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‘Most Difficult and Least Glamorous’: the Politics of Style in the Late Works of Nadine Gordimer

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Declaration

This thesis has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

An edited excerpt of Chapter 1 has been published as:

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Abstract

Much of the established scholarship on Nadine Gordimer regards her as a chronicler of the injustices of apartheid, as scholars like Stephen Clingman and Dominic Head describe her mature works as writing 'history from the inside' in a socialist realist tradition drawing from György Lukács and Ernst Fischer. Nevertheless, Head as well as other critics like Judie Newman and Simon Lewis note that Gordimer's later fiction develops in more complex directions, incorporating postmodern metafiction, intertextual allusions, and the deconstruction of metanarratives. In this thesis, I extend this examination of these stylistic changes to her post-apartheid works, and I consider how these changes relate to the persisting injustices and conflicts in post-apartheid South Africa. In doing so, I evaluate the extent to which the end of apartheid marks the transition to a distinct late style in Gordimer's works, as well as what political and ethical purpose such a late style serves.

The scope of my study includes Gordimer's novels and short story collections written after the end of apartheid: the short story collections *Beethoven was One-Sixteenth Black* and *Loot, and Other Stories*, and the novels *The House Gun*, *The Pickup*, *Get a Life*, and *No Time Like the Present*. In the introduction, I contextualise Gordimer's late style within the wider field of late style studies, as well as within the landscape of Gordimer scholarship. In the first chapter, I expand upon Graham Riach's reading of late style in Gordimer's short stories. I examine how the qualitative multiplicity of time in Gordimer's late short story cycles allows these works to present a critique of late-capitalist society in post-apartheid South Africa. Following my discussion of the short story form, I examine how the stylistic features of Gordimer's late style in her short stories — such as melancholy, cynicism, alienation, and self-awareness — manifest in each of her post-apartheid novels. In the second chapter, I explore the ways in which her use of postmodern melancholy and cynicism in *The House Gun* conveys the epistemic uncertainties of the white subject position within post-apartheid

South Africa. In the third chapter, I examine how *The Pickup* takes this epistemic uncertainty further through its critique of empathy as a way of knowing the racial other, as well the idea of what J.M. Coetzee and Ileana Dimitriu describe as a 'spiritual turn' in her works. In the fourth chapter, I consider Gordimer's ecological turn in *Get a Life* and how this novel imagines a new mode of political engagement. In the final chapter on *No Time Like the Present*, I examine the significance of grief, mourning and moral repair in the wake of disillusionment with the post-apartheid reality, and how these manifest through the dualities in Gordimer's style.

Gordimer, echoing Gustave Flaubert, describes the political work of transitioning to a post-apartheid society as 'most difficult and least glamorous'. The style of her late works is correspondingly difficult and unglamorous as she interrogates the persisting injustices that betray the ideals of the freedom struggle. In contrast to what Clingman identifies as the dialectical arc of her mature works, her late works present a negative dialectic that introspects on the irreconcilable contradictions of her position as a white subject, grieves the arresting of the radical energies of decolonisation, and imagines new forms of political engagement through an embodied sense of vulnerability and interdependence.

Lay Summary

Nadine Gordimer is a white South African writer who has, throughout her career, chronicled and critiqued the racial injustices of apartheid. Scholars like Stephen Clingman and Dominic Head characterise her work as historical realism, describing Gordimer's many novels and short stories as writing 'history from the inside' to reflect the socio-political conditions of its present moment. However, Gordimer's late works complicate this picture, as many of her novels and short stories experiment with literary devices that call into question the very idea of there being such an objective reality or frame of reference through which to reflect history. Gordimer's style, as critics like Head, Judie Newman, and Simon Lewis note, resonates with the aesthetic practices and philosophical assumptions associated with postmodernism. Against this background, this thesis examines the ways in which these shifts in Gordimer's style in her post-apartheid works reflect the conflicts during the social and political transformations in an independent South Africa. In particular, I argue that this constitutes a distinct 'late style' in Gordimer's works. I further evaluate how this late style enables new forms of social and political critique in Gordimer's later fiction.

The scope of my study includes Gordimer's novels and short story collections written after the end of apartheid: the short story collections *Beethoven was One-Sixteenth Black* and *Loot, and Other Stories*, and the novels *The House Gun*, *The Pickup*, *Get a Life*, and *No Time Like the Present*. In the introduction, explore the concept of late style as well as the position within the field of late style studies that I adopt throughout this thesis. Within this framework, I give an account of the characteristics that define Gordimer's late style. Much of the scholarship on Gordimer's late style is based on Graham Riach's work on her short stories. In my first chapter, I elaborate this analysis of her short stories and examine how the specific stylistic aspects of her late short story collections enable them to reflect particular social and political issues within post-apartheid South Africa. In the

subsequent chapters, I look at Gordimer's late novels in sequence. I start with *The House Gun* in the second chapter, and I explore how the novel's treatment of melancholy and cynicism call into question the possibility of an objective knowledge of one's socio-political milieu. What we see instead is a white character's perspective is always frustrated by their position within their society. In the third chapter, I extend this problem of knowledge as presented in *The Pickup*, and evaluate the novel's critique of empathy as a mode for the white subject to know the experience of non-white people. *The Pickup* presents examples of what critics describe as a 'spiritual turn' in Gordimer's fiction, and I explore how such a transformation of the self becomes a new basis of understanding the experiences of marginalised peoples. I further expand my discussion of these transformations of the self in my subsequent chapter on *Get a Life*, where I explore an ecological turn in Gordimer's fiction and the mutual interdependence of the self with the non-human other. My final chapter on *No Time Like the Present* examines how the dualities in Gordimer's style accommodates the conflicts caused by grief and mourning, how these conflicts and dualities can be accommodated through care.

Late style is, in some interpretations, regarded as difficult, intransigent, and opaque. In a similar vein, I argue that Gordimer's late style presents a number of provocative complexities and challenges. The complexities of her late style reflect what she describes, quoting Flaubert, as the 'most difficult and least glamorous' task of building a transition. While critics like Clingman and Head argue that Gordimer's mature period works have presented a dialectic of historical realism, where different conflicting moments of radical politics form a synthesis of progress, I argue in contrast that Gordimer's late works present a negative dialectic: the synthesis is itself not uniform or free of conflict, rather it holds these conflicts without resolving them within the complexities and tensions of this late style.

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Introduction: Periodising Gordimer's Late Style

Defining Late Style

Periodising Gordimer's work, as with the work of any author, is a vexed question: the categories into which the works are classified — early, middle and late — are arbitrary, as are the characteristics on which these categorisations are based. The boundaries between these categories are vague, and often works which appear at a different stage chronologically can exhibit stylistic characteristics of a different period. Moreover, the emphasis on biographical details or contemporary historical events as causal or explanatory factors for these stylistic changes can be overstated. This question becomes even more complex when considering any one of these categories in isolation. The idea of lateness is especially fraught with multiple connotations beyond just the chronological: as critical discourses on the subject suggest, lateness can, depending on the context, connote artistic distinction, stylistic maturity, elevated insight into the human condition, a summation or cementing of an artist's reputation, and a crowning achievement that sits atop a larger oeuvre, or it could also be a mark of decline and the failing of one's creative faculties. Furthermore, because of the teleological assumption of these categories, they can only ever be applied retrospectively. This is difficult to do for a contemporary author, whose output may extend beyond the time in which the criticism is written. Bruce King's edited collection *The Later Fiction of Nadine Gordimer*, published in 1993, is caught in a similar bind: it considers her works from the 1950s to the 1970s as her earlier works, and her subsequent works from *A Guest of Honour* (1970) until *My Son's Story* (1990) as her *later* fiction. Of course, 'later' does not necessarily mean 'late' in this way, nor does it make any of the conceptual claims that attend to the idea of lateness. Rather, it is being used, in King's case, to draw a chronological boundary to make the scope of the discussion manageable and to designate what is widely

acknowledged as Gordimer's mature period. But given that Gordimer's career continued long after until the publication of her final novel, *No Time Like the Present*, in 2012, King's periodisation becomes untenable, especially because, in my view, the works between 1994 and 2012 are what constitute a distinct 'late' period of her oeuvre. It is in these late works that Gordimer's politics and aesthetic shifts drastically from a radical, committed socialist fiction in her mature works to a frustrated and contradictory one in her late works.

