberation of blacks that Lionel Burger struggles, it is he who is central and they ancillary in the struggle, as he conceives it. Baasie aggressively rejects his earlier dependency on Lionel's charity: a charity he now comes to identify with a bourgeois code. Behind Baasie, the mouthpiece of BC, we glimpse a black child seduced by the family web of the Burger household.

The resonances in the novel, I would suggest, go beyond Gordimer's public statement that, although she understood BC as a historical necessity, emotionally she found it "as wounding as anyone else" (1977: 89). Although she is preoccupied throughout the novel with the moral implications of BC, the anger and energy of Baasie's exchange with Rosa have a personal sharpness that probably finds its origins in the world of the Burger family. The monologue which Baasie delivers over the telephone to Rosa takes the forms not simply of a political diatribe against whites (although this is part of it), but of a scorned and rejected lover: the theme of sex and death crosses with sex and politics. Baasie wishes to take revenge not merely on whites *en masse*, but especially on Rosa, the embodiment in his understanding of the all-consuming confidence of Lionel Burger, the hero who destroys others' self-confidence. The complicated mixture of the political and personal is phrased by the narrative in metaphors of thwarted love: "the trance of common resentment ... and that romance of humiliation by which and through which each in his different way draws strength and anger to revenge it" (158).

The Burger household remained filled with hangers-on, 'worshippers' living on Lionel's generosity. An extreme example is the old-maid schoolteacher, whose "self-effacing lack of definition" (85) ensures that she is one of 'the faithful' in the Burgers' cause. Her case

is highlighted by Rosa who, as a grown woman, questions revolutionary commitment and has no sympathy for her parents' "collection of the dispossessed" (84). She is judgmental about her parents' need to attract needy people around them, people who are on the look-out for "someone else's cause or salvation" (297). These people's existence seems to be devoid of meaning; hence their desperate need to be given a reason for living. That Gordimer has doubts about the intrinsic commitments of the 'faithful' is poignantly demonstrated in the old schoolteacher's betrayal at Burger's trial. Rosa comes gradually to understand the betrayal as manifestation of an individual's emotional destitution seeking his/her purpose in life by identifying with an external cause. Rosa herself had been encouraged to give up her *self* in exchange for the social 'specialness' of being 'Burger's daughter'. As Rosa comments on the schoolteacher's actions : "(The poor creature) ... A longing to attach [herself] to an acolyte destiny; to let someone else use [her], lend [her] passionate purpose, propelled by meaning other than [her] own" (155).

The old teacher does not, as does Baasie, rebel against the Burgers. However, she fails to live up to their expectation that their associates will offer them unqualified, even heroic support. Rosa observes:

she [the schoolteacher] is the example, in particular, that white liberals give when they point out how Communists, even my father, used innocent people; one could admire the courage, the daring, the lack of regard for self with which a man like Burger acted according to his convictions about social injustice (which, of course, one shares), even if one certainly didn't share his Communistic beliefs and the form of action these took, but the way in which he involved others was surely ruthless? (86)

Betrayed by the old schoolteacher at his trial, his sincerity doubted by free-thinkers such as Conrad, accused by Baasie of manipulation and betrayal, Lionel Burger appears, in the course of the novel, as a highly contradictory character, a doubtful hero, whose "smile, unanswerable, demanding ... had invaded people's lives, getting them to do things" (120). He inhabits a world, the political underground, which acts almost as the image of ambiguity. Interestingly, it is an ambiguity confirmed by Breytenbach, himself imprisoned for revolutionary activity:

Have we veritably thought through all the negative connotations and results of ... underground work itself? Isn't it often just a Boy Scout game? Adults carrying forward the excitement the child has when teasing fire or running round the garden for a game of hide-and-seek? (1984: 85)

Gordimer also implies that there are dangers in the romanticism of the underground, including the phenomenon of its 'extended family'. Besides the criticism implied in Baasie's rejection of the Burgers and in Lionel's betrayal by one of his own group, the world of the underground is adversely mirrored in the physiognomy of some of its members. The Terblanche women, for example, are presented as bodies without sexual pride, "sad rather than ugly" (123). Critics such as Lazar (1992) condemn Gordimer's attitude towards her female characters' physical appearance, an attitude which, from the point of view of gender, they consider to be sexist. Her attitude may also be considered, however, as an expression of mistrust in 'public landscapes' invading private lives to the total depersonalisation and annihilation of the self. Self-effacing bodies grotesquely covered in eczema and dandruff (124), people having lost interest in their physical appearance: this is how Gordimer chooses to describe the inhabitants of the underground, those who exist through the "survival cunning

of concealment" (142) and, symbolically, avoid the light. The body becomes one's private prison.

Living in the underground also comes under scrutiny in Rosa's observation of the 'faithful', in whose absolutist mindsets is expressed the vocabulary of the catchphrase. Describing an emotional encounter with Clare Terblanche, one of the self-effacing faithful, Rosa ponders:

There is nothing but failure, until the day the Future is achieved. It is the only success. ... 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. (125)

With the Future as a revolutionary high-priest, the everyday life of the present becomes the grim matter of survival; Lionel's faithful "studied the pattern of police surveillance as surveillance studied them" (95). In contrast, revolutionary fervour makes ordinary commitments lose significance. The neglect of one's family (here represented by the death of Lionel's son by drowning) is a symbol of such imbalance. Neglected bodies and neglected families are offered as sacrificial lambs on the altar of the cause. Christian symbolism, evoked in the vocabulary and the use of visual symbols, is recurrent. At his trial Burger is presented as a "saviour" (24); after his detention 'the faithful' disciples gather in the spirit of "bravado and sentiment" (33); even after his death the activists continue to worship the spirit of their leader and the noble causes which were to lead to the promised land of the Future. 'The faithful', nonetheless, have a negative effect on Rosa as their lives are lived – as she tells Conrad – in routines of "going from shabby suburb to prison, and back from prison to shabby suburb" (109). This entire reliance on external causes of salvation,

whether Marxist or Christian, makes Rosa "sick, sick of the maimed, the endangered, the fugitive, the stoic; sick of courts, sick of prisons, sick of institutions scrubbed bare for the regulation endurance of dread and pain" (70). Meditating during her telephone conversation with Baasie on the difficulties in South Africa of overcoming racial hatred, she says: "The Future has been a long time coming and who's going to recognise the messiah by the form he finally takes?" (330). Many of the doubts about the commitment of revolutionaries to noble causes in the future are expressed by Conrad. Concerning the future, this worshipper of the present in private emotion has no sympathy for "the future in place of the present, ... [for I]ives you can't live, instead of your own" (52). At the same time, as I have suggested, Conrad's rejection of long-term societal commitments is an inadequate response to the dialectic of the private in the public, within the localities of the South African situation.

Not all the revolutionary acolytes, however, choose to remain faithful to Lionel Burger's cause or, like Baasie and the elderly schoolteacher, to become his victims. Katya, Lionel's first wife, withdraws gracefully from the marriage when she realises that to be a revolutionary is not her real calling. In a conversation she has with Katya in France, Rosa sums up for Lionel's first wife the stereotypical version the faithful have conveyed to her about this past episode: "She left him for another man or another life – same thing, really, what else is there for a woman who won't live for the Future?" (264). The meeting between Rosa and Katya has a cathartic effect on each. Lionel Burger was "a fact between them. It changed them, each for the other, at different times and in different contexts" (246). Katya sees in Rosa an embodiment of the inquisitive mind that is able to question the influence of Lionel Burger's charismatic leadership. Rosa Burger, for her part, seeks out Katya so as to learn how to liberate herself from her father's ghost: "I didn't come on some pilgrimage,

worshipping or iconoclastic, to learn about my father ... I wanted to know how to defect from him" (264). The choice of the word "defect" is apposite: political codes intrude upon the personal response.

Marisa Kgosana is another character who defies the expectation of blind submission to the cause. The symbolism of the body is again used by Gordimer in order to emphasise the life of private concern. While Katya lives in her body as a dancer, Marisa worships hers by paying great attention to cosmetics and outfits, and by taking lovers despite a residual loyalty to her imprisoned husband. About Marisa's body-consciousness, Rosa confides in Conrad:

She doesn't have to find a solemn face, acknowledge the distance between the prison and the cosmetic counter. ... Defiance and confidence don't mourn; her beauty and the way she assumes it are stronger than any declaration. (136)

In sharp contrast, we are reminded of the descriptions of ugly physicality, which are reserved for members of the underground.

The method of building a multifaceted picture extends, in contrasting perspective, beyond the portrait of Rosa. We have not only a complication of the revolutionary profile in the presentation of Lionel Burger, but – further to complicate the picture – two versions of Afrikanerdom: Afrikaner nationalism in its limited, but relatively 'innocent' form, and its more sophisticated form. The notice, "streng privaat" on the door of the Nel family home, is appropriate to a life defined in the order and security of the family, church and the law (72). Afrikanerdom has to be strictly protected against the intrusion of external influences, especially revolutionary influences, and its defence justifies extraordinary measures, including the abrogation of the rule of law. We are reminded that Lionel Burger has travelled

the road from the world of Afrikaner order, even rigidity, when Rosa remarks to Conrad on her second name, Marie: "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" (72).

Talking to Conrad about traditional value-systems, she muses:

Perhaps it was an illness not to be able to live one's life the way they did (if not the way you did, Conrad) 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. (73)

Yet the jealous life of church and family has been extended to the idolatry of race and the terror of the Afrikaner state. Whatever Lionel Burger's tendency to idolise a different set of imperatives, he is a reminder that justice has been perverted in the politics of Apartheid, to which the *volk* is committed. As far as the sophisticated Brand Vermeulen is concerned, Lionel's life has been an expression of despair: "I think his living as a Communist was an expression of despair" (186), the despair of an Afrikaner who has replaced the cause of the *volk* with the cause of the *Future* (193) and has replaced the vocabulary of separatism with that of Communist Newspeak. Yet the Vermeulens, the 'new Nats' as they came to be called, merely put a gloss on the racism of the old Nats: their pragmatism reminds us that without idealism, without a future, South Africa would have been doomed to remain ruled by its cruel Afrikaner oligarchy.

The questions concerning Lionel Burger, that are posed from all sides, set up a massive dialectic between absolute commitment and pragmatic adaptation. Rosa comes in

her encounters to understand the different positions within this huge debate. Through Rosa's judgements Gordimer is endlessly qualifying our understanding of the figure of the South African revolutionary. In *Burger's Daughter* Gordimer's methodical doubt, as I suggested earlier on, reveals her deep concern for the 'South African problem'. The problem, however, is not permitted to overwhelm the value of Rosa's own life, her need to find a free space amid the totalising demands of her heritage. Although *My Son's Story* is more laconic in style, it too is concerned with negotiating spaces of individual freedom.

* * *

The story of Will, the son of Sonny, is actually his father's story filtered through the son's eyes. Will is the inheritor of the revolutionary spirit as embodied in his father's commitment to the cause of self- and community-improvement. Unlike Rosa, Will can confide in no one in trying to come to terms with his father's remoteness and his involvement in a sexual and political underground. Unlike Rosa, Will does not follow a path towards human complexity in which revolutionary commitment begins to fit into a range of life's tasks and developments. Confronted with his father's necessary gestures, Will cannot overcome resentment and bitterness at what he perceives to be Sonny's betrayal of his private obligations. The title of the novel might be extended: "my son's story of disappointment with revolutionary forms of commitment."

Gordimer uses a narrative device similar to that in *Burger's Daughter*: free indirect speech is used to move almost imperceptibly from objective comment to the subjective views of character response. *My Son's Story* begins as autobiography, in which the son tells his

father's story in the first person: "How did I find out? I was deceiving him" (3). Thus, Will begins his story about the fact that his father is having an affair. The effect of the autobiographical beginning is to qualify, almost immediately, the entire truth of any observation: Sonny's affair is observed by a son who is obviously hurt at his father's betrayal of his mother. Will says about his father's mistress, Hannah: "I could have put her together like those composite drawings of wanted criminals you see in the papers, an identikit. The schoolboy's wet dream" (15). But the first-person account – Will's story – is not retained with consistency throughout the novel. At different times, the voice of the 'I' vanishes and a third-person narrator enters the tale. Though the assumption may be that Will, as 'fictional author', is the creator of these passages too, it is Gordimer, as 'author of the fictional author', who is the final guiding consciousness. The following is an example of what I assume to be the author's comment on Sonny's affair, slightly coloured by Sonny's own contemplation of himself:

He could not think of what had happened to him as 'love', 'falling in love' any more than, except as lip-service convenience, political jargon expressed for him his decision to sacrifice schoolmastering, self-improvement, and to go to prison for his kind. (53)

Such observations are devoid of the anger and resentment experienced by the son who feels betrayed by an immoral father, and the point is that the reader has to be wary about being too simply judgmental about Sonny and Hannah. *My Son's Story* is not only about infidelity. It is about people operating under conditions of stress: both Sonny and Hannah are involved in political community work in the days of the state of emergency. The nature of Hannah's work, for example, is described by the third-person narrator as developing

high emotions. It arises from crises. It deals only with disruption, disjunction – circumstances in people's lives that cannot be met with the responses that serve for continuity. To monitor trials is to 'monitor' the soaring graph of feelings that move men and women to act, endangering themselves. (89)

While Will judges Sonny harshly, there is also a kind of understanding that unusual times lead to unusual kinds of situations. Sonny's actions are not endorsed, but because of the complicated point of view, the reader is prevented from making easy moral judgments.

As in *Burger's Daughter*, Gordimer does not suggest that she is enamoured of revolutionary actions as a justification of diminished responsibility in the issues of daily life. Just as Lionel Burger's heroic status is qualified, so Sonny's neglect of his family for the excitement of illicit sex and underground politics is shown to exact its price. The novel emphasises, by contrast, kinds of integrity that survive in less 'spectacular' forms. But at the same time, because Gordimer cannot avoid the national narrative of approaching revolutionary change, there is an ambiguity in the novel that permits readers to understand political commitment in all its human imperfections and to arrive at their own, always partial, assessment of living in extreme times. Critics like Clingman and Wagner have alleged that, as 'history' writes Gordimer, she is not fully in control of her narrative. My own view goes a step further: granting that the context of the times exists as a pressure on her, we nevertheless appreciate a novelistic art that attempts to give the private life its proper place and establish its relationship to the public. Or, to put it another way, *My Son's Story* is neither about typicality, nor individuality; rather, it is concerned with negotiations between the typical and the individual and, hence, the social and the psychological. As I suggested in my Introduction, the model of understanding and evaluation of the whole may be that of social

psychology: a key illustration is to be found in Sonny's illicit love affair, through which we understand the flaws in his political commitment.

Having been introduced through the jaundiced eye of the teenage son, the father's affair reverberates beyond itself to become a locus of the revolutionary underground. For Will, the lovers' hide-out is a 'hostile space', smelling "of smoke ... the smell of destruction" (274). Certainly Sonny brings back home "the smell of smoke", but also "her smell" (238), and his public commitment, which is inseparable from his illicit love affair, invades "the charmed circle" of his privacy, in which [his family] "lived in innocence" (20). The totalist atmosphere of the underground movement with its game of concealment and surveillance is linked with that of the illicit love affair, and emphasises the point that Gordimer, throughout her *oeuvre*, has used politics and sex as mutually dependent sounding-boards: "You don't live for each other, the loving is contained within the cause" (174), as the narrator comments about the relationship of Sonny and Hannah.

Considering the necessity of engagement with human rights in a racist state, Hannah recognises that "South Africa is a centripetal force that draws people, in the region, not only out of economic necessity, but also out of the fascination of commitment to political struggle" (88). While one cannot dispute this, the introduction of the illicit love relationship at the centre of the national narrative disrupts the political recognition. With her rigorously sceptical intelligence, Gordimer uses their love affair to question the authenticity of any commitment that operates underground and believes that the excitement of an illicit relationship is, ultimately, to be explained as the excitement of specialness. In the light of totalist considerations, the attraction can be seen to arise from the slightly arrogant belief in being

part of an elect. This sense of exclusiveness is expressed in the text through deliberate clichés that are characteristic of the language of ideological totalism, as mentioned earlier on.

One such cliché is "happy for battle", used both as a secret code and as a sexually arousing catchphrase. It is this particular phrase that stimulates Sonny's fantasy after Hannah's first visit to the prison:

Happy for battle. He lay on his bed in the dark and sounded over in his mind that phrase, so simple, so loaded, audacious, such a shocking, wild glorious juxtaposition of menace and elation, flowers and blood, people sitting in the sun and bodies dismembered by car bombs; the harmonized singing coming from somewhere in the cells, and the snarl of a police dog leaping at his face, once, in the crowd. (56-57)

"Happy for battle" and "sermons in stones" – the latter a phrase from Shakespeare's *As You Like It* – are among the most frequently used ideological metaphors. Overuse, however, reduces them to the flatness of other jargon-words like "cabal", "putting out feelers", "like-minded" (159), or "disaffected" (179). Political vocabulary is compared to a "needle [which] jumps back and you hear the same record" (212). "How poor and melodramatic the political vocabulary was" (159), says the implied author as a parenthetical comment elsewhere in the novel. Behind the use of political jargon, one detects both the drive to simplification and the attempt to conceal one's special actions behind the banalities of generalisation. Through such examples, I wish to suggest, Gordimer uses clichés in a reflective and self-reflective way, so as to point out the emotional deprivation and tribute to the self that overdetermined times have imposed upon the everyday lives of exceptional people – what I referred to earlier on as Trilling's 'language of non-thought'. I do not concur with statements such as Kohler's,

which claim that Gordimer makes expedient and unreflective use of ANC *Newspeak*: "she allows her language to be tied to, trapped by, the political discourse of the 'now', which in the end turns out to be a discourse whose intuitive allegiance is to the ANC; no more, no less" (1991: 10). Kohler, like Clingman and Wagner, regards history as having 'written' Gordimer, and offers – in my view – an oversimplified interpretation of Gordimer's tension between necessary and essential political gestures, thus undermining her level of artistic intention.

Ironically, the deliberate flatness only throws into relief a language of symbolic representation. As Sonny attempts to conceal his forbidden liaison, details begin to acquire interpretative significance. The sullen Will, we recall, has artistic pretensions in his piecing together of his father's life. When he discovers a dried-up sunflower head on the backseat of the family car, Will ponders: "It was the dried head of a sunflower. ... I don't know how it could have got there. Why. I only knew he would not be able to explain it to my mother" (58). Little secrets, omissions, hints of the affair, all pile up upon the political discourse of platitude, and emphasise a desperate, dangerous and finally destructive human process below the surface: the text is a kind of self-referring metaphor for the theme of public and private underground life. As Sonny's illicit relationship is revealed, the authorial voice tells us about the sunflower as a symbol of death-in-life, and the crippling effects of the underground on emotional life:

[Hannah] promised [Sonny] fields of sunflower because he liked so much the Van Gogh reproduction that was stuck up in her kitchen among the drawings made by black children. But she had mistaken the season. The sunflower fields were a vast company of the dead, with black faces bowed. (74)

The dried sunflower shows signs of physical death; it has black seeds that fall out of the disk, its head is bowed, and when picked, it leaves splinters in Sonny's hands.

Sonny's carry-all emerges as another image of the interplay between concealment and exposure. Meant to hold emergency clothing and toiletries, should Sonny have to go on the run to avoid arrest, the case also serves his stop-over visits to Hannah. Exposure and clandestinity – the fascination of underground life – is also reflected in the lovers' "obstinate, irresistible hankering to see a film together" (72), the cinema hall becoming the spatial motif of the underground. Similarly, Hannah's room is compared by the narrator to underground political life: "like underground political life, it had nothing to do with the everyday" (70). The illicit love affair becomes synonymous with any underground activity: "the security police", for example, "work secretly as any love affair" (81). The spirit of concealment, the novel concludes, is the product of an extraordinary situation, whereas it is only amid the ordinary rhythms of life that one's real commitment is tested. The national narrative is in a sense displaced by domestic narrative, while outside the domestic space, Sonny becomes so enamoured with Hannah that he suffers the total disintegration of his personality. His "needing Hannah" becomes a leitmotif, almost as limiting to thought as the clichés "happy for battle" and "sermons in stones". His "needing Hannah" invades and poisons his personal life. The author shows, in addition, that Hannah's "capacity simply to be needed" (130) is not as innocent as it might appear at first glance. Hannah, like Lionel Burger, has developed the art of infiltrating herself into the lives of the people who need her support as a human-rights activist: hers is the art of becoming indispensable to others who stray into the spectacular world of the underground.

Both Hannah Plowman and Lionel Burger are infected with the spirit of the underground: their lives represent concealment from surveillance, on the one hand, and ‘surveillance surveyed’, on the other. Infiltration is their method of operation: they infiltrate themselves into other people’s lives. Burger’s “muscular excitement and grinning energy” (1980a: 116) makes people follow him. Through his charismatic personality and “smile, unanswerable, demanding, [Lionel Burger] invades people’s lives, getting them to do things” (120). But, as with Hannah, his innocent need to be needed contains in itself the seeds of totalism. Lionel insinuates himself into the lives of the faithful; similarly, Hannah invades and destroys Sonny’s family. Aila, Baby [his daughter] and Will each react with aggressive passivity to what they sense as the invasion of their home by political commitments. Baby cuts her wrists, Will scornfully imitates his father’s sexual habits: “Just like Dad. My sex life has no home” (185). Aila apparently withdraws emotionally into the silently “aesthetic discipline” (4) of her domestic life. She is a character, however, to whom I shall return.

* * *

To summarise, *Burger’s Daughter* and *My Son’s Story* can be read as mutually complementary. The discussions of psychological motivation in the former help fill in the silences and gaps in the latter. Conversely, the symbolism of the destructive underground in *My Son’s Story* helps return attention to the less elaborate, but equally dangerous aspects of the revolutionary underground in *Burger’s Daughter*. For all their differences in style, both novels challenge the ‘spectacular’ by looking at the complexity of the ordinary life. Within the novel, the national narrative, in its preoccupation with political commitment, is interrogated in relation to the value of individual people behind the abstract ideals of large

causes. The underground as metaphor for necessary gestures and split consciences, of group loyalties and individual betrayal, acts as the point of tension between the public and the private spheres. What emerges is a commitment to non-totalist ways of being, to self-love as an expression of human complexity, creativity and choice.

As I have suggested, such self-love requires more than breaking free from the fetters of racial injustice and inequity. To quote Fromm, "freedom from" is not identical with positive freedom, with "freedom to" (1985;1942: 28). 'Freedom to' implies that the individual must be free to realise his or her own potential. Characters such as the Terblanches manage to break 'free from' the prejudices of Apartheid, but at the same time enter a new kind of submissiveness: they become Lionel Burger's faithful who, in the process, lose their individuality, and end up as classical embodiments of the 'anti-individual'. Incapable of standing alone, they desperately seek a leader, or moral manager. Their fear of individual decision-making inevitably traps them in a new form of emotional serfdom, in which the submissive individual "lives in a social protectorate which relieves him from the burden of 'self-determination'" (Oakeshott 1961: 165). Yet while doubting aspects of the lore of revolutionary commitment, Gordimer does not suggest solutions in political abstention. Radical individualism, for example, is not perceived to be a viable alternative. Gordimer has limited sympathy for the dilettantish Conrad, whom she nonetheless uses to question Burger's patriarchal profile. Neither does she extend much sympathy to shallow philanthropists or hedonists, such as Flora Donaldson and Rosa's lover, Chabaliere, the French leftist intellectual whom she meets in the Mediterranean, while seeking a role beyond that of 'Burger's daughter'.

Gordimer does not, in short, confuse egocentricism with genuine 'self-love', or the 'expression of individual confidence', to use terms from social psychology. As Fromm says, "selfishness is rooted in the lack of affirmation and love for the real self, that is, for the whole concrete human being with all his potentialities" (1985: 101). He also distinguishes between the principle of "maximum pleasure", which reflects a selfish attitude, and "the theory of well-being", which engages individuals in all their potentialities (1980: 13). In discussing the non-totalist 'how' of commitment, I wish to return to the character of Aila (in *My Son's Story*), or more exactly to the silences and omissions – Macherey's concept of the "not-said" (1978) – surrounding Sonny's wife, who seems to be a direct descendant of Mrs Bamjee in Gordimer's short story, "A Chip of Glass Ruby" (1965a).

Aila has tended to be regarded somewhat dismissively as an incomplete character creation. After the assumption has remained unquestioned for many pages that she is the politically uninvolved wife of a revolutionary, she surfaces suddenly at the end of the novel as the more committed fighter for freedom. We are asked in retrospect to grant heroic resonance to Aila's silences: "Why did Aila never speak? Why did she never say what he wanted her to say?" (57), asks Sonny early in the work. Similarly, her veneration of domestic harmony is evidently not supposed to have been taken at face value. The images of Aila's creaming her hands and boiling fresh water for tea have to be transformed in the reader's consciousness from habits of daily routine into symbols of silent power. Seen with hindsight, Hannah's confusion when she faces Aila becomes an indication of the latter's moral stature: "The wife kept listening sympathetically, making Hannah's confusion worse. This quiet woman apparently was accustomed to being obeyed" (91).

There comes a point in the unfolding story – the process of living rather than the highlighted moment – when Hannah’s perception of Aila’s strength, of "Aila happy for battle" and "Aila prison-wise" (234), supersedes Hannah’s perception of herself as the committed revolutionary. Aila’s commitment is cast in the same unostentatious manner as her private life. Again, with hindsight, the reader realises that Aila’s silence has been a sign of inner strength rather than lack of revolutionary commitment. Hannah’s finding out about Aila’s courage and political involvement guarantees an unpredictable anti-climax. She realises that Aila is the more complex and, therefore, the more authentic revolutionary. As the non-figural narrator puts it, "Sonny was amazed; intruded upon. Hannah wept. The tears moved slowly down her broad cheeks and she did not turn from him or cover her face in decency with her hands. She had no right to weep for Aila!" (235). Hannah weeps not out of pity for the imprisoned Aila, but out of self-pity. She instantaneously realises that what she thought had been Aila’s domestic limitation actually involved political commitment and strength. She feels disqualified: she realises the complexity of Aila’s existence, in comparison with which her own revolutionary commitment seems ‘one-dimensional’, arrogantly intrusive and patronising.

But is Aila a credible figure in the design of the novel? In the course of the narrative, the reader is not prepared by the author for Aila’s politically engaged intervention. In *Burger’s Daughter* Gordimer, articulating her trepidation about Black Consciousness, attempted to reconnect her set of values to an earlier, non-racial tradition. It was a set of values – non-racist, liberal, humane – that acted as the antidote to revolutionary single-mindedness and provided a marker against which to measure the possibility of Rosa’s finding a more complex pattern of growth than that permitted to her in the struggle era of the 1970s.

By the time of *My Son's Story*, the national condition must have seemed bleak. *Burger's Daughter* grew out of the exhilaration of 1976 (and the recognition of white marginality) while *My Son's Story* came from the exhaustion at the end of the interregnum. Certainly, there is a kind of indeterminacy in the silences, gaps and omissions of this novel. Gordimer's use of literary allusion – Will's quoting from Shakespeare, for instance, or Gordimer's choosing to have Will 'write' the story – does not result in intertextual truths greater than the stony reality of the immediate state of emergency. Rather, textual strategies are muted: Aila's silence may, by desperate inversion, emphasise the superficiality of Sonny and Hannah.

The possibility I hold out reminds us that real commitment is an austere, a silent and deeply singular affair, not something that works through grandiose gestures of public display. In this sense Aila, the silent wife turned revolutionary, is radical in her rejection of the various revolutionary enthusiasms, as typified in Lionel Burger, Baasie and BC, or in Sonny and Hannah's feeling for each other, on which commentary has usually focused. Although Sonny and Hannah claim involvement in the public sphere, this involvement in the tough processes of struggle lapses into a fuss about their needs. Towards the end of the novel, Sonny has an intuitive insight into the real point of Aila's purpose when – the free, indirect speech shifts to the subjective mode – he muses about the meaning of life, the 'silences' at the heart of sound:

He had listened entranced to the things Hannah said; they seemed to speak from the centre of life, which no-one else he had known had ever mentioned. But the centre of life wasn't there, with her, the centre of life was where the banalities are enacted – the fuss over births, marriages, family affairs with their survival rituals of food and clothing, that were with Aila. (243)

Such comments – what one might call existentialist, even philosophical, contemplations – are scattered throughout Gordimer's fiction, but have seldom absorbed critical attention. The demands of national politics have been too severe. What I am arguing for here is a return to the contemplative dimension of the fiction. It is a dimension that is germane to the central significance of the short stories, if we are prepared to grant Gordimer an art that occupies its territory problematically, but ultimately creatively, in an uneasy zone between the national and the more personal imperative.

* * *

Just as *My Son's Story* finally queries the symbols of the public life (without denying their necessity), so *Burger's Daughter*, if we are willing to attend to the minutiae of its experiential layers, has a claim to being regarded not only as a novel of political ideas, but as a novel of metaphysical contemplation: "in a drop of saliva there was a whole world" (278). As we read: "no one knows where the end of suffering will begin" (356). One of the causes of suffering as identified by Gordimer is, paradoxically, its very suppression. Commenting on the relationship between Rosa and her married French lover, Chabalier, the narrator observes that Rosa "did not cry but he was in awe of all she had known in order to learn not to weep" (308). Through Chabalier's love, which is free of the pressures of South Africa's various demands, Rosa gradually learns how to express her emotions: "love doesn't cast out fear but makes it possible to weep, howl, at least" (324).

Politically committed criticism, however, has neglected the large sections of the narrative in which Rosa has left South Africa for France. I suspect that critics of the

'politically unconscious' have regarded such sections as forms of escape from the compelling national narrative. But if we are concerned with the individual, we may regard it as necessary that Gordimer offer interludes of relative quiet, even if it has to be in a 'First World' country, as a foil to the social crisis of South Africa. Apart from such abrupt juxtapositions of place, there are areas of general human experience that Rosa uncovers on her own, namely the experience of extreme suffering, the mystery of death that nobody can help her penetrate and which she must confront on her own. The death of a hobo on a park bench "was the mystery itself ... we die because we live" (79). As in the case of the hobo on the bench, there is an obvious allusion to racial injustice, but also a sample of Rosa's contemplation on the mystery of life and death: "I don't know the ideology: It's about suffering. How to end suffering. And it ends in suffering" (332).

Significantly, the mystery of suffering and death is an area of experience that was not taught to Rosa by her revolutionary parents. Another is the mystery of love. *Eros* and *thanatos*, the two fundamental human experiences, are linked in the individual's intimate involvement in the experience of love and suffering, or death. Although the political dimension is ever present, these private acts are experienced in the existential self. In an interpretation written in 1989 (that is, subsequent to his landmark study of 1986) of Gordimer, Clingman emphasised this kind of interaction in Gordimer between commitment and freedom: "for there is a *solitude* here, an existential loneliness which accompanies commitment" (1989: 6). In her involvement with Chabaliier, Rosa replaces the kind of incestuous liaison she had had with Conrad with a symbiotic partnership, a bond between two equals, two individuals, who are confident enough to express their sense of their respective uniqueness. As Cooke notes, Rosa does not regard her role of mistress as demeaning, but as

one of freedom from her overpowering father (1985: 83). It helps her better to understand and challenge her old self as 'Burger's daughter':

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. (304)

The slight irony that creeps into Rosa's thoughts is directed back at her father's world of burdens. The unicorn emerges not as light-footed fantasy, but as the visual symbol of privacy: the personification of inwardly creative energies. The Unicorn and the Lion, the Lady and the Unicorn, are hypostases of the principle of imagination needing to be unfettered by social constraints in the same way as Chabalier himself becomes the embodiment of the free-thinking, unfettered mind. He lives "among [his] wife and children – not with them" (289), his attitude suggesting a way of defining the individual's inviolate emotional space.

The private space even disturbs the prison. While the prison represents public confinement, the *tomb* – the body – and the *womb* – the intricate private space – are recurrently composite in their symbolism. In Rosa's preoccupations with her body's beauty, she wishes to express her self-love, her self-cultivation, and self-confidence in the language of the body. In contrast to Clare Terblanche's "body that had no signals" (122), Rosa's is "a body with the assurance of embraces, as cultivated intelligence forms a mind" (121). The body is represented by Gordimer as a temple of the mind and a vehicle for exercising one's deeper self. "The assurance of embraces" allows Rosa to enjoy dancing. Her dance with

Conrad is a symbol of confident self-expression in overdetermined times: "they watched the silhouettes of their waving feet, wagging like tongues, talking like hands" (53).

It is through Conrad that Rosa actually learns how the most ordinary of human acts have built into them the confidence of self-expression. She gradually learns to 'deconstruct' the spectacle of the prison universe and to replace it with the ordinariness of less intense commitments. Towards the end of the novel, we see Rosa the physiotherapist helping the victims of Soweto "put one foot before the other" (332). As Cooke has commented,

in this calling she has found a means of alleviating the paralysis she had felt as a child under parents' demands. She can act when faced with the inexplicable suffering of crippled and wounded children. One can be sure she would not run from a dead man in a park or a tormented donkey. (1985: 86)

When she goes to prison at the end of the novel she is, in her mind, an anonymous, private person. The symbolic scene marks a tentativeness. Perhaps the revolutionary trajectory of *Burger's Daughter* is finally not as confident as critics have wished to imagine. We are reminded that the novel was a reflection of post-Soweto, post-interregnum times.

The meditative passages in Gordimer's fiction are, of course, set in contexts of character growth and awareness: it is against Rosa's growing existential awareness that Gordimer offers her contemplative comments. As I have already mentioned, what Clingman calls Gordimer's "observation" (her capacity for social analysis) refers also – and without detachment – to her awareness of the contemplative aspects of life. It seems important to retrieve Gordimer's meditative habit, an element of her fiction which, as I said above, has been neglected in the context in which, as a national spokesperson, she has had to operate.

What is interesting about *Burger's Daughter* is that both symbolic and meditative strains are governed by a confidence not in the revolution, but in the direction of the narrative towards the protagonist's emergence from her father's shadow. Gordimer may qualify the certainties of revolutionary zeal; she has recourse, nonetheless, to a long pattern of history. It is one that 'places' BC as a mood of the moment and seeks reintegration with non-racial alliances of the 1950s: the alternative history to Apartheid that is humanistic and embodied in admirable personalities, actions and ethics. With such a national narrative underscoring the world of individual development, Rosa may seek her complex self within her implicit belief in human virtue. By the time of *My Son's Story*, such implicit confidence was under strain. While the white order might have been in a terminal stage of collapse, the trajectory forward was obscured by the very immediacy of the state of emergency: the mass funerals, necklacings and military frenzy. A national narrative as trace appears only intermittently; but at the same time, personal development emerges equally intermittently. Instead of the meditations which define Rosa's inner development, we have the silence of Aila. The reader of *My Son's Story* has to be particularly sensitive to the implications of narrative gaps. The result is a novel that hovers somewhat awkwardly between its public and private commitments. Perhaps this is an accurate register of the late 1980s, a time in which nothing was certain.

The larger purpose of my reading strategy, nonetheless, remains valid. It is possible, from the vantage point of a freer civilian time in the 1990s, to revisit the most over-determined novels and recognise – as it was perhaps not possible or desirable to do in the highly charged politics of the previous decade – that Gordimer, the artist of individual life processes, always existed in tension alongside Gordimer the national spokesperson, and that

‘meaning’ was often to be located at the intersection of her necessary (public) and essential (personal) gestures. Clearly, neither *Burger’s Daughter* nor *My Son’s Story* simply deserts liberal tenets (the individualised consciousness) for the radicalised collective will. Neither, however, do characters step out of their political surroundings to satisfy any ‘non-political’ yearnings after the autonomy of life or art.

* * *

In my discussion within this chapter, I have dealt only with two novels. My method of subjecting the novelistic design to more personal motivation, to meditative contemplation and authorial qualification, however, may be applied generally to other novels of spectacular times such as *The Conservationist*, *July’s People* and *A Sport of Nature*. In each case, the powerful impact of symbolic-political scenes tends to predominate over the processes of living, with the result that interpretation has tended to dwell on the national dimensions. *The Conservationist* (1974) is, accordingly, regarded widely as posing the question as to who owns the land. As I indicated in the Introduction, Mehring’s white-owned world is literally swept away by storms; at the same time, the black body rises from its shallow grave to proclaim its ancestral (as opposed to legal) ownership of African history and the future. While I would not wish to discuss Clingman’s insight that Gordimer uses symbol (unifying in its mythic coherences) because she has difficulty in predicting the exact course of change (1986: 160), I would suggest that his observation holds its value only so long as we are reading with the expectation of allegory. As we might acknowledge in retrospect, South Africa did not experience apocalyptic change, but a long, arduous process of negotiation, compromise, duplicity and imaginative re-consideration. An ordinary, as distinct from a

spectacular, reading of *The Conservationist* might, in the spirit of ongoing human and social interaction, focus on the tortuous conversations between Mehring and his mistress, Mehring and his son, and Mehring and the farm worker, Johannes. Here, liberal ideals and pragmatic realities are tested in ways in which there are no easy victors. As a South African of the 1990s should understand, the hard world of Mehring's business principles retains a purchase on the ideals of transformation. At the same time, the defence of political equality, as offered by his mistress, and the tolerance of alternative life styles, as epitomised in Mehring's son, are crucial ingredients in any successful democratic order. The challenge of *The Conservationist* resides in the fact that Mehring's pragmatism is usually expressed with greater conviction (perhaps Gordimer was fascinated by her own character creation) than his mistress's somewhat glib defences of liberalism.

The shift from race to gender, in fact, permits civil spaces to assert claims in both *July's People* (1981) and *A Sport of Nature* (1987). In the former, the interpreters of national allegory have tackled the impossible question that arises from the symbolic dimensions: on the devastated landscape, beyond the city, after the revolution has taken its hold, Maureen Smales runs blindly towards a helicopter that might rescue her or shoot her down, depending upon who sits within it. To turn the lens on the smaller world of marital stress in unsettling conditions, however, is not necessarily to agree with Chapman, who suggests a failure of scale in the novel when he says that *July's People* "gestures towards national allegory even as it remains locked in the claustrophobia of its own marital pettiness" (1996: 393). Rather, we need to recognise that the scale of the novel is domestic; the allegory is probably insecurely insistent. Once we accept the novel as containing a minute examination of a middle-class marital relationship conducted in the view of the servant (a South African

phenomenon that continues today), we may be willing to attend less to the symbolic scenes of helicopters and more to Gordimer's many and illuminating contemplations of intimate personal lives in an overwhelmingly public design. It is the public design that, in *A Sport of Nature*, diverts attention, unnecessarily, from the more contemporaneous challenge of the novel. Gordimer has Hillela end up as the consort of the President of the Organisation of African Unity: a popular Madonna figure or, pre-1990, a Winnie Mandela figure. What we should be considering, however, are the possibilities – in gender-sensitive circles – of a successful Moll Flanders. It is a question that certainly survives the 'end of Apartheid'.

Can the liberalism that Gordimer herself condemned, however, be recovered in pertinent ways? In investigating the issue – the subject of the next chapter – I shall compare Gordimer's 'after Apartheid' novel *None to Accompany Me* with her first novel, almost a pre-Apartheid novel, *The Lying Days*. I hope to suggest that the recovery of *The Lying Days* can prepare more generally for a recovery of other early Gordimer works.

2. THE NOVEL OF THE CIVIL IMAGINARY

None to Accompany Me and The Lying Days

In continuing to connect themes of a socio-political and a psychological nature, I shall in this chapter continue also to be governed by the overriding question: if Gordimer was so closely linked to the conscience of Apartheid, what value does she have as society moves beyond the political struggle? The two novels on which I shall focus are, in different ways, both set in climates of civilian, as opposed to revolutionary, time.

The Lying Days (1953) is Gordimer's first novel, written at the very beginning of the era of institutionalised racism in South Africa. The 1950s saw the rapid enactment of a programme of Apartheid legislation by the newly elected National Party government. Although this provoked the Defiance Campaign of the early fifties, the forces which at that time opposed Apartheid had not yet developed the sustained civil disobedience of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in the 1980s to withstand the terror tactics of the police state. In any case, the writing of *The Lying Days* preceded the big events of the 1950s, including the Defiance Campaign itself and the massive Treason Trial of 1956. Written forty years after *The Lying Days*, *None to Accompany Me* (1994) is also a first novel of sorts. It is the first of Gordimer's works to have been published after the unbannings of February 1990, the date that marked the beginning of the move to a non-racial dispensation in South Africa. The early nineties remained characterised by township violence and the assassinations of political

leaders (the murder of Chris Hani is alluded to in the novel). At the same time, the early 1990s witnessed uniquely liberatory images and events: the release of Nelson Mandela from prison, the return of exiles, the formulation of non-racial land policies, the beginning of serious negotiations between the ANC and the National Party government with a view to establishing an interim Constitution.

In different ways, therefore, the 1950s to 1960s and the 1990s frame the two crisis periods of the 1970s and 1980s. The 1970s may be regarded as the BC and Soweto decade, and the 1980s as the 'Interregnum' and 'State of Emergency' decade. Both may be regarded as politically spectacular. In contrast, my concern here is with writing in more 'civil' times, or at least in times in which the large public events did not entirely obscure the rhythms of people's living outside, or beyond, the demands of public life. In both novels, issues of individual choice and responsibility are foregrounded, while matters of race influence, rather than guide, the central story of the protagonists' personal growth. As a reviewer remarked shortly after the publication of Gordimer's latest novel:

None to Accompany Me marks, I believe, a welcome retreat from the apocalyptic, even strident, tone that has jeopardised some of her recent books, a return to the liberal and multiracial Johannesburg of the earliest novels and short stories of thirty years ago: today, almost unbelievably, the revolution has been achieved, the circle has been closed. (Anon. 1994: 6)

This observation suggests, by implication, the concept which I have used as a convenient alternative to the single-mindedness of the revolutionary ethos: that of the civil imaginary. It is a term of convenience, clearly, but one that permits the coherence of issues pertaining to slightly freer times. At the centre is the idea of the nation, less as unified system,

more as diverse society, in which freedom is entertained not as the abstract ideal but as the various forms of private life. *The Lying Days* and *None To Accompany Me* reject the "law of the fathers, the absolutist order, with autonomous subjects regulated by internalised representations" (During 1990: 143). This absolutist order is a reasonable description of the regime depicted in *Burger's Daughter* and is somewhat pertinent, at least, to the life of the son, Will, in *My Son's Story*. *The Lying Days* and *None to Accompany Me* reflect a situation, to quote Chapman, in which

the balance of the public and the private has shifted towards the private – the freer civil space – in a manner reminiscent of Gordimer's novels of the 1950s. *None to Accompany Me*, in fact, suggests a path back to the early Gordimer. (1996: 395)

This does not mean that the political dimension vanishes from the fictional landscape. The effects of Apartheid are felt in *None to Accompany Me* in the violence which is always a threat at the periphery of the characters' lives. In her work in the Legal Foundation, Vera Stark, the protagonist, is involved in issues of land dispute and resettlement claims. In *The Lying Days* the reader of the 1990s remains attuned to the fact that Apartheid was a shaping force in the scene of township violence, for example, and more subtly, in the psychology of Helen Shaw's growth to young womanhood.

Besides the changing socio-historical backgrounds, there is also the matter of a literary-critical climate which has changed in the intervening years. In the case of the early novel, Gordimer was writing at a time when she was strongly influenced by the liberal humanism of European academics. Leavisianism and New Criticism provided expectations that literature would function at a distance from the weight of political problems; the novel,

in particular, was expected to depict the intricate inner lives of individual characters. As in the Western academy, so among South Africa's small 'literary set', liberal humanism was a tenet of literary-cultural life. The tendency may be illustrated in Lionel Abrahams's magazine, *The Purple Renoster*, which in the fifties vigorously promoted artistic subtlety and irony as defences against the slogans and the crudity of political programmes.

By the time of the appearance of *None to Accompany Me* there had been a move in literary debate, away from the Marxist materialism and deconstructive critiques that had replaced earlier emphases on the close reading of the autonomous text. As I indicated in my Introduction in my discussion of neo-thematism, reactions against suspicions of 'human centredness' – the mark of the deconstructive habit – had begun to encourage a return in the early 1990s to the rehabilitation of the human subject and the plot of experience. In South Africa the terms 'reconstruction' and 'rehabilitation' had begun to capture a 'post-Apartheid' mood in seeking new kinds of unities after the divisiveness of ethnic engineering. It is necessary, accordingly, to reconstitute the term 'liberal' which, during revolutionary times, fell into near-caricatural use. As I have already mentioned, Gordimer herself spoke of rejecting liberalism for fear of being tainted with white capitalism: "I am a white South African radical. Please don't call me a liberal" (1974b). At the same time, a fairly wide reaction against liberalism in South African 'progressive' circles had the effect of marginalising novels like *A World of Strangers*, a novel that was seen by Green (1979) as privileging liberal interests and, in consequence, compromising the possibility of radical, economic change. In attempting, cautiously, to reconstitute a liberal perspective, I have turned to character, experience and theme as salient points of critical reference.

In such a purpose, the two novels to be discussed provide an interesting comparison of central characters and stories. Both stories have a marked autobiographical strand: Gordimer herself grew up in a mining town, attended the University of the Witwatersrand and explored the social worlds of Johannesburg in her youth. The young Helen Shaw and the older Vera Stark serve as studies of the middle-class white South African woman in youth and age, respectively, and live at the onset and the demise of Apartheid. The matter of character delineation is linked to that of style. In the overdetermined novels of the previous section, symbolism operates as allegorical marker. In the two novels of this chapter I shall argue that a realism appropriate to processes of character development displaces the pre-eminence of the symbol. In addition, there is a shift from the tortured syntax that Gordimer, especially in *Burger's Daughter*, employs in her attempt to capture the disjunctions of the private in the political. In *None to Accompany Me* we return to a grammar of prose: direct, spare, more logical in matters of causality. It is a realism of the everyday that, despite its lyricism, also governs the syntactical thought structures of *The Lying Days*. Of course, it could be argued that I am advocating a turning away from the 'modernist' dislocations of narration and a return to an earlier phase in which 'real people' were presumed to be pursuing their moral and psychological dilemmas in knowable, transcendent conditions. In fact, my reconstitutive approach is not meant to discard the political critique of the 1970s in favour of any homogenous, bourgeois-liberal myth.

What I have been suggesting is that the 1990s require a revitalised humanism, in which psychological realism will be foregrounded in the literary work. After the collapse of capitalist/ communist binaries, of which the collapse of South Africa's racial binaries was a subset, literary criticism is required to challenge its own ideological presuppositions – its

reading into silences – and restore the potential of character creation in thematic interchange. We are reminded of the term neo-thematism, to which I referred in the Introduction. Neo-thematism, which has absorbed the impact of structuralism's generative transformational model, systematically identifies themes in terms of surface vs deep structures of narrative: "it [is] transformational linguistics with its 'deep' and 'surface' structures" (Shcheglov 1993: 65) that leaves its imprint on contemporary readings of theme and text. In this chapter, I shall be looking at tensions in the thematic interaction of determination and autonomy, sex and politics, and power and love: in short, at Gordimer's perennial concerns. As I suggested in the previous section, one finds not merely sets of opposites in Gordimer, but a contemplative response that is appropriate to the recovery of civil concern.

To turn the contemplative mode to the matter of character creation, we may start with a refutation of the simple notion that autobiographical novels are pale reflections of the author herself. While I do not deny the presence of Gordimer the author in her own fiction, I suggest that it is interesting to recollect Gordimer's comments on the relationship of fiction and reality:

The writer has to recognize that the guessing-game, the prying and prurience and often absurdity, is merely a vulgar expression of a mystery that the relation of fiction to the appearance of reality is, to those who are not writers [Y]ou have to be a performer of the mystery to understand it. (1995: 3)

The mystery to which she refers is deeply embedded in the dynamics of fact/ fiction, real person/ fictional character, author/ fiction. Gordimer does not believe in the truth of fact itself: "The facts are always less than what really happens. I mean the facts are just on the surface – it's what makes the fact" (1990c: 76). As she says elsewhere about newspaper

reports: "You can read the newspaper reports, but the psychological process within people ... is the stuff for the novelist, not for the journalist" (1990k: 125). One such fact of history is the issue of power shifts. While the historian can read power shifts in the events, "the novelist is concerned with the power shifts within the history of individuals" (Gordimer 1990e: 224). Gordimer's beliefs about the subaltern role of fact vis-à-vis fiction can be extrapolated to cover her feelings about the relationship of the real person to the fictional character. Gordimer does not deny that "every writer ... [may] 'use' people, or rather other people's lives" (1989: 114). But she hastens to add: "A writer sees in your life what you do not. ... Fiction is a way of exploring possibilities present but undreamt of in the living of a single life" (1989: 114-15).

In summary, Gordimer does not deny that fictional characters usually have some connection to real life situations, that typologies are made out of the "superimposition of transparencies of many individuals" (1995: 4). But she believes firmly in the writer's particular kind of relation to real personages. She gives the metaphorical example of Primo Levi's *metamir*, which is "a metaphysical mirror, [and] does not obey the law of optics but reproduces your image *as it is seen by the person who stands in front of you*" (1995: 5). In the spirit of the *metamir*, Gordimer invents "alternative destinies to real people", as she says quoting Graham Greene (1995: 6). She repeats the same point when, in quoting Joseph Conrad, she says that a novel is "a form of imagined life clearer than reality" (1995: 7). On a previous occasion, Gordimer claimed that "'nothing I write here in this essay will be as true as my fiction'" (1990h: 260).

Gordimer's insights into the dynamics of fact/ fiction and real person/ fictional character help us understand the nature of her 'one story' behind each piece she has written. The writer selects the ingredients of her story or, to put it differently, "a writer is selected by his subject ... *the consciousness* of his era" (Gordimer 1983a: 15). Whatever one would call this consciousness in its atmosphere, beliefs and prejudices, Gordimer believes that in the end "we all write one book, but we write it piecemeal and often from very different points of view throughout our lives" (1990i: 44). Elsewhere, she says: "I have a theory that a writer is always writing the same story – like a mosaic, a jigsaw puzzle that is put together" (1990d: 57). Gordimer's 'one story' at bottom reflects a single set of needs: "I do believe," she says, "that we are all basically exactly the same in our *needs*. But these needs have been formulated and dealt with differently by different societies and it is always extremely enriching to make this contact" (1990e: 216).

These needs are not reflected directly, but are referred to as an "ethos ... lives give off, a vapour of the truth condensed" (Gordimer 1995: 12), "synthesis of being" (1995: 4), "a series of intimations" (1995: 5), all of which, as she says, are first-hand expressions of her emotions. Or, in paradoxical juxtaposition: "My lovers are my private business. But the emotion must be first-hand" (1990a: 267). Put differently, it is not the exactness of facts or real people that matters, but the artistic coherence through which the writer fulfills her function: "The function of the artist is to make sense of life ... [by] assembling amorphous things and putting them into an order" (1990f: 304-05). Elsewhere, she articulates the same credo: "For everything one writes is part of the whole story, so far as any individual writer attempts to build the pattern of his own perception out of chaos" (1983a: 9-10).

In returning her fiction to an analysis of character, one is in a sense permitting Gordimer her own essential gesture, in which her voice as artist (something of the credo is captured in the various quotations above) begins to supplant her voice as national spokesperson. It is this inner artistic and imaginative coherence, the "interior world ... the great line of continuity in [her] life" (Gordimer 1990b: 11) that I have in mind when considering Helen Shaw or Vera Stark as 'Gordimer women'. In focusing on the recurrent tensions between commitment and autonomy, strong woman and weak man, private life and public life, I am not regarding Gordimer's characters as thinly disguised autobiographical portraits, but rather as trying to make sense of what appear to be Gordimer's literary preoccupations within the dynamics of character and theme.

If indeed there is some 'autobiographical' continuity between Vera Stark and Helen Shaw, it is interesting to speculate as to what might have become of Helen had she chosen to stay in South Africa. The concluding lines of *The Lying Days* suggest Helen's desire to end the process of self-deception inscribed in "the lying days" of her youth:

I'm not practising 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. (1988;1953: 367)

If *The Lying Days* is about the search for truth in the process of growing up, *None to Accompany Me* is uncompromisingly about the truth that is possible with experience and age.

There is a sense of homecoming in *None to Accompany Me*. The 'arrival' however is not as glamorous as prophesied in *A Sport of Nature* (1987), where Gordimer anticipates the creation of 'the new African state'. Neither does she speculate about relatively abstract concepts such as the complex implications of social transformation as she did in her 1994 Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard: "We know we have to perform what Flaubert called 'the most difficult and least glamorous of all tasks: transition'. This is the reality of freedom. This is the great matter" (1995: 134). In contrast, *None to Accompany Me* announces freedom from the ostentatious gestures of rebellion: it is an examination of the "transition from rebellion to responsibility" (Kanhema 1994: 4). This novel is unadorned in its style and quite short in length, suggesting a compulsion to vent an essential inner truth: the need to gain and maintain distance from both the political and personal demands of people and events. The responsibility is in the first instance to oneself.

This is not to say that *None to Accompany Me* lacks a public dimension. It offers insights into the works of organisations like the Legal Foundation, which supports the institution of democratic land policies; it comments on the return of exiles, township violence, and the difficulties of squatters. Yet how effective is Gordimer's use of the public event in relation to its private counterpart? The quick response is that the two do not seem to be linked as dynamically as in *Burger's Daughter*. Ironically, one of the advantages of overdetermined times was that there was no escape from the public/ private dialectic. In *None to Accompany Me*, by contrast, the events often dislocate themselves from the functioning of the private life, and it is tempting to endorse the observation of Caryl Phillips that "Gordimer's new novel is really two ill-matched novels in one" (1994: 1). Or, as Lovell puts it, "an unhappy blend of creativity and commentary; of fiction and forum" (1994: 4).

The 'forum' presents several social realities in the build-up to the 1994 elections. Attention is given to the return from exile of a black family, the Maqomas, whose arrival in Johannesburg is set against a background of continuing violence and a campaign for the reclamation of land by those (black people) who had been dispossessed under Apartheid legislation. At many points the novel resorts to reportage in the 'telling' – rather than 'showing' – of the national incident. The reader is subjected to a number of discussions intended to explain economic or land policy, corruption in office, federalism, the education crisis, as well as the more private issues of lesbianism and AIDS. There is a sense that Gordimer is anxious not to disappoint those readers for whom she might still be the 'national spokesperson'. Yet reportage does not account for the whole picture: there is the vividly enacted scene of a Right-wing confrontation over the land issue, and 'crime' as a post-Apartheid obsession in the white community is given brutal enactment in a robbery scene involving the central characters. At the same time, another, private story occupies most attention: the inward journey of Vera Stark, a sixty-something year-old lawyer who is a "fixture at the Legal Foundation" that helps blacks with land ownership.

In a psychological process of house-cleaning, Vera – while remaining engaged in her public duties – mentally begins discarding her commitment to people and causes outside of herself. As exiles return, Vera – at the same time as she renews acquaintances – embarks on her own kind of secular retreat. What captivates the reader (at least, this reader) are not the 'national' appendages of the story, but Vera's initiation into the art of self-discovery. Vera Stark, as her name suggests, is the seeker of the stark truth, one who has the courage to discard those stages of her life that have exhausted their challenge or significance. She allows neither colleagues nor family to interfere with her new sense of freedom. Gordimer, in her

role of authorial commentator, summarises the theme: "Perhaps the passing away of the old regime makes the abandonment of an old personal life also possible" (1994: 315). Or, to use the terminology I have been using, perhaps the passing of overdetermined times allows the individual the space and courage to embark on his/ her inward journey without guilt or apology. This is the journey of Vera Stark.

Yet it is not an easy matter to return to civilian times. Gordimer carries her burden as national spokesperson: she cannot avoid, as fact, the baggage of South Africa's traumatic transition. In her attempt to deflect the obdurate event, it is almost as if she has to rediscover an earlier novelistic craft concerning the resilience of the private life amid the social surroundings. There is a scale that has to be shifted: the private domain has to reclaim areas of the public domain as its own. We might test such a proposition by asking whether Vera Stark's story requires to be set in public activity. In some ways, her feelings for her lovers, her rejection of her husband, and her detachment from her own children are linked to her conditioning as a South African trying to live with responsibility towards a life beyond family. But even were the pull of social responsibility not to feature, Vera would remain fundamentally the same individual. Finally, we are given a psychology of the self: the story is about the crisis of self-identity in the process of ageing, and one needs to treat with caution comments such as Wagner's which attempt to preserve the interpretation of Gordimer's novels as narratives of political struggle. As Wagner incorrectly, I think, phrases it:

Gordimer argues for the power of the political life ... to bend personal energies in a redemptive thrust to the service of moral issues which, in their ideal articulation, transcend the petty betrayals and muddy complexities of the private life. Within this paradigm, it is clear that, in the ongoing search for a

home, for a place in Africa, it will be the private life which will have to be jettisoned, the public commitments which must be valorised. (1995: 70)

We should also treat with caution Phillips's remarks about the separate novels in the covers of the single work. Rather, *None to Accompany Me* reminds us that there has always been an element in Gordimer that has wanted to resist the grasp of the event, an author who would have preferred a more domestic, literary climate in which to write her fiction: "I am not a politically-minded person by nature. I don't suppose if I had lived elsewhere my writing would have reflected politics much. If at all" (Gordimer 1965b: 23).

Wagner (1994) has remarked that Gordimer's novels are, at bottom, middle-class domestic romances. But even if there is some truth in this, the expectations of public commitment in immediately post-Apartheid years demand that in *None to Accompany Me* Gordimer's protagonist be given her several workaday roles. Vera Stark, as Deputy Director of the Legal Foundation, serves on the Technical Committee on Constitutional issues shortly before the first free elections. Though she reveals efficiency and integrity in her job, she inhabits for considerable narrative time an inner place that is more central to her being than either the demands of work or domestic life. What is new about this type of 'Gordimer woman' is her courage to confront her inner needs, her existential self, with an emphasis on individual choice and a responsibility towards her own singular life. After a lifetime of duties and commitments to others, Vera chooses to end her story by dancing alone through life, dancing to the rhythms of her inner voice. She

danced alone, no one to witness, in the living-room of her house ... the dancing was a rite of passage. An exaltation of solitude would come over her. It was connected to something else: a freedom; an attraction between her and

a man that had no desire for the usual consummation. Ben believes their marriage was a failure. Vera sees it as a stage on the way, along with others, many and different. Everyone ends up moving alone towards the self. (305-6)

This hardly calls to mind Gordimer the national spokesperson. Yet the very directness of the writing carries conviction. It is a conviction underscored in a recent interview in a French journal, in which Gordimer was asked about Vera Stark's need for privacy: "what did she [Vera] want?", to which Gordimer replied:

We are each born alone and we must each die alone; this is part of the nature and the intensity of one's relationships with the others, be they spouses, children or friends. These relationships are based on experiences which bring us together at a certain moment in time. But they do not change the human condition. That's why Vera says to her daughter when talking about Ben: "I cannot live with somebody who cannot live without me." This would be too heavy a burden; besides, one can never be entirely responsible for the life of somebody else. (1996: 34) [my translation]

Given my argument in the previous chapter that even in revolutionary times Gordimer the political novelist cohabited, as it were, with Gordimer the novelist of more personal concerns, it is tempting to suggest that the end of the revolutionary climate may signal for Gordimer a strange kind of liberation. I do not wish to predict her continuing development as a novelist, but *None to Accompany Me* may point towards a reversal of the previous balance between public and private. Unlike Wagner, I see in Gordimer a willing, even a compulsive, attempt to recapture the individual commitment to living and experiencing life, a liberation from her burden as the political moralist. In the determined pursuit of her identity, Vera Stark implicitly announces the end of the grand narrative of Apartheid. Perhaps the shift of attention has been recognised in several comments on the 'stark' truth-telling of the novel.

As the epigraph (from Proust) says: "We must never be afraid to go too far, for truth lies beyond." The search for truth can, of course, be a cliché in any literary enterprise. In Gordimer, however, the Proustian dictum is evidently more than a necessary gesture towards an international readership (to allude to criticism of Gordimer's recurrent use in her work of foreign texts). In *Writing and Being* (1995) she elaborates on and qualifies her concern with the truth that "lies beyond". She exhorts writers not to fear going "too far" in the search for truth:

[not] too far for the accepted norms of loyalty to the regimes, the societies, the mores, the politics of the countries whose earth, nevertheless, they feel between bare toes, flesh of the flesh. (1995: 43)

As Edward Said has remarked in a review of *Writing and Being*, the concept of 'being' in the title of this collection of critical writings attests to Gordimer's preoccupation with "an existential actuality that becomes the starting point for novelists as they look for the real Home to be attained on the Concealed Side, away from normally lived experience" (1995: 7).

This foregrounding of the Concealed Side – the repressed-made-visible – is expressed in *None to Accompany Me* by ideas and images of emptiness that recur in the narrative. We encounter empty streets and empty buses from the townships to the city (180). The city in the 1990s is inhabited by aspiring black people eager to escape their township existence. Sadly, however, they move "into the [empty] shell of middle-class life without the means or habits that give it any advantage" (184). When Vera and her black colleague, Oupa, are attacked and robbed as "castaways in the immensity of the sky ... abandoned in the diminishing perspective of an empty dirt road" (197), the immensity of the sky and the emptiness of the country road

highlight, in contrast, the vulnerability of individual human beings. Attention is given particularly to Oupa's fatally wounded body which is attached, naked, to life-support machines in the hospital, causing Vera to contemplate the humiliation suffered by the agonising flesh according to which "a naked man is always another man" (206). At the mercy of the medical staff, Oupa "was kept naked because every bodily change, every function had to be monitored all the time" (208). While to the staff in the intensive care unit Oupa's body "did not feel vulnerable in his nakedness because fever glowed in him like coal" (209), his nakedness to those close to him was "the grotesque miracle of his metamorphosis" (209). It is the metamorphosis of life and death as well as of death-in-life that Gordimer contemplates, not only in Oupa's nakedness, but throughout the novel.

In another scene depicting the process of dying, Ben's father, who has come to spend the last days of his life with the Starks, is described as "an old man who has lost [his] power" (157) and who "couldn't hear; or he heard only as an echo in an empty chamber" (165). In such resonances of theme between the political event and the private event, the 'two stories' that Phillips sees as a weakness in the novel may not simply represent dislocation, but an allusive, though tenuous link between the private and the public. Such links may be identified in the 'strong' dialectic of *Burger's Daughter*. This is not to recede from my earlier observation, partly in agreement with Phillips, that the reportage of events is sometimes plastered on to the intimate 'autobiography' of Vera. In the insistence on nakedness as the exposure of vulnerability, however, the public world directs the theme inwards to the naked truth of individual life. Paradoxically, the long-established couple, Vera and Ben, who initially find their meaning in the nakedness of passion, end in a naked kind of exhaustion. Even in her middle years Vera turns to others, and attempts to conceal the sexual excitement

of her affair with Otto Abarbanel. On hearing of her lover's being "a Jew, orphaned by racism, without a name that was his own" (67), she symbolically gives him "toys and sweets. Naked in bed with her, he was also an infant deported, naked in the world" (67). At the same time, her husband's childlike dependency on her makes her impatient. But then Otto is a transitory excitement, a step in Vera's ruthless re-assertion of her own selfishness or, more precisely, 'self-ishness'.

Just as we are directed into the private realm, the matter of breaking old habits has its impact on the political surroundings. The Legal Foundation finds its rationale in a society of insecure boundaries, characterised by the collapse of Apartheid's demarcations into a fluidity that is both challenging and extremely insecure. The exile, the wanderer to new territories, becomes almost the symbolic figure of the transition: Zeph Rapulana challenges the recalcitrant Right over land occupation. In the public space, as well as in the private space, *None to Accompany Me* is about the end of old structures which, however constricting, may have had a perverse kind of comfort.

Another new aspect of the 1990s is its spirit of negotiation which, at times, is difficult to connect with its climate of uncompromising pursuit. Didymus, the returned exile, is a case in point: he cannot understand how "if sincerity calls all compromise into question, what ... what then was the whole philosophy, the *business* – yes – that's what it is – of negotiation about?" (232). Torn between the need for sincerity and the need for negotiation or compromise, Didymus lives between the past memory of revolutionary enthusiasm and the sceptical hesitancy of a new era. One of the many heroes of the political underground, Didymus arrives home only to face a moral confrontation with his own political legacy. His

guilt for the torture of people who were suspected by the Movement of being traitors in the years of struggle follows him into the present. He is placed under scrutiny as the past begins to be scoured in the attempt to understand what behaviour and conduct should not be repeated in the future. Whatever the toughness of the process of truth and reconciliation, the novel almost revels in the end of secretiveness, the end to the 'lying days':

Boundaries are changed, ideologies merge, sects, religious and philosophical, create new idols out of combinations of belief, scientific discoveries link cause and effect between the disparate, ethnically jumbled territorial names make a nationality out of many-tongued peoples of different religions, a style of beauty comes out of the clash between domination and resistance. (49)

Yet if the time opens new possibilities of definition and self-definition, it provides little that is certain: "there are no gods for them to turn to, either. No new state, not yet; no Security that was not at the time part of the threat" (265). This is a time of intense awareness about transition from a past mode of life towards a new, as yet unfamiliar, alternative. It is what Homi Bhabha has called "border lives" or "liminal states" of mind (1994: 1-2) that have not yet been moulded into fixed forms as they are located at the same time along the boundaries connecting and delineating spaces of difference. Liminality, as a psychological feature of our times, is what in *None to Accompany Me* continually characterises the political sphere and the same liminality spreads into all areas of life. Mpho, the daughter of exiled parents (Didymus and Sibongile), is in her attitude and fashion, for example, a hybrid of the West and Africa as she combines "the style of *Vogue* with the assertion of Africa. She was a mutation achieving happy appropriation of the aesthetics of opposing species" (49). Annick, Vera and Ben's daughter, is a lesbian, whose publicly announced life-style seems to Vera to be abnormal, a form of androgyny, for which she blames herself. Ivan, who regards Ben as

his father, turns out to have been conceived in a moment of passion between Vera and her first husband after she had already abandoned him for Ben. Gordimer experiments with variants of public and private liminality, implying the need for visibility and the end of pretensions or sham concealment.

Similarly, Vera Stark abandons past compromises for an integrity that reflects her newly-won sense of self. Hers is an emotional independence without guilt or apology. In having Vera cast aside many of the social burdens that weighed so heavily on Rosa Burger, Gordimer, after Apartheid, might be said to be declaring her own emotional independence of the responsibilities of novelist as national prophet.

Vera's relationships with men provide the most obvious shift from dependencies to independence. Her early divorce, for example, is an act of gaining independence from "a boy-girl love affair, [and] their clumsy assumption of adulthood together" (8), an assumption of which she became acutely aware on meeting Ben. In anticipating a more stimulating life with Ben, she does not hesitate to leave her immature husband for what she felt was the more experienced man. The second marriage begins to disappoint her, however, when she realises that Ben has sacrificed his artistic interests in order to dedicate himself fully to her. What had started as an emotionally, sexually and creatively tantalising experience turns out to involve a weak man's fixation on his spouse. Ben's mistake was to have invested his energies in Vera at the expense of his professional self. As we hear in the subjective style of Vera's thoughts: "Ben had created Vera for himself as body, a torso without a head" (228).

In reaction, Vera's betrayals of Ben, with Otto Abarbanel, for example, become acts of independence. Bourgeois morality does not play a significant role in a declaration that filled Vera "with a sense of pride and freedom rather than betrayal" (63). Vera's dancing through life to her inner rhythms is encapsulated in variations of the leitmotif, "*what shall I do with this love*", which recurs in the novel (132, 140, 200, 248) in connection with her relationship not only with Ben, but with her children and grandchildren, as well as with colleagues. This obsessive question points to actions that step decisively beyond middle-class habits and patterns. Her son, Ivan, is accordingly "her invader [who] had germinated in her body, interloper from an episode into her definitive life" (248). Her grandson, Adam, seems to be a continuation of this emotional invasion. Her anxieties about "*what shall [she] do with this love*" are expressed in her relationship to Annick, her daughter, as the fear of another round of emotional attachments, in which children make demands on their parents. This is a rejection of the most hallowed codes by which the middle classes are supposed to conduct their lives and construct their moral schemas. Hillela's flouting of these conventions in the inter-racial sex of *A Sport of Nature* seems shallow and extravagant in comparison with Vera's principled rejection of 'interrelationship'. Had Helen Shaw continued to pursue into adult life her youthful rebellions against domestic claustrophobia, she might have ended up as a Vera Stark.

Vera's determination that 'none shall accompany her' on the authentic journey of life extends beyond her own family. Shortly after having been wounded in a township attack, Oupa, the Legal Foundation clerk, drops his bravado and reaches out to Vera: "the words fell from him with the clatter of a weapon concealed on his person. – I couldn't live without you

– " (199), he says. But Vera's rejection of responsibility is almost spontaneous: "she was not responsible for his existence, no, no, love does not carry that covenant" (200):

what to do with that love. Now she saw what it was about, the sudden irrelevant question, a sort of distress within herself, that came to her from time to time, lately. (200)

As Vera begins to understand her deep-seated need for privacy in all the spheres of her life – "she had never realized how much her (what was it?) sense of privacy had grown" (247) – the reader has to ask whether this is her self-actualisation or her neurotic rejection of the overdetermination of her past. The 'self-actualisation' is carried in the conviction of the story. There are no qualificatory apologies, finally, for the singular course of Vera's growth to a kind of wisdom beyond the necessary gestures of her social attachments.

This 'post-political' liberation from the bondages of responsibility for others reaches its height in Vera's relationship with Zeph Rapulana, a character reminiscent of Luke Fokase of *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966) and Hillela's first husband, Whaila, of *A Sport of Nature* (1987). These characters act as agents of inner growth for the female protagonist. Like his 'predecessors', Zeph, in his own brand of almost selfish integrity, becomes a catalyst of Vera's inner journey: her "working through – what shall I say – dependencies" (313). Vera symbolically occupies Zeph's garden cottage as a tenant, a designation which suits her new sense of self; a self that extends itself into a liminal space,

in which there were loyalties, but no dependencies, in which there was feeling caught in no recognised category. ... Vera felt it open, to be traversed by herself; *herself* a final form of company discovered. (321)

Besides the political symbolism of a white, privileged person finding satisfaction in a subordinate role in a black man's household and, by implication, in a black man's country (the national allegorical interpretation), Vera is empowered as a human being in a new state of mind that goes beyond considerations of colour. Just as Vera's lesbian daughter, Annick, finds an identity in a transgression of bourgeois codes, so in her own way does Vera. The fact that what really troubles her about Annick is not so much the 'unconventionality' of lesbianism, but her belief that penetration by a penis is an essential satisfaction. Just as *My Son's Story* introduced the world of extra-marital affairs while avoiding the label sexual escapade, so *None to Accompany Me* challenges several racial and gender themes that had become almost too 'correct' in the violent but morally predictable landscape of South Africa's national narrative. As in the dancing scene I mentioned earlier, Vera undergoes a moment of cathartic transfiguration from the realm of determination to that of internal autonomy. In her redemption in subjective volition, we are reminded of Yeats's lines: "O brightening glance/ How can we know the dancer from the dance?" (1967: 245).

The symbolism of dancing is present in each of the two novels, and it is a powerful symbolic form of "inner visions seek[ing] expression and outer facts seek[ing] meaning" (Chetwynd 1982: 389). We are reminded here of Maureen Smales running towards the helicopter gunship at the end of *July's People* (1981), a scene that some critics have found to have predictive and symbolic value in our decoding of "fictions of the future" (see, for example, Lenta 1988). Whereas Maureen Smales runs in a desperate flight towards the gunship – any escape seems preferable to her domestic condition – Vera's dancing signals a wise acceptance of her place in society (she has a role to play, but no longer needs to intrude her white authority): an acceptance too of her personal wisdom in which loyalty is

replaced by integrity. It was this very distinction that in "Living in the Interregnum" (1989;1983) as well as in her complementary essay "The Essential Gesture" (1989;1984) distinguished for Gordimer the role of the novelist as involved in a cause from the role of the novelist as the explorer of truth.

* * *

As we turn from *None to Accompany Me* to *The Lying Days*, we begin to see that it is the exploration of individual, psychological truth – rather than general political truth – that, surprisingly, proves to have been the constant feature of Gordimer's fiction. Despite the different personality traits of Vera Stark and Helen Shaw, Gordimer is concerned in both age and youth with the human intricacies behind abstractions, and, behind power relations, with a different form of love: love which in its truth-telling may appear selfish, even cruel to others, love which, as I shall argue, is inextricably bound up with metaphysical contemplation. What I am suggesting, in line with my overall thesis, is that the key question, after Apartheid, is not the question governing Green's influential article (1979) as to whether *The Lying Days* fails or succeeds because it is, or is not, a politically liberal or a radical novel. Rather, *The Lying Days* succeeds because without ignoring the effects of the South African social structure on the characters' lives, it interweaves its South African particularities into supple processes of psychological responsiveness.

There is, between Helen and Vera, a kind of autobiographical continuity: whereas Vera ends up rejoicing in her freedom from bourgeois codes, Helen begins her 'rebellion' in the confines of the South African small town. Symbolism in both novels does not, however,

impose itself as the allegorical pattern of the national story. In both *None to Accompany Me* and *The Lying Days* symbols are transmuted into ordinary activities in order to suggest inner states of mind, or individual processes of recognition. Thus, the images of dancing – reminders of Gordimer's own interest as a young person in the expressive potential of ballet – ineluctably merge into the private reflections of the people inhabiting the domain. The spirit of the mining town, the influence against which the young Helen Shaw reacts, or the spirit of the Legal Foundation, Vera's mature public identification, each becomes a mental equivalent not of a national, but of an individual trajectory. As Gordimer herself has said in an interview: "By place ... I don't mean a predetermined place; your place depends on the role you take in society'" (Macaskill 1993: 60).

The Lying Days depicts the young life of Helen Shaw immediately after the coming to power of the National Party with its predominantly Afrikaner interests and its institutionalisation of Apartheid. The statutes that defined the 'space' of racial discrimination included the Group Areas Act (1950), which legislated the forcible separation of different ethnic groups; the Bantu Education Act (1953), which established separate and unequal educational systems based on colour; and the Immorality Act (1950), which extended the criminalisation of sexual relationships across lines of colour. At the same time, black assertion in South Africa consolidated itself around a series of illegal strikes in the early 1940s to culminate in the 1946 African Mineworkers' Strike and, in the early 1950s, in the Defiance Campaign, in which passive resistance to Apartheid laws was met by increased state repression. Commenting on Gordimer's literary response to the first years of Apartheid, Clingman has observed that the two nationalist forces – Afrikaner and African – created two

zones of extreme possibility while "it is precisely this middle-ground that *The Lying Days* occupies, and this exclusion underlies its characteristic response to 1948" (1986: 37).

As I have said, however, my focus will be neither on the middle ground of political liberalism, nor on the hard ground of political radicalism (it strikes me that those who expected radicalism in the 1950s were being somewhat anachronistic in their expectations) but on what has perhaps remained of more enduring interest to readers. We are reminded that *The Lying Days* continues to be reprinted, and has perhaps borne out a comment made in 1954 by a reviewer who said: "read this book; it is a memorable experience and it is the yardstick by which future South African novels will be judged" (A. O. D. 1954: 13). Or, as a more recent commentator has written: "*The Lying Days* will ensure Gordimer the kind of reputation of a Virginia Woolf who could tap into the perennial life experiences beneath the surface events" (Graeber 1994: 32). Yet, to emphasise a key point, a political purpose does not cease to operate in any of Gordimer's fiction. *The Lying Days* may be a *Bildungsroman* (we follow Helen Shaw's growth to young adulthood), but Helen is shaped crucially by the special circumstances of the South Africa in which she lives: the drab gold-mining town of her childhood in which "groping toward maturity, Helen Shaw supplies her own clinical study of her troubles" (Anon. 1953: 119).

Helen rebels against the confines of the small-town mentality, and on entering university joins Johannesburg's vaguely liberal, intellectual scene. She mixes with bohemians and social workers and eventually meets Paul Clark, who works as a welfare officer in the Department of Native Affairs. Their love affair is fuelled initially by a certain idealism, but, paradoxically, it falls foul of its own ideals when it becomes apparent that the ideal –

generally, opposition to Apartheid – cannot connect in any practical way with the harsh pragmatics of the times. This leads to severe tensions between Helen and Paul. Helen leaves South Africa for Europe, in what has struck several critics as an ambiguous gesture of liberating and finding herself beyond the determinants of the familiar ground that has conditioned her. It is a point to which I shall return.

Although the narrative takes Helen Shaw through a number of social spaces, it is the mining town with its mean and bigoted attitudes that leaves its indelible imprint on her wherever she journeys. And whereas Vera Stark's Legal Foundation epitomises the post-1990 spirit of negotiation, the mining town of Helen's youth suggests all that is petty and racist about white South Africa. Both are in their own ways, nonetheless, important reinforcements of the personal stories: spatial "images as the concentration of the entire psyche" (Bachelard 1969: xiv), or spatial forms as a mental matrix, the "basic patterns of the psyche" in its social totality (Chetwynd 1982: 251). Although not derived from the concepts of postmodernism, these definitions have affinities with Foucault's concept of 'heterotopias': the sites that stand in significant relationship to other social spaces. Head quotes from Foucault in his analysis of Gordimer's space:

[heterotopias] ... have "the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralise, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror or reflect". (1994: 29)

Head's study is in fact based on a heterotopic reading of Gordimer's several novels. In his interpretation of *The Lying Days* he identifies the tripartite structure of the novel – "The Mine", "The Sea", "The City" – as paralleling the process of *Bildung*, in which space offers an enlargement of the micropolitics of the body; Helen's growing into maturity at a physical

and an emotional level finds an objective correlative in the spaces she inhabits. Instead of living in the spirit of "I am the place where something has occurred" (epigraph to *Burger's Daughter*, taken from Levi Strauss), the epigraph to *The Lying Days* might be "I am the place where I am" (N. Arnaud, quoted in Bachelard, 1969: 147), an epigraph which would emphasise the predominantly existential dimension of the novel. With her insights guided by the authorial voice (the autobiographical element is markedly present) Helen Shaw supports such an interpretation of her own state of mind when she says: "it was not enough to create the existence of the Mine, to make it possible at the other end of a space of which *this* was at one end" (54). The mine shapes the social psychology of Helen's life, in which the 'colonial mentality' defines and attenuates interpersonal relationships. As Helen observes of the rituals of the place:

weddings were the appearance of dear little girls dressed up to strew rose petals, rather than matings; death was the speculation about who would step up to the dead man's position; dignity was the chain of baubles the mayor wore round his neck. (136)

The pettiness creates an atmosphere of concealment and secretiveness: 'the lying days', in which shallow nods to the wider world 'overseas' summarise the colonials' displacement: "this rickety thing, everybody's makeshift Europe" (146). In the corrupt conservatism of the mining town Helen Shaw's alert, idealistic young mind has to conceal its real impulses. Even after she leaves Atherton, she retains her defensiveness. This is evident in her tense relationship with her parents: her letters home, for example, never confess to her inner joys and tribulations. The novel, a story of gradual and painful awakening, follows Helen's quest for liberation from the shaping influence of the Mine; it is a search for personal autonomy beyond its heterotopic conditioning.

The issue of Helen's growth to independence and awareness has been pursued by several critics besides Head. As a starting point, Cooke refers to Gordimer's own understanding of the liberation of daughters from unusually possessive mothers: "'First, you know, you leave your mother's house, and later you leave the house of the white race'" (1985: 47). Cooke goes on to show that, in spite of Helen Shaw's urge to discover her mature self beyond her mother's influence, she never fully succeeds in severing her umbilical cord. Not being able to relate to others like an adult, Helen feels homeless everywhere. Her desire to leave South Africa for England is, paradoxically, only a symbolic *regressus ad uterum* in the sense that her own mother often described England as "home". Whilst there is some truth in Cooke's claim, I believe it is the case that 'regressus' supposes a coming rebirth, a re-mothering which will be 'truer'. Wade's (1978) approach is to identify shortcomings in the protagonist's capacities of perception. In analysing Helen's growth he finds similarities with Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in which, he feels, there are difficulties in establishing an authorial yardstick against which to assess the created character. Head also touches on the issue of an unstable identity: a narrative voice which results in "an indeterminacy and ambiguity about the stage Helen Shaw reaches at the novel's end" (1994: 36) and which is shown to undermine the structural foundations of the *Bildungsroman* as genre. I wish to dwell on this apparent difficulty about the consistency or inconsistency of Gordimer's method of character creation.

As I have suggested, a consequence of my reading strategy – a turning from the politically symbolic to the gradations of life's intricacies – represents a turning of critical attention to what could strike one as an older, humanist mode of interpretation: an analysis of theme, setting and character. I have also said, however, that such a re-focusing on the text

need not imply a simple desertion of the insights of post-Leavisian and post-New Critical methodologies. In the case of *The Lying Days* the setting of the mine is more than a stifling atmosphere (although such evocation helps reinforce the social mentality); the 'Mine' pursues Helen almost like an active intruder into her consciousness, its pervasiveness infecting the rhythms of her thought processes in passages that define the essentially meditative strain of the entire reading experience:

There our house was; and I lived in it as I lived in my body. I was not aware of the shape of it, of its existence as a building the way the school existed or the houses in the town; ... There was no need of an exterior, a way to smile and talk and listen to other people, the little suit of consciousness a child climbs into the very first time he is led in to be shown to someone from outside; there I did not have to put on that to show I was alive. (27)

In such passages external and internal worlds are inextricably bound in the perceiving Helen Shaw. The resulting character creation does not, in my view, signal the ambiguities or inconsistencies in identity-making that concern both Wade and Head. What neither critic takes sufficiently seriously, I think, is the 'autobiographical' conglomerate of character and author as a valid storytelling device.

Wade's naive perception postulates a Helen Shaw who, though autobiographically based, has something like the autonomy of a living, rather than a fictional, person. Head, too, has a lingering fondness for such separations of the fictional creation from its author. In consequence, Wade finds it problematic that Gordimer's writerly presence, which he cannot help detecting, enters in greater or lesser degrees into Helen's mental landscapes. What is evident, however, in the novel is a consistent and continuing writerly presence in the text:

Gordimer does not pretend that the narrating 'I' begins as a child and moves to young adulthood. There is a kind of mature reflection in Helen from the start: at the outset Gordimer the author (through Helen, the twenty-four year old) injects the relatively adult consciousness into the story. The characteristic 'awareness' may be illustrated in most passages. As early as pages 13 and 14, for example, we have Helen's perceptive 'analysing' of her mother's words regarding Helen's wish to stay at home after her parents' departure:

But her indifference was not real ... "Helen! You must make up your mind what you want to do. You know I can't leave you on your own, the girl's out". Yes, I knew that, an unwritten law so sternly upheld and generally accepted that it would occur to no child to ask why: a little girl must not be left alone because there were native boys about. That was all. ... "No, we're just going to leave her here, that's all," said my mother briskly and coldly She had gone too far, and spoiled the effect. We all knew that her afternoon *was* ruined; that she was terrified and convinced that 'something' would happen to me; that her stride to the gate was a piece of bravado that cost her more than it was worth. (13-14)

Though the perception of the mother's uneasiness is the child's, the analysis of it and the vocabulary in which it is expressed is that of the adult. It is this kind of 'analysis' that permits implicit evaluations of the social scene: "a little girl must not be left alone because there were native boys about" (13). Thus, Helen reflects on her mother's demand that she make up her mind as to what she wants to do because – the South African 'typicality' requires no explanatory intervention – the mother cannot leave her (white) daughter alone on the Mine when "the girl's out". Gordimer's implied reader is presumed to have broadly liberal values that would detect the ironic method. But the reader should also – I am arguing – accept the 'double voicedness' of Helen, not as an inconsistency, but as a means of continuous

psychological reflection, assessment and evaluation. Just as Vera Stark is partly Gordimer, so Helen Shaw is partly Gordimer. This betokens not a failure of novelistic creation, but a consistent Gordimer characteristic: the consequence is the absorbing 'awareness' to which I have alluded and to which, after Apartheid, we might wish to give renewed attention.

I shall return to Helen's 'soliloquising' habit, but do not wish to give the impression that Helen's story is one of complete self-absorption. I have mentioned the use of the Mine in setting the individual life in a South African social condition. It is a condition that is an inescapable context for the various relationships Helen forms in the process of her growth. As in *Burger's Daughter*, Gordimer uses a series of differing interactive relationships in which her protagonist is involved to give both human solidity and variety to the scene: we experience voices in conversation, not only inner reflection, as we follow the process of Helen's growth.

The first agent of her growth is Ludi who, during her holiday on the coast, makes Helen aware of the possibilities of sensual love. The warmth she experiences from Ludi and his mother, Mrs Koch, offers Helen an intense, almost existential experience, which disturbs the regularity of her day-to-day existence. She discovers what she had never experienced on the Mine: genuine expressions of caring and affection. Unlike her own mother, Mrs Koch does not hesitate to express her feelings for fear of "loss of dignity in showing that she felt, that she cared ... [and] gave access to herself in a way that [Helen] did not know anyone ever did" (51). The relaxed atmosphere in the Koch cottage contrasts sharply with that of her own home, and her resentment grows as she realises the deprivations of her own life on the Mine.

In terms of scene, the arid, dusty mining town is set against the fluidity of the sea, with its rhythms suggesting renewal.

Another agent of transformation brings Helen into direct confrontation with her own parents. It is Joel, a South African Jew of Eastern European origin, who loves Helen and acts as a catalyst in her process of maturation. Through him, again in contrast, she discovers a further dimension that is missing in her petty-bourgeois Atherton family code: an intellectual approach to life that is not governed by crudely materialist endeavours. Joel's "aliveness was not confined to any narrow aspect, but to the whole of aliveness itself: with everything that grew, that inquired, that illuminated instead of merely perpetuating the human state" (158). Serving as the protagonist's catalyst – as Conrad did for Rosa Burger – Joel enlightens Helen about her constricting environment and suggests that she need not hate in order to reject. Helen says: "all that I really cared about was what happened directly to myself; there was nothing and no one in the world beyond the urgent importance of me" (125). This sounds somewhat like a youthful Vera Stark. At the same time, Joel accepts that consideration must be given to the older generation that might be set in its ways: "Making them over would be getting rid of them as they are" (126). Joel thus suggests to Helen that all of us have to learn to live amid our difficulties: that is the lesson of experience. Unfortunately, Helen does not have the strength or self-knowledge to enable her to cast aside what she has to a degree absorbed into her own instinctive responses: her parents' racial prejudices against Jews. She cannot, in consequence, really profit from Joel's insight. Painfully, she comes to realise that she has taken Joel for granted. She has not understood his love for her; or hers for him.

Neither is she capable, as yet, of overcoming the sense of imprisonment that the Mine, like a 'character' presence, imposes on her young womanhood, as well as on her young white South Africanness. When she leaves Atherton for the University in Johannesburg, she is rebelling against the spirit of the Mine, but not out of any real illumination. Having failed to benefit from Joel's understanding and acceptance of having to live in the difficulties of one's place, she is haunted by her own unresolved relationship with her parents and the emotionally crippling environment of her home town. In Jenny and John Marcus she finds substitute parents, whose domestic warmth and ease she enjoys. She had not, as a child or a teenager, experienced a similarly resonant – as opposed to claustrophobic – domesticity. In Johannesburg she mixes with vaguely liberal students whose half-formed ideas are attractive to her: they signal a different ethos from that of the small-town mentality. But the danger is a certain naivety. She does not perceive the shakiness of many of the Marcuses' ideals. She is unable to 'interpret' the poignant and pathetic scene of Jenny Marcus secretly admiring the flamboyance of her hat. The irony is that the 'liberal' John Marcus forbids his wife to wear a hat. Neither is Helen able to analyse, at the time, the break-up of her relationship with Paul Clark, who had seemed to offer her a liberation from her parents' control.

Helen moves in with Paul in rebellion against her parents. But he is shown to be as insecure as herself, albeit in a different way. Living an impossible contradiction – he is a clerk in Native Affairs who helps mitigate Apartheid's laws and a sympathiser with the black struggle – Paul is unable to address the contradictions of his own 'liberal' position. In a sense, he is a mirror image of Helen's own young rebellion which is unable to attach idealism to the practicalities of South African reality. In beginning to despise Paul, Helen despises herself. As often in the reading of Gordimer's novels, we find our bearings by measuring one point

of view against another. Our yardstick remains Joel, who manages to integrate ideals and practicalities, while Helen initially can only accumulate reflections on her experiences. As Wade puts it:

one of the most important themes in the novel is the difficulty, the uncertainty of perceiving adequately the true nature of people and relationships. Nadine Gordimer suggests that one requires an adequate idea of oneself before one is able to proceed to just assessments of others. (1978: 26)

The critique of idealism, as embodied in Paul's 'laziness' about the complexities of South African society, is vividly captured in the scene of the township riot that occurs towards the end of the novel. The scene is offered as an emblematic version of a larger racial reality, which cannot be altered by ameliorative exercises in welfare. Helen stares at the bloodshed from within a motor car. Although she has had the illusion that she was actively involved in the process of change, she is, like Paul, only an onlooker. Like the scene in *Burger's Daughter* in which Rosa must re-assess her liberal catchphrases when she witnesses a black man whipping a donkey, the scene of the riot has an illuminating and a liberating effect on Helen. She is jolted out of her illusions and penetrates the illusions surrounding Paul: "what he did not know was that he had not accepted, and would never accept it in the real, the personal realm in which life was lived" (330).

The novel ends with Joel's return to Helen's life in the capacity of an agent of moral clarification, and for the moment as Gordimer's mouthpiece. By contrast with Paul, whose perceptions of human frailty and social reality are permanently enfeebled and impaired, Joel is shown to possess a deep wisdom, manifested in strong capacities of synthesis and integration. He sees through Helen's own perceptual limitations: limitations that are partly

the crippling legacy of the Mine, partly the result of her fascination with superficial idealism.

As Joel says:

You're such a snob, when it comes to emotion. Only the loftiest, the purest, will do for you. Sometimes I've thought that it's a kind of laziness, really. If you embrace something that seems to embody all this idealism, you feel you yourself have achieved the loftiest, the purest, the *most real*. (353)

Through Joel's intervention, Helen learns about the fine dividing-line between the reality of social complication and the unreality of idealism. Through a process of growing understanding and compassion, she increasingly liberates herself from determination by people and places in her life. Through her newly-found sense of autonomy – an autonomy that goes beyond her liberation from her mother, the thesis of Cooke's study (1985) – Helen learns to accept Joel's truth about the relativity of things: "I accepted him, humbly, wholly ... [because] Joel took away from me the burden of my ego" (357). Helen ends her journey with a leap in understanding of the importance of integration and self-acceptance, while at the same time regretting her own past blindness to Joel's love:

With him, I believed, I might have achieved the synthesis of most of the things in which I believed. Of lovers and friends, he seemed the only one who had not discarded everything and found nothing. Unlike me, he loved his parents enough to accept their deep differences from him He had not placed upon any relationship with human beings the burden of the proof of an ideal. (366)

This is Helen's declaration of independence from the tyranny of both a constricting space and of an overcompensatory tendency to idealism. Shortly after her meeting with Joel, she leaves the country for Europe. This act may, of course, be considered as a liberatory act: in escaping the racist society and its psychological confinement, Helen also liberates herself

from the 'lying days' of her youth. But the note is not youthfully light-hearted. Helen has "accepted disillusionment as a beginning rather than an end" (367) of the quest for experience. The determination to come back to South Africa is given credence, in retrospect, in the weight of detail: in the particularity of place, sound and experience that has anchored Helen, the individual, to a social landscape while permitting her to develop as a person in her own mental awareness.

Different critics have, however, interpreted the ending of the novel in strikingly different ways. Haugh puts Helen in Gordimer's tradition of 'sojourners' – the motif will be discussed in Chapter Three as it applies to the early short stories – and considers her leave-taking to be a stage in her journey, while the sight of African children singing in the streets suggests an "image of promise and hope" (1974: 105). Whereas Haugh's emphasis smacks of an older liberal vindication (fiction evaluated as a triumph of the human spirit), Clingman turns the so-called virtues of liberalism into the radical's suspicions of liberal vacuousness (his scare quotes are insistent):

'Acceptance' is the ethical keyword of *The Lying Days*. Thus, Joel, the novel's authoritative moral voice, tells Helen she must 'accept' her parents for what they are; in the end, Helen comes to 'accept' Joel for what he is; finally, as we have seen, she joyfully 'accepts' the fundamental contradictions of life. In this respect the novel is typically humanist in form, not only tolerating paradox and contradiction, but actively coming to celebrate them. (1986: 42)

Neither Haugh nor Clingman, however, captures the openness of the ending which, as Ettin recognises, embodies the perplexity of choice and commitment, thus illustrating that Helen, like many of her successors, is

caught between two problematic assertions: Rosa Burger's 'no one can defect' and Turgenev's 'The honourable man will end by not knowing where to live'... . The self-aware person caught in this dilemma cannot avoid wondering, who am I and what am I about? (Ettin 1993: 81)

It is a dilemma that has continued to engage Gordimer's sensibility and which, in informing her first novel, can be seen also to inform *None to Accompany Me*. The dilemma is reinforced in *The Lying Days* in numerous scenes, dialogues and images, and lends aptness to the temper of the conclusion. For all her familiarity with Atherton, Helen cannot accommodate or be reconciled with her home place: "I have learned since that sometimes the things we want most are impossible for us. You may long to come home, yet wander forever" (366). If the theme of belonging is almost a leitmotif in South African literature – *The Lying Days* has significance in any history of the South African novel, as predicted by a reviewer in the early fifties mentioned earlier (A.O.D. 1954) – the process of reflection, as I have suggested, simultaneously shifts the text into a psychologising realm, in which Helen experiences not just the burdens of social interaction, but the frustrations and awe of life's mysteries. It is time to return to a key point of this study and to retrieve Gordimer the humanist writer who, with a capacity for wonder, ponders life's consciousness, not only its conscience: the Gordimer who can travel beyond the overdetermination of political time and re-enter civilian time.

To consider the contemplative Gordimer in *The Lying Days* does not mean dwelling on a universal story of a young girl's growth. If the novel is a convincing portrait of a single psychology, it is also a convincing portrait of a particular social psychology, in which its 'society' is marked by the early 1950s. Yet – at least, to many undergraduates who in the

mid-nineties studied the novel – there is a freshness to Helen's choices, limits, opportunities and contemplations. In fact, the very words "mystery", "wonder" and "awareness" appear frequently in Gordimer's (or Helen's) responses to the action. Helen's awe and wonder at life's mysteries range, on the same page (14), from contemplating Black people's "mysteriousness" to watching her father's knees "thin and surprised at their exposure, in shorts ... [as they] flickered a suggestion ... that *he* had mysteriousness somewhere, was someone else, to be seen by other people the way I could see other people" (14). Helen meditates on the nature of human relationships, whether sexual or marital, along similar lines of heightened awareness and wonder. After making love with Paul, she "looked on his exhaustion with wonder" (231) and in valuing the mysterious quality of life, she is disappointed that her parents have accepted "marriage as a social rather than a mysterious personal relationship" (40).

Beyond the imperfection of personal relationships, it is an awareness, an aliveness to the possibilities of mystery and wonder that, within social constraints, Gordimer offers as the route to the autonomy of self. I disagree with Cooke, who considers *The Lying Days* to be "one of her bleakest, Gordimer's only novel in which private and public responsibilities are avoided and nothing learned" (1985: 48). Helen's mental life emerges, rather, in the lyrical intricacy of the text as a sign of affirmation, not despair. Instead of youthful sentimentality – a charge that has been levelled against the novel – the luxury of the writing in its slow unfolding of a state of mind aptly reminds us of freer, more personally attuned rhythms that may hold renewed interest at the end of the interregnum.

To return to the dissimilarities and similarities between *The Lying Days* and *None to Accompany Me*, the innocence of Helen Shaw has given way to the experience of Vera Stark: the awareness of wonder has become hyper-lucidity; the truth of emotion – the lunar Helen (the etymological root being ‘moon’) – has developed into the vodka-drinking Vera: *verax*, the truth of self-confident selfhood. What remains constant over forty years, however, is the bedrock of awareness. Although the words "mystery" and "wonder" have been replaced by "emptiness" and "nakedness", the terms continue to encapsulate the need for independence from both personal and social demands. It is a reminder – once again – of the tension between necessary and essential gestures. The challenge – or difficulty – has been characteristic of Gordimer from the outset of her career and has often manifested itself in the plays and ploys of power relations.

* * *

It has become almost a commonplace of Gordimer criticism to pursue the private/ public dynamic by equating ‘sex’ and ‘politics’ as the poles of her novelistic endeavour. Gordimer herself has repeatedly spoken in these terms about the interrelation of private and public motivations of her main characters. The two categories belong to the same existential category, that of power: intimate and public, respectively. I find it useful in this respect to employ Foucault’s concept of power in its relation to sexual discourse. Power is viewed as "the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate" (1981: 92), with sex as one of those forces. Further, the sex/ power dynamic is considered to be a component of the larger whole of a power/ knowledge continuum:

We must not look for who has the power in the order of sexuality ... and who is deprived of it ... ; nor for who has the right to know and who is forced to remain ignorant. We must seek rather the pattern of the modifications which the relationships of force imply by the very nature of their process Relations of power-knowledge are not static forms of distribution, they are 'matrices of transformation'. (Foucault 1981: 99)

As I have tried to show, Gordimer is suspicious of the overdetermination of the private sphere by the public demand. The Sonny/Hannah relationship embodies precisely the collapse of sexual involvement based on the attraction of sex and politics with no deeper, redeeming, emotion. If sex and politics bonded together, are used by Gordimer as part of the paradigm of power – another form of 'overdetermination' – then one may seek in the concept of 'love' integrative forms of 'autonomy' from the limitations of bonded sex and politics. What has been suggesting itself, particularly in my analyses of *None to Accompany Me* and *The Lying Days*, is Gordimer's need to modify the sex/ power dynamic from one that negates a cold and calculating 'love' to one that values a generous and spontaneous, fundamentally integrative, behaviour. Love may appear, accordingly, so uncompromising as to be perceived as harsh and be confused by critics with irony. Or, in *None to Accompany Me*, love may be so preoccupied with the self as to refuse to be compromised by the dependencies of others. I shall conclude by attempting to rediscover a concept of love, a form of awareness as an important part of any existential quest, which has remained buried in Gordimer's fiction.

To remind ourselves of the sex-politics ingredient in power relations, the compound from which arise more complex considerations, we must return to the character of Vera Stark. As I indicated earlier, there is in Vera a revulsion against emotional dependency, which

appears in her dislike of the imbalance of power between the strong woman and the weak man. As a lawyer at the Legal Foundation, she is preoccupied with responding to the plight of black communities. In this capacity, she has the power to influence major decisions made by the Technical Committee on Constitutional Issues regarding land policies. Her public image is that of an efficient professional with a "hard-headed sense of proportion" (13) and a "discouraging coldness" (14): a public profile which is meant to prevent her from either "ingratiating herself chummily" (14) or from "patroniz[ing] these applicants trying to express themselves in English" (14). She has a certain dignity that resembles Gordimer's own detachment from her subjects. Vera preserves a distance between herself and other people, especially those who seem to threaten her sense of privacy: "for her it was a calculation; for [Ben, her husband] it put something of the fascinating distance between them" (104 – 5). Behind the calculation is a play of power, in which the weaker party is likely to get hurt. This is encapsulated in the rhetorical question, "*what shall I do with this love ?*" – Vera's leitmotif. It is germane to my argument that the word "love" is very deliberately employed.

Vera Stark, the woman with "white-streaked hair cut like a man" (23), carries her "briefcase documenting inquiry into other people's lives" (39) as a symbol of efficiency and power; her "public distinction" is "sexually tantalizing despite the passing of years" (302). Even after her lengthy marriage to Ben breaks down, he continues to admire her: "Ben saw her in the foyer of some hotel. One day in London. He said she was splendid" (303). Elsewhere, Ben is shown to look "at her with admiration, seeing the light of others playing upon her and taking pride in it" (278). He admires her in spite of the fact that she does not return his feelings: "He saw that Vera never ever really wanted a husband – only for a time, when it excited her to have her lover domesticated" (298). As Ben interprets the matter

referring to Rainer Maria Rilke's poem: "Vera is Malte Laurids Brigge's 'one who didn't want to be loved'. 'That inner indifference of spirit': it was written of Vera" (299). She is the woman who is unable to offer reciprocal love because she has probably always been emotionally self-sufficient. Certainly, the depiction of Vera supports a psyche that is that of a "wilful sexy bitch" who, in producing her first child with her estranged husband while involved with Ben, transforms "fertilization into parthenogenesis, the proof of her deceit being that she reproduced herself, only herself, in male form, for her new lover" (275).

But as is usually Gordimer's method, authorial observation in the form of third-person free indirect speech enters Vera's consciousness while retaining the distance of ironic commentary. This method proves an apt illustration of the author's ambiguous attitude towards her character creation. On the one hand, there is admiration for Vera's tough independence. On the other, there is scorn for the "beast with two backs" (161) – an allusion to Iago's degrading image of the sexual act in *Othello*. Of similar ambiguity are Vera's meditations on her reactions to men. When Ben allows his artistic talent to fail because of his dedication to Vera, she ponders "What have I done to put him in such company, what have I done to him?" (109). But her guilt is immediately followed by the aggrieved tone of "But why *me*? What has he done to himself?" (109). In ending her second marriage, Vera evinces her longing for independence of the spirit. On moving into Zeph Rapulana's annexe, she is asked by her daughter: "What are you experimenting with?", to which she replies: "working through – what shall I say – dependencies" (313).

The question remains: where in the game of power do we locate love? To move towards an answer we may compare the characters of power and love in *The Lying Days*.

Newman has analysed at length the gender-based power game between Helen and Paul, showing how "Helen is marginalised, her experience appropriated and narrated by the male" (1988: 21). There is another level, though, which one may add to the paradigm of sexual power: it is the power of idealism that Paul exerts upon Helen. Paul has dedicated his young life to a social mission that grants him the aura of the romantic revolutionary. It is an aura that Helen initially finds irresistible. She is drawn to what seems the power in Paul:

The owners of these faces have only to look. They themselves cannot escape the power which is upon them ... [and] live their whole lives off it, making the world pay for a divine and lucky accident. Others, for whom it is not the only asset, are sometimes unaware of it, and even mistake the advantages it draws as due to some more responsible cause. (215)

Yet here too there is ambiguity. While seduced by the "magic cipher of power", Helen intuitively senses that Paul's power is easily dispersed among any numbers of admirers. A hollowness in his responses to the real issues behind gestures eventually infects his relationship with Helen. Allure fades; sex becomes an escape for her from inner loneliness. Love – so rarely articulated in Gordimer – is disappointed. It is not Helen, who is too close to her own despair, but Isa, who attempts to understand the disappointment of love. Having herself once been intimately involved with Paul, she says to Helen:

You're too clever for him, too – not with your head ... but in your emotions. I think you're one of those women who have great talent for loving a man, but he's not whole enough to have that love expanded on him. It's too weighty for him. He likes to be all chopped up, a mass of contradictions, and he wants to believe they're all right. He isn't enough of a *central* personality to be able to accept the whole weight of complete love: it's integration, love is, and that's the antithesis of Paul. You frighten him, I frighten him. Different ways, but all the same. (334)

As in the case of Ben, Paul is shown to be the emotionally weaker one in the relationship: "the mass of contradictions" is precisely what weakens his vital self and unbalances his relationships with women: women who are "too clever for [their] own meddling primitive womanly instincts" (335), as Helen muses about the similarity between herself and Isa. Joel also comments on the failure of the relationship: "It's not only your own failure with Paul you're running away from, it's also what you conceive to be Paul's failure with himself" (357). The observation is reminiscent of that of Vera Stark's: "What have I done to him ... what has he done to himself?" (109). It is only when her characters free themselves from relations of power or impotence, it seems, that in Gordimer's work love has an opportunity to define and express itself, or its *self*.

* * *

In the previous chapter, I concluded that Gordimer presents both Rosa and Aila as eventually manifesting self-confidence and self-love, that is, the ingredients of love, in what was referred to as an "open approach to human change": a maturity of emotional responsiveness that goes beyond the politics of power. A similar pattern emerges in *None to Accompany Me* and *The Lying Days*. In both novels, though in different expressions, love assumes the connotations of awareness and vitality, mystery and wonder.

Helen initially experiences physical love-making with a deep sense of awareness. Contemplation, however, does not stop at the physical level. For Helen the sex act acquires the significance of life's mystery itself: "perhaps the mystery of the end to which life is directed is simply the miracle of the means" (233). Love becomes a form of protection against

the void of infinity: "so I, who had inherited no God, made my mystery and my reassurance out of human love" (233). She has the potential of perceiving being-in-love, love-making itself, as a form of secular worship, without which the human condition seems to be intolerable. Her sense of wonder at the power of love leads Helen to contemplate her very existence with a "sense of wonder at the pin speck of myself", as she says, "in a swirling universe, a creature perpetually surrounded by a perpetual growth, stars and earthworm, wind and diamond" (97).

This is not mere teenage romance, but the reflections of the twenty-four year old Helen on the intimations of mystery that may be soiled by the imbalances of power in a relationship, but lead, however painfully, to selfconsciousness as the prerequisite for the learning of love. It is through receptivity – Vera finds a kind of burdenless receptivity with Rapulana – that "the softening towards the pain and danger of being human" (1988;1953: 230) permits love not as a demarcation of sex and power, but as an extension and deepening of one's power of awareness. Understood in this way, Vera's relationship with Zeph is not that of stagey 'political correctness': the compliant white woman doing her bit for reconstruction and development by reversing the white/ black dichotomy and symbolically staying in a 'new' black man's garden cottage. Vera has found another kind of love: that which does not involve dependencies. If love is a journey from games of sex and power to states of reciprocity, one should not expect an uncomplicated 'happiness': that would be to return Gordimer to a bland bourgeois conception of the issue: instead, love is unable to satisfy ontological questions about loneliness or insecurity: "the sense of security is something that is constantly in danger in love" (1988;1953: 77). From the beginning of the novel to its end, Helen, through the writerly consciousness of Gordimer, the then thirty year

old author, meditates on the significance of love in her life while discovering that love is not a panacea against suffering.

Gordimer reinforces Helen's developing concept of love in several lyrical scenes to which nature is the significant background. Helen's relationship with Ludi, for example, is reflected lyrically in the seascape. Helen feels the sea, dipping her hands in the lukewarm pools and watching "the rocks bristl[ing] with mussels and branches ... [which] were warm and alive, like flesh" (55). In contrast to the 'young' memory, later puzzlement finds its correlative in the changed landscape:

But the life of the sky, leisured, awesome in the swift changes from calm to storm that human beings can only understand emotionally, in terms of anger and love, beauty and ugliness; – the life of the sky, analogous only to the sea, usually so far above our heads that we have given it to the gods, was suddenly discovered to me. (283)

The passage reflects the emotional contradictions in Helen's agonised feelings for Paul. The point is, however, that *The Lying Days*, having been under less of a political obligation than novels written in the years of the interregnum, was able to be generous in the rhythms of its reflections. While the device of the objective correlative – the setting reinforcing the mood – is characteristic of the novel of showing, the evocative passages are not indulgent or extraneous. Neither are the concepts naively guiding the train of meditation in any sentimental collapse of all contradictions. Love retains its potential for loneliness, and even aloneness; but it retains, too, its potential for awareness in its freedom from dependency. If the later *None to Accompany Me* captures this paradox in the stark prose of Vera's experience, *The Lying Days* offers a supple mingling of young idealism and shrewd

reflection. In the ‘civil’ times of the 1990s, one may re-visit with considerable profit Gordimer’s grammar of lyricism.

* * *

In choosing in my discussion of *The Lying Days* to illustrate with some insistence the ‘personal’ nature of Helen Shaw’s world, I am not simply trying to remind readers of an evocation in Gordimer’s art that tended in the political criticism of the last decade to be unjustly, if understandably, neglected. Rather, it is that the ‘personal’ needs to be recovered in the re-reading of Gordimer’s forty-year narrative commitment. One might argue that *The Lying Days* is an extreme case of the individual character’s superseding the social milieu in which she develops. In defending Gordimer against the charge of liberal transcendence, we should recognise Helen’s imagination as *aptly* – I use the word deliberately – limited by her race, sex and youth; by the trivial spaces of the white South African teenage girl. When the novel itself becomes too fastidious about such a limitation it is, ironically, when Gordimer is attempting to be most ‘politically’ correct: the scenes involving Helen as a rebellious university student who befriends Mary Seswayo, her black fellow student, in order, in part, to shock her bigoted colonial parents. Mostly, however, *The Lying Days* charts the difficulties of needing both relationship and independence, of experiencing an existential ache somewhere deep in the self beyond the external pressure of society’s intrusions.

A similar reversal of the equations private/ public and sex/ power may be applied to some purpose, too, in a reconsideration of other early novels. The result could lead to interesting ‘post-Clingman’ re-evaluations. Clingman’s study, despite its superb historical

insights, if it stands unchallenged, and unmodified in the 1990s, holds dangers for Gordimer's criticism. It is because of my understanding of the need for such a challenge that I have focused on the tension, even in the novels of the 1970s and 1980s, between artistic integrity and political affiliation. The seventies and eighties have mostly escaped Clingman's condemnation on the grounds of liberalism. He has been satisfied with the evidence within them of Gordimer's radicalism – at times her sympathies with socialism. Looking back at the early novels, in contrast, Clingman identifies as a recurrent theme the 'failure of liberalism'. Accordingly, *The Lying Days*, despite finding its human concerns inextricably influenced by a broader social field, bears the "marks of luxury in the final egocentricity of its form" (Clingman 1986: 44). I hope I have at least persuaded readers to return to the novel to test these charges against the text.

In *A World of Strangers* (1958) Clingman sees inaccurately analysed material relations, resulting in Apartheid's being perceived as a problem of consciousness, to be overcome in a triumph of consciousness (1986: 70). A saner, more historically realistic assessment of the South African reality begins, he feels, with *Occasion for Loving* (1963) when the character Jessie – unlike Helen Shaw, Toby Hood or Steven Sitole (the latter two in *A World of Strangers*) – begins to understand that personal lives cannot avoid the determinants of the racial state. Such an awakening, Clingman concludes, grants the necessity of historical selfconsciousness and ratiocination to *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966) and *A Guest of Honour* (1970). (I am brutally summarising the argument.) Clingman's study certainly permits 'contradictions', and mentions that even in the politically conscious characters (James Bray in *A Guest of Honour*, for example), political realities cannot account for the whole of life. Both Elizabeth van der Sandt (*The Late Bourgeois World*) and James

Bray at crucial moments, as Clingman observes, wish to reach beyond the analysis of themselves in the society and touch an existential realm. As Bray in *A Guest of Honour* reflects:

He had the feeling that the area of uncertainty that surrounded him visually when he took off his glasses was the real circumstance in which he had lived his life; and his glasses were more than a means of correcting a physical shortcoming, they were his chosen way of rearranging the unknowable into a few outlines he had gone by. (1971: 431)

Such emphases, however, are rare in Clingman: his focus, consistent with his own thesis, is with history from the outside (the attention to fiction frequently disappears in his description of events) and history from the inside: the typicality of character in society. My re-reading aims to move the critical lens to the more individualised, reflective, existential, at times justifiably idiosyncratic aspects of the novels.

To mention other early novels, *A World of Strangers*, for example, transmutes its social data into a psychological state which is characterised by dysfunctional relationships and terrible alienations. The effects of Apartheid are certainly present, but the narrative method – the entire story is filtered through Toby Hood's personality – ensures subjective distortions of the realist mode. The effect is an accentuation of character over and above the event. The distinction is important: Toby's own indecision about life's meaning and commitments finds its *alter ego* in the bravado of Steven Sitole, the figure of the Sophiatown shebeens. If these are romantics in rebellion against the structures of Apartheid, they are at the same time rebels in a much wider sense. As in the case of the Johannesburg northern suburbs group (sardonically captured in *A World of Strangers*), individuals with impulses

akin to those of Toby Hood will reappear in the 'bourgeois-ification' of South African society after Apartheid.

This is not to suggest an easy globalism. What are likely to remain as stark reminders of a society divided by vast inequalities, poverty and crime are the many succinct scenic comments that, in Gordimer's *oeuvre*, continue to jolt us into appreciations of her 'art' of human and social observation. Steven, probably drunk, is killed in a high-speed chase with the police, and the way in which the news of his death is conveyed to Toby cruelly converts his death into a 'tsotsi problem', which the reader is guided to recognise as a tragic complication of the personal and the public:

We got a coat here, sir [the policeman repeats to Toby Hood]. There was a card in the pocket with your name and address" "But I'd lent that coat to a friend." "Well, it must've been stolen from him. It was found on a native on Saturday night. (1983b; 1958: 250)

My purpose, as the illustration should underscore, is not to grant credence to 'transcendence' at the expense of 'engagement'. The policeman's words are thoroughly grounded in South Africa of the 1950s and, unfortunately, the 1990s. Rather my purpose is to uncover the humanist Gordimer: not as a simplification of the political commitment, but as a writer who, in my reading, never deserted her primary commitment to a novelistic universe of character straining against its historical surroundings.

Like *A World of Strangers*, *The Late Bourgeois World* is undoubtedly true to the temper of its time: in its case, the 'silent decade' of the 1960s, in which the revolutionary idealism and the amateurism of the African Resistance Movement (Max van der Sandt really

rebels against his privileged but neglectful upbringing) revealed the limitations of liberal ideology in resistance politics. The social landscape of the novel, however, is absorbed into the mental landscape of Elizabeth van der Sandt – her voice gives ‘character’ to the narrative – as she reflects, in internal monologue, on what it is to be not only a woman but a *self* in the circumstances of South Africa. She is, as a very young woman, seduced by the romantic zeal of her husband Max who, years later, turns state evidence before committing suicide. Like Ben in *None to Accompany Me*, Max, rather cruelly in a novel by a national spokesperson, is depicted as unnecessary baggage, a dependent who constricts Elizabeth van der Sandt’s expression of need and love. Elizabeth is a cynical Helen Shaw; she has not arrived at the uncomfortable truth of a Vera Stark, but remains a compelling character creation.

In setting out to ‘revise’ what have become standard readings of Gordimer, I do not need to deny the political import, in *Occasion for Loving*, of the failed relationship across the colour bar between Gideon (the black man) and the white interloper Ann. But it is interesting that Gordimer, as early as 1963, had modified the stereotypical black/ white sexual encounter by investing Gideon and Ann with moments of sexual beauty that transcend their colour difference. What has been neglected, however, is the fact that the narrative in its intricacy is not centrally concerned with Gideon and Ann, but with the gradations, the processes of Jessie Stillwell’s attempts to retain a sense of awareness, wonder and commitment within the confines of a tired but kindly marriage. The despair of Jessie’s comment that perhaps she should blow up a power pylon marks the external specificities of the early 1960s; the comment accentuates by tragic contrast, however, her aloneness in her world of suburban respectability. The political interpretation clearly identifies Jessie as the white, vaguely liberal type who is uncomprehending of ‘history’; Gordimer’s portraiture, however, gives the reader

a complex human individual whose voice shapes the entire fictional experience of *Occasion for Loving*.

The portraiture of sensitive feeling – tangential to major events – is actually the preferred mode of a relatively neglected aspect of Gordimer’s art: her short stories. These occupy the final section of this study.

3. THE TRUTH OF STORY TELLING

Jump and The Soft Voice of the Serpent

As Clingman has noted, there have always been critics who have recognised an emphasis on the inner, 'non-political' life in Gordimer's short stories:

there have always been two schools of thought in relation to Gordimer's fiction The first consists of those who feel that the best of Gordimer's writing is the personal kind dealing with psychological realities – an implicit assumption behind this being that here she is able to contemplate the eternal verities of the human condition ... and Gordimer's genre for this school is pre-eminently the short story. (1985: 192)

In arguing for a reconsideration, after Apartheid, of the more personal landscapes of Gordimer's fiction, I hope I have not lapsed into the "eternal verities of the human condition" as simply transcending all social determinants. The barely concealed scorn behind Clingman's observation suggests that, at least in the 1980s, he subscribed to the binary oppositions that understandably characterised criticism in the years of the state of emergency. One was either responsibly 'determined' by the political imperatives of the time, or one avoided radical commitment in favour of liberal universals: a transcendence of the spirit that, we are told, ignored transformations of the society.

But I am simplifying Clingman's position for the sake of taking stock of my own. Like Morphet (1985) in his defence of Gordimer the novelist, Clingman permits the gaps and

silences, the aspects of experience that escape the novelistic control, to emerge in Gordimer as a sign of her grappling with a weight of subject matter. My own modification has been to suggest that Gordimer usually understands the tension within herself, between the political imperative and the artistic imperative, as a necessary burden of being responsible in politically overdetermined times. Even in her most 'overburdened' phase as national spokesperson, she never deserted her essential novelistic understanding, her commitment to the intricacies of individual people trying to express their multifaceted personalities within the constrictions of their public condition.

The short stories do not operate in a realm different from that of the novels, and the central tension, reiterated here, may be located in many of her earliest stories, as well as in the later stories written in the 1980s. The conventions of the short story, in which necessary brevity favours the illuminating incident rather than the unfolding of time, have had the effect, nonetheless, of curtailing the national dimension and focusing on the more individualised incident. At the same time, the concentration of the short story form favours the character type and the symbolic scene, the Lucaksian explanation that is often given of Gordimer's practice as a political novelist. What I am suggesting is that binary alternatives need to be treated with caution. Just as Gordimer's novels include private lives within their public spheres, the short stories generally present social contexts as influencing individual human lives. So long as we do not regard the short stories as 'transcending' social and cultural codes, however, we may shift critical emphases and grant Gordimer an art of the 'story' that probably satisfies her desire to be freer from political determinants than the large statement of the novel often seems to permit.

Despite this, it remains true that her stories have been relatively neglected by critics, as a brief summary of responses should suggest. Whereas several monographs have been devoted to the novels, no extended study of the stories has been published. Several articles deal with the specific issues of race or gender, or, as in the case of Lazar, with the relationship between politics and gender (1990, 1992, 1996). There is the consideration of political activism (Eckstein, 1985) and the investigation of race and history (King 1983; and Trump 1986). Amongst surveys there are investigations into Gordimer's later short fiction 'at the end of the Interregnum' (Lomberg 1993 and Colleran 1993). To find a study which is not only or mainly concerned with South African politics and the public realm, one has to return to Haugh's long chapter in his early study of Gordimer (1974). Unfortunately, Haugh's preoccupation with poetic intensity, technical perfection, and aesthetic completeness at the expense of social concern may have had the opposite effect to what he no doubt intended: his unself-conscious New Critical formalism is fair game for any critic seeking to give Gordimer her due as a South African writer of social responsibility. Magarey (1990;1974) also permits attention to poetic structure and subliminal themes to displace the political emphases of Gordimer's stories.

Cooke (1985), for his part, ignores the short fiction. Similarly, the short fiction is not Newman's concern (1988). Clingman (1986) actually gives reasons for not attending to the stories: he considers the short stories to be of lesser importance than novels in terms of their historical interest, for their brevity offers too little opportunity for the authorial 'contradictions' that he finds significant indicators of the pressure of public events pushing beyond the artistic form. Wagner (1994) too believes that the canvas of the short story cannot be stretched to include national matter, and that the short story, therefore, is not of primary

importance in understanding the 'biography' of Gordimer's response. Ettin (1993) intersperses novels with short stories in his generally thematic study; the result is that the stories, as a genre, are subsumed into the novels. It is Head (1994), twenty years after Haugh, who seriously attends to the short stories and sets about countering Clingman's virtual dismissal of the historical plausibility of short fiction.

In arguing that Clingman is overdogmatic and typecasts short stories as aesthetically self-contained and, therefore, incapable of embracing the untidy matter of history, Head sees no easy distinctions between Gordimer's short stories and her novels. For one thing, her stories, as single entities, do not exhibit an unproblematic unity based on aesthetic perfection; rather, Head claims, Gordimer has been influenced by the modernist tradition of short story writing with the result that her stories show signs of disunity and disruption, the very same elements that Clingman praises in the novels. Head says: "It may be that the effect of these disruptive elements is less marked in shorter fiction than it is in the novels, but the aesthetic seems to me to be similar in both cases" (1994: 163). Again in reply to Clingman, Head argues that novels, as well as short stories, can deal adequately with the intricacies of a psychological, or an emotional, nature and that despite several theorists, the short story and the novel are not so different in kind:

both [the novel and the short story] investigate the public through the private, the political ramifications of personal actions, even though the novels may develop the embryonic kind of investigations the stories can offer. The (justified) privileging of the novels over the stories seems a matter of degree *rather than* one of kind. (1994: 163)

Written after the political crises of the 1980s and the change of political direction in the early 1990s, Head's study points towards a more comprehensive and complex approach to Gordimer's entire *oeuvre*. I hope to give added emphasis to the need to reconsider Gordimer's short stories as a key element of her achievement. Like Head, I do not see the stories – to repeat my comment above – as operating in a different realm from the novels. Certainly, I would not wish to persist in using the novels as the sole yardstick of value. The short stories offer their own insights; the reading experience is distinctive to itself. It is a distinctiveness that characterises Gordimer's own observations on the short story: observations which suggest that she herself has never regarded the short story as the work of her left hand.

She is intrigued, for example, by the capacity of the short story to survive literary fashions:

Why is it that while the death of the novel is good for post-mortem at least once a year, the short story lives on unmolested? ... like a child suffering from healthy neglect, the short story survives. (1976b: 178).

Among the reasons for its survival, according to Gordimer, are its flexibility and particularly its openness to experimentation. It has a paradoxical combination of technical discipline and a freedom from expectation. The short story deals with the intricacies of the present moment which, as Gordimer has it, constitute the ultimate reality. The resilience of the genre is to be located, accordingly, in its

fragmented and restless form, a matter of hit and miss, and it is perhaps for this reason that it suits modern consciousness – which seems best expressed

as flashes of fearful insight alternating with near-hypnotic states of indifference. (Gordimer 1976b: 180-81)

Gordimer considers the form to be appropriate to the full context of contemporary life, its brevity apposite to the pressure exerted on reading time and the relative 'democratisation' of the reading culture. In this, she would probably agree with Es'kia Mphahlele's famous comment that the short story captures the 'interruptibility' of a non-middle class reading environment (1981). In response to Gordimer's claim that "a writer is 'selected' by his subject – his subject being *the consciousness* of his own era" (1983a;1975: 15), we may consider how writers are 'chosen' by the literary form in which they decide to write. If the short stories embody her 'essential gesture' of breaking 'free from' the overdetermination of the Apartheid years, how do they signal her 'freedom to' engage not only with rupture, but with lyricism and a more general contemplation? As Eckstein phrases it:

Even though Gordimer's novels show a development away from compartmentalised personal lives toward a holistic social vision, from the 1950s onward, her short stories have suggested the kind of ambiguities that confound one's efforts to separate self from other, hero from enemy, even pleasure from joy. (1985: 343)

As in the previous chapter, my intention is to re-visit the earlier Gordimer, the Gordimer unjustly neglected during political times, and I shall conclude by analysing as an example of Gordimer's mature talent a story representative of those that absorbed her imagination prior to the impositions of the 'interregnum'. As in *The Lying Days*, the private, even the lyrical, moment will be found to be characteristic of the approach. First, however, I wish to look at stories written at a time of political crisis. My intention is to reinforce what

we discovered when examining novels like *Burger's Daughter*: although external events are sharply present, human beings are not reduced to ciphers of the abstract idea. In contrasting the later and earlier stories we are reminded not of a disjuncture between a later and an earlier phase, but of evolutions of theme. We are reminded also of the stylistic range of Gordimer's short fiction.

* * *

I shall focus initially on *Jump* (1991) and then on *The Soft Voice of the Serpent* (1952). In reading these two collections, I am struck by the fact that both collections, though written forty years apart, are governed by a similar principle of arrangement within the covers of the single book: a unity of idea, tempo and tone. *Jump*, like her novels of the later 1970s and the 1980s, reveals individual lives in the totalist demands of revolutionary times. These are stories in which decisive actions seem required to define the characters' destinies of 'becoming'. In *The Soft Voice of the Serpent*, in contrast, characters are required to contemplate their senses of 'being'. I have adapted the terms from Joseph Sachs's review of the early Gordimer stories as "stories of being" (1971: 139). The term reminds us of Sartre's famous *Being and Nothingness* (tr.1956;1943), which deals with the basic existentialist relationship between essence and existence; Gordimer is known to have been attracted to Sartre's writing, and the term "stories of being" suggests her early preoccupations with existential issues such as one's responsibility for one's choices and the anxiety that accompanies adjustments to apparently arbitrary circumstance. The question of the unity within the collection, however, raises the important issue as to how we might best approach a book of Gordimer's stories.

The story collection as a literary form has, over the last few decades, raised interesting debates, in which various critics have identified different criteria for unity (see a useful overview of the debate in May 1976). Gullason, in 1964, noted that a collection could offer a general degree of integration, with individual stories being "connected into a oneness by hero, theme or mood" (1976: 30) while Baldeshwiler considered the relationship between parts and the whole to be of crucial significance (1976;1969). Allen (1981) looks at the collection as a minor category of the novel, with each story being distinct and separate, and yet put together as a whole by the vision of one writer. Shaw (1983), on the other hand, has reservations about such tempting parallels with novels. Probably the most comprehensive study of the story collection is Forrest Ingram's *Representative Short Story Collections of the Twentieth Century* (1971), in which he offers a critical paradigm for a formal and thematic structuring that may distinguish a "collection" from a "cycle". It is worth pursuing the argument.

Ingram considers the patterns of recurrence and development to be the fundamental connective tissues between stories, at the same time as he identifies a "tension" between one and many: "cycles are made by establishing 'such relationships among smaller entities as to create a larger whole' without at the same time destroying the identity of smaller entities" (1971: 13). In the spirit of Henry James, Ingram shows that short-story cycles are distinct from both individual stories and novels. While single, unconnected stories cover only a limited field of experience, the writer can make a collection reveal life's diversity in a more complex way. At the same time, the collection points to the multiplicity and complexity of life, and offers a similar reading experience to that of the novel. In sum, the cycle is a more unified type of collection, which can offer a variety of ideas, moods, scenes, characters and

plots, while achieving an all-encompassing unity through the reader's awareness of the author's controlling mind behind the tales. South African literature has a well-established tradition of story cycles, with Pauline Smith's *The Little Karoo* (1925), Herman Charles Bosman's *Mafeking Road* (1947), Bessie Head's *The Collector of Treasures* (1977), Ahmed Essop's *The Hajji and Other Stories* (1978), and Mtutuzeli Matshoba's *Call Me Not a Man* (1979) as significant achievements. All these collections have locales common to the stories within them; Bosman's has recurring personages; all are held together by thematic links that contribute towards a vision of an overriding purpose. There may be variously identifiable South African communities; racial and cultural conflict; or the clash of rural and urban values.

Unlike these writers, Gordimer has not given her collections the strong coherence characteristic of the short story cycle. Her stories possess fewer recurrences of locale or character, but, as I suggested above, manage to manifest another kind of unity within the single collection. The unity is attributable mainly to matters of selection and arrangement, and we are reminded by Gordimer's own introduction to her *Selected Stories* that her effects of unity are a deliberate ploy:

I wrote these stories over thirty years. I have attempted now to influence any reader's judgment of, or pleasure in, them only to the extent implied by the fact that I have chosen some and excluded others. In this sense, I suppose, I have 're-written': imposed a certain form, shaped by retrospect, upon the collection as an entity. (1983a;1975: 9)

I must assume that a similar intention is evident in her other collections. The assumption is a useful guide to a reading strategy. As Lazar points out:

Gordimer always chooses the title of her anthologies and the order of the stories within each collection – she does not leave it to editors. The titular story, habitually at the start of each collection, often sets its tone and establishes its salient questions and scenarios. (1996: 283)

Or, as Colleran claims, there are distinct advantages in granting Gordimer her ‘unity’ within the diversity of the collection:

Some of the reasons [for this type of reading] are obvious: the range and variety of voices it is possible to include within the boundaries of the collection are suggestive of the even greater multiplicity of voices, attitudes and constituencies that comprise South African society and compete – or co-labour – to determine its future. (1993: 240)

* * *

Having said this, one must immediately add the qualificatory comment that disunity in *Jump* is what marks Gordimer’s approach. Whilst stylistically it could seem as though Gordimer had been influenced by the postmodernism of the 1980s, since forms of reportage and sharp juxtaposition of different writerly conventions characterise the stories, the reader remains compelled by a deep structure of theme and mood: a coherence struggling within the ‘incarcerated imagination’. As in *Burger’s Daughter* and to a lesser degree *My Son’s Story*, the recurrent allusion, the motif of the collection, is that of the underground as both social and psychological correlative. The stories "Jump", "Safe Houses", "Amnesty" and "Some are Born to Sweet Delight" deal with the underground and its political activity. "Home" and "Once upon a Time" do not locate the ‘underground’ in an explicit way, but evoke the high emotional and intellectual tension usually associated in Gordimer’s work with the functioning

of clandestine organisations. Unlike *Burger's Daughter* or even the less highly charged *My Son's Story*, however, the underground in *Jump* reveals almost in its midst the signs of a new dispensation about to disrupt the 'totalist' mentality. The stories are set in the late 1980s, by which time many institutional forms of Apartheid had been abolished. At the crossroads between the totalitarian order and its fractured present, Gordimer combines the themes of 'guerilla' struggle in public and private venues with symptoms of morbidity, with broken promises and unstable allegiances.

The story "Jump" introduces the collection, its titular importance having been intended by Gordimer presumably to capture the general temper of the entire reading experience. As Lazar says,

'Jump' sets a note for the whole collection, its significance lying in the grasp of the twists and turns, the oddities and complications, the jumps that characterise the current conjuncture in South Africa. (1996: 284).

The main character is an ex-member of one of the South African military counter-insurgency units: probably Special Services that, like Koevoet, fought the secret, 'dirty' war against the enemies – SWAPO, the ANC – of the Apartheid state. The protagonist has now left the underground wing and awaits transfer to the regular defence force of the new government in power. He has undergone a kind of psychological trauma which he attempts to conceal behind his mask of masculine bravado, but he is in a frame of mind where he seeks to make his confession, whether out of contrition or for catharsis. The story has its parallel in news events of the time: the atrocities attributed to Koevoet, for example, and the 'high profile' political revelations of Dirk Coetzee and other members of state-sponsored hit squads. "Jump" presents a case of betrayal with abrupt changes in allegiance. Although the

underground is counter-insurgent rather than revolutionary, it shows the characteristics of any clandestine situation. Its heroic ethos is summarised in the symbol of the parachute jump, a sign of the rite of passage into a male world of violence and death: "as an adolescent he bonded with his peers through joining the parachute club, and he jumped – the rite of passage into manhood" (1991: 7).

Secrecy is felt to be a condition of some glamour: "at night he went to clandestine meetings. He felt importantly patriotic" (9), and: "when he travelled on his European missions he himself was that fighting man: the beard, the fatigues, the beret" (13). By choosing the emotively loaded vocabulary of military-speak, Gordimer flattens the humanity of the ex-soldier to an embodiment of the fighting automaton that has to protect secrets as some "field of operations" (14), to "stabilize by destabilization" (15) and elevate "disinformation" (15) to the status of truth-telling while concealing any involvement in massacres. This hardening of the spirit has led to loveless sexual encounters between the fighters and young women who are captured to provide physical gratification for men who have been without women for a long time. Gordimer seems both repelled and fascinated by the phenomenon, and her narrative method permits her both detachment and enquiry. She limits her own omniscience, refusing to offer a single point of view, and abandons her earlier linear narrative for a collocation of almost discrete sequences. The point is the difficulty of presentation. As she comments in her Nobel Lecture,

life is aleatory in itself, being is constantly pulled and shaped this way and that way by circumstances and different levels of consciousness. There is no pure state of being, and it follows that there is no pure text, 'real' text, totally incorporating the aleatory. (1992: 6)

As the ex-soldier confesses to his involvement in atrocities, his story shifts between the past and the present, and the reader is offered varying degrees of involvement in his tale by experiencing details alternately through the perspectives of first-person telling and third-person observation. The manner in which Gordimer almost manipulates the reader's opportunities of perception is linked closely to the protagonist's growing awareness of the gravity of the acts to which he has been party. The story begins in the third-person free, indirect speech of unusual 'subjective' urgency:

he is aware of himself in the room ... he is aware of being finally reached within all this, as in a film a series of dissolves passes the camera through walls to find a single figure, the hero, the criminal. Himself. (3)

The abrupt juxtaposition of 'hero' and 'criminal' captures the tension: the revelation of real identity is the thread running through the entire story. Symbolically, the protagonist shaves off his beard, which has served to conceal his features during the underground times: "there is no beard there The face pale and sloping away into the pale flesh of the chin: his hidden self produced for them" (4). He discovers that he has in the past become enamoured with the necessities of concealment. His hand, for example, "never matched the beard, the fatigues, the beret, the orders it signed" (4-5). Yet the fragile bones of his hand point to a fragility buried deep inside himself and which he has betrayed in the service of an unjust cause.

As he begins his confession – his gesture of reconciliation with the new group in power – the narrative shifts dramatically to the first person. The 'I' tells us of false expectations of heroism; the involvement in patriotic causes becomes an agonising awareness of being part of "a murderous horde that burned hospitals, cut off the ears of the villagers, raped, blew up trains full of workers" (16). At this point the story returns to the third-person

narrative mode as it pursues its psychological understanding in the dichotomy between knowledge through introspection and information by reportage.

The third and last part of the story offers a conclusion to the deceptive game of manhood into which the protagonist had been initiated by the parachute club. This 'manhood' has emerged in his confessions as one of atrocities and concealments damaging the human spirit. It is as difficult to confess to the atrocities as it is to conceal them: "they would realise who he was and what he knew. Not the atrocities. Something else; all that he could offer to efface his knowledge of the atrocities" (17). But ironically, as he strengthens himself in his new resolve, he is needed less and less by the new authorities: "once he's told everything, once he's been displayed, what use is he to them?" (18). The story ends with the protagonist deserted by the media and left in a state of tormented self-awareness about his guilt and his impoverished emotional life. His only companion is a bought woman and the bright light of a new day. At the end he stands in the window, suspended between his memories of participating in atrocities and the vision of the city outside as the site of his potential rehabilitation. Symbolically, he is exposed now 'in broad daylight':

He pulls aside the curtains to left and right. They are parched and faded, burned out. And now he is exposed: there is the bright stare of the beggared city, city turned inside out, no shelter there for life. (20)

The end of concealment – that is, the exposure of the underground – also means the shedding of light on the morbid symptoms, the oddities and complications, the 'jumps', of overdetermined times. At this stage, jumping with a parachute does not invite thoughts of male prowess, but of suicide: " ... jump. The stunning blow of the earth as it came up to flexed knees, the parachute sinking silken. He stands, and then backs into the room. Not

now; not yet" (20). The story is shaped by the public event; at the same time, it is an intense concentration on a psychological condition.

A similar effect characterises "Safe Houses", in which the duality of safety/ danger is associated with both the political underground and the underground of the illicit love-affair. As in *My Son's Story*, nothing in overdetermined times is safe: the title plays ironically on the theme. What Sylvie, the sophisticated suburbanite with her "skills of vigilance, [is] making safe for herself" (201) proves to be a metaphorical mine-field when she meets Harry, a returned exile, who finds himself living out another exile in Johannesburg while involved in underground politics. A politically callow white woman (a recurrent Gordimer creation), Sylvie has her privileged private space invaded by Harry and his subversive ways, which had served him as a guerilla fighter and now serve his invasion of Sylvie's most intimate life. In a graphic image of her preoccupation with sex and politics, Gordimer contrasts two 'bodies' that function in very different 'spaces': Harry, the guerilla – in the 'above-ground' life, a construction engineer – and Sylvie, the cosmopolitan socialite, extend the concept of the underground. Paradoxically, the two manage to create a 'safe' – because atemporal and asocial – house of sexual freedom. Their mutual attraction is purely physical; it starts by his being "aware [of her perfume] like an animal" (185) and leads to his behaving like a "cannibal tasting flesh" (201).

Harry's body is not described in any great detail, but Gordimer insists on two features: his beard and his "greedy warrior's smile contradicting the humble appearance" (189). The beard, which is mentioned at the beginning and the end of the story, suggests the underground fighter's habit of concealment. As for the smile, it is referred to as a sign of erotic

convenience: "the greedy grin of a man snatching life on the run" (196), and as "the voracious, confident smile [that] was the constant in these personae" (209). It is also a sign of the predatory spirit in a South African society of 'spectacular' times, in which deceit and opportunism are elevated to elements of survival: "the unexpected was his means of survival ... living without consequences. The corrupt wriggle of freedom – there it was again. Shameful but enjoyable" (188-89).

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Gordimer is scrupulous about the quality of freedom as an existential aspiration. It is not Harry's political commitments that she questions: he is indeed the brave freedom fighter who is defending the right to political freedom. The freedom that she feels has become perverted in his character is his inner freedom. He lacks the freedom to live with a sense of responsibility towards himself and others in his life: "to be Underground is to have a go at living without consequences" (188). At another point, Gordimer refers to Harry while on the city bus as having a joyful sense of freedom from the fear of being arrested: "he can't suppress a little thrill, a sort of inner giggle. Perhaps *this* is freedom? Something secret, internal, after all?" (184). But, Gordimer continues, "philosophising is another danger, in his situation, undermining the concept of freedom, for which he has risked discovery and imprisonment yet again" (184).

Gordimer does not undervalue Harry's political role, but questions implicitly its high price in terms of genuine humanity. The issue of his identity is at stake. He has a "planned nonexistence" (199); "he really existed now out of the nonexistence of himself" (201); "who he was didn't exist [for Sylvie]; he was safe" (208). The story almost imperceptibly hints at a metaphysical dimension concerning true and false selves: the dynamics are those of

underground/ inside and above-ground/ outside. This is Gordimer's preoccupation with reference to Kierkegaard's territorial metaphor of tension between 'imagined inland' and 'imagined outland' as described by Jacobs (1987). The underground, the heterocosm or heterotopia, is all-absorbing, and virtually determines the self in its duplicity and perplexity:

Underground, Underground: this time, as at other times, he's aware of how unsuitably abstract a term that is. To hide away, you have to be out in the open of life; too soon and easily run to ground, holed up somewhere. (183)

As in "Jump", the political imperative, by ironic juxtaposition, highlights a damaged inner life. The voice of the national spokesperson is troubled, I suggest, by the propensity of spectacular times to diminish our potential for ordinary living.

The mood is even more severe in "Some are Born to Sweet Delight", in which the 'minimalism' of the underground is focused not through the consciousness of participants, as in the previous two stories, but through the barely comprehending minds of those who have become caught up in situations that defy the expectations of most human beings. The bleakness actually assumes a surreal quality. The setting is England, and the story is told from the point of view of Vera, a working-class woman, who falls in love with her parents' foreign lodger, Rad. Rad seduces Vera and, when she falls pregnant, promises to marry her in his own country. But his intentions are different: he puts Vera on a plane and in her hand-baggage he plants a bomb, which explodes over the sea. (In the real incident, on which this story is based (Lazar 1996: 291), the bomb failed to explode, having been discovered during a security check.) Gordimer's macabre rendition may suggest the atmosphere in the state of emergency in the mid-1980s. Prior to Vera's boarding the plane, her communication with Rad has been reduced to a minimum; the human interchange was one of emotional

impoverishment. As in the case of Sylvie and Harry, sex has functioned as a desperate grasping at another body, with Rad's fear of intimacy finding a telling parallel in the scene of the bomb exploding between the legs of his pregnant 'fiancée'. Processes of experience are brutally curtailed; the symbolic-political carries the intention. Yet the personal story has a horrible insistence when Vera's womb, which carries Rad's child, is blown apart by the political obsession of her dehumanised 'lover'.

The topicality of the stories in *Jump* may lead us to suppose that Gordimer, under the pressure of the politics of the 1980s, has deserted the 'civil imaginary' in favour of the large and dramatic public event. What I have wished to emphasise, however, is my general argument as it pertains also to the novels of overdetermined times: that the tribute exacted from the self by the pain resulting from damaged, or at least sharply constricted, personal experiences has remained a constant concern in Gordimer's work. In the 'surface structure' of *Jump*, reportage could strike one as the motivating factor. Just as the stories discussed so far exhibit events that would have been characteristic of the times, so do most of the other stories in *Jump*.

In "Keeping Fit" a white jogger gets lost in the township and begins *to see*, as if for the first time, an aspect of South African life that he has simply not considered. In "What Were You Dreaming?" a white motorist gives a lift to black people and intrudes his 'liberal' naivety in trying to elicit from them answers to questions of social injustice. In "Comrades" a white woman giving a lift to black students learns something of the depth of the damage that an utterly politicised environment has done to the individual psyche. If these sound almost clichéd in terms of the theme of white liberal guilt, what is worth recollecting is the

element of lament for lost human potential that has accompanied Gordimer's overtly public themes. While "A Find" and "A Journey" are, more evidently, stories of intricate personal relationships, "The Ultimate Safari" plays with shocking irony on the national 'hunting' trope to reveal the agony suffered by Mozambican refugees at the mercy of wild animals and white South African hunters. Like Bushmen of yesteryear, the refugees are 'fair game' and Gordimer's use of their situation serves to underscore the pathos of human beings in circumstances of such desperate poverty that even the Apartheid state is a kind of El Dorado.

More pertinent to my general re-reading of *Jump* – my modification of interpretation – are the stories "Amnesty" and "Home". In "Amnesty" Gordimer presents two common concerns of the struggle years: the journey to the political prison on Robben Island and the question as to whether, in Black Consciousness rhetoric, women can be much more than stereotyped sisters of the revolution. In Matshoba's "A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana" (from his collection *Call Me Not A Man*, 1979) individual contemplations are deliberately generalised into 'typical thought'. The climax of the journey, for example, is not the protagonist's meeting with his imprisoned brother, but the slogan *A Luta Continua* (the struggle continues). In several of Miriam Tlali's stories in *Footprints in the Quag* (1989) it is suggested that the woman's role is indeed that of the supportive sister of the male revolutionary. In "Amnesty" Gordimer, daringly, given the risks of entering the black other, filters the story through the consciousness of a rural black woman whose fate, according to struggle lore, should be to wait silently, patiently, for the release from prison of her politically active husband. She waits, but as she does so, she begins to reflect on and to master the meanings of what is happening to her, so that she grows into a complex being with a potential for contemplative understanding. The story ends as a tribute to her own potential:

I am up with the clouds. The sun behind me is changing the colours of the sky and the clouds are changing themselves, slowly, slowly There's a huge grey rat moving across the sky, eating the sky. ... I'm watching the rat, it's losing itself, its shape, eating the sky, and I'm waiting. Waiting for him to come back. Waiting. I'm waiting to come back home." (257)

From a naive and romantic state of dependence, the protagonist begins to intrude a reflective and questioning element into her task of waiting: "On Saturday, no school and I plant and weed with my mother, she sings but I don't; I think" (256). She becomes aware by the end of the story that waiting is a painful process of transformation, thus investing suffering with meaning.

Before we are tempted in our reading of *Jump* to trace any consistent rite of passage from public confinement to individual freedom, however, we are reminded that Gordimer's mood remains sombre. In "Home" – as in *My Son's Story* – a tribute of pain has to be paid by those who step into the iron determinants of underground politics. A foreigner falls in love with, and marries, a 'coloured' South African woman, members of whose family have been imprisoned for political reasons. Because of her guilt about failure to play her proper political role, she cannot enjoy the normality of a caring marital environment. At the same time, the husband is made to feel his foreign otherness, his marginalisation in a world of struggle, the codes of which he cannot penetrate. The themes of sex, politics and betrayal define the narrative. But as in the stories in *Jump* as a whole, it is through the reportage that the extremely painful personal betrayals are registered:

In the kitchen was a note: "I'll be gone for a few days. Don't worry. *Lille lopa*". It was the kind of note left, these days, by people like Robbie, people like the ones she mixed with. If they had to disappear; if they didn't want

anyone who might be questioned about their whereabouts to get in trouble with the police; the less you know, the better for you. But he knew. He was sure, now. Perhaps it was even her way of letting him know. If the police came, he could tell them: she has gone away with a lover. (138)

Husband and wife have developed a terse and laconic style of communication or miscommunication. It is in the latter term – the miscommunication – that Gordimer locates the sadness of public surveillance infecting what should be the motive of human intimacy.

The brevity of the short story has the effect in *Jump* of limiting the hints of national allegories while focusing on the actions of people towards other people in close, sometimes brutal, at other times urgent, encounters. The taciturn, almost report-like, style, as illustrated in the quotations, restricts interior monologue, but creates appropriate ‘silences’ not only within single stories, but between stories. As Colleran phrases it, the reader is asked to read "*diacritically*, across the silences between stories" (1993: 240). The cumulative experience is not clinical in its catalogue of hard exterior events but, paradoxically, almost painful in its attempts to penetrate to the people behind the reporting eye. Here we find issues of initiation, dislocation, identity and transformation; innocence and experience, sex, politics, distrust and silences; but also struggles towards forms of awareness. The characters in the stories themselves struggle but the reader too struggles to locate, in the elliptical style, the illuminating incident or moment. The general temper of the collection now seems appropriate to the 1980s and very different from the stories of the 1950s, to which I now wish to turn. My analysis has nevertheless suggested, I hope, that *Jump* is not merely a document of the years of struggle. Its motivations are crucially concerned with human behaviour in extreme times.

Its place in Gordimer's *oeuvre* may be identified in the tensions between the responsibility to witness the social issue and the responsibility to perceive the underlying process.

* * *

In returning to the young Gordimer, we are reminded of her deep interest in philosophical and, particularly, existential ideas. Interviewed in 1979 and 1980 about her formative years, she expressed her disenchantment with the anti-intellectual atmosphere of her home-town and, in reaction, her attraction to existentialism:

When I got to university ... I met people who lived in the world of ideas, in the world that interested me passionately. In the town where I lived there was no mental food of this kind at all. I'm often amazed to think how they live, those people, and what an oppressed life it must be, because human beings *must* live in the world of ideas. This dimension in the human psyche is very important ... Nobody ever talked about, or even around, the big things – life and death. The whole existential aspect of life was never discussed. ... It was something so private, because I felt that there was nobody with whom I could talk about these things, just *nobody*. But then, of course, when I was moving around at university, my life changed. From Europe – it was just after the war – came Existentialism, and at home in South Africa there was great interest in movements of the left, and black national movements. (1990g: 134)

The comments suggest something of the impetus behind *The Lying Days* while in *The Soft Voice of the Serpent* (1952) there are several stories that anticipate Helen Shaw's attempts to break free from the constrictions of colonial bigotry in the small South African town and discover a freer spirit.

My point is, however, that individual action seen from the introspective and the contemplative viewpoint has for Gordimer never been the luxury of escape from her surrounding milieu, but a form of oppositional discourse: a psychological reaction to the oppressive mental frameworks of South Africa. The moments when she has recourse to methodical doubt and sceptical hesitation should be seen as expressions of her need to salvage a sense of individual worth from brutal socio-psychological determinants. In other words, her artistic inclination towards introspection may reflect her need to master reality and temporality in mental strategies for coping with the strains of living without frames in which she could invest value or respect. Just as this 'metaphysic' was foregrounded at the expense of 'material' action in *The Lying Days*, so *The Soft Voice of the Serpent* offers us a sharp reminder of the commitment to psychological realism rather than political commitment. The political element (or perhaps in the early works the term 'social' would be more accurate) is nonetheless pervasive. Before we turn to the stories, a brief comment on the key existentialist element might be useful.

Existentialism, in its opposition to abstract schemas, gathered international momentum in the mid-twentieth century in the work of Heidegger, Jaspers, Marcel and Sartre. In not subscribing to an ordered universe, or to 'essences' of individual experience, the philosophy emphasised the individual's responsibility for choice. Paradoxically, it is the concept of free will that generates "nausea", in Sartre's terms, as well as anxiety. The individual is faced with the challenge of structural indeterminacy and uncertainty, and can only rely on him/ herself to choose between either adapting to, or changing, the circumstance. Although existentialism originated in Europe, South African writers have continued to show an interest in its ideas, themes and identificatory symbolism.

For all the differences of socio-political background between Europe and South Africa, there are many similarities in the social dynamics, as has been suggested by Peck in his tellingly entitled article "Condemned to Choose, but What?" (1992). In South Africa, Peck argues, the absence of a sense of community and social belonging has led to a generalised state of anxiety. As examples, he points to André Brink's *The Wall of the Plague* (1984) with its echoes of Camus and to Athol Fugard who, also influenced by Camus's defiance of absurdity, never entirely surrenders the metaphysical dimension to material facticity in plays such as *The Blood Knot* (1961) and *Boesman and Lena* (1969). Interestingly, Rosa in *Burger's Daughter* experiences a crisis of identity when she realises that she has lost her parents' "connection with blacks that was completely personal" (68). Her sense of herself, in fact, is no longer confirmed by those with whom she wishes to have bonds. At the end of the novel she manages to regain a sense of community among women in prison (354-56). One might add to the list several other works, like Menàn du Plessis' tellingly titled *A State of Fear* (1983), in which political crisis and severe mental anxiety are virtually the condition of each other's being.

The influence of European existentialism is also to be found in the mentality of 'waiting': an instance of the passive acceptance of external circumstances and, more generally, the absurdity of the human condition over which the individual feels powerless. Inspired by Camus's *Myth of Sisyphus* (1940), many South African writers have addressed the issue of non-action and paralysis of the will in terms of the crippling effect of Apartheid on the psyche. J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) and *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983) both illustrate the point. There is also the act of choosing to commit oneself to change by discarding attitudes of mere survival or hopelessness. In South Africa it has been

the distinguishing mark of progressive writers that they have advocated the need for commitment to racial justice. While reminding us that such activities in the political sphere are not necessarily at odds with the spirit of existentialism, Peck makes the valuable point that the poles of both passivity and activism in the existential universe may be necessary aspects of the trauma of choice:

But not all existentialist writing stresses the necessity of choosing through action. From this perspective, one is free to choose, and indeed, condemned to such freedom; therefore, one defines oneself by action, and good faith would seem to demand forms of action that are capable of enlarging human life and freedom. (1992: 73)

Such a dialectic, from a condition of passive acceptance to that of a challenge to human debasement, characterises Camus's *The Rebel* (1954), which advocates both a quantitative and a qualitative rebellion against frozen attitudes of mind. My point is that this shift, from 'activism' in the exterior event to a largely mental ground of confrontation and recovery of will, remains 'political' in a profound sense. This reminds us in the South African context that, to take an example, it is not only Fugard's nihilistic *Boesman and Lena* which is 'relevantly' existential in a social milieu, but also the more intellectually rebellious of his works, like *The Road to Mecca* (1984). Once we recover, via existentialism, or otherwise, a comprehensive understanding of responsibility, commitment and choice, we renounce the often artificial barrier between the private and the public domains of being or becoming. In this sense of dialectical interaction, virtually all of Gordimer's fiction contains an element of the 'existential,' with *Burger's Daughter* possibly the most existentialist of her novels.

To return to Gordimer's earlier writings is to return to existential tenets that emphasise adaptation, survival and individual salvation in adversity. As she would show in *The Lying Days*, the society in which Gordimer matured was a society of petty attitudes and destinies, in which the beliefs of an older generation were expected to remain unchanged. It was a space inhabited by insignificant people, where 'nobody' was 'everybody'. (Such societies breed the interchangeable identities that Sartre refers to as "*n'importe qui*" ['whoever']). Set against such a background, Gordimer's preoccupation with existentialism in her early career reveals the rebellious streak we encounter in Helen Shaw. To question and challenge the complacencies of one's own kind is an act of opposition, and forces one into the position of an outsider.

Gordimer was, of course, not alone in her rebellious stance. She was the product of a wave of post-war dissatisfaction and was influenced by a general ethos in South African intellectual and artistic circles of emulating European existentialism as an escape from the mentality of a crude 'pioneering' society. This is expressed not only in *The Lying Days* and in several of her early short stories, but – as I have indicated – in later interviews in which she speaks of her formative years. It appears, for example, in her interviews of 1965, 1979 and 1980 (Gordimer 1990). Her fascination with Sartre and Camus suggests her direct interest in mainstream existentialist thought, while her other literary interests, although not directly related to this philosophical trend, indicate preoccupation with a psychologising and contemplative mode of fiction. Her Nobel Prize Lecture in 1991 contains a long list of writers to whom she feels indebted and among whom are many role-models for her meditative and introspective temperament. She mentions, in both her Nobel Prize Lecture and in several interviews, her admiration for nineteenth-century Russian literature, especially the works of

Chekhov, Dostoevsky and Turgenev. We hear also of her sensitivity to the absurdity of the human condition and the individual's vulnerability in a faceless social machine: she is drawn here also to the writings of Kafka and Borges. The introspective quality of writing derived from Eastern Europe, for example, that of Conrad and Kundera, has continued to appeal to her need to confront the darker sides of the psyche. While fascinated by the complexity of Virginia Woolf's stream-of-consciousness, Gordimer admires John Dos Passos's narratological reflexivity. All these literary interests are organically linked to her need to register the psychology of experience in a schizoid, racist and materialistic environment.

My digression on existentialism is meant to lend focus to the rebellious element of Gordimer's earliest writing, in which the 'outsider' – we are reminded of the title of Colin Wilson's influential popular book of the day, *The Outsider* (1997;1956) – is frequently trapped in the codes and conventions of a society unsympathetic to the non-conformist. Commenting on the success of his book one year after its publication, Wilson concludes that "outsiders appear like pimples on a dying civilisation" (1957: 9) and considers that

the answer to [the outsider's refusal to conform], quite simply, lies in extending the range of the consciousness: setting emotions circulating, and setting the intellect working, until new areas of consciousness are brought to life in the way that the blood starts flowing again through a leg which has gone numb. (1957: 12)

But my digression is meant also to underline Peck's point that a hankering after the metaphysical dimension might well be confirmed as a characteristic of the civil imaginary in South Africa after Apartheid:

there is no reason to believe that existentialism has ceased to influence South African writing. If Christopher Hope is right when he claims that liberal South African writers will have to learn to deal with "a world where there are no certainties and where no one is uncompromised, no one is on the side of the angels", existentialism will continue to exercise a certain appeal for white South Africans. The variety of their reactions to the momentous developments in South Africa since early 1990 suggests that calls for commitment have not lost their urgency. The South African crisis has entered a new phase, but it remains a crisis. (1992: 81)

It is in her early short fiction that Gordimer explores the intricacies of the time-honoured subjects of a genre that has been influenced decisively by Chekhov and Maupassant, both of whom in their tales of implication and tangential illumination, seem to have been important influences on Gordimer. The themes of initiation, transformation, dislocation, catharsis, frontier experience, ritualisation, exoticism and other related contemplations make their first appearance in her stories of 'underdetermined' times. As regards character delineation, the interest goes beyond the ideological to dwell on the intricacies and idiosyncracies of the psychological realm, and in matters of texture and tone Gordimer uses the opportunity to experiment with lyricism, scenic concentrations, and the ironic juxtaposition of comment and symbol. These last are the defining features of stories to which I shall turn including the title story, "The Soft Voice of the Serpent".

Having said this, I should add immediately that not all stories in *The Soft Voice of the Serpent* are equally successful. It would have been surprising if they were. Gordimer may have been able to refer to international models; in South Africa, however, she would lead the way from what, in the 1940s, remained the stock South African short story to the story of

suggestion, implication and, generally, of indirection. The stock story in this country had remained the colonial yarn in its numerous nineteenth-century versions; it continued to flourish until the 1950s in the popular white magazine, *The Outspan*: the preoccupations were hunting adventures, or ghost stories around the campfire; the mode was either mystery or anecdote. (William Westrup's pioneer Old McBein appeared regularly in *The Outspan*.) A literary 'thickening' had occurred earlier in Pauline Smith's tragedies of rural Afrikaner life (*The Little Karoo*, 1925) and in the ironic twists of Herman Charles Bosman's Marico stories which, having begun to appear in the 1930s, were first collected in *Mafeking Road* (1947). This volume of Bosman's stories appeared in collected form in 1947, only two years before the locally published *Face to Face* (1949), a short collection which contained most of the stories subsequently to appear in Gordimer's first internationally published volume, *The Soft Voice of the Serpent* (1952).

Those writers who have come to be grouped with Gordimer as shifting the local story to a 'modern', internationally recognisable form had not, by the time of the first Gordimer stories, achieved regular publication. While the 'little magazine' continues to be the home of the short story in South Africa, first collections by Doris Lessing (*This Was the Old Chief's Country*, 1961), Jack Cope (*The Tame Ox*, 1960) and Dan Jacobson (*A Long Way from London*, 1958, and *Beggar My Neighbour*, 1964) appeared in 1951, 1960, 1958 and 1964, respectively. All these white, middle-class writers attempt to use the local setting to a greater or lesser degree as an emotional parallel for problems of human anxiety, sudden triumphs, or sad defeats.

Short story writing among blacks was beginning to become 'popular', in a literal sense, since the magazine *Drum*, in the 1950s, offered an outlet for the work of black writers. The *Drum* stories of this period, by writers such as Modisane, Themba, Mphahlele and Rive, present black life in the city in acts of daring and bravado. The Gordimer of this period seems unaware of the life which they celebrate and deplore. Gordimer's early stories, as I have observed, were Chekhovian in their amassing of the apparently trivial details that usually stifle unremarkable lives. When Gordimer the individual author is dominated by her own themes – the death-in-life, or the life-in-death, of unexceptional beings – the external data of setting and mood tend to overwhelm her characters' ability to surprise us with the volition of their own actions. Where she is most impressive is where the 'formula' is broken by the unexpected perspective, or when a symbol conveys a meaning beyond the prose. Her art of anti-climax, which paradoxically leads the character or the reader to an insight, has been noted by several critics, including Delius, who in 1953, soon after the appearance of *The Soft Voice of the Serpent*, wrote that "her style is to mass meticulous imagery and observation until the story ends in a swift emotional blow or the snapping of a tiny nerve or a dull disillusion" (1990: 23). A 'resonance' beyond the immediate telling was to become the hallmark of Gordimer's later short stories and will be illustrated towards the end of this chapter in my analysis of a representative story from the 'middle' collection, *Selected Stories* (1975). In the early collection under discussion here, we witness the young writer as apprentice. I shall group together for brief commentary those stories in which I feel the objective correlative dominates, rather than releases, the human illumination. I shall then turn to two broad groupings in which Gordimer shows promise of development: her 'interracial' stories; and her more contemplative stories.

To the first group belong stories about the concession store, which aptly evoke the stifling small-town atmosphere of *The Lying Days*. The store provides a recurrent metaphor for the familial and social limitations that almost destroyed Helen Shaw's young life. We are offered vivid genre scenes which constitute themselves as pictorial symbols of spiritual entrapment in the tradition of Chekhov. Chekhov's technique, which Gordimer has to an extent adopted, is to present a wealth of apparently irrelevant detail in a near plotless succession and to create some expectation of catharsis through climax, only to end inevitably and relentlessly in anti-climax. We may do these stories an injustice nowadays when we encounter them after we have read *The Lying Days*. Haugh (1974), in the first full-length study of Gordimer, made much of the store as existential entity. Comparing the literary significance of the store to that of Faulkner's courthouse and town square, or to Hemingway's bar and café, Haugh says:

the small town store was a place of meeting in Nadine Gordimer's fiction ... her store teems with vitality, a strange and wonderful place to a child. It is a place where aloneness is discovered; where the shy meet the shrewd and adept ... here innocence is lost. (1974: 51)

The order in which the stories of the store appear in the collection suggests a deepening of the investigative focus: the atmosphere and the ethos of the store are contemplated by an outsider in the first story ("A Present for a Good Girl"), and by two types of outsiders in the other two ("The Umbilical Cord" and "The Defeated"). As in the stories of the underground, Gordimer dichotomises space through employing different points of view, the insider's and the outsider's, as an investigative strategy. "A Present for a Good Girl", "The Umbilical Cord" and "The Defeated" – all offer sharply observed incidents of thwarted lives.

In "A Present for a Good Girl," an old woman seeks to buy a handbag for her daughter in the store that appears to her as an "Aladdin's cave" (107). But the magic is gradually tarnished: she cannot pay off the gift and her dream-world is shattered when her daughter rushes into the store, to throw the blame at the store-keepers for entertaining the fancies of an old woman whom intelligent people should be able to perceive as senile or entirely irresponsible. Not only is the old woman humiliated after this encounter, but the daughter's "hand sank leaden at her side, as if defeated in the desire to strike" (118). Between mother and daughter the sense of defeat is mutual and complete.

"The Umbilical Cord" also ends in an impotent anti-climax. The storekeeper's son accepts his defeat as a young spirit in a world that is dominated by his own entrapment in the routine responsibilities of his parents' shop: the piles of cheap, inanimate objects – the goods of the store – threaten to overwhelm his young life: "to belong to this ... [to] the dead dry air of the window, like the air of a tomb newly opened, dead flies lay sprinkled over everything" (160). The narrator is morbidly attracted by the noise, the movements and even by the smells of the store. The signs of desiccated and discarded life include sucked-out oranges, tatters of dirty paper, and the smells of grease and rotting oranges. This is a sample of Gordimer's contrapuntal style, which Haugh compares to that of Mansfield and Hemingway. As he puts it, Gordimer's "story method uses an inductive process (rather than plot) whereby currents of thought set up in one sequence ... create a flow of ideas in another sequence, with no direct plot connection or overt conflict" (1974: 53). As far as character delineation is concerned, the boy, who seems to be a pessimistic, defeated version of Joel in *The Lying Days*, muses about escaping from the stultification of the store but, unlike his novelistic counter-part, fails to do so.

"The Defeated", too, prepares us for the first novel. Here, the daughter escapes the stifling atmosphere of her parents' store, but even though she marries in Johannesburg, she bears the scar of her emigré Jewish parents' passively accepted moral defeat in what should have been a country of opportunity. With a touch of Maupassant-like detachment Gordimer analyses the parents' passive acceptance of "waiting ... As animals wait in a cage; for nothing" (210); their impotence leaves them "defeated, and without understanding in their defeat" (212). As in my "My Father Leaves Home" (from *Jump*), these people are victims of their own European, social and temperamental marginalisation. They turn, in the new country of South Africa, to victimising state-decreed 'others'. The Africans who have to rely on the store for their mean purchases must endure the store-keepers' scornful contempt for them, a projection of what has been called "the Jewish self-rejection" (Leveson 1996: 174) at work. Marked by her parents' defeat and low self-esteem, the daughter, like the child Helen Shaw, retreats into herself in an attempt to preserve some sense of her independence.

One might identify in the setting Gordimer's tendency to clothe an existential tenet in a local metaphor, thus illustrating a metaphysical generality in a concrete situation. The existential dilemma – the thwarting of potentially sensitive minds – reminds one of a great theme of the genre: 'the un-lived life', notably described by Henry James and Honoré de Balzac, among others. The environment stifles vitality in the torpor of psychological stasis: death-in-life. This is the condition Gordimer describes in an interview quoted above (1990g: 134) about the despair of her own young life in the small, up-country town of Springs. Perhaps it was an autobiographical compulsion that had Gordimer place these stories of the store one after the other in her early collection.

"A Commonplace Story" depicts another hopeless life trapped in a pattern of relentless repetition. To suggest the circular banality of a music teacher's life, Gordimer, in what would become a characteristic feature, varies the leitmotif, "Once a music teacher, always a music teacher" (220), so as to introduce qualificatory shades of meaning leading gradually to a culmination of despair in the protagonist's realisation that she has become a nobody:

But was there anything left of her? ... People came face to face with her, crossing the street and they did not see her ... That pale face where even the freckles were faded, that ridiculous old felt hat, the costume that hung ... the glum expression she was always surprised to see because she didn't feel it, inside her. She was dry as a stick; and she knew it. She was nothing at all.
(219)

"The Amateurs" also deals with failed professional aspirations and – like other stories of failed lives – shows sharp insight into the stifling condition, in which Gordimer "rel[ies] on the technique known as 'the bitter bit', a reversal" (Githii 1981: 48), a technique she may have learned from Flaubert. Similarly "The Prisoner", in playing on the symbolism of its title, contrasts states of confinement – captivity during war time; the return to the shackles of home – in order to arrive at the impasse of recognition confirming only death-in-life:

Nothing has changed. It repeated itself with horror. *Nothing has changed.* In poverty and drabness nothing changes. Wood does not wither. Chalk does not rot. What is dead and dry lives on forever and is forever dead. (90)

While the writing is almost hypnotic in its fascination with 'unreality' (to use a term reminiscent of Eliot's sense of the waste land), the stories of the store are perhaps finally too unremitting in their accumulation of bric-à-brac lives. There is confusion about the respective

purposes of content and technique. What happens in each of these stories is that, instead of the technique of the setting (the correlative of the human mentality) serving by ironic juxtaposition to reveal something of the vulnerable lives, the setting is so overwhelmingly evoked as to crush the personal stories into a predetermined submission.

In contrast, in the stories "In the Beginning" and "A Watcher of the Dead", apparently stable settings, which appear capable of determining action within them, are 'destabilised' by behaviour. In the former, we enter the intricacies of a young doctor's responses as his idealism about his new profession is modified in his brushes with a life-hardened head nurse. In the latter, the Jewish 'wacher', who is supposed to initiate the bereaved family into the mysteries of death, turns out to be a bureaucratic official intent on procuring contributions to religious funds in the Jewish community. In both stories the narrative unfolds in the unexpected, even ambiguous processes of the characters' motivations. What is almost absent, however, is any sense of the greater South African community. Yet when the South African ethos was persistent in the store, the viability of the human drama was virtually stifled. The metaphor of the dull South African Sunday afternoon, recurrently invoked, seems to Gordimer at this stage to be a decidedly mixed element. It is when the symbolic scene is suffused by psychological contemplation – whether in stories of interracial exchange or in the more metaphysical meditations – that Gordimer anticipates most promisingly her future talents as writer of short stories.

* * *

As in many subsequent collections, the relationships between blacks and whites in *The Soft Voice of the Serpent* are shown to be based on imbalances of power. By methods of ironic focalisation – methods that I have discussed in relation to her novels – Gordimer was from the beginning able to avoid both idealised and stereotypical presentations of race relations. Or, as Haugh phrased it, Gordimer resisted the

invitation to melodrama, to events of harsh confrontation, to scenes of violence, of rape and bloodshed. The writer who writes as a journalist is inevitably drawn into sociological melodrama Nadine Gordimer, whose gift is that of a poet rather than of a journalist or a dramatist, is one of the rare exceptions. (1974: 34)

"The Catch" is a good example. The motif, as contained in the title, suggests the superficiality, as well as the unwanted dependencies, of human interaction based on inequalities not only of race, but, in an inextricably connected way, a whole gamut of resources in a structurally deformed society. The object of interest to a [white] holiday-making couple is the local Indian fisherman: "An entertaining creature existing nowhere in your life outside that holiday, yet bound with absolute intimacy within that holiday itself" (12). The ambiguity is effortlessly introduced in such subjective processes of thought. Initially excited by "their Indian", who offers an exotic touch to their holiday, the couple become increasingly resentful as the tokens of generosity from their side begin to exact material demands. The Indian, their holiday "catch", is helpless in front of his own catch, the biggest fish he has ever caught, which he is unable to sell, except to relatively well-off whites like the holidaying couple. The author as commentator vanishes from the story; the reader is shown incidents in ironic juxtaposition; social critique, judgment, must be inferred. The

holiday with its easy pleasures becomes, by implication, a bitter reminder of the several barriers characterising South African society.

Similarly, "The Train from Rhodesia" has the mode of the holiday disrupted by a racial incident. But the racial incident serves, in turn, to focus the young woman's apprehension as she returns home with her husband after their honeymoon, that the period of the honeymoon might have been somewhat 'unreal' and separate from the responsibilities of the life now awaiting her. The bone of contention between husband and wife is, apparently, a lion carved out of dry wood that a black man on the side of the railway track is trying to sell to them. Emerging from his holiday mood, the husband reveals a cruelty based on his greater power over the railside vendor by humiliating the black man into accepting a miserable price. The wife feels ashamed and embarrassed by her husband's behaviour even as she transfers the incident, in her thoughts, to another register: that of power relations in a marriage in which she is likely to experience the humiliations of powerlessness: "a weariness, a tastelessness, the discovery of a void made her hands slacken their grip, atrophy emptily, as if the hour was not worth their grasp" (54). The existential 'nausea' of the young woman finds a visual correspondence in the carved lion, the curio with its "mouth opened in an endless roar too terrible to be heard, it had a black tongue" (49). The illumination, that she must escape, occurs involuntarily to the young woman. Or perhaps it occurs to the reader. In many of Gordimer's most subtle stories it is difficult precisely to pinpoint the locus of insight. The method sharply distinguishes *The Soft Voice of the Serpent* from earlier expectations of short stories from South Africa according to which, as I have suggested, the anecdotes of action superseded the gradations of inner tensions.

There are other stories of a less intricate interracial pattern. In "Another Part of the Sky", for example, two white liberals, an educationist and the principal of a reformatory (is Gordimer rewriting the life story of Alan Paton?) talk out the dilemmas of liberalism to conclude that their gestures of good will cannot make a substantial difference to the lives of black South Africans. While the story is a reminder that Gordimer's liberalism never took the form of complacent optimism, it is the symbolic mode of "The Train from Rhodesia" that best leads into the more positive aspects of the metaphysical dimension, the dimension, both in defeat and transformation, that I wish mainly to recollect in her earliest stories.

Among what I have called Gordimer's 'stories of being' we have, in *The Soft Voice of the Serpent*, the title story, "The Talisman" and "The End of the Tunnel". Several others – notably "The Kindest Thing to Do" and "The Hour and the Years" – also veer towards the meditative manner. In all of these stories, the emphasis falls on mental process rather than physical transformation. Overwhelming settings, such as the store, need not inhibit but may rather free character, though freedom does not necessarily guarantee resolution. There must remain, according to existentialist beliefs, the possibility of re-evaluation, even choice. In addition, a character is permitted to assess itself against its conditioning in its recourse to the unusual or surprising action or activity.

"The Kindest Thing to Do", for example, gives us in this first collection a situation which was to become familiar: that of the single life imprisoned by its oppressive environment: the environment is objectified in the torpor of the South African Sunday afternoon, with its trappings of dour Afrikaner Calvinism. But the protagonist refuses to remain passive: she agonises about delivering the death blow to a bird that has been mutilated

by a dog. The agony is, of course, her own. Her agony, however, is the conflict between an imposed 'death-in-life' and the responsibility to take decisions. In "The Hour and the Years" a woman's domestic boredom stands to be broken by her decision as to whether to embark on an extra-marital love affair: "there was a sense of growing awareness in her; what was it? A feeling of apprehension, of a need to pause, and think" (40). Suddenly, however, a dog yelps as it is run over by a motor car, and the shock, the inarticulated sense of danger or fear, returns her train of thoughts to her domestic responsibilities. Nonetheless, she has acquired a painful awareness of her repressed dissatisfactions:

She knew and dreaded that presently she would come back to life and feel again. She was filled with horror at the thought of facing up to her life, of finding that everything still went on, while she was utterly changed. She wandered about the house in a muffled distress which separated her even from herself. She knew the numb detachment of the dispossessed. (46)

We are a long way from the ruthless decision-making power of the mature Gordimer, or the mature Vera Stark, but the will to 'being', I suggest, has been a feature of Gordimer from the start.

The necessity of awareness, however painful, helps us chart the direction of the collection as a whole. Utilising the symbol of the woman's dress as the 'talisman' of her identity, "The Talisman" forces its protagonist to stare into her threadbare existence behind the attractive attire: it is a life anchored in the complexities of interchange which has a truth not to be found in a life of appearances. Similarly, the confrontation of guilt in "The End of the Tunnel" permits the move beyond a failed, illicit relationship towards emancipation from a sense of defeat. A more paradoxical presentation of being is offered, appropriately perhaps,

in the story which lends the collection its name. In "The Soft Voice of the Serpent" the husband, who must adjust to the loss of a limb, is placed in the garden he has shared with his wife. By finding succour in the minutiae of nature, he begins to transcend the immediately physical loss of his leg and discover a sense of reverence in God's creation:

There was a feeling that there, in the garden, he would come to an understanding; that it would come easier there. Perhaps there was something in this of the old Eden idea; the tender human adjusting himself to himself in the soothing impersonal presence of trees and grass and earth, before going into the stare of the world. (1)

The biblical allusions frame the domestic tale. As in Eden, he is tempted in his garden by the soft voice of the serpent: life might find its peculiar satisfactions in his new-found communion as he reinterprets the loss of his limb in terms of the apparent resilience of a locust that has lost a leg:

It was the same trouble. His own trouble. The creature had lost one leg Of course he knew that feeling! That absolute certainty that the leg was there: one had only to lift it The upward shaft of the locust's leg quivered, lifted; why couldn't he walk? (5)

But before the story can settle into such comforting one-dimensionality, Gordimer overturns the symbols. The wife disrupts her husband's self-sufficiency when she disturbs the locust and disrupts his meditations. The implication is that human life must intrude upon the fine line between reverence and romantic self-indulgence. In fixing his 'healing' on the image of the locust, the husband forgets the effects of his withdrawal from his wife. The realisation that "they had forgotten that locusts can fly" (7) captures the deftly humorous mood; the illumination, however, is penetrating: we continue to find our significance amid the setbacks

of the here and now. The soft voice of the serpent, however alluring, cannot compensate for the understanding of the self in the contingencies of life. It is an insight to which Gordimer has consistently adhered, and marks the title story, in its method as well as its intuitions, as a clear indicator of the talent that would be developed.

* * *

Criticism of Gordimer's short fiction mostly pre-dates the 1970s and eighties. One of the first favourable responses appeared in 1953, after the publication of *The Soft Voice of the Serpent*, when Anthony Delius praised Gordimer's deep interest in "the uncatalogued humanity of human beings" and her way of describing "the conception and growth of interior human incident [which has] almost the quality of foetal development" (1990;1953: 23). By 1960 Gordimer had established a reputation for herself, according to Lionel Abrahams, as a writer of

masterly prose [which] bespeaks her art as a vocation in the religious sense ... [in possession of] ... an illuminating intelligence: its central function [being] to render visible, or be rendered visible by, the physical, social and emotional phenomena of experience. (1990;1960: 26-27)

Abrahams considered that Gordimer's "transparent ego" and its "illuminating intelligence" were most apparent in the short stories, since she excels in dealing with time divided into small incidents.

In the early 1970s, by which time Gordimer had established herself in both novels and short fiction, there were critics who still considered the short stories to be among her best

work. While condemning her novels for their lack of cohesion and detachment, Magarey in 1974 praised the implied poetry of the stories. He says: "a Gordimer story is often best regarded as a poem or an essay as much as a story, even when the technique is narrative and covers the span of a life" (1990: 47). Magarey astutely identified poetic quality expressed at four levels: at the level of title symbolism and concentration, at the subliminal level of revelatory scenes, in the carefully planned way of handling details that become relevant, and also in the fact, implicit in the previous point, that the material for all the analogies in the story is to be found within the story itself.

In similar vein, Haugh's study of 1974 had as one of its aims the delineation of Gordimer in the modern tradition of the short story. He considers her work to be part of the tradition of story of implication and revelation as it began in the late nineteenth century in the work of Chekhov, Maupassant, James and Conrad, and into our century in others such as Mansfield, Welty, Joyce, Crane, and Salinger. Haugh reveals Gordimer's subscription to categories of artistry in the *trait de lumière*, *progression d'effet*, tangential structures, inductive patterns, counterpoint and resonance. Of these, according to Haugh, "Gordimer's most enchanting gift is the *trait de lumière*, the illuminating moment, the quick perceptive glance of the author which sparkles like a gem" (1974: 14). Concerning thematic constants, he singles out the

tension in her stories resulting from 'what might be', in capacities for love and compassion, [which], contrasted with the existing relationships, produces in her best stories an irony of tender sorrow. (1974: 15)

It is through the illuminating moment that Gordimer foregrounds the existing, but diminishing, potential of hope. Or, as Sachs memorably expressed the matter in a distinction to which I have already referred:

an abundance of untapped resources enriched by a keen perception of atmosphere, and the poetry of common things ... almost alive with their human saturation. [These are Gordimer's] ... stories of *being*, rather than of *doing*; there is enough in birth and death, in youth and old age to weave a pattern without having to invent elaborate stories about them. (1971: 138-39)

These early commentaries on Gordimer are undoubtedly worthy of recovery. They remind us, after the politics and prose of the 1980s, of Gordimer's art of indirection. It is in her stories that Gordimer, in the concentration of the miniature, emphasised her own comments in "Living in the Interregnum" (1989;1983), comments central to my study. She claims that her necessary responsibility to the large canvas of the national scene was always lived in a tension with her essential responsibility to time-honoured notions of artistic integrity. This is fidelity to character creation, to scenic exactitude, to the sudden turns of phrase or ironic juxtapositions of insight that yield the intangible truth of fiction.

Accordingly, truth means nothing more dramatic, yet nothing less profound, than the accurate reflection of human experience, so that in the presence of a true story we might say, yes, this is how it feels, this is how it would happen, this is what one might think. I am claiming, as would the adherents of neo-thematism, that the fashions of anti-humanist postmodernism, or poststructuralism, though they have at times intrigued her, have never diverted Gordimer in any sustained way from the philosophical and stylistic assumptions of the great realist tradition. As I hope I have shown, such philosophical and stylistic

assumptions give us truth as the uncompromising, existential requirement that we encounter in both the early and the later Gordimer; in Gordimer the novelist and Gordimer the writer of short stories. The justification of such a technique is that it is cognitive in its social observation: it is a social psychology that is methodical in its capacity to test each insight according to an epistemology of doubt, scepticism and irony as a commitment to analytical awareness. Brooks sums up Gordimer's method:

Perhaps, as Freud suggests ... "We must be content ... with having clearly recognised the obscurity." Within this model of narrative, memory and desire, reader and text, analyst and analysand work together dialogically in an effort to create, in an age of suspicion, narratives that may achieve a provisional but crucial truth, allowing us for a while longer to make meaning in the world. (1994: 9)

It is through such a 'psychoanalytical' dimension that Gordimer rescues the individual in her fiction. What I am suggesting is that the sociological criticism of the last twenty years, which saw Gordimer as deserting liberalism for radicalism and, by implication, marginalising the individual destiny for the collective will of the people, should be reconsidered in the light of the various pointers of my study. We must reformulate the binary oppositions of private/public, or individual/type to a more dialectically inclusive model of social psychology, in which humanism may be revindicated in the analysis of awareness. At the same time, we must re-evaluate literature as crucially concerned with the individual life, even in the most pressing of social times.

It is a modification that necessitates a judicious use, in an age of 'deconstructive' suspicion, of a language of critical humanism. We must adopt, as does Gordimer, a

vocabulary which implies suspicion of bland universalisms of transcendence and individuality. Simultaneously, there is a need (as Gordimer realises) for the art of the writer, as artist, to be one of 'showing' rather than of 'telling' in her observations of insights into the individual psyche. She must reveal to us the 'determining' quality of the setting (the objective correlative) as well as the ironies and ambiguities of the free, indirect narrator: a means of revealing more to the reader than the character knows. She must use the form as a means of producing the sudden and often disturbing illuminations of character and conduct.

As my examination, particularly of the interracial story, "The Train from Rhodesia", and of the symbolically titled, "The Soft Voice of the Serpent", has suggested, such traits had already begun to manifest themselves in Gordimer's earliest work. My contention is that we should re-orientate ourselves to the personal within the public by stepping back at this point from Gordimer's novels and returning to her short stories: to the art of intricately attuned mental states, where the writer of fiction has least felt the obligation to make the national statement, or even predict the national outcome.

The subtle fusions of inner and outer landscapes that we encounter in several stories from this early volume anticipate what, in my view, are the unjustly neglected stories of Gordimer's 'middle period'. A representative sample of such stories – chosen by Gordimer herself – is to be found in *Selected Stories* (1975), in which Gordimer has become daring in her charting of elusive states of mind through the metaphor of the African social geography. The insistence of the event has not yet, as it will in *Jump*, moved the style towards the topicality of the newsroom. "Livingstone's Companions" – the title story of her 1972 volume – is characteristic of what I have in mind. Here the external detail is reminiscent of *The New*

Yorker formula (Gordimer had begun to publish in leading magazines abroad) of the cynical, world-weary (white) reporter in the newly independent African state. The meaning of the story, however, goes beyond the narration of events to reside in the implications of the scenic method.

In this almost plotless narrative, Carl Church, the reporter, is assigned to cover a story, gets stranded at a hotel beside a lake, swims, attempts to catch fish, and interacts with the hotel owner (a brash Rhodesian woman), her son (a garrulous hopeful with a guitar) and a peripatetic English girl 'waitressing' her way around the world. He perceives in the background the silent African barman and the sweating African hotel workers. On learning that somewhere in the vicinity of the hotel are the graves of Livingstone's companions, Church intersperses his observations of the present with reading extracts from David Livingstone's *Travels*, the Victorian justification of white Christianity and commerce among the heathen. Gordimer avoids the predictable dichotomy, however, between the past and present of white colonials who occupy African territory. Rather, the hybridity of the West and Africa is captured in the sardonic observations: Church's cynical eye is appropriate to Gordimer's ironic mode as he observes the new government of this one-party state resplendent in its long curly wigs, part of the "investiture of sovereignty handed down from the British" (1983a;1975: 346). At the same time, colonial superiority receives a stinging deflation in Church's observations of Mrs Palmer, the hotel owner, with her stridently clicking heels and domineering manner:

Madam – Lady Jane in person – had sent me down a boy to pick up bottle tops and cigarette stubs from the water's edge. She had high standards. (She had said so in the bar last night. "The trouble is, *they'll* never be any different,

they just don't know how to look after anything.") This was the enlightenment the explorers had brought the black man in the baggage he portered for them on his head. This one was singing to himself as he worked. If the plans that were being made in the capital got the backing of the World Bank and the U.N. Development Fund and all the rest of it, his life would change. Whatever happened to him, he would lose the standard that had been set by people who maintained it by using them to pick up their dirt. Church thought of the ruin (he'd forgotten to ask what it was) – Lady Jane's prefabricated concrete blocks and terrazzo would fall down more easily than that. (368-69)

Despite this, Mrs Palmer, the story makes clear, is a survivor in Africa. She regards the hotel as her home and she is more acute than she realises when she refers to the graves on her property as "her graves" (the title deeds are hers, left to her by her deceased husband). Church glimpses the graves briefly as he leaves the hotel for some other destination: "a yard or two away, but in line with the rest, was another gravestone ... *In Memory of Richard Alastair Macnab, Beloved Husband of Dorothy [Palmer]*" (377). As Church looks back at the lake to which even in two days he has attached memories, and up the lake – which stretches "as far as one could see, flat and shining; a long way up Africa" (377), what does not occur to him but has occurred to the reader are the bigotries, the bravados, and the vulnerabilities of all those who live there. Even the obnoxious Mrs Palmer unexpectedly reveals her own insecurity in her almost irrational panic about her son Dickie's "doing something silly" about a broken romance as he is not made of pioneering stock. The point is that Gordimer's concern, as well as her worry, is double-edged.

What suggests itself, but is never stated, is that Livingstone's single-minded companions are now complex and various, as well as registering the different purposes of

their groups in Africa. Their roots are to be found in Africa and the West, and Africa will define itself within its complicated history: a history which has even given roles, good and bad, to birds of passage like Church. The lake offers 'pure' interludes for fishing and contemplation; Africa, however, is not pure essence. Its landscapes are historicised, humanised and, hence, in need of interpretation. Who belongs to Africa? What might be the commitment of belonging? The questions are likely to retain currency in the South Africa of the 1990s. The answers, if there are answers, are unlikely to be clear-cut. Gordimer's art of integrity, it seems to me, will repay new reading projects in the spirit of the civil imaginary. This study has attempted to suggest a point of entry.

CONCLUSION

My method of selection and analysis – my ‘reading strategy’ – has argued that, though they were at times ignored in the shifts of political and critical discourse over the forty years of Gordimer’s writing career, certain constants in her work give coherence to her development as a writer of fiction. To draw again from the vocabulary of social psychology, I reiterate the point that Gordimer’s ‘humanism’ does not diminish her as a social witness. We may identify her integrity as a citizen and artist in the spirit of Fromm’s observation that modern humanity cannot disentangle itself from the two great discourses of the twentieth century, those of Freud and Marx:

Different as they were, they have in common an uncompromising will to liberate man, an equally uncompromising faith in truth as the instrument of liberation and the belief that the condition for this lies in man’s capacity to break the chain of illusion. (1989;1962: 25)

The truth-telling of fiction as a complex amalgam of the psychological and the social has guided this study. In the novels of overdetermined times, I have wanted, without dismissing the national frame, to focus on the intricate dramas of individual lives: the lives of the Rosa Burgers and the Ailas, who experience the world of political liberation as personal constriction even as their liberal or radical sensitivities will not permit their turning away from the burden of political necessity. In the novels written in the years after 1990 and back in the 1950s, I have emphasised not a ‘different’ Gordimer, but a Gordimer who, in freer spaces than those of monolithic Apartheid, has continued to resist any temptation to

spring her characters free of their societies as they pursue individual selfhood, however uncomfortable the journey.

It is difficult to know how the novelist of the national narrative will eventually be assessed against the recorder of Vera Stark's need to rebel against the expectations of family and friends, and even against the social obligations that intrude upon the core personality. Whatever the final verdict, it is likely to support Peck's comment, which I quoted earlier on, that the challenges of existence without the securities of habit, or even belief, are appropriate to the uncertain, but extremely challenging South Africa of the future.

The strategy has been to select certain novels and stories in terms of their own content, as well as for the guidance they might provide in any accentuation of the *individual* rather than the *typical* reading of Gordimer's *oeuvre*. Each chapter concludes, accordingly, with an application of principles and emphases to other works. The perspective on *Burger's Daughter*, for example, could have implications for a reading of *A Sport of Nature*, in which novels of the symbolic-political are re-read as novels of character in process. A recollection of Gordimer's initial interests as a writer of short stories could attune us to *psychological*, rather than to *sociological*, accents in other stories, especially in those that have tended to be overshadowed by the literature of emergency in the 1980s.

My return to the text does not reinstate textual 'autonomy', but acknowledges the activity of reception: texts may be 're-energised', or modified according to the terms of the reader's critical assumptions. The method might apply in some respects to South African fiction as a whole. In dislodging from its prime position what has become the dominant

convention of the national subject, we create not only a space for Gordimer's short stories, but for renewed attention to the short story as a prolific genre in South African writing. By encouraging a return to the lyrical, contemplative and symbolic dimensions of Gordimer's themes and forms, we are reminded, afresh, of the contribution to South African literature of Doris Lessing, Jack Cope, Dan Jacobson, Hennie Aucamp, Bessie Head and more recently, Ivan Vladislavič. In the same vein, the valuably corrective attention that in the 1980s was accorded to black writing, which produced astute appreciations of the *Drum* stories and the *Staffrider* material, should be extended in the 1990s to the story of implication, of which Gordimer remains a leading practitioner.

Similarly, by dislodging the novel as 'history from the inside' from its privileged position (it was such novels which surely earned Gordimer her Nobel Prize) we do not only encourage a re-reading of Gordimer beyond the liberal/ radical divide. We remind ourselves at the same time of other novelists whose work seems to contain the complex mental landscapes which invite discussion in a language of criticism sensitive to the humanist world of action in meditation. This language has tended to be rejected or at least side-lined in the ideology critique of the last decade. I am thinking here of the modernism of the early Sestigers, the allusiveness of Dan Jacobson's later fiction in *The Confessions of Josef Baisz* (1977), J. M. Coetzee's tangentially 'South African' settings in *Foe* (1986) and *The Master of Petersburg* (1994) and Karel Schoeman's exquisite registers of psychological responsiveness in novels such as *'n Ander Land* (1984; tr. *Another Country*, 1991) and *Afskeid en Vertrek* (1990; *Take Leave and Go*, 1992).

None of these novels may be adequately described, in Clingman's terms, as "history from the inside" (1986). Rather, the self, while buffeted by the social milieu, seeks awareness in the solitude of self-knowledge. Refracted through this critical lens, Nadine Gordimer remains true to her essential gesture.

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APPENDIX:
FICTIONAL WORKS BY NADINE GORDIMER IN
CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

1949. *Face to Face* Short stories.
1951. *The Soft Voice of the Serpent* Short Stories.
1953. *The Lying Days* Novel.
1956. *Six Feet of the Country* Short Stories.
1958. *A World of Strangers* Novel.
1960. *Friday's Footprint* Short stories.
1963. *Occasion for Loving* Novel.
1965. *Not for Publication* Short stories.
1966. *The Late Bourgeois World* Novel.
1970. *A Guest of Honour* Novel.
1971. *Livingstone's Companions* Short stories.
1974. *The Conservationist* Novel.
1975. *Selected Stories* Short stories.
1976. *Some Monday for Sure* Short stories.
1979. *Burger's Daughter* Novel.
1980. *A Soldier's Embrace* Short stories.
1980. *Town and Country Lovers* Short stories.
1981. *July's People* Novel.
1984. *Something Out There* Short stories.
1987. *A Sport of Nature* Novel.
1990. *My Son's Story* Novel.
1991. *Jump* Short stories.
1994. *None to Accompany Me* Novel.