CHAPTER IV

A Gender Study of the Novels of Nadine Gordimer

4.1. Gordimer and Feminism

Nadine Gordimer in her fiction has dealt with apartheid in South Africa and its resistance. Another major concern of Gordimer is sexual politics. According to Judie Newman, gender is a "conditioning factor" in Gordimer's fiction (17). Gordimer's exploration of sexuality draws the attention of the feminist critics. But she never identified herself as a feminist though she was sensitive to women's oppression. She has been consistently arguing that in South Africa the primary issue is racism and sexism is only a secondary one. An excerpt from her interview with Robert Boyers is cited below as a representative view:

> The white man and the white woman have much more in common than the white woman and the black woman, despite their difference in sex. Similarly, the black man and the black woman have much more in common than the black man and the white man (19).

Gordimer further observes that in the apartheid South Africa the colour of skin is the basis of "sisterhood or brotherhood of sex". Loyalty to one's sex is secondary to the loyalty to one's race. "That's why Women's Liberation is, I think, a farce in South Africa," says Gordimer (Interview with Robert Boyers 20). In her review of the biography of Olive Schreiner by Ruth First and Ann Scott, Gordimer repeated her conviction that racism is central and feminism is "marginal" in the struggle for South African liberation. To her, women's liberation is insignificant to fight against apartheid ideology. Gordimer's position is different from that of Simon de Beauvoir. In her consideration of the issues of national liberation and women's liberation, Beauvoir gives priority to women's liberation: "Later means never" (Gardner 173). Gordimer argues that in the given South African context sexual behaviour of the blacks is a result of the racist system.

However, this does not mean that Gordimer has not been concerned with oppression of women. Nor does it completely invalidate the argument that racism may

result from sexism. The fact of the matter is that in the given socio-political condition, Gordimer has given priority to racism. She has been aware that women comprise a "disadvantage working group" and are in a subordinate position (Driver 33). Gordimer states in the Introduction to *Selected Stories* (*SS*) that "all writers are androgynous beings" (3). She knows what Kate Millett explains in her influential book, *Sexual Politics* (1971) that many writers do not attempt to be androgynous. In this connection, Dorothy Driver observes that Gordimer intends to be androgynous to make up for the South African society which is not so (33). Throughout her fiction she has shown her interest in women's subordinate position and in her interview with Gray she admits that she has become "much more radical" both as a women and as a citizen. This may imply the feminist strain in her works. Judie Newman even observes that Gordimer is "doubly marginalized in South Africa, as a white and as a woman" (17). She has been aware of the complex relation between racism and sexism. In fact, she has analysed the socio-political issues in her fiction through her own "brand of micropolitics or politics of the body" (Head 19). The personal often merges with the public in the kind of body politics as found in the fiction of Gordimer.

4.2 Gordimer's Novels

The early novels of Gordimer examine the adequacy of the liberals in the apartheid South Africa. And while examining it, she does not ignore the politics of the body. The first novel, *The Lying Days* (*LD*) deals with Helen Shaw's search for her social identity. The novel outlines the development of the consciousness of Shaw, including her awakening to bodily consciousness. Early in the novel, Helen refuses to accompany her parents and leaves for the concession stores. She finds a white boy moving about the 'mine boys'. She notices the white boy entering the stores while she remains an outsider. She experiences there a different social environment. However, when she notices a mine boy urinating in the open, she runs back to towards her home. Judie Newman comments that this episode shows how a white girl is "excluded" from the African world as well as the male world (18). In that culturally different situation, she registers her reaction bodily. As she moves through holding her "buttocks stiffly together", she realises that her eyes cannot take in everything around her surrounding

(*LD* 10). This action of holding her buttocks stiffly together and walking back may be called a protective response of Helen to something which is frightening and also desiring. She also feels within herself to suppress a giggle or a kind of excitement. It may be noted that Gordimer has several times in the novel associated laughter with repression or fear. Thus, Helen's physical attraction and her early responses to Ludi Koch are marked by laughter, before they have kissed each other for the first time. As the episode shows, Helen's sexual awakening occurs with Ludi Koch. Another detail given early in the novel is also significant. There is an unwritten law in the apartheid South Africa that little girls should never be left alone because of the 'native' boys: "a little girl must not be left alone because there were native boys about" (*LD* 4). This fear of the black sexuality is a collective fear inculcated into the young minds of the white community.

Through Paul –Helen episode Gordimer explores the connection between sexuality and politics. According to Dominic Head, Gordimer gives the hint of a dichotomy of mind and body in a conversation between Helen and Ian Petrie, a fellow train passenger (40). Petrie tells Helen that his marriage is devoid of intellectual equality. It is based completely on "physical intelligence". Petrie further tells, '"–It's very important. I enjoy making love to her and I enjoy playing games with her"' (*LD* 101). The intellectual and physical dualism characterizes Helen's two important relationships: her affair with Paul Clark, which is based on physical intimacy and which eventually fails, and her platonic friendship with Joel Aaron. Leaving the Mercuses, Helen lives with Paul. But their relationship starts declining when she begins to doubt their political complicity. They gradually lose their common ground. Helen notices a change in Paul resulting from the burden of his work at the government Welfare Department connected with the housing problems of the South African blacks. Paul realises that his work comprises his political activities –mixing with African nationalists at night and carrying the government's orders which they (the nationalists) protest during day. Helen and Paul's relationship fails day by day just as Paul gradually feels the impossibility of his work. Helen wonders how the "difficulties of this work, affecting him, throw our relationship out of balance" (300). She wanted to live with him "in the greatest possible intimacy" (*LD* 253) and refused to belong to the company of women. But Paul has shown signs that he prefers a different world of gender relations. When Helen is trying with an essay on George Eliot, Paul belittles her, asking what is

confusing her "little brain"(*LD* 242). This remark of Paul betrays his prejudice toward a woman. He attempts to cheer her up sharing an amusing incident of a black man who rejects his wife because she is "a damned ugly woman" (*LD* 243). This clearly exposes the hypocrisy of Paul. On the one hand he engages with the liberal activities of the Welfare Department, on the other hand he takes delight at the action of the black man only to denigrate the female. One evening, when the meal was late, Paul complains, "Helen, you're becoming a rotten wife" (*LD* 290). And with this reaction of Paul, as pointed out by Judie Newman, Helen realises that "her flight from conventional sexual paradigms has merely brought her full circle" (20). Now she cooks a "man's breakfast" and keeps her "mouth shut" (*LD* 320). When they both worked, they snatched their breakfast together. But now she stood about while Paul "sat down and ate; plenty of time for me to breakfast" (*LD* 320). In her book, *Sexual Politics* (1970), Kate Millett argues that the relationship between men and women is governed by a power structure which has political implications. "All aspects of society and culture functioned according to a sexual politics that encouraged women to internalize their own inferiority until it became psychologically rooted"(Tolan 326). This sexual politics is also visible in the narration of the riot that Helen witnesses. She is horrified when she saw the shooting of a black man in the riot. "Everyone fears fear; but horror –that belongs to second-hand experience, through books and films," reacts Helen (*LD* 333). But Paul makes little of this real experience of Helen and calls it "Helen's adventure at the barricades" (*LD* 334). Later Helen along with her companion Laurie is invited to a gathering to get first hand account of the incident. And soon Helen recognizes that the incident was described, "the tale was told" by Laurie who "developed quite a technique in the telling" (*LD* 334). In the narration, Helen is marginalized. Her experience is appropriated and narrated by the male. She can see through the technique of Laurie –how at different points of the narrative he pauses, drops his voice and places his emphasis. Ultimately it turns out that "it was his technique only that I heard" (*LD* 334) and that she was never present there. Judie Newman observes that this episode makes two points clear. First, it shows the technique of men through which they "select and appropriate the significance of female experience, exercising male proxy over a woman's story" (21). Secondly, as argued by Newman, the episode suggests the need for a form of narrative which can capture the horror of black experience.

The affair between Paul and Helen fails. But the 1948 victory of the Nationalist Party makes way for the Mixed Marriages Act of 1949. Gordimer has shown how the Nationalist government used this act to intrude upon the private life of the South Africans. One day Paul narrated to Helen an incident of how the police torches suddenly flashed on the faces of a mixed –races couple in the bed at night, who were subsequently arrested. She is haunted by the memory of this incident. Once she awakes to car headlights in the bedroom and springs back from Paul. However, Gordimer wants to convey that even the private world of intimacy is invaded by patriarchy and racism as well.

Gordimer's second novel, *A World of Strangers* (*WS*) deals with Toby Hood's attempts to explore the life in the black townships and the high society of the whites while remaining neutral to both the worlds. Though the novel shows some change in his views, it also examines limitations of his liberal values vis a vis apartheid regime. Gordimer seems to be critical about his attitudes, particularly his attitude to women. He considers women as objects of desire or pleasure. They cannot be equal partners. Toby has seen racism in his office, when his office worker, Miss McCann quits her job after noticing Toby, a white having lunch with the two black men, Steven and Dick Chaputra. He could have shared his feelings of anger and confusion with his lover, Cecil Rowe. Instead he finds in his lover a source of distraction. He thinks that he had "an Eastern equation of women with pleasure; I fiercely resisted any impingement on this preserve" (*WS* 150). Thus, Toby reduces women to objects of personal pleasure. For Toby, comments Dominic Head, this reduction is a 'preserve' which he 'fiercely' wants to protect. And this metaphor establishes a link between an individual male desire and the institutionalized male desire of the state, which also employs a sanctioned violence, a 'fierceness' to establish 'preserves' for whites" (Head 50). Once while making love with Cecil, he insisted that the light must be left on: "She argued about the light, but I wanted to see her face, to know what she was feeling. (Who knows what women feel, in their queer, gratuitous moment?) Gordimer seems to represent here the female sexuality as the 'other' for Toby. Later, when he along with Steven visits the club run by Indians, Toby sees a girl with face and body of the most tender grace and beauty (*WS* 191). And after witnessing the singing of this girl, he reacts that she was a "creature" made to "please" (*WS* 192). This clearly reflects the colonial mind of Toby. Even the liberal Toby, who

can have friendship with the black, treats the colonial women as creatures or as objects because of sexual difference. Analyzing Gilman, Ania Loomba states that "racial as well as sexual 'others' derive from 'the same deep structure'" (137). However, Toby again expresses such an attitude when he dismisses the thought of his marriage. He tells Cecil that for him "the exoticism of women still lay in beauty and self-absorbed femininity, I would choose an houri rather than a companion" (*WS* 261). This view of Toby confirms his reaction to the Indian girl in the club. In the words of Head, in both instances "there is an evident commodification and reduction of woman to an exotic other for personal use; this is precisely the way in which the forces of colonial imperialism view the potential of exotic 'other' places and populations" (51). Earlier in the novel he says that he wants to see people who interest him –black, white, or any colour. As Gordimer makes him realise that politics intrudes every kind of relationship in South Africa. He does not even act upon the suggestion given by his friend, Steven to "interest him [self] in a nice African girl yet." He acknowledges the fact that he had not yet been attracted by any African woman (*WS* 215).

Toby's relationship with Anna Louw has been very brief but significant. This brief relationship also involves a sexual encounter between Toby and Anna. But this time his sexual advances are governed by his fear: "I put out my hand and touched, with the touch of fear, the thing I fled from." And when he makes love to her, he feels that "pleasure came to me as if wrung from my grasp" (*WS* 184). It appears that the motif behind Toby's sexual act is the need to control the object of fear –the fear of the other.

Gordimer has combined the racial and sexual themes more explicitly in the novel, *Occasion for Loving* (*OL*). The cross-racial relationship between the black painter, Gideon Shibalo and the young white woman Ann Davis constitutes the major action of the novel. Boaz Davis, researcher of the musical heritage of the black Africans comes to South Africa along with his wife Ann and stays with Tom and Jessie Stilwell. Brilliant dancer, Ann falls in love with Gideon, defying the colour bar prevalent in the apartheid South Africa. She visits different places like Lucky Star and mixes with people across colours or races. When she moves to Western Transvaal with Gideon, she becomes aware of Gideon as a black first, and as a man second. And she and Boaz finally leave South Africa without telling a single word to Gideon. Their love affair fails because of the racist ideology that they have internalized. As Clingman has observed, their

relationship fails because the repressions of apartheid have been "psychologically inscribed" or because of the "prestructuring effects" of apartheid (82). When Gideon informs about the failure of their affair, she suddenly discovers the prestructuring effects of apartheid on her mind though she thought it was settled "once and for all, long ago" (*OL* 290). While talking to Gideon, she suddenly discovers her childhood fear as emanating from "the black man" that she must never be left alone with in their house. In her early life she used feel at night that someone was following her from behind. She was told that she must not be alone in the house with a black man. But nobody explained to her the reason. She remembers how she used to feel apprehensive at night that someone was following her in the dark passage when she went to the bathroom. She would ask,

> Who was it, do you think? And how many more little white girls are there for whom the very first man was a black man? The very first man, the man of the sex fantasies . . . (*OL* 290).

Jessie had forgotten or left it behind but when she sees Ann Gideon falling out "one suddenly needs to feel one's way back" (*OL* 290). Jessie's reaction here echoes Helen's reference to the unwritten law or the fear of the black sexuality in *The Lying Days*. White women like Helen and Jessie are taught to fear or treat the black as the other. In her Article, "Othering the Self: Nadine Gordimer's Colonial Heroines", Robin Visel observes that the colonial woman goes through a conflict between her sex and her colour and that Gordimer's white African women exemplify this conflict. As seen in the fiction of Gordimer, these women are alienated –both intellectually and emotionally –from the white minority society. At the same time, they cannot physically identify with the black (33). When Ann finally leaves for England, Jessie is angry with her not because of her physical relation with Gideon but because of betrayal of a black, or, for that matter, betrayal of African life. In fact, she attempts to rebel what Visel calls, against "the patriarchal order as she struggles to define herself in a hostile environment," and as a result she discovers "the connections between patriarchy and racism under colonialism" (33). Ann's sudden departure hurts Jessie as much as it does Gideon. It makes her wonder how a white can fall in love with a person of another race (black) and at the same time destroy him, and "escape back into your filthy damn whiteness" (*OL* 312). This appalling state of mind of Jessie can be described as her "unhomely" moment (Bhabha 15). In a conversation with her husband, she expresses her anxiety and fear more clearly.

However, as Robin Visel points out in the article mentioned above, Gordimer does not allow her white women to "claim innocence" (34) because she cannot disinherit her "privilege and guilt" (33). Visel admits that the white woman cannot shoulder her "responsibility" because of "the social and political conditions of apartheid" (34). In her oppression she turns out to be a self-divided figure and a site of rapprochement. In the words of Visel,

> Furthermore, she is increasingly cut off from blackness, both by government decree and the rising hostility of her black brothers and sisters . . . the ambiguous, self-divided figure of the white girl or woman is the site of the hesitant, fraught rapprochement of white and black. She is the site of connection, while she is made to realize the impossibility of connection (35).

The character and situation of Jessie best illustrate the points made in the above passage. After his disastrous love affair, Jessie sees Gideon heavily drunk in a party. When she approaches him and tries to speak to him, only to be told: "White bitch –get away" (*OL* 331). As Jessie becomes aware of her whiteness so does Gideon of his blackness. It may be noted that in the 1960s the African National Congress forms its armed wings and the resistance movement gradually turns violent, and the blacks begin thinking that they must fight their battle on their own. Hence the gap between the liberal whites and the black widens. However, Gideon's words once again open her mind to the sufferings of the blacks as much as the incident reminds her whiteness. She becomes a site of rapprochement or connection between the races though she understands the difficulty it involves. Even after the final confrontation, she continues to meet Gideon in friends' home or in the Lucky Star where white and black people mix. Gordimer seems to explore sexuality or politics of the body as a point of transgression between races and thereby provide borderline situation that may give rise to new ideas or new cultures.

Gordimer has explored the theme of sexual politics through the attitudes of Gideon as well. His treatment of his wife, Clara is highly questionable. When Gideon was supposed to go abroad on a scholarship, his wife went to Bloemfontein to live with her mother and sister. After a lengthy process, he was refused passport and he could not go abroad. Gideon spent months and years jobless and drunk, and never thought of going

to or bringing back Clara. “He and she lost sight of one another” (*OL* 197). When Sandile, Clara’s brother told him that she wanted to go to him, he replies, “It’s not possible” (195). Though he found it difficult to admit, there was nothing to talk about the woman who had been his wife and given birth to a child. The responsibility of his child had been born by Sandile for some time because the latter owed him money. So Gideon’s carelessness about his past relationship reflects his irresponsibility towards woman. His relationship with Ida also reveals the problem of female oppression within the black people. Chapter nine of the novel narrates how Gideon has been living with Ida in a casual manner. Ida, a nurse understands that he is not committed enough to her to make them a couple though she does washing and chores for him. This imbalance of commitment often results in an oppression of women in the black community, who has little voice in the social and domestic life. At the end of the novel, Gideon appears drunken at a party with a nurse, probably Ida. But, as Head observes, she has now become an “anonymous background” of the action as well as to Gideon (68). His relationship with his wife and Ida points to issue of hierarchy of oppression in the South Africa of the time. The almost non-visibility of Ida or Clara may be seen as act of silencing the female.

The theme of problematic sexual politics is also seen in Gordimer’s short story, “Good Climate, Friendly Inhabitants”, first published in 1965 and later included in the collection titled *Selected Stories* (*SS*). The story is concerned with a white woman’s relationship with a mysterious white man and a black called Jack, a petrol attendant at a petrol station or garage in Johannesburg. As the story opens the woman declares herself as a very fair skinned lady. But her claim is also coloured with anxieties of her age: “I’m forty-nine but I could be twenty-five except for my face and my legs. I’ve got that *very fair skin* and *my legs have gone mottled*, like Roquefort cheese” (emphasis added, *SS* 263). Thus she introduces herself through her physical appearance without naming herself. Another important idea that makes clear in the beginning of narrative is the power-relation between the white and the black. She often moves about in front of the garage to keep “an eye on the boys”, that is, the black attendants in the garage. She is not worried about the mechanics who are white but she is rather worried about the petrol attendants who are black South Africans. “On the whole they’re not a bad lot of natives, though you get a cheeky bastard now and then, or a thief, but he does not last long *with*

us" (emphasis added, *SS* 263). The power-relation is structured in terms of 'us' and 'them'. She keeps surveillance over the petrol attendants but not over the mechanics because they are "all white chaps". She refers to the black men as 'boys' and she is addressed as 'missus', which assures her power and superiority. She nevertheless acknowledges that the 'boy', Jack is smarter and even tries to establish a kind friendship with him. The real reason why she finds Jack reliable is that he is comparatively 'white' than others. He is familiar to them also because of his European name, Jack which is different from his original African name. The woman finds it confusing when his people address him by different names. She often receives phone calls from the natives asking for speaking to Mpanza and Makiwane. When she tells them there is no one with that name, they will ask for Jack. This irritates the woman and so one day she asks him why they have hundred and one names and why his relatives do not ask for Jack straight way without wasting her time. To this Jack replies,

> 'Here I'm Jack because Mpanza Makiwane is not a name, and there I'm Mpanza Makiwane because Jack is not a name, but I'm the only one who knows who I am wherever I am.' I couldn't help laughing (*SS* 265).

The practice of re-naming the 'natives' may be described as what postcolonial theorists call "epistemic violence" (Spivak 31). Gayatri Spivak argues that the west always defines the rest of the world using its own concepts and definitions, and thereby constitutes the colonial subjects as the 'other'. The woman refuses to acknowledge Jack's original name in order to retain her superiority and her authority.

The more important aspect of the story in connection with the present study is the woman's relationship with a young man who appears at the garage. The man one day comes to the petrol station and refills petrol in his car and wants to pay in Rhodesian money. When Jack takes him to his 'missus', that is, the woman, the man claims he has come from Rhodesia and requests the woman for her help in finding a place to exchange money. The woman immediately reflects upon the attractive young man and the way she must appear in his eyes. She notices that he was young and that his "hair was streaky blond kind" (*SS* 266). When the man addresses her as "Miss", she reflects "Well, I'd had my hair done, it's true, but I don't kid myself you could think of me as a miss unless you saw my figure, from behind (*SS* 266). This reflection is also tinged with anxieties of her

physical appearance. However, the relationship that begins dramatically continues to deepen and even becomes sexual in nature. And the relationship becomes disturbing for the woman. After the first night together, he tells her that he might stay in her room since she is at work all day. He even leaves his hotel room without paying for it. She finds herself in a difficult situation. She thinks that she has no choice but to accommodate him. On the other hand, she is not comfortable in his presence. Perhaps, she is haunted by a conflict between her fear of the man and the thought of social insecurity. She is worried about herself. She is anxious about her future when she will be unable to work. She is afraid that she will be alone and nobody will visit her. "Every Sunday you read in the paper about woman dead alone in flats, no one discovers it for days" (*SS* 272). So her insecurity and loneliness derive her to desire for the clean, good-looking man though there is a growing fear for the strange man. She allows him to stay with her in order to win him. And the man manipulates her desire very effectively. This is what a man does in a patriarchal society. Karen Lazar describes him as "an incarnation of the exploitation of women" (219). She argues that "sexual violence is an enactment of generic power over and control of women by men" and that the relationship of the woman is a combination of need and fear that go to make the "domestic trap which so many battered women cannot escape" (219). However, besides threat of sexual violence, the woman also faces political violence to some extent. The man appears to be a mercenary who is involved in the recent conflicts in Africa, fighting with the revolutionaries to bring down the white minority rule. He tells the woman how he was in the Congo a few years ago, "fighting for that native chief, what's-name –Tshombe –against the Irishmen who were sent out here to put old what's-name down" (*SS* 268).

On the other hand, alone and scared the woman cannot but confide in the 'boy', Jack. Despite prejudice of racial superiority, she develops certain relationship with the petrol attendant. Though she maintains some distance with him because "he [Jack] mustn't get too free with a white person" (*SS* 274), she comes to share news about the stranger, the young man with Jack. One day he tells the woman how he sends away the young man, informing him, falsely though, that she has left the petrol station for Rhodesia. Thus Jack, the black shows some compassion toward the white woman and frees her from the fear of the unwelcome visitor, the intruder. But once she is free from her fear, the old racial prejudice overcomes her. Jack's kindness is repaid with insult. She

starts thinking that Jack wants to present himself as an educated man. And, she assumes, "if you take any notice of things like that with them, you begin to give them big ideas about themselves" (*SS* 275). So Lazar observes that it is a perverse twist of blame in which Jack loses his particularity in the eyes of the woman and "becomes one of the 'natives' whom a woman on her own 'can't trust at night'" (220). Gordimer seems to suggest that private life in South Africa is affected by politics as well as sexual relations between individuals and also between races. All in all, the story nicely illustrates the complexity of the issue of race and gender in the society of apartheid South Africa.

The atmosphere of fear also runs through the story, "Is There Nowhere Else Where We Can Meet?" which Gordimer places at the beginning of her collection of short stories, *Selected Stories*. While describing the conflict between the white and the black in the South African society, the narrative also captures the psychological effects on a young white woman of her encounter with a black man. The story tells how a black man suddenly confronts a white woman and steals her parcel and handbag. This has been a shattering experience for the woman. Her loss of calmness is reflected in Gordimer's description of the veld. The opening of the story reflects natural harmony: "It was cool grey morning and the air was like smoke. In that reversal of the elements that sometimes takes place, the grey, soft, muffled sky moved like the sea on a silent day" (*SS* 9). Here the description of a natural scene shows a Lawrentian quality and establishes an "intimacy between the mental state of the character and her surrounding world" (Trump 345). After the attack of the black man, the white woman is frightened. She loses her calmness and so does the nature around her. The familiar world turns out to be cruel to her. She began running, stumbling against the stalks of dead grass and turning over her heels against the winter tussocks. With dust in her eyes, she somehow reaches a fence on the other side of a ditch and then road. She attempts to climbs over the fence though her hands became numb. She has to struggle with the wires of the fence because

> . . . her coat got caught on a barb, and she was imprisoned there, bent in half, while *the waves of terror swept over her in the heat and trembling*. At last the wire tore through its hold on the cloth; wobbling, frantic, she climbed over the fence" (emphasis added, *SS* 11-12).

When the woman reaches the suburban area, she should have a feeling of relief. Instead she is enveloped with a profound sense of loneliness and uncertainty. In the final lines of the story Gordimer excellently conveys the effects of the attack on the woman. It has maimed and crippled her. As she reaches the first house of the white suburban area, the thought of the fight suddenly comes to her mind. She thinks why she fights and why she does not give him the money, etc. The figure of the black with his red eyes, smell and cracks in his feet flashes in mind. "She shuddered. The cold of the morning flowed into her" (*SS* 12). And she went down the road slowly like an invalid person.

Martin Trump in his essay, "The Short Fiction of Nadine Gordimer" suggests that in the story, "Is There Nowhere Else Where We Can Meet?" both the poor black man and the white young woman are victims. Gordimer offers an intriguing perception of the encounter between the two characters, "namely, that the black man and the woman are together victims of the society in which they live" (Trump 347). The sexual, psychological and political implications of this story set the tone for the collection, *Selected Stories*. Hence, perhaps, Gordimer has placed this short piece at the beginning of the anthology.

Trump contends that men often dominate or rule over women through silence. They maintain their dominance by "wholly or partly silencing the views and suggestions" of their female partner (353). Trump corroborates his argument through an excellent analysis of Gordimer's story, "Something for the Time Being". The story centres around two couples: one white South African couple and the other a black one living in the township. The opening part of the narratives depicts the marital relationship between the blacks –Daniel and Mngoma. Gordimer has very skilfully captured the 'silence' that exists between the two. The novelist has effectively emphasized the silence and the uneasy condition that it leads to:

> "He thought of it as discussing with her, but the truth was that she did not help him out at all. She said nothing, while she ran her hand up the ridge of bone behind the rim of her child-sized yellow-brown ear . . . Yet her listening was very demanding; when he stopped at the end of a supposition or a suggestion, her silence made the stop inconclusive. He had to take up again what he had said, carry it –where" (SS 205)?

Ella does not respond to Daniel because she is hardly given any opportunity to talk. Their married life has been solely governed by what Daniel thinks or does. She has no role to play or to pass any opinion in their life. And even when she says something, as the last part of the story shows, she is cowed down by him. As the story begins, he tells her how he has been arrested several times and sent to jail because of his political activities and how this time he is dismissed from his job. So he plans to go to Flora Donaldson, a white woman who helps the political prisoners. All the time Daniel speaks, Ella remains silent and shows no reaction. But Gordimer has conveyed Ella's thoughts through the third-person narrative. She (Ella) is deeply concerned with the fact that her husband is jobless now and that poverty stares at them. She suddenly realises that all the things that she knew deserted her. She had lost her wits. She fell back to her old habit and nervously began to scratch the skin on her neck. Through her characterisation Gordimer has portrayed her as a wife who is cowed down by her husband. She has achieved it through her description of Ella and through her prolonged silence. When in the final scene of the story she attempts to say something, Daniel reacts angrily to silence her. Ella asks him about his new job at the workshop of Wlliam Chadders. He tells her that his employer has asked him not to wear the ANC badge at the workshop. And he suggests that he is again going to lose the job as he will not stop wearing the badge. This makes her deeply worried. She cherishes the hope that Daniel somehow retains the job. But she cannot express her thought as they do not enjoy a relationship on equal terms. So she keeps looking at him as he talks about his job, and finally her eyes are filled with tears. She tries to speak and not to cry. Gordimer has captured her fear and agony in the following conversation between the husband and wife:

> The idea of tears exasperated him and he held her with a firm almost belligerently inquiring gaze. Her hand went up round the back of her neck under her collar, anxiously exploratory. "Don't do that!" he said. "You're like monkey catching lice."
>
> . . . She began to breathe hysterically. "You couldn't put it in your packet, for the day, she said wildly, grimacing at the bitterness of the malice towards him (*SS* 215-16).

Ella has been living with him through thick and thin, and shouldering the responsibility of running the family even in his absence. But she turns out to be a 'monkey' in his eyes. On hearing him calling her monkey, she breaks into trembling and asks him if he couldn't put the ANC badge in his pocket during the day and thus saved his job. But the moment she questions him, he shouts angrily and 'silences' her. He jumps from the table and bursts out: "'Christ I knew you would say it! I've been waiting for you to say it. You've been wanting to say it for five years"(*SS* 216). Gordimer has described the incident so vividly and effectively. Daniel reacts verbally but he reacts in such a way as if it were a physical attack on Ella. She begins to weep as she has no other option. He calms down a little bit and finally speaks to her in a kindly voice: "'Don't cry. Don't cry. You're just like any other woman'" (*SS* 216). If Ella is like any other woman, he is like all men who maintain and control their rule or dominance over women through fear. They always treat the female as the voiceless other and when they try to raise a little voice it is silenced through different tactics.

On the other hand, the relationship between William and Madge is characterised by a kind of openness. But there is difference between the two in terms of their attitude to life in South Africa. Giving an account of the two, Gordimer says that William had no black friends before he married Madge. But he considers racial prejudice as completely absurd and immoral. Madge has friends both blacks and whites. And she does not feel only; she always "did something, at once, to express what she felt" (*SS* 208). When William objects to Daniel's wearing the ANC badge at the workshop, Madge challenges it and thereby puts his position in question. She wonders that how a man who appears to hold liberal political views can occupy a place in a factory which is intolerant of any form of liberal gesture. She questions how he can give him the job because he is sympathetic to him but he allows him to wear the Congress badge. Madge has touched upon the worst inconsistency in the life of William and, by extension, in the life of many whites. However, Madge's question leads to a dispute between them and they lose the easy relation they enjoyed earlier. Gordimer has captured their thought in a passage describing how they stood in close proximity in a bathroom:

> "They were at once aware of each other as people who live in intimacy are only when hostility returns each to the confines of himself. He felt himself naked before her, where he had stepped out on to the toweling

> mat, and he took a towel slowly covered himself, pushing the free end in round his waist. She felt herself *an intrusion and, in silence*, went out" (emphasis added, *SS* 214).

So ultimately "silence" intrudes in their relationship. With her understanding of the real attitude of Williams, comes between them a silence. Madge tells him that she is not angry. She is rather beginning to know him (*SS* 214). Commenting on this story, Trump observes that the political issues have brought division between two couples. Gordimer has successfully created a situation in which "she can examine not simply ideas about political commitment but can focus upon forces which hold people together and break them from one another in the most intimate of personal relationships" (Trump 356).

If Gordimer lays bare the hypocrisy or inconsistency of William, she represents Mehring in *The Conservationist* (*CN*) as one who exploits land as well as woman in guise of a conservationist. Like Toby Hood, Mehring considers woman as an object of pleasure. So he told his son, "what's the reason we go after them –she was pretty. She had a smashing figure" (*CN* 83). He confesses to his mistress, Antonia that he takes "special pleasure" in buying a woman and she characterises his behaviour as "sexual fascism" (*CN* 83, 117). Dorothy Driver observes that Gordimer suggests through Mehring's relationship with Antonia "another 'special pleasure' that males feel, and thus power into sex, and by implication, sex into power" (40). Mehring also shows impulses of sexual exploitation in his frequent erotic imaginings about young girls and women – such as his desire for the young daughter of a dinner hostess. In postcolonial discourse, woman is often seen as a symbol of land to indicate the control or ownership. A significant and relevant scene of this kind is the one which occurs in one of Mehring's business flights when he molests a young girl seating next to him in the plane. His sexuality, his predation for young girls and exploitation of land are all combined in this scene. The scene may be interpreted as Mehring's sexual colonialism. Here in this scene landscape merges in Mehring's mind with the body of the young girl as object of sexual desire. It is significant that the girl does not speak throughout the journey while Mehring keeps 'fingering' her body beneath her blanket. Here the body of the girl becomes the land as he explores it, comparing its flesh to water in desert beneath the plane and exploring the ridges of her anatomy (Newman 60). Another important scene occurs in the end of the novel. The final monologue of Mehring again situates him in a landscape

that unites the themes of the novel. While returning in his car from the farm, a woman, a hitchhiker signals for a lift. He thinks "No, no" but nevertheless lets her into the car (*Con* 304). The woman takes him through a landscape. In fact, he feels that he is lured away by the woman or that he is going to be entrapped into a cross-racial relationship. As he is about to possess the woman, he suddenly becomes aware of the legs of a male in the background. So, being afraid, he leaves and runs:

> "He's going to run, run and leave them to rape her and rob her. She'll be all right. They survive everything. *Coloured or poor-white*, whichever she is, their brothers or fathers take their virginity good and early" (emphasis added, *CN* 319).

Mehring is not sure if the girl is an Afrikaner or Portuguese. He even thinks that the girl may be a black. Whoever she may be, Newman observes, as a woman she stands for all the women of the book (65). Mehring abandons the woman and his abandonment implies how he makes difference between himself and coloured and poor-whites. This difference is class, racial and sexual. The difference reflects the difference of Mehring's psyche and, by implication, of the colonist.

Observing Gordimer's treatment of sexuality in her novels, Clingman notes that in *The Laying Days*, Helen discovered sexuality as a matter of joy, and in *Occasion for Loving*, sexuality was subjected to political power. From *The Late Bourgeois World* (*LBW*) onward "sexuality is becoming politicized" (Clingman 105). In this novel, Gordimer has portrayed Elisabeth as an intelligent woman as against Max, a man who has been carried away by his own estimation of his role as a historical saviour. She tells their son, Bobo that Max fails miserably or commits suicide because he is not equal to the demands that he has made upon himself. By the end of the novel, Elisabeth, as intelligent she is, rejects the late bourgeois world and engages with its material realities. And in doing so, she transforms them. Luke Fukase, a member of the underground Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) asks her to use her power of attorney over the bank account of her grandmother. She almost agrees to use her grandmother's bank account to transfer money for the banned organization, PAC. That is to say, she plans to use an old woman's property for underground activities. This may be considered as an attack on the bourgeois morality. The bank is a basic institution of the capitalist world. Her plan is

now to use it as an instrument of revolutionary politics, and thus her plan also involves a material transformation. More importantly, Elisabeth knows that probably Luke will also make love to her. She anticipates that it is quite possible "he'll make love to me, next time or some time. That's part of the bargain . . ." (*LBW* 142). She is prepared to accept his offer because, she thinks, he has only this to offer her. Elisabeth recognizes him as her Orpheus who has come to take "pale Eurydice" from her "life insured Shades" (*LBW* 133). However, by accepting his offer, each of them will be given what she or he has. This will be a new kind of equality. Through this episode, Gordimer seems to suggest that a kind of sexual politics with specific bearings on South Africa seems to be emerging. As Clingman points out,

> In a white-male-dominated culture . . . it has very frequently been women (both black and white) who have been amongst the most courageous opponents of apartheid or, as in Gordimer's own case, the most uncompromising witnesses of its social effects (105).

Gordimer suggests the emergence of a new female whose political awakening is perceived in sexual terms. Elisabeth feels that the thought of her senile grandmother's bank account grows "like sexual tumescence" within herself (*LBW* 130). In her next novels like *Berger's Daughter* or *My Son's Story*, Gordimer delineates women who become more engaged with politics, suggesting politics transforms sexuality.

In her essay, "Still Waiting for the Great Feminist Novel", Susan Gardner contends that *Burger's Daughter* (*BD*) is an "inspirational novel for feminist readers" and the particular interest for them is "the heroine's [Rosa Burger's] attempt to differentiate herself from her patriarchal identity "Burger's daughter"" (170). Rosa rebels against her father, another rebel to assert her identity. Both her parents, Lionel Burger and Cathy Burger, have fought against the oppression of the apartheid regime and finally died in the prison. As a daughter of a political revolutionary, she had few exclusive rights with her parents. Her likes and dislikes, even her intimate relationships are subordinated to political struggle. Thus she is desexualized. She maintains the image of a faithful daughter, at least in the eyes of the faithful, the comrades of her parents. In the opening scene, she is described as having "taken on her mother's role in the household" and "giving loving support" to her father, when her mother is imprisoned (*BD* 6). When Noel

de Witt is in jail, she has to pose as a fiancée of him. This is planned in order to enabled Noel receive visits and information in the jail as he had no relatives. Scented and dressed that emphasized her femaleness with their sexual ambiguity, she visits the prison and exchanges her loving prison letters (*BD* 62). She presents herself as sexual object in the prison, "conveying a political subtext" beneath the lovey-dovey phrases (Newman 75). Thus Gordimer politicizes sex. However, Rosa is really in love with Noel. But her parents are blind to see her real emotions or, at least, do not want see it. They are happy to see her just play the surrogate sexual role, which denies her emotions and confines her sexuality within the walls of the prison. This episode shows how the children of the Burger household have to sacrifice their personal emotions and even their individuality. So, after the death of her father she intends to defect from the revolutionary tradition of her parents and assert her identity. Her quest for identity leads her through a series of events: she first lives with her lover Conrad, and then leaves South Africa for Paris to live with her father's first wife Katya and finally returns to South Africa.

Judie Newman argues that Rosa's revolt against the ideology of her father is connected with "sexual assertion" and this is seen in the scene with Clare Terblanche, the daughter of Dick and Ivy (76). Dick and Ivy are her father's comrades and have been even surrogate parents to her. She has felt great happiness in "the enveloping acceptance of Ivy's motherly arms" *(BD* 111). Clare lives with her parents and she devotes her life to their cause as she has been taught. In other words, she has lost her sexual identity. So, she appears at Rosa's door as a shadow which had no identity, seen through a glass panel. Rosa considers that Clare is still her childish playmate, who is sturdy as a teddy-bear and suffers from eczema. But now they argue about their ideological patrimony – about the use of a chamber in a building. Rosa triumphs over Clare and it is symbolised by her sexual appeal to men. She (Rosa) is beautiful and she has a "body with the assurance of embraces, as cultivated intelligence forms a mind. Men would recognize at a glance . . ." (*BD* 119). On the other hand, Clare, who has all along been faithful to her parents, has a body without any signals of a woman. Clare's attempt to recruit Rosa as a political intermediary fails. Rosa refuses because she does not want to conform to her parents. She wants to break away from the revolutionary tradition and live like other people who lead a completely different life. Their confrontation ends with an important act. When they visit a vacant apartment, Clare notices a used sanitary towel. Disgusted,

she picks up it between paper and "buried her burden" in the abandoned cartons "as if she had successfully disposed of a body" (*BD* 126). The sanitary towel is an evidence of menstruation and a sign of reproduction. But involved in the political struggle, Clare has forgotten the realities of the body. She renounces her body in the same way that she hurriedly disposes of the sanitary towel. She might have become the "revolutionary Rosa" if she had not resisted "the family ideology in search of the missing feminine" (Liscio 193). They never connect. The male ideology intervenes and prevents intimacy between them.

If Rosa shows a kind of repulsion for Clare, she feels attracted toward Marisa Kgosana. A black woman and wife of a resistance activist, Marisa is under house arrest while her husband has been imprisoned in Robben Island for years. But she moves about comfortably in her body. She does not shift tones when speaking about prisoners in public. Leeuwenburg suggests that Marisa is clearly based on Winnie Mandela and that she represents Mother Africa in her sunny self confidence and proud sexuality (cited in Head 119). Marisa's splashy-coloured dress, her clear, unhesitating voice and the fact that she and Rosa meet over the cosmetics counter make her "a character link between Ivy Terblanche and Colette Swan" (Liscio 193). Rosa's attraction for Marisa has been sensuous in nature. She could see the half-bare back of a black woman dressed in splashing colour which included as overall effect the colour of her skin, and she was Marisa.

> To touch in women's token embrace against the live, night cheek of Marisa, seeing huge for a second the lake-flash of her eye . . . to enter for a moment the invisible magnetic field of the body of a beautiful creature and receive on oneself its imprint . . . As near as a woman can get to the transformation of the world a man seeks in the beauty of a woman (*BD* 131-32).

Rosa's appreciation of the "splashing colour" of Marisa's dress and the physicality of Marisa – neck, half-bare back and legs –has a political as well as a sexual significance. Marisa's clothing depicts "ancient ideogrammatic symbols" (*BD* 134), which suggests an ethnic African culture linked with black African identity. According to Dominic Head, Marisa's physical perfection represent for Rosa "the health and potential of African

culture" (120). This in turn suggests a link between the public and the private. But Rosa's responses to Marisa do not make this connection clear. The significance of Rosa's attraction for Marisa becomes clear by the end of the novel when they will be seen together in the prison cell. The significance of this prison scene may be discussed a little later.

After her father's death, Rosa lives with Conrad in a cottage for some period. Set in a garden of palms, she finds the house "safe and cosy as a child's playhouse and sexually arousing as a lovers' hideout. It was nowhere" (*BD* 15). In the darkness of their cottage, Rosa and Conrad act out and enjoy their dream of a private erotic world over which parents have no control. Conrad has no political affiliations and for him only psychological events matter. Even the Sharpeville passes unnoticed as he is overwhelmingly aware of his mother having a lover. Now he is freed from the Oedipal conflicts and he becomes obsessed with her: "I was mad about her; now I could be, with someone other than my father there already" (*BD* 40). Rosa admits a kinship with him as they "had in common such terrible secrets in the tin house" (*BD* 59). Conrad reacts at the death of Lionel, saying: "Now you are free" (*BD* 58). Rosa also "must have wished him to die" (*BD* 59). She wished this for freedom. But she obtains it at the death of her father. "Freedom from the father liberates Rosa but is attended by guilt" (Newman 79). Her relationship with Conrad has other limitations as well. She recoils from the erotic activities with Conrad because she has come to perceive these activities as dirty and incestuous. This relationship is repeated with Baasie, a black boy who used to came to live with the Burgers when his father was jailed and who was brought up as Rosa's brother. So she ends her relationship. She says that they left the "tree house" in which they were living and treating their dirt as Baasie and she had done long ago:

> Baasie and I had long ago performed the child's black mass, tasting on a finger the gall of our own sheet and the saline of our own pee . . . And you know we stopped making love together months before I left, aware that it had become incest (*BD* 66).

Rosa finds that her sexual freedom is always connected to "images of the black, and to imperfectly suppressed incestuous desires" (Newman 79). Though Conrad initiates

Rosa into a journey of self-knowledge, she finds his self-centeredness and impersonal fascination for others' live rather unsettling.

Eventually Rosa leaves South Africa. She moves to Nice in France, to the arms of his father's first wife, Colette Swan, also known as Katya. Before discussing her life and time she spends with Katya, a brief discussion about her mother Cathy will be pertinent here. In her quest for self identity, Rosa examines the significance of her father's life. She also searches for the significance of her mother who has often been mentioned but not developed. It is important to note that in title *Burger's Daughter*, Burger can suggest both Lionel and Cathy as well. However, Cathy seems to be overshadowed by the image of Lionel. Lorraine Liscio argues, "Cathy is curiously absent in a narrative that *does* allude to her" (original italics, 189). Though she is "named", Cathy Burger slips away and becomes invisible. This offers her a form of cover that deflects attention from her to her activist husband and this, in turn, helps her become more mobile, secretive and effective. In an interview with Susan Gardner in 1980, Gordimer tells that in a politically active Afrikaner family, traditionally the husband is the leader and head of the family. He is, therefore, closely watched by surveillance. The woman, on the other hand, is considered more important for home and is often dealt leniently by court. This provides her opportunities to work for the struggle. Thus the marriage provides a cover for the question of who is more important person for the Party work –the husband or the wife. In *Burger's Daughter* Gordimer has given significant hints to the role played by woman in South African politics. There were middle class woman like Flora Donaldson, who devoted their leisure time to charitable activities and consequently got involved in social reforms initiatives. These public-spirited women were the first to understand the inequity of the black oppression and pathetic conditions in which the blacks lived. Women like Flora could not become very aggressive because of their protective husband who often prevented them from undertaking more radical campaigns. But one thing was clear that these white women did feel for changes or reforms in the society. In the interview mentioned above, Gordimer admires the women's organization called the Black Sash to which Flora might belong. The women of this organization opposed the government of the National Party and tried to bring about social reform. But, she asked, why there is no Black Sash

for men. On the other hand, these women had the guts to defy the police and organise protest and other activities and thus posed a challenge to the apartheid regime.

Though Cathy is comparatively absent in the narrative, Ivy Terblanche considers, so does Katya as well, her as the real revolutionary. For Rosa, her mother's story has more gaps than narrative line. She defects from the male governed family expectations to see herself in a role different from the prescribed role of a revolutionary. Her defection from the male/public form of action may be said to be a defection to the female/private sphere of silence, absence, defects. Perhaps, Rosa's capacity to do this is lacking in her mother. Once she finds an attractive photo of her mother, she remembers that her mother has been "a woman who is unaware of her good looks, but . . . literally *does not inhabit them* (original italics, *BD* 78). Rosa considers her mother's split from her body as a loss of self. Cathy was, after all, a committed member of the Communist Party. She had a trait of self-effacement. She was unlike Colette who could not sacrifice her private self for the public cause. However, in Rosa's assessment her lost mother has occupied a silent place. Liscio argues that this (Rosa's assessment of her mother) "resembles feminists' attempts to validate female, maternal experience" (190). And this may be said to correspond to the pre-Oedipal, prelinguistic stage of development where much communication occurs between the mother's body impulses and the infant's. Noting Luce Irigaray's suggestion, Liscio observes that this conversation duplicates female sexuality or, in the words of Irigaray, "fills the gaps in a repressed female sexuality" (cited in Liscio 191).

If Cathy has lost herself in the wave of commitment, Katya or Colette Swan emerges as an individual in her own right in the bright Mediterranean landscape bearing as many identities as Renoir's diverse colours. Unlike Cathy, Colette tries her hand in as many jobs as she has names. Her maiden name, Swan is reminiscent of literature's most famous dilettante, Proust's Swann. Like the real Colette, she was initially a music-hall dancer. Her identity as Madame Bagnelli is an invention because she and Bagnelli were never married. However, as Mme Bagnelli, she gives English lessons, dancing lessons, does housekeeping, and works as a secretary and editor for a Russian writer. As Colette Burger, she worked for the Communist Party. Finally, she adopts the name Katya, the Russian form of Cathy, for her relationship with Rosa. Cathy dies under the pressure of patriarchal ideals but Colette survives through the winding unevenness of changing

occupations. As Liscio put it, she is an embodiment of “the personal,” who evades an particular definition and upsets “the public,” order (196). In other words, she tries to establish her individual identity as a woman.

Rosa goes to Nice, South of France and stays with her stepmother Katya. The place called Nice and Katya’s home evoke an atmosphere of romance, not commitment. Nice appears to Rosa as an enchanted land. She can glimpse through the glass window of the plane the “silk tent of the morning sea tilted” (*BD* 219), the tables outside a bar looking like “tiny islands” and the “roadside tapestry flowers” growing ashy with dust (*BD* 222). Katya reminds Rosa that Nice as a place represents the world of art. This is a place where Renoir’s home and Picasso’s museum are located. The world of Nice with all its colours, scents, exotic foods and stories Rosa hears from Katya’s friends provides Rosa with the joys and pleasures of childhood. The childhood sensuality has been absent or forgotten for Rosa. Colette’s naming herself Katya, like a Russian dancer, and Rosa’s eventual love affair in Paris with Bernard Chabalier both serve to reinforce the fairy tale quality of Nice. Rosa feels dazed, as if she is entering a world of sensuality. Katya recounts her memories of parties, vodka and sexual affairs when Rosa and she take their meal. On the other hand, Rosa is dissolving in the pleasures of wine and French sights and sounds. The room that has been made ready for Rosa is full of flowers, mirrors and feminine ornaments:

> A girl, a creature whose sense of existence would be in her nose buried in flowers, peace juice running down her chin, face tended at mirrors, mind dreamily diverted, body seeking pleasure. Rosa burger entered, going forward into possession by that image. (*BD* 235)

As seen in the above lines Rosa is presented in Nice as a sensual woman, an image which she assumes, and enjoys the sensual pleasures of an unreal country. Here in this country she ceases to be her father’s daughter and becomes instead the mistress of Bernard Chabalier. With Chabalier, Rosa for the first time seems to have a satisfying life –both emotionally and sexually. She comes to believe that “it’s possible to live within the ambit of person, not a country” (*BD* 310). And she becomes Bernard’s mistress because the life of mistress allows one to lead a completely private and personal life. “Bernard Chabalier’s mistress isn’t Lionel Burger’s daughter; she’s certainly not

accountable to the Future" (*BD* 312). Thus Rosa may be said to develop a romantic relationship which offers her personal freedom and does not demand any responsibility. As Louise Yelin argues, Chabalier represents romantic love which is a version of personal liberation. His name has the same etymology as *chivalry* and *chevalier* (original italics, 213). But this, Yelin continues, speaks of a regressive undertone of romantic love because the chivalric order carries the burden of feudalism, which is a step backward from the bourgeois order ironically represented by her father's name Lionel Burger. However, Rosa develops the affair with Chabalier while staying in Katya, who "mothers her" (Yelin 213). That is to say, Rosa's sexual awakening is caused by her rediscovery of her mother. And this rediscovery of her mother is more important than her love affair. This is implied by the choice of Katya as the narrator in part two of the narrative. So, Rosa undergoes a sexual as well as aesthetic awakening while living in Nice. For example, Katya introduces her to modern art and one night she takes her to hear nightingales sing. Listening to the song, the two women experience an ecstasy. They could hear around them a kind of piercingly sweet ringing which was only a little audible. "A new perception was picking up the utmost ring of waves whose centre must be unreachable ecstasy" (*BD* 269). This passage suggests a moment of ecstasy which is aesthetic and sexual as well. And the ecstasy, unlike the solitary ecstasy suggested by Keats' "Ode to Nightingale," is shared by a mother and a daughter.

Thus, one can argue, Rosa's stay in Nice helps her "tease apart the fabric of her self, moving inward and backward through the mother" as suggested by Woolf (Liscio 197). She alternately allows her body the freedom of feeling, of questioning other women and measuring herself alongside them. For her, this is a new territory of experience. So she confesses to Katya that she has "never talked with anyone as I do with you, incontinently, femininely" and that Katya tells her "anecdotes of your youth that could transform my own" (BD 270-71). Katya's nurturing helps her develop sensuality and emotions which find no place in her familial experience of responsibility. Pleasure in the self enlarges her capacity to "move freely toward the Other" which is central to the theory of feminists like Cixous and Irigaray (Liscio 197).

Rosa goes to London and happens to attend a conference of South African exiles, where she encounters Baasie with whom she shares her childhood. She recognizes him but he is reluctant in his responses to her. Later at midnight he telephones her and

expresses his anger. He angrily tells her that he is not Baasie (meaning, 'the little boss'); he is Zwelinzima (meaning 'suffering land'), the name given by his father. "—I'm not your Baasie . . . don't think of that black 'brother', that's all" (*BD* 330) He asserts himself as a person in his own right and forces Rosa to put on the light. At the end of the conversation, she vomits in front of the bathroom mirror and sees herself as "ugly", "filthy", and "debauched" and realises "how I disfigured myself" (*BD* 340). This disfiguration is "an essential step in Rosa's progress towards autonomy" (Newman 84). In other words, it helps her assert an independent identity. Rosa's confrontation is similar to that between Jessie and Gideon in *Occasion for Loving*. But this time the confrontation is not elegiac as it was for Jessie. For Rosa, it has a cathartic effect. She cries for the second time over the loss of her black brother (the first was on leaving Chabalier). The confrontation has created in her an overwhelming awareness of commitment from which she cannot escape. Eventually she understands, "No one can defect" (*BD* 343).

Finally Rosa returns to South Africa to lead her own life and contribute to the liberation movement in her own way. She joins the liberation struggle led by the Soweto students. Along with the black rebels, she is also detained on charges of colluding with Marisa and abetting the school children's revolt. She is imprisoned with other women revolutionaries: Marisa, Clare and an Indian woman. At the beginning of the story, Rosa was outside the prison walls where her mother was. Now she is inside the prison, exchanging massages with the help of her art. She draws on Christmas cards the portraits of Marisa, Clare and the Indian woman, and assures those outside the prison of their well-being. Though separated from one another, they remain in touch through their song and laughter that escape from their cells. As for Rosa herself, Gordimer has conveyed through her only visitor Flora Donaldson that she has become lovelier and looked like a girl about fourteen. And she was fourteen when narrative began. Gordimer has pointed out that this ending should not be seen as a passive or circular development. Rosa is brought to trial along with Marisa, wife of an ANC leader. Thus, Gordimer thinks, Rosa has taken some political action by supporting the black students. But it is not clear whether Rosa has done this to show her allegiance to her father and his ally or to support the Black Consciousness movement. But Gordimer asserts that one thing is clear:

> What is certain is that in taking up the burden of other people's suffering through revolutionary political action, *she has acted in her own name and her own identity*, rather than the family tradition. (emphasis added, "What the Book, 152)

In *Burger's Daughter*, Gordimer continues with the form of bildungsroman that she has used for her first novel *The Lying Days*. Citing Elizabeth Abel et al. Yelin notes that the ends of bildungsroman are gender-specific: work or autonomy for man; and marriage, romance or sexual fulfilment for women (211). However, some novels like *To the Lighthouse* mark a departure from the gender-specific norms, where art, not love is the object of women's quest. But Gordimer has made certain revisions of these feminist revisions in *Burger's Daughter*. Rosa's quest is governed by political activity, not by love or even art. In *A Sport of Nature* (*SN*), Gordimer further revises this genre and produces a revolutionary protagonist, Hillela whose private and public life is governed by sexuality. Colonialism was considered as male adventures where the women of the empire had been relegated to a subordinate position. Through her latest novel, Gordimer provides a corrective to literary and political readings of the empire which focus exclusively on the male hero. "*A Sport of Nature* focuses on a female 'adventuress', rewriting the meaning of the term to include sexuality with a positive hypothesis" (Newman 94).

Hillela Capran, the central character of the novel, is the 'sport of nature' as described in the title. As a 'sport of nature' Hillela is, as Gordimer mentions in the epigraph, different from the parental stock or type. She is a new variety of protagonist who is an extension of and yet different from the previous protagonists of Gordimer's work. The novel captures the adventurous life and coming of age of Hillela. She enters the narrative as a four-year child. Her mother, Ruth runs away with a Portuguese lover, abandoning her daughter at the care of her two sisters, Olga and Pauline (one rich, materialist and the other liberal). Expelled from her Rhodesian boarding school for befriending a 'coloured' youth, she returns to South Africa to outrage her aunts. She is caught sleeping with her cousin, Sasha, leading to her expulsion from her aunt's home. Then she moves through a series of adventures: she tries her hand at different jobs and explores various relationships. In one such incident or relationship, she flees with a white activist to Tanzania, who later deserts her. 'Rescued' by South African revolutionaries,

she marries a South African revolutionary organizer, Whaila Kgomani and has a child with him. This step towards her 'rainbow family' is shattered by the assassination of her lover Whaila. But she becomes committed to the cause of liberation and works untiringly for it. After an interlude with an American fiancé, Brad, she marries a powerful West African revolutionary general, Reuel. Thus, her sexuality is channelled for military ambition and political power. Reuel soon becomes the president of an unspecified independent African country. Hillela and her black husband preside over the ceremony celebrating the successful liberation from apartheid South Africa. Theirs is the first happy cross-racial relationship between a white woman and black man among the couples of Gordimer.

Unlike Rosa Burger, Hillela pursues her slippery life which is determined by her sexuality and history, and which is beyond any formulation applied to the earlier heroine. In creating Hillela, Gordimer has envisioned altogether a new person who can overcome the barriers of apartheid. Robin Visel argues that in Hillela, Gordimer introduces a new type who overthrows the "social ties" or the "rules of behaviour" which bind Helen and Maureen (38). She triumphs because she does not conform, and because she is an amoral law unto herself. Sexual freedom is her road to revolution. In other words, Gordimer represents in Hillela sexuality as a source of political radicalism. Her personal development and her influence on others are expressed in terms of her sexual relationships throughout the novel. As a result of an accidental exile from South Africa, she meets and marries Whaila Kgomani. And this is the beginning of her political awakening. Perhaps, Hillela attempts to respond to the question which Gordimer raised in her early story. Hillela wants to fix a "place where we can meet" for her rainbow family. Hillela with her husband and their baby on the beach seems to have the sense of completeness. She thinks, "in the hot shade, contained within their bowl of sand whose circle had no ingress for anyone or anything else and no egress by which one could be cast out" *(SN* 192). Her union with Whaila and their child may be said to symbolise the communion of blacks and whites. She feels delighted to give birth to a black baby. She is relieved and satisfied "not to have reproduced herself" (*SN* 195), and names her after Winnie Mandela. This has a clear political orientation. When she is expecting the second child, she does not ask Whaila to guess what will be the colour of the child. She wishes that their children will form a "rainbow family'. She envisions the rainbow family as a

manifestation of inter-racial harmony and a source of power to defeat apartheid. But her aunt Pauline is cynical about the efficacy of her behaviour. Sasha, of course, sees beyond her mother's cynicism. He believes that the dynamic of real change is always utopian. He admits that it is "unattainable" but "without aiming for it" one cannot even "fall short of it." He further says,

> *Without utopia –the idea of utopia –there's a failure of imagination –and that's a failure to know how to go on living. It will take another kind of being to stay on, here. A new white person. Not us. The chance is a wild chance –like falling in love*. (original italics, *SN* 236-37)

Gordimer said in "Living in the Interregnum", "We must continue to be tormented by the ideal" (284). She seems to represents Hillela as a visionary, symbolic figure to meet "the ideal". Metaphorically speaking, like Gordimer, Sasha recognizes that Hillela has her own language, language of the body. She is "a sport of nature" through whom the artist has explored the possibilities of ideas about the future of South Africa. Gordimer has borrowed the term "a sport of nature" from Sarah Gertrude Millin. As Temple-Thurston has observed, Gordimer's use of the term is ironical (181). Millin advocated for racial purity through her writings in the early twentieth century. Her argument is that people who deny having "colour consciousness are, biologically speaking, sports." She claimed colour consciousness to be a "profound feeling (call it instinct or call it acquired prejudiced)" which can be overcome only by another biological force such as sexual desire (Coetzee 153). But Hillela celebrates racial difference as difference in colour rather than denying it, and becomes a sport of nature. While lying beside her fiancé, she examines his body and she caresses his dark birth mark without shame. She refuses to accept their different skin pigmentations. Her celebration of difference is felicitated by her sensuality. Such a celebration may be said to represent "a subversion of the racist code which demands separation through difference" though it was not always successful (Head 141). It is this "otherness" of Hillela in white South Africa that enables her to move to the future, which the early heroines of Gordimer failed to achieve. "Hillela as other" turns out to be a natural rebel and nonconformist who "fearlessly embraces blackness" (Visel 39).

However, Gordimer's vision of the new white person is not simple. The killing of Whaila dispels her idealistic notion of the political potential of her maternal role. She suddenly realises that there is no rainbow-coloured family. This prompts her to carry on the struggle and move beyond the romantic worship of Whaila. In her stream of consciousness, she expresses her reflections:

> *The real rainbow family stinks. The dried liquid of dysentery streaks the legs of babies and old men and the women smell of their monthly blood. . . They smell of bodies blown up by the expanding gases of their corpses' innards, lying in the bush in the sun*. (original italics, *SN* 317)

Hillela understands the hard reality of oppression and deprivation of the African family. She rejects the naïve idealism of the rainbow family and marries another black African leader, Reuel. But this time there is a change in her role as Reuel's wife. As Head points out, now she does not intend to perpetuate a blood-line. She is no longer the "maternal fount" (149). In Reuel's family she is "the non-matrilineal centre" of her own invention (*SN* 392-93). There is a change in her from the idealism of her first marriage to the pragmatism of warfare. Reuel values her capacity to adapt in new circumstances of power. She is not to be the personal property of her husband who has two other wives. Their marriage is secure but not sexually exclusive on either side. Gordimer here seems to move beyond the ideal inter-racial sexual relationship to suggest a more complex vision.

There is a possibility of considering Hillela as a mere object of sexual desire. Critics, particularly Brenda Cooper has been very critical. Cooper finds it "interesting" that even in the 1980s a woman writer creates such a "heroine," in a "situation like South Africa," where Gordimer's "primary concern is to illustrate the ways in which her new breed of white South African can love, serve and physically worship *black* men" (Cooper 82). Gordimer hardly considers gender equality as part of her otherwise radical vision. She appears to accept the status quo of patriarchal structures. Her portrayal of Hillela as woman who uses her sexuality for political power, may serve to encourage the dangerous attitudes to female sexuality that oppress and subordinate women. However, it is reductive to say that Gordimer does not present the biological and sensual solutions to "the social and political problems and difficult emotions faced by whites in South Africa

today" (Cooper 76). There are positive possibilities of Hillela's sexuality, though it may be mythic. Dominic Head has dwelt on both negative and positive connotations of Hlillela's sexuality. He, however, asserts that the "*principal* connotation of Hillela's sexuality . . . appear positive" (original italics 142). Head argues that it is through her sexuality that Hillela can break restrictive taboos, and inspire in herself and in others productive, committed action. The novel establishes its positive link between private and public worlds through sexuality. This is done by allowing the primacy of personal desire and then channelling it in appropriate way. Thus in the following passage Hillel's sexuality is identified as the source of the General Reuel's authority:

> Her sexuality, evident every man watching her pass as he sat in the bush oiling his gun, or stood at attention of review before the General, was part of the General's Command . . . Her small, generous, urging, inventive body was the deserts of success . . . But he had known from the first time he made love with her that that was only an experience of her possibilities . . . (*SN* 359).

There are some significant images in the above passage. The oiling of the guns, which accompanies the troop's sexual recognition of Hillela, has a phallic connotation. Her sexuality was considered part of the General's command. In this image of ownership, her body is associated with the actual military capture of terrain suggested through the phrase "deserts of success" which can suggest the African battlefield. However, the novelist has not made the connection between sexuality and revolutionary activity straightforward. The metaphoric connection between the female body and the male appropriation of land is complex, even uncomfortable. This is because it may reverse the criticism of the colonizing male psyche made in *The Conservationist*. Gordimer herself said in an interview with *New York Times* that the creation of Hillela is an attempt to imagine a white South African woman who can survive, even flourish, in revolutionary conditions (cited in Visel 38).

In fact, Gordimer's characterization is very complex. And the complexity of her character eludes the charges of anti-feminism. Gordimer's next novel *My Son's Story* shows how the female character move out of the traditional gender roles to a revolutionary vision that includes feminism. In the early novels like *Occasion for*

Loving, the black women had no voice. However, in *A Sport of Nature*, Gordimer has given a few lines to the two black wives of the General who later becomes the president. The firs wife dislikes Hillela but she could not show her resentment. The second wife respects Hillela but "cannot make a sister out of white woman." To her, Hillela is a "usurper, a foreigner" (*SN* 392). The black South African women suffer both racially and sexually. They are shown lacking power. They are ignored and left to suffer even amidst all the talk of liberation. They are ignored by the male blacks and the male and female whites. Hence, Chandra Talpade Mohanty criticises the representation of women as a coherent group with the same experience of male oppression everywhere (199).

In *My Sons Story* (*MSS*), Gordimer finally depicts a coloured woman, Aila who silently moves out of her traditional and involves herself in radical political action. By focusing on a coloured family and the role of gender in building a nation, Gordimer seems to cross the 'borderland' of her early fiction. She attempts to capture the consciousness of Aila through the first narrator, Will. In the beginning of the novel, the cross-racial relationship between Sonny and Hannah dominates the action. Sonny, the coloured school teacher falls in love with the human rights activist, Hannah because of their shared political struggle and ideology. Hannah becomes for Sonny the centre of his commitment to political struggle and sexual pleasure. Thus, Gordimer combines politics and sexuality in South African political context: ". . . in her –needing Hannah –sexual happiness and political commitment were one" (*MSS* 125). As the narrative unfolds, politics centres on both male and female bodies. Politics is sexualized. Sonny's son, Will comes to know about his relationship with the white blonde, Hannah as a result of his chance encounter with them when they came out of a cinema hall. Will does not protest. He keeps it secret and inwardly feels guilty because of his complicity with his father. Aila, the caring and beautiful wife of Sonny knows about his sexual relationship that he enjoys along with his political activities. But she does not protest. She remains silent about it. She is still submissive to Sonny and continues to make love with him. Later he realises that she "faked her pleasure" (*MSS* 242). This may be seen at least as a "nonverbal protest" of her body (Bazin). Their daughter, Baby also reacts to his illicit relationship with Hannah. She cuts her wrist. But Sonny fails to see it as he is deeply engaged with Hannah as much as with political liberation. But Sonny is surprised when Aila is arrested for storing weapons and for her links with black South African

revolutionaries across the border. Egotistical as he is, he is so convinced that Aila is incapable of revolutionary activity. He believes Aila's arrest has been a mistake. The fact of the matter is that she has been carrying on revolutionary acts under the guise of her visits to Baby in a neighbouring country. And her activities were more dangerous than his. More shocks wait for him. Aila faces her trial, gets bail and finally flees the country. Baby already joined the struggle and married a revolutionary. Thus toward the end of the novel, the women, particularly Aila, usurp the central authority. Will or Sonny's story is dislodged by Aila's story. In other words, men's story is overtaken by that of women who refuse to be deceived by the sexist male narrative. As a committed activist, Aila replaces Sonny and becomes the real revolutionary. Both Sonny and Will fail to perceive the ability of Aila because their vision is clouded by their pre-conceived notions of woman as embodiment of beauty and feminine refinement. Aila has been appreciated for her caring nature, domestic skills and silent and supportive manner. But Aila and Baby move from the passive, domestic role to active political one and marginalize the men, Sonny and Will. Gordimer suggests a change in the traditional 'gender bond'. The father-son bond shifts to the bond between mother and daughter.

Gordimer also hints at another bond between women. When the police arrests Aila for her involvement in revolutionary activities, Hannah has to leave South Africa in order to take up another job. She leaves South Africa and cuts off all communication with Sonny because, as Bazin points out, she finally sees "Aila as a sister" (40). On hearing that Aila has joined the underground activities, Hannah becomes very emotional and her eyes turn tearful. The following passage of the novel makes it clear:

> Whether Aila was a revolutionary or not, whether she had joined the struggle –and who should not rejoice at her choice if she had? . . . the quiet, beautiful wife with the curtain material she'd sewn now used to wrap hand-grenades and mines was betrayed, betrayed. (*MSS* 235)

Hannah, the white woman regrets that the beautiful wife of Sonny was betrayed. So she wept. This is a kind of fellow feeling –a woman's feeling for another. Sonny, on the other hand, is amazed at this sudden bond between his two women. He felt "intruded upon" and even thought that Hannah "had no right to weep for Aila" (*MSS* 235). In fact, Sonny is upset. His wife, his daughter and his mistress have left him. They are serving

the cause of liberation somewhere else. Both he and his son, Will are confronted with the changing roles of women –coloured or black women. At home these women may be silent. But some of them like Aila and Baby will assume more power and take their place in the liberation movement. In her next novel, *None to Accompany Me* (1994), Gordimer has explored further the role of black women in building the nation through the character of Sibongile.

It is significant to note that Gordimer does not tell the story of Aila. The narrative is told from the perspective of a male, Will. Unlike in the early in stories, Will protests the black man and white woman relationship that causes suffering to the black woman. He is angry at his father's deception of the family, particularly his mother. But he also brings the racist image of the ideal woman like his father: "I pretend, in dreams, that I'm doing things to them, the blondes in full-page spreads I tear out" (*MSS* 46). Moreover, Will ultimately feels that she is after all a woman –"some sort of sister to my father's blonde, since he's fancied them both" (*MSS* 187). What is more shocking is that he appears to be a misogynist when he declares his independence from his mother:

> She mustn't think she can count forever on the child who used to put himself to sleep stroking his lips with the tail of her long black plait . . . I'm a man, I thrust myself into women as my father does" (*MSS* 252-53).

That is, as Bazin observes, Will shows his allegiance to patriarchy by repressing his feminist insight, rejecting his mother, and reducing women to sex objects (43). And this allegiance is rooted in his deep response to the body of the female as the Other.

However, Gordimer's portrayal of the women characters, particularly that of Aila, raises some pertinent questions. Aila has been a strong woman who risks her life for political struggle. But she does not stand up to the faithlessness of her husband. How one can explain her stoic silence. One can also ask whether or not the portrayal of Aila is realistic. This may be explained in terms of Gordimer's belief that the feminist battle must come afterwards. But Meese Elizabeth argues that the struggle against racism and sexism must be simultaneous (65). Black South African women can hardly resist the oppressive behaviour of the males. In her novels such as *Occasion for Loving* and *A Sport of Nature*, Gordimer focuses on the white women's love for black males. This ignores the silence of the black women. Gordimer seems to overcome this problem in *My*

Son's Story where Aila turns out to be a strong woman whose revolutionary behaviour and acts excels those of any male revolutionary.

Gordimer suggests, Bazin points out, that one can experience the sacredness of the Other through physical love. But ideal love can occur between equals –equals in terms of social, political and economic conditions. In her apartheid novels, the whiteness of the female serves to balance the masculinity of the black. "The status of race (her whiteness) can counterbalance the status of gender (his maleness) in a society still racist and sexist" (Bazin 44). Gordimer seems to argue that the same principle of domination underlies both racism and sexism. She links human sexuality to her political concerns because it all has to do with the body.

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