There are a number of factors that set Gordimer's works from this period apart. The most obvious is that these are her works from after the end of apartheid. The violence and oppression of apartheid were central concerns in Gordimer's writing as well as her activism. The change in political landscape entailed not just a personal realignment for Gordimer in terms of her politics, but also a marked change in her fiction. As a result, there are a number of striking stylistic changes in Gordimer's post-apartheid works when compared with the rest of her oeuvre. Style is generally used to refer to the texture of a writer's prose, things like diction, syntax, imagery, rhetoric, et cetera. But the change in Gordimer's works is not just textural; it is also to do with macroscopic issues of form, plot, and structure. Because these aspects of her writing like style, form and content are mutually-constitutive, it is necessary to consider her writing not just in terms of the texture of its prose but also the larger issues of form and content, and to treat each of these characteristics of her works as stylistic decisions, pertaining not only to her style of writing but to her style of engagement with prevailing social, political, and ethical concerns. Moreover, the aspects of style most critics discuss in the context of lateness are to do with 'a distinctive combination of thought and language, a combination of the work's content and the way that content is expressed' (Spencer 224), rather than just a narrowly-defined notion of style in the context of texture or technique. The drastic changes in Gordimer's novels and short stories from this period, in terms of their setting, plot, form, structure, language, themes, ethical thrust and political commitment, constitute what I would argue is Gordimer's late style.

The idea of late style has attracted a great deal of critical controversy. This idea is, as Gordon McMullan notes, a trend in the history of criticism that began with German Romantic philosophers and became first established in the field of musicology, particularly the study of the works of Ludwig van Beethoven and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and has since spread to other disciplines like the visual arts and literary criticism (*Shakespeare* 5). The idea of late style can be divided, according to McMullan, along two broad lines, each deriving from a particular national tradition: German critics focus on the works of Beethoven as the paradigmatic case for late style and characterise late style as the work of a grim, isolated artist who is resisting his impending death (*Shakespeare* 48). This tradition has a rich and complicated genealogy. One significant account of lateness was by the psychologist Erich Neumann, who believed that late style was the result of a kind of genius only present in great artists which allows them, by virtue of their old age, some kind of transcendence into a Lacanian 'real' of essence (103). Neumann is clearly influenced by Romanticist notions of genius. Contrarily, one of the most wide-ranging and influential accounts of late style was by Theodor Adorno in his essay on Beethoven. For Adorno, Beethoven's late works are characterised not by transcendental insight, but by dissonance, eccentricity and an anticipation of future aesthetic tastes (*Beethoven* 123). This is because, for Adorno, the proximity to death evacuates the subjectivity of the artist, leaving behind only the 'catastrophes' of dissociative forces that tear apart the landscape of art and form (*Beethoven* 126).

Adorno's ideas of lateness were taken even further by Edward Said in *On Late Style*, which is an eclectic and eloquent meditation on a kind of late style that is characterised not by the serenity or wisdom of old age, but its intransigence and unresolved contradictions. Said's work, while compelling and provocative, is not so much a critical analysis of lateness as it is a 'celebration of a certain manifestation' of lateness (McMullan *Shakespeare* 13). Adorno and Said consider Beethoven the best exemplar of late style. His works, by their reckoning, fall easily into three distinct periods — early, middle and late — each bounded by significant biographical events like

contemplating suicide at the onset of deafness in 1802 and the painful affair with the woman he knew as his 'Immortal Beloved' in 1812, which ended in him resigning himself to dying alone (see Spitzer 191). His musical style from these periods was also quite distinct, and what is particularly noteworthy about his late works is that they are abstract, eccentric and impenetrable, foregoing the rules and logic that governed his earlier works (Spitzer 194-5). For both Adorno and Said, the music is also characteristic of the man himself: irascible, unpleasant, and embittered, withdrawn from the rest of the world and devoted to his own music.

While German critics focussed on Beethoven as their exemplar of late style, anglophone critics since the mid-nineteenth century have focussed on the works of William Shakespeare as the embodiment of a contrasting kind of lateness, one characterised by serenity, wisdom and calm resolution (McMullan *Shakespeare* 48-9). Said acknowledges this particular variant of late style in passing but gives short shrift. These accounts of lateness in the works of Beethoven and Shakespeare have contributed to what McMullan terms the 'discourse of lateness' (*Shakespeare* 5), which has subsequently been applied to the works of other writers, composers and artists — Mozart, Franz Schubert, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, J.M.W. Turner, Titian, Claude Monet, even David Bowie and Leonard Cohen after the release of their final albums, or Nick Cave following the death of his son.[1] The eclecticism of this list is indicative of how diverse this field is. But despite this diversity, late style is seen as a phenomenon common to all of these artists, a development that is trans-historical and supra-individual, unifying such a broad church of late stylists across the arts from different periods, characterised by a sudden

[1] On David Bowie's late style see McCrum, Robert. 'David Bowie's Exceptional Late Style.' https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/jan/14/david-bowie-late-style. Accessed 21 Mar. 2017. On Leonard Cohen see Timberg, Scott. 'Leonard Cohen's Farewell Masterpiece: Whether This Is Goodbye or Not, "You Want It Darker" Is Powerful and Real.' http://www.salon.com/2016/10/21/leonard-cohens-farewell-masterpiece-whether-this-is-goodbye-or-not-you-want-it-darker-is-powerful-and-real. Accessed 21 Mar. 2017. Finally, on Nick Cave see Mordue's interview Cave, Nick. 'Nick Cave: 'I Have Turned a Corner and Wandered on to a Vast Landscape'.' Interview by Mark Mordue, The Guardian, 4 May 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2017/may/04/nick-cave-death-son-struggle-write-tragedy.

rupture of the artists' mature style, and a move towards a more intransigent or eccentric idiom.

McMullan distils the discourse on late style into two key issues: the extent to which late style is the product of an artist's subjectivity or volition versus epochal forces from outside the artist's control, and the calm return to an innocent past where difficult contradictions are reconciled versus a tumultuous finality where these contradictions persist (*Shakespeare* 45-6). Later critics have further expanded this discussion of late style to question the impact of gerontology and the life course, or the idea that late style was the result of age and proximity to death as opposed to a deterministic reading that overemphasises the specific events in the artist's live. Scholarship along these lines has been divided. However, regardless of whichever orientation on lateness one adopts, some assumptions are common to both poles of late style: firstly, lateness was considered innovative, difficult and ahead of its time; secondly, the artist was conditioned by physical and psychological characteristics of ageing or illness; and finally, the creativity of the artist transcended their immediate historical context (McMullan and Smiles 'Introduction: Late Style and Its Discontents' 4). Moreover, there is a notion underlying all of this that only certain, elect artists have a late style, and that it is a mark of distinction and elevated insight. This late style is regarded as a common enterprise for such a diverse group of artists. One further unspoken assumption which later critics have questioned rigorously is that these notions of genius and artistic excellence are only reserved for male artists, and it is very rare in criticism to consider women artists as geniuses of the kind that have a late style (see Hutcheon and Hutcheon; Murphy).

Another version of late style is a self-conscious one which is adopted by an artist as a genre of writing, as a way of what Michael Millgate describes as exerting posthumous control over one's reputation (1). Millgate uses Thomas Hardy as an example of a writer who settled into the mantle of old age, constantly editing and revising his late works to manage what posterity thought of him (110). In Millgate's case, developing a late style is related to a 'testamentary act', or a valedictory gesture by which a writer summarises

their lifetime's career in their late works. Also along similar lines is Helen Vendler's *Last Looks, Last Books*, in which she studies the 'strange, binocular style' through which poets like Wallace Stevens, Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell, et al. invented in their last works order to render and contemplate their confrontation with death and dying (1). Vendler's work does not deal with an abstract notion of late style, but is instead concerned with a very specific stylistic development, what she describes the 'binocular vision' of representing the meeting of both hope and despair when one is confronted with personal extinction (6). The idea a writer's last book, written with the awareness of one's impending death, is in some ways a last look at one's career, is more an act of introspection and personal reflection rather than, as Millgate argues, an attempt at having a posthumous control over one's legacy and corpus. None of this presumes greatness or accomplishment: a last work need not be better than its predecessors by virtue of its lateness. Instead, all it provides is a sense of closure, summarising the artist's career for better or for worse. This idea of late style as being something a writer deliberately inhabits as a self-styled closure of one's career is something that has received little critical attention compared to the field of lateness discourse as something that is intransigent or eccentric. Nevertheless, it can be quite illuminating when considering the late works of certain writers who are conscious of their own age, stature and reputation, whose last works can be read as a final statement about their oeuvre.

However, the problem with these notions of late style is that they tend to generalise lateness into a common experience or phenomenon characteristic of a broad range of artists, whereas in reality the artists' lives, circumstances and styles are diverse and more complex. Later scholarship on late style has been critical of this tendency to generalise lateness into a universal phenomenon. This was the subject of two conferences titled 'Rethinking Late Style: Art, Literature, Music, Film', one in King's College London in 2007 and another at the Australian National University, Canberra, in 2008. Many of the papers presented in this conference were collected later in a volume titled *Late Style and its Discontents*, edited by McMullan and Sam Smiles. The

essays in this collection interrogate these assumptions. One of the points about which there is consensus in the essays collected is that because of how diverse the lives of different artists have been, because of different ages of the onset of lateness and because of the diversity of their late styles, it is problematic to assert that there is a single, uniform 'late style'; rather, as Linda and Michael Hutcheon note, 'there are as many late styles as there are late artists' (68). But a more interesting critique of late style is what Smiles and McMullan propose in their respective essays, that lateness is a modern construct, and rather than being a phenomenon of the works themselves it is a mode of critical appreciation (see McMullan 'The Strangeness of George Oppen' 36; Smiles 20-1). For Smiles, lateness is not so much a theory as much as it is a 'discursive field' (30), and occurring within this field are different kinds of late style. Similarly, McMullan's conviction that late style is a critical construct is one that determines the line taken by all other critics collected in this anthology. The critics collected in this anthology attempt to provide a taxonomy of late styles in the works of various artists in light of these contradictions.

One point which Smiles makes is especially revealing: writing about Georg Simmel's essay on Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, he notes that Simmel had erroneously categorised the fresco as one of Leonardo's late works based on a mistaken chronology (Smiles 21). Smiles then asks whether it was Simmel's belief that this was a late work which predisposed him to see in it characteristics of lateness. This suggests that many of the aspects of late style are arbitrary critical fictions, and if applied inaccurately can lead to erroneous or meaningless conclusions. The same can be said about both Adorno and Said's accounts of lateness: their ideas of lateness are the result of them reading their own ideological positions into their appreciation of Beethoven. Said considers Adorno as a figure of lateness like Beethoven himself, as his reflections on Beethoven were part of a late series of fragments which were published posthumously (*On Late Style* 14). Robert Spencer argues that Adorno's sense of lateness derives from his diagnosis of the moribund nature of late-capitalist society. For Adorno, history progresses

not towards a liberated and enlightened society, but towards greater violence and slaughter. This capitalist modernity, moreover, is resistant to change, and it endures long after it ceases to be a progressive or emancipating force (Spencer 228). For Spencer, one of the most prominent themes in Adorno's philosophy, manifested in his magnum opus *Negative Dialectics*, is a sense of surviving and outlasting, such as outliving Europe's Jews who were killed in the Holocaust, or the enduring of capitalism in the face of contradiction and resistance. Lateness in the context of this capitalist modernity, Spencer argues, is a form of 'temporal exile', or a form of historical dislocation (229). This dislocation is manifested in Adorno's reflections on Beethoven — emphasising contradiction and dissonance — as well as in the form of his writing — fragmentary and disordered.

Similarly, Said wrote *On Late Style* towards the end of his life, and Jacqueline Rose remarks that many of his comments about Adorno and Beethoven — their intransigence and irascible transgressiveness — are him describing himself. Michael Wood, in his introduction to *On Late Style*, makes a similar comparison between Said's own life and his reflections on lateness, although noting with some caution that 'thoughts of his own death deepened [Said's] attachment to the question of late style; [although] they didn't instigate it' (xvii). This is not to say that both Adorno and Said's own age and proximity to death were what caused their interest in late style; rather, these were two factors amongst many that made them emphasise certain aspects of lateness over others. Moreover, Said's own position as a Palestinian exile writing in the twilight of his life suffuses his work. The preface by Miriam Said notes how Said was working on this book close to his death. His emphasis on the contradictory and difficult version of late style in the case of Beethoven — as opposed to the serene and reconciled one like in Shakespeare — is entirely idiosyncratic:

> It is this second type of lateness as a factor of style that I find deeply interesting. I'd like to explore the experience of late style that involves a nonharmonious, nonserene tension, and above all, a sort of deliberately unproductive productiveness going *against*. (*On Late Style* 7)

Said describes his personal interest, and he chooses to emphasise this particular aspect of late style because of his investment in it. Just like how Adorno's idea of late style was influenced by his own critical position within a capitalist modernity, Said's idea of late style situated himself within his own reading of Beethoven and Adorno. What is especially revealing about these two examples of late style criticism is that the critics have been reading themselves and their own critical positions into the works about which they have written: their emphasis on certain stylistic traits as being hallmarks of lateness and their particular brand of late style are indicative of their own ideological positions.

But this idea of lateness being a critical fiction, drawing from Smiles and McMullan's critique of its genealogy, is not to suggest that the term is entirely without any value. It can be a critical fiction that is useful in the appreciation of literary texts by highlighting and comparing different themes and features that are common across a certain period in an author's life. It is difficult to argue, as Adorno and Said do, for some universal notion of late style that unifies all artists. Nevertheless, one can still talk of an individual artist's late style and use the debates within the field of lateness discourse to analyse and interpret the late works of an author or artist. In other words, while there is considerable debate on what exactly is a late style, it can nevertheless be revealing and interesting to treat certain works of an artist as late works and use these debates as new ways of reading a text and giving it meaning within different historical or personal contexts. This is certainly my intention regarding Gordimer's late works, and this thesis is concerned with what new meanings can be found if we were to read the thematic and stylistic transformations in Gordimer's post-apartheid works as a 'late style' that responds to the changed political landscape in which she writes. This politicised sense of late style — taking a cue from Spencer's reading of Adorno — can illuminate the persisting conflicts in the conscience of liberal whites in post-apartheid South African society, as well as the frustrations of former radicals at the betrayal of the ideals of the past freedom struggle. The political vision that characterises Gordimer's post-apartheid fiction is one of a

strained reconciliation in a new, democratic South Africa, one in which the injustices and contradictions of the previous regime are still rife. The stylistic aspects of Gordimer's late works — the provisional form and its accommodation of contradictions, the haunting presence of the past and the precariousness of posterity — mirror the nature of her fraught political vision.

From Gordimer's Mature Period to her Late Style

In my thesis, I will situate Gordimer's works within this wider terrain of the idea of late style. In particular, I will consider the political dimensions of Gordimer's late style, and how it is not just a response to a changed political dispensation but in itself reflects the search for a new mode of political engagement. In evaluating the development of this late style, it is useful to compare it to what was widely regarded by critics as Gordimer's mature style and the modes of political engagement that attended to it. For Bruce King, who in turn cites John Cooke, *A Guest of Honour* marks the beginning of Gordimer's 'mature' period because, they argue, of its 'larger, pan-African perspective' and because it first introduces a central concern of Gordimer's later fiction 'that black rule in independent Africa has not led to social or political justice; that a more humane and egalitarian black Africa requires a further revolution destroying the role of the white progressive in Africa' (3-4). In contrast, Dominic Head and Stephen Clingman claim this mature period begins further back with *The Late Bourgeois World*. Clingman sees *The Late Bourgeois World* and *A Guest of Honour* as 'inverse images of one another' as part of an internal dialectic: the former is intensely South African, abandoning liberal ideologies in a moment of despair, whereas the latter is more generally pan-African, rediscovering its politics in the face of despair (90). Gordimer's first mature works — *The Late Bourgeois World*, *A Guest of Honour* and *The Conservationist* — are, according to both the critics and Gordimer herself[2] a point of significant development in her skill as a writer.

[2] See her interview in *The Paris Review*, where she describes herself as beginning to 'develop narrative muscle', Gordimer, Nadine. 'The Art of Fiction No. 77.' Interview by

But a further point which sets Gordimer's mature works apart for both Head and Clingman is that they are defined by a breakdown in Gordimer's beliefs in liberal ideals in a way that is emphatic and disruptive (see Clingman 100; Head 77). This resonates with King and Cooke's account of Gordimer's later fiction as calling for a further destruction of the white progressive ideology. For Clingman, Gordimer's early works are characterised by a dialectic of the erosion of a personal humanism (Clingman 72). The ethics of her early works — *The Lying Days*, *A World of Strangers* and *Occasion for Loving* — are centred on the personal relations between characters, their encounters with and feeling of love and kindness towards others and the projection of these concerns onto a much wider social context. According to Clingman, however, this subjective, interpersonal aspect of humanism is rendered inadequate in the face of the political injustices in South Africa under the Nationalist government, when facing the social realities of the 1950s and 60s. For Clingman, then, *Occasion for Loving* marks the 'end of [this] discourse of personal relations' as it comes to a crisis (102). Instead, her mature works take on 'the tasks of objectivity', of finding an adequately impersonal basis on which to advance the terms of action (102).

Clingman reads *The Late Bourgeois World*, a novel written shortly after the Nationalist government brutally quashed resistance movements against it in the early 1960s, as representing an 'oppositional consciousness in [this] moment of anguish and crisis' in liberal politics, characterised by 'the stunned psychological fundamentalism of the period of aftermath itself; the radical utilitarianism of [its protagonist] Elizabeth's prospective action; and the mythic romanticism whereby [this utilitarianism] is justified' (110). For Head, this is the first novel in which social decay — the continuing injustice and the routed anti-apartheid movements like the African Resistance Movement and the various militant and democratic wings of the African National Congress — is manifested overtly in the form of the novel, particularly in its use of Ernst

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Jannika Hurwitt, The Paris Review, Summer 1983 1983, https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3060/nadine-gordimer-the-art-of-riction-no-77-nadine-gordimer, 2 Apr. 2017.

Fischer's *The Necessity of Art* as an intertext (78). For Fischer, who drew heavily from Bertolt Brecht, the objective of socialist art is not just to reflect social decay but also suggest ways for the betterment of society, such that its spectators will be inspired to action (10). *The Late Bourgeois World* is a similar form of socialist fiction which reflects and critiques social decay, even though it does not necessarily provide a vision of how this society can be changed. In contrast, *A Guest of Honour* and *The Conservationist* not only reflect social decay and the dissolution of the white bourgeois colonial self, but they also envision sites at which this dominance can be resisted.

A Guest of Honour, published in 1970, emerged from the circumstances of a prolonged and uneasy silence in the underground resistance movements in South Africa during the late 1960s, a time when these organisations 'had been decisively crippled inside the country, while in exile they were primarily preoccupied with recuperation' (Clingman 113). Even though the novel is set in a fictional African state, it is clear from the political questions that it projects into this fictional elsewhere that it is embedded within its South African context, and it is still shaped by predominant local concerns like race, neo-colonialism and economic exploitation. The dissolution of the protagonist Colonel John Bray's sense of self reflects the dissolution of the bourgeois colonial subjectivity. In its place, Bray takes up a violent means of revolutionary, anti-colonial struggle. Head notes that these terms of struggle draw heavily from Frantz Fanon, whose *The Wretched of the Earth* he considers an important intertext for this novel (89-90). Drawing from Fanon, class becomes the basis of the anti-colonial struggle: the novel is deeply committed to an African socialism and mounts a trenchant critique of the neo-colonial elites in this newly independent African nation. In Fanon's terms, this reflects an opposition to the native bourgeoisie who, owing to their own economic interest, are complicit with neo-colonial exploitation (141-2). This commitment is evident in the form of the novel as well, which can be considered a work of 'African socialist realism' (127). Where *The Late Bourgeois World* does not present a positive vision of South Africa, arguably the pan-African vision of a post-colonial state and radical anti-colonial class

struggle in *A Guest of Honour* are steps towards the direction of presenting an alternate vision of a post-apartheid South Africa.

Finally, Clingman reads *The Conservationist* as responding to an emerging political wave across southern Africa in which white supremacy was being usurped, beginning with the incursion of guerrilla incursions into white farms in 1972 and the Portuguese withdrawal from Africa in 1974 (138-9). This is reflected in the form of the novel through the subversion of the dominant white narrative using amaZulu myths as intertexts to fragment the voice of Mehring, the white industrialist and recreational farmer. As Clingman notes, Mehring represents a capitalist elite whose utilitarian, technocratic approach — motivated by profit and power rather than being strictly ideological — displaced the preceding ideology of racism for its own sake (143). Moreover, his mistress Antonia represents a naïve liberalism which is mostly artificial and the result of a privileged excess (145). That this liberalism is in bed with this kind of capitalist exploitation represents the inadequacy of white liberal politics in the 1970s and emphasises in its place the need for a more radical act of subversion. That radical subversion takes place in the novel's form and the dialogical space between its intertexts. As both Head and Judie Newman note, the form of the novel stages a conflict between the amaZulu intertext and Mehring's own consciousness (Head 102; Newman 56): the novel focalises through Mehring's subjectivity, which for the most part is in stasis and is ruptured by natural calamities like drought, fire and drought. The quotations from *The Religious Systems of the AmaZulu*, which appear between chapters of the novel, serve to further fragment Mehring's narrative. These quotations gradually become more direct in their relation to the events in the novel, especially the natural disasters that precipitate a crisis in Mehring's subjectivity. This represents, as Clingman argues, the hypostatisation of nature as a power in its own right (159), and the imminent return of the black world as it usurps white dominance (155). This usurpation of white dominance and the notion of black authenticity and ownership of the land characterise the kind of positive vision for the improvement of society which is central to Fischer's precepts for socialist art.

These three of Gordimer's mature novels are driven by the necessity of socialist art to reflect critically on social decay and to imagine a way in which this decay can be opposed. Crucially, this opposition is based on material realities of class, exploitation, and racial injustice rather than the subjective experience of the protagonist. Gordimer's mature works are characterised by the dissolution of the subjective and the reassertion of the material. In contrast, her late works seem to foreground the subjective, especially in the way they emphasise not the socialist need for critique or change, but also the frustration of the radical energies of the freedom struggle in the new, post-apartheid South Africa. In a sense, the dialectical movement that Clingman considers characteristic of Gordimer's mature works is arrested in her late fiction. In his perceptive account of Gordimer's late short story collections, Graham Riach identifies the stylistic shifts in Gordimer's late works that set them apart from her mature period. While I will examine the specific characteristics of Gordimer's stories that Riach discusses — such as the intertexts that consciously situate her works within late style discourse and the particular devices associated with lateness — in detail in the chapter on Gordimer's late short story collections, there are some general features of Gordimer's fiction which are worth sketching now to distinguish her late period from her previous works. For Riach, Gordimer's late style is characterised by a sparse plot that seems to have neither a linear development nor resolution, an uneasy vacillation between the past and the present, and the protagonists' confusion about their own racial identity and their place within South African society. Similarly, in her post-apartheid novels, Gordimer's protagonists are usually white characters who are adrift in the new political reality, some of whom had been activists or freedom fighters in the past. The stymying of these radical energies by frustration, ennui, hopelessness and cynicism in these works contrasts sharply with the dialectical progression and critical objectivity that Clingman, Head, and others identify as the driving socialist aesthetics of her mature fiction. These general features are pronounced across all of the works that I consider her late fiction in this study.

In the last of her Charles Eliot Norton Lectures in 1994, Gordimer describes what she sees before her the complex and difficult political work of building a new, democratic South Africa. Echoing Gustave Flaubert, she describes this political work as 'the most difficult and least glamorous of all tasks: transition' (*Writing and Being* 134). The same can be said of her late style, which through its emphasis on the contradictions and tensions within the white subject position, manifested in the cynicism, ennui, and melancholy of the prose, is a similarly difficult and unglamorous idiom. Riach situates this change in style within the context of a changing political dispensation. Against the wider terrain of late style discourse, and the many different interpretations of what such an idea of lateness entails, late style in the context of Gordimer's work — and certainly in the way in which I will be using late style as a way of reading Gordimer's post-apartheid fiction — is what McMullan describes as the result of epochal forces. I will be examining the effect of the social transitions in post-apartheid South Africa, and how Gordimer's late style embody a nuanced political response that is different from the socialist politics of her earlier works. But that is not to say that such epochal forces are the only dimension to the lateness of Gordimer's style. There is, however, an important caveat that bears emphasising. As Riach notes, echoing Rita Barnard, many of the stylistic features that are characteristic of Gordimer's late style have been present in her earlier works from during apartheid (Riach 'The Late Nadine Gordimer' 1086-7). It is important to remain cautious when considering Gordimer's late style to avoid the pitfalls of late style scholarship that I had mentioned earlier. In Gordimer's case, Riach further elaborates, 'it is not the case that Gordimer's writing post-1990 marks a clean break from what came before, but rather that certain characteristics — complex syntax, allusion, erratic punctuation — are more emphasised than in her writing of previous decades, and the degree and kind of self-referentiality differs' ('The Late Nadine Gordimer' 1087). In addition, I would add, that these stylistic features of Gordimer's syntax, allusions, and punctuation, further parallel the epistemological, ethical, and phenomenological crises that attend to writing and politics in these changed

circumstances. In each chapter, I will further consider where within this wider terrain the style of Gordimer's late works can be situated. In essence, Gordimer's late style is far from static: it develops and is inflected in different ways in each successive work in a way that emphasises changing political and ethical responses to her social and political milieu. In the same way that Gordimer's mature style was deeply inflected by a Marxist politics, the developments of her late style embody a changed political disposition, one which is more contradictory and circumspect, but nevertheless deeply committed to the interrogation and reconfiguration of the white self in a changed environment. I argue that while her distancing from her earlier style presents a disillusionment with the politics of the Freedom Struggle in the face of persisting inequalities in the new South Africa that betrayed its ideals, the manifestation of this in her late style is not so much a disengagement or abrogation of political action but a search for nuanced modes of political engagement. The politics of Gordimer's late style, thus, is the search for a new mode of understanding the position of the white self within post-apartheid South Africa and for a way of engaging with persisting injustices in the new society without reiterating them.

Thesis Outline

For this study, then, I will consider two of Gordimer's late short story collections — *Beethoven was One-Sixteenth Black* and *Loot, and Other Stories* — and four of her novels — *The House Gun*, *The Pickup*, *Get a Life*, and *No Time Like the Present* — as the corpus that constitutes her late works. All of these are works published following the end of apartheid. While *None to Accompany Me*, published in 1994, was Gordimer's first novel published after the end of apartheid, *The House Gun* was the first to be written during an independent South Africa and to be explicitly concerned with this question of political transition. It is with *The House Gun* that the pronounced features of Gordimer's late style begin to manifest in her novels. This is why the scope of my study begins with *The House Gun* and encompasses the rest of her oeuvre thereafter. In the chapters that follow, I

will consider Gordimer's works in a broadly sequential manner and examine the specific aspects of late style in those works, and the mode of political engagement that those works present. Moreover, through my study of Gordimer's late works, I hope to take further the existing scholarship on her works. The last major monograph on her writing was by Head in 1994, written at a time of resurgent critical interest following her being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. My thesis hopes to continue scholarship on Gordimer's works written since then, and to situate those works within the context of lateness as a way of opening up further questions about the ways in which the political edge of her idiom develops over time.

As the existing scholarship on Gordimer's late style focusses on her short stories, my first chapter takes this as its starting point. In it, I consider the politics of Gordimer's post-apartheid short story cycles, *Beethoven was One-Sixteenth Black* and *Loot*, and how these short story cycles reflect a preliminary and self-reflexive idea of lateness in Gordimer's fiction which develops going through her late works. As I mentioned previously, Riach draws attention to the intertextual references to late style discourse, such as the mentions of Beethoven's late string quartets in 'Beethoven was One-Sixteenth Black', and to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in 'Loot'. There is a further element of self-consciousness in a story like 'Dreaming of the Dead', where Gordimer imagines having dinner with her deceased contemporaries like Susan Sontag and, more revealingly, Edward Said: by literally invoking the spirit of Said, the story is conversant with ideas of lateness, mortality, and the proximity of one's death, that animated Said's own reflections on the theme. In taking these two short story collections together, I consider how they present a specific idea of lateness that manifests in particular stylistic features of the prose as a response to a political landscape wherein racial and economic injustices of the past still striate the independent nation whose freedom was won through struggle. Through their non-linear plot, temporal vacillations between the past and present, and sense of confusion about identity and place, Gordimer's short stories embody the persisting contradictions in post-apartheid South Africa. By taking as my starting point

this idea of lateness, I further consider what these stylistic features mean within the context of Gordimer's short stories and the postcolonial short story more generally. There has been some debate in Gordimer scholarship regarding the status and value of her short stories, and they have been generally given short shrift compared to her novels. This chapter also makes a timely intervention in these debates, arguing that the style of Gordimer's late short stories in particular demonstrate ways in which these works are specifically adapted to engage with and critique persisting injustices in post-apartheid South Africa. To do this, I argue that Gordimer's late short stories present a qualitative multiplicity of an experience of the present in which the past as well as ideals of the future, intrude upon and overlay the present in each story. Moreover, at a more macroscopic level of the short story cycle itself, the fragmentary nature of the form and the dynamically shifting perspectives characterise another dimension of a qualitative multiplicity, as the short story cycle telescopes between multiple forms of neo-colonial relations across different geographical scales. By shifting focus in successive stories between personal histories, multinational aid organisations, mining and industry, or universities, the short story cycles explore ways in which these inequalities in post-apartheid South Africa are diffused within different institutions. Thus, the style and form of Gordimer's late short story cycles enable them to register and critique these forms of inequality in a way that is uniquely adapted to the dispersed forms of colonial hierarchy manifested in post-apartheid South Africa.

Having taken this idea of lateness as my starting point, in my subsequent chapters I will consider each of Gordimer's late novels chronologically and evaluate the specific development in her late style in those works in particular. As I mentioned previously, Gordimer's late style is far from static, and in my reading of each of her novels I will examine individual aspects of Gordimer's late style that become more pronounced in each work, and subsequently what political or ethical purpose this serves, starting with *The House Gun*. In my second chapter, I will start by examining Simon Lewis' reading of the novel and the change in Gordimer's sense of

herself as a writer. Lewis sketches what he describes as a change of direction in Gordimer's works, one which is consistent with Riach's description of Gordimer's late style. Lewis further situates this change alongside not just the political transition in South Africa, but also Gordimer's changing sense of self as a writer. This change is far-reaching: not only does it characterise the overarching mood of cynicism and melancholy in the novel, but also the ontological and phenomenological assumptions that the novel makes. While I will discuss the phenomenological turn of Gordimer's fiction in a later chapter, it is worth noting nevertheless, as Lewis argues, that a characteristic feature of Gordimer's late novels is that the very possibility of objective knowledge of one's political environment becomes untenable, and likewise the very possibility of apprehending and engaging with one's political reality is called into question. While in the discourse of late style, there are two broad lines along which lateness is interpreted — the eccentric intransigence of old age or the peaceful serenity of reconciliation — the affective charge of lateness in Gordimer's case in one that is subtly different: *The House Gun* is marked by a sense of cynical detachment, and the novel explores and critiques this cynicism by bringing the perspectives of its white protagonists in conflict with those voices that are rendered marginal. This marks a re-evaluation of the position of the white subject within post-apartheid South Africa, and the hierarchies of race, class, and knowledge within which one is complicit. To evaluate this, I will examine ways in which these cynical narratives of disengagement, resulting from the protagonists' privileged racial and class position, embody a sense of epistemic injustice, or injustice related to the dominance and hierarchy of different modes of knowledge. These injustices are characterised in different bodies of knowledge, such as knowledge of the law, which is embodied by institutions like the justice system and the Constitutional Court. Gordimer's late style, through its use of cynicism and metafictional erosion of it, creates a sense of epistemic friction that serves to draw attention to and critique the limitations of the white subject in post-apartheid South Africa. It further exposes the entrenched prejudices that are constitutive of the position that these white

subjects occupy. Not only then does Gordimer's late style embody frustration with a changed political landscape, but it also further reflects a dissatisfaction with and critique of the constitutive assumptions of certain modes of knowledge of a white subject's political reality.

Gordimer's subsequent novel, *The Pickup*, is in many was a continuation of the perspectival shifts expressed in *The House Gun*. Rather tellingly, characters and events in *The House Gun*, such as the Lindgard's legal ordeal or Hamilton Motsamai's legal work, are mentioned in passing in *The Pickup*, situating the novel within the same social and political milieu as its predecessor. This novel focalises through the perspective of Julie Summers, a young, wealthy, white woman who benefits from her family's largesse. Her generation, and the spaces that they inhabit like The Table, their regular spot at their favourite café, become a microcosm of a new, liberal future of their country. But while the wealthy elite have the advantages and opportunities this freedom affords them, there remains a regime of segregation and power that polices the rights and bodies of immigrants. Julie takes Abdu, an irregular migrant, as a lover, and what is, for her, an act of rebellion against her conservative family cuts across these racial inequalities and xenophobic measures. In the same way that Gordimer's style in *The House Gun* explores the epistemic friction of cynical disaffection, *The Pickup* further explores the frictions and erasures of empathy and the way in which other bodies and their pain are rendered fungible to the white subject. The style of the novel draws attention to the limitations of empathy as a way of knowing the Other's pain, and further critiques the possibility of intimate knowledge of the Other. The principal language through which Julie understands Abdu's experience is one of seduction and desire, and it is her own sense of the fungibility of his pain or her conflation of his agency with her attraction to her eclipse his subjectivity within the narrative. But while *The House Gun* draws attention to these epistemic frictions by indicating lapses and erasures, *The Pickup* seems to tentatively imagine a different mode of understanding that avoids the pitfalls of hierarchies between the white self and the Other. Julie's emigration to Abdu's home country, and her sense of

exile and desire to adapt to the new place, are ambivalently framed as, on one hand, her attempt at sharing in the vulnerability and pain of her husband and, on the other, as yet another picaresque fantasy for a white trust fund kid. But against the backdrop of this deeply contradictory sense of belonging and exile, the novel presents, as some critics note, a 'spiritual turn' in Gordimer's writing. In Gordimer's late style, such a spiritual turn is a response to the epistemic frictions resulting from the contradictions within the white subject position. Such a turn in *The Pickup* presents a subtle reconfiguration of one's sense of belonging in a way that is embedded within the landscape and ecology. Against what Lewis identifies as the untenability of an objective political vision, Gordimer's spiritual turn presents a transcendental basis on which to ground one's ethics and sense of self. Compared to the many different understandings of late style, the sense of epistemic friction in *The Pickup* suggests a similar sense of contradiction and irreconcilable difference as in *The House Gun*, however this spiritual turn seems to make a gesture towards some sense of reconciliation and serenity. Moreover, the novel also marks a burgeoning ecological vision, one which will be realised even further in Gordimer's subsequent novel.

In *Get a Life*, Gordimer develops the clearest expression of an ecological vision in her novels. This novel is about a white, middle-class, liberal environmentalist who becomes radioactive following treatment for thyroid cancer. His personal struggle with his irradiated state mirrors the campaign in his professional life against the expansion of civilian nuclear power in South Africa. The significance of this is manifold: nuclear power in South Africa is mired within a long history of colonial extractivism and apartheid racial segregation. While the settler-colonial state has been dismantled on the surface, the nexus of multinational capital represents the continuation of the same forms of ecological excess. Moreover, the novel represents a sense of ennui with past idioms of organisation and politics as the protagonist, Paul Bannerman, finds his erstwhile political ideals insufficient when trying to understand the sheer scale and extent of nuclear catastrophe and violence. The profound sense of ennui that marks

Gordimer's late style in a novel like *Get a Life* forms the basis on which the novel re-imagines its own ethical commitments, interrogating the subject position that Gordimer inhabits as a white writer but also what it would mean for someone from such a position to have a meaningful sense of political commitment. As Paul becomes radioactive, the novel imagines a new mode of engaging with the politics of nuclear energy and capitalist extractivism through the embeddedness of the human self within a greater-than-human ecosystem. The ecological vision that Gordimer's late style presents, then, rejects the separation of the human self from a non-human nature, and instead presents both as intimately inter-dependent and co-constituted. This, I will argue, is a departure from what critics describe as her 'spiritual turn' in *The Pickup*. I will elaborate on this in the relevant chapter, but to summarise, the distinction is that Gordimer's phenomenological turn presents an interrogation of the way in which the self apprehends and constructs its political reality. Unlike the assumptions made regarding Gordimer's spiritual turn, this phenomenological turn remains agnostic about any transcendental basis on which to ground one's experience or sense of self. Rather, it is concerned with the reconfiguration of the self in response to its vulnerability to and the permeability of the self with a greater-than-human ecosystem. There is, nevertheless, a further dimension of late style as a response to personal events in an author's life — and an author's own sense of mortality — that are relevant to *Get a Life*: the novel is dedicated to Reinhold Cassirer, Gordimer's late husband who died of cancer shortly before. However, I avoid such a biographical reading for two reasons: firstly, Gordimer herself has been adamant to avoid both being biographized and having her works attributed to biographical events. Secondly, such a biographical reading would be somewhat reductive. While there is a case to be made about the sense of lateness in the novel as a proximity to mortality, I find it more illuminating to focus not on characterising what events instigated Gordimer's late style, but instead on what kind of ethical reconfigurations her phenomenological turn presents.

Within the wider discourse on lateness, it is clear that Gordimer's own late style develops across her novels to serve different political and ethical ends. In her final novel, *No Time Like the Present*, there is a further development of this. The novel spans several years of Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma's presidencies in independent South Africa, and it chronicles the lives of a mixed couple of former freedom fighters as they adjust to their new political environment. While it bears many of the hallmarks of Gordimer's previous works — narrated through contradictory, irreconcilable perspectives of its protagonists, and evoking the frustration and anger at the betrayal of the ideals of the freedom struggle — there is a sense in which the novel's scope and scale indicate that her late style takes on new dimensions. The past that it evokes, of the protagonists Steven Reed and Jabulile Gumede's radical activism, as well as the way in which it chronicles and critiques its present moment, reflect a much longer history of struggle and the ways in which this struggle is transformed in the present. There is a testamentary quality to this novel, as it appears to take stock of what the freedom struggle has failed to achieve. If *No Time Like the Present* is read as a capstone to the development of Gordimer's late style, then there are many aspects of Gordimer's late works that find their most heightened expression in this novel. In particular, this novel expresses a sense of grief at the failure of the freedom struggle to achieve the equality and justice that it sought to achieve. The novel further mourns the loss of the radical energies of the past as the former freedom fighters like Steven Reed are forced to compromise in order to adjust to their new lives after the struggle. However, while Steven's fraught reconciliation with the new dispensation manifest in his angry and cynical disaffection with politics, the novel exposes how privileged and self-serving such cynicism is by counterposing Steven's voice with that of Jabulile. It is through Jabulile, and in particular the gendered and racial position she occupies as a black woman, that the novel moves past Steven's cynical desire to leave South Africa behind and emigrate to Australia. Jabulile comes to represent an ethics of care. This novel, like Gordimer's other late novels, is deeply invested in the topography and lived interactions within domestic

spaces. The household becomes a space for care and restitution. Crucially, this ethics of care extends beyond just the household and further encompasses Jabulile's legal practice: she does more than just care *about* the political crises that face South Africa, but she actively cares *for* vulnerable women who are disenfranchised in the legal system through her work as a paralegal aide. Jabulile comes to embody not just a private ethics of care, but also care as a political project that can create the necessary conditions for justice. In contrasting her disposition to care against Steven's cynicism, Gordimer's late style serves to highlight the emerging ethics of care as a response to the political crises of her present. While *No Time Like the Present* is rife with the same contradictions that characterise Gordimer's other late works, there is a sense in which these contradictions, though unreconciled, still present what can be interpreted as a space for moral repair. While Gordimer's late works do show what McMullan describes as a form of wisdom or serenity characteristic of some late works of other writers, there is nevertheless an imagining of the possibility of moral repair through care which draws together the subtle ethical developments in Gordimer's late fiction.

In drawing these themes together, in my conclusion I will address two standing questions from Clingman and Head's monographs. The first is one by Head in a short coda in his 1994 monograph that evaluates Gordimer's fiction in the context of the critical theories and stylistic practices associated with postmodernism. I remain agnostic as to the veracity or the utility of a label like 'postmodernism', itself deeply fraught and subject to frequent re-evaluation, but I nevertheless see a number of useful themes emerging from such a taxonomy of Gordimer's works. The principal aspects of postmodernist fiction, such as a concern with the untenability of ontological metanarratives previously held as truths, as well as stylistic devices that emphasise fictionality and the mediation of a literary text, seem to run counter to Gordimer's Marxist-realist aesthetics drawing from Fischer or György Lukács that were central to her earlier works. The features that characterise Gordimer's late style, such as her disillusionment with the

freedom struggle and the perspectival emphasis of the erosion of the white subject position, speak to these postmodernist narrative features, and could, in some interpretations, be considered a departure from Gordimer's earlier idiom. Regardless of the utility of postmodernism as a descriptor, such aspects of Gordimer's fiction do mark a stylistic shift that characterise a late style. But this lateness, I will argue, has a further dimension within the way in which Gordimer's fiction relates to history itself, one which emerges from Clingman's conception of Gordimer's mature works as a dialectic of the history of liberal politics and the freedom struggle. The specific metanarrative that is in decline in Gordimer's late fiction is that of the progressive, dialectical teleology of history that was central to Lukács's reading of Georg Hegel. Contrary to the linear, Hegelian dialectic of history where contradictions are sublated into a higher unity, I argue that Gordimer's late style presents what Adorno would regard as a 'negative dialectic' of history, wherein the contradictions are not unified into a whole, but remain unresolved and discordant. So if, according to Clingman, Gordimer's mature works present a dialectic of history that is disaffected with liberal politics and moves towards radical action, Gordimer's late works are a negative dialectic in response to the failure of that radical politics in achieving freedom, presenting instead a search for new modes of organising in such compromised times. It is this negative dialectic, then, embodied in the ontological and phenomenological questions presented in Gordimer's late works, that characterises her late style while also animating different modes of political engagement within the post-apartheid dispensation.

1. ‘By the Light of Fireflies’: Gordimer’s Late Style and the Post-Colonial Short Story

In his article on Nadine Gordimer’s late short stories, Graham Riach pays close attention to their stylistic characteristics and their intertexts with other defining works in late style discourse. He further situates these aspects of her work within the social and political context of post-apartheid South Africa. As scholarship on Gordimer’s late style has focussed on her short stories, I begin my investigation into the politics of Gordimer’s late style in this study from the same place in order to further develop Riach’s analysis. While this will be a departure from the chronological sequence that I follow in the subsequent chapters to trace the development of Gordimer’s late style, by looking at her two post-apartheid short story collections together I hope to speak to some wider questions within Gordimer scholarship as well as scholarship on the postcolonial short story. In this chapter, I will examine how Gordimer’s use of the short story form is particularly well adapted to address the political and ethical questions that are germane to the post-apartheid dispensation. I acknowledge, moreover, that within Gordimer scholarship and in the study of postcolonial fiction more generally the short story form has been given less attention and importance compared to the novel. In the context of Gordimer’s late style, however, I argue that the short story is an especially important and relevant field of inquiry, not just because they are exemplars of the stylistic and thematic features of Gordimer’s late style, but because their specific formal characteristics and their orientation towards the registering of social and political injustices of post-apartheid South Africa resonate with these political issues in her late works.

It is worth recapping Riach’s summary of the characteristic features of Gordimer’s late style, which include a sparse plot that seems to have neither a linear development nor resolution, uneasy vacillation between the past and the present, and the protagonists’ confusion about their identity and place within South African society. He takes, for example, the opening story of

Jump and Other Stories and its use of frequent flashbacks as well as its emphasis on memory and recollection to illustrate the how Gordimer's 'imagery and […] narrative strategy create a pervasive sense of temporal suspension' ('The Late Nadine Gordimer' 1083-4). I will examine the ways in which the apartheid past permeates Gordimer's short stories in due course. Riach, moreover, draws parallels between these temporal suspensions in Gordimer's stories with a sense of syntactic complexity, self-reflexivity, and inter-textual positioning within late style discourse. In particular, he highlights the many metafictional allusions to *The Tempest* in 'Loot'. *The Tempest* is a play which McMullan argues is 'synecdochic for late plays as a whole' (Shakespeare 169). Moreover, 'Loot' does not seem to have a clear plot, and is instead an abstract moral fable. Riach similarly considers the elliptic titular story from *Beethoven was One-Sixteenth Black*, with an almost non-existent plot and a syntax that vacillates between the past and present, as a further illustration of Gordimer's stylistic lateness ('The Late Nadine Gordimer' 1090). In particular, the protagonist of this story, like the white protagonist of many of Gordimer's late novels, seems to be adrift within the new society in an independent South Africa, being unable to reconcile his heritage as a white settler with the present moment. While all of these are aspects of Gordimer's late style that I will address in turn, it is useful to highlight the temporal characteristics specifically of Gordimer's late style. This recurring idea that the past permeates the present — syntactically at the level of Gordimer's prose, narratively through her use of flashbacks, and thematically through imagery that characterises a blending of the past and present — is especially revealing: the sense of arrested time embodies a disillusionment with a progressive teleology of revolution and radical politics. Moreover, this disruption within the phenomenology of time is one which Gordimer's short stories are especially adept at representing.

In this chapter, I will examine two of Gordimer's post-apartheid short story collections, *Beethoven was One-Sixteenth Black* and *Loot, and Other Stories*, and evaluate the specific formal and stylistic features of her late style in these texts. In particular, I will pay close attention to the way in which the

short story form accentuates the aspect of arrested time that is central to Gordimer's late works, particularly through a reading of the short story form's treatment of time. I will consider, on one level, individual short stories, and the ways in which the layering of time within the narrative as well as the formal succinctness and closure of the short story through the device of the epiphany create a sense of time that is a multiplicity of the past, present, and future. I argue that the layered, multiplicitous temporality of the short story form allow it to emphasise the recursiveness of the past within the present that is central to Gordimer's late style, and in so doing makes it especially suited to engage with the persisting inequalities of the colonial past in the post-apartheid present. Moreover, I will consider not just the temporality of the individual short story, but also the questions of perspective and scale across the short story cycle as a unified work. By telescoping across multiple perspectives, as embodied in different settings, genres, and protagonists in successive short stories, the short story cycle presents a further layer of multiplicity whereby it engages with different forms and structures of hierarchical power relations simultaneously. In the context of neo-colonial hierarchies, which are dispersed and decentralised, Gordimer's short story cycles are attuned to register and critique the polygonal and multifaceted dimensions of such inequalities.

Time and the Short Story

In an illuminating account of its form, Mary Rohrberger characterises the short story as 'an analogical mode [that] defied linearity and arrested time and moment in an eternal and continuous present' (8). Her account of time in the short story derives from Henri Bergson's distinction between time as it is measured on a clock and the psychic experience of duration. For Bergson, clock time is given by a succession of events like the oscillation of a pendulum or the movement of the hands of a clock (*Key Writings* 75). This is separate from the idea of duration, which is a subjective experience of time (*Key Writings* 77). Clock time is a homogeneous magnitude that can be measured, like when one counts the individual oscillations of a pendulum.

However, duration cannot be measured in this way as it is an abstract, subjective experience of multiple moments in time: if one considers the duration of one minute as all sixty oscillations of a minute pendulum simultaneously, then this simultaneity precludes the movement as the pendulum is stationary in each individual moment. Alternatively, if duration were simply the series of individual oscillations, then one would be trapped in an eternal present because each oscillation is identical and homogeneous (Bergson *Key Writings* 75). What characterises the experience of duration is that it is simultaneously both a succession of individual oscillations, and a series in which each oscillation is not identical, but instead contains all oscillations preceding it. This is created through the mental synthesis of these successive states through their accretion within consciousness (Bergson *Key Writings* 77). Duration, then, is what Bergson describes as a qualitative multiplicity, or a multiplicity in which heterogeneous temporal states coexist and permeate each other. Bergson's analogy is to think of this as notes in a tune: while the individual notes succeed each other, they are perceived in their totality and therefore melt into each other (*Key Writings* 72,5). While clock time is a physical magnitude that can be measured, duration is abstract and cannot be apprehended through measurement or analysis, but can only be 'penetrat[ed] into […] by an effort of the intuition' (Bergson *An Introduction to Metaphysics* 20).

For Rohrberger, Bergson's notion of clock time 'seems to define the novel's temporal base' (8): the linear plot and temporality of the conventional realist novel, manifesting in its extended narrative arc that is developed by the accretion of successive events in the plot, reflects the notion of time as a succession of events. In contrast, Bergson's idea of duration, or *durée*, 'seems perfectly fitted to the short story' as 'synchronicity defines the short story's base' (Rohrberger 8). However, the way in which she applies Bergson's notion of time to the short story is unclear: she introduces within the discussion of Bergson's terminology that has the potential to be misleading, particularly the distinction between 'synchronicity' and 'diachronicity' which Bergson himself did not use. While Rohrberger's

characterisation of clock time as diachronic is straightforward and unproblematic, there is a tension in her emphasis on the synchronicity of duration/*durée*. Bergson himself would resist the characterisation of duration as synchronic, as different temporal states do not, in his view, exist simultaneously. They are only synchronous insofar as they form part of a larger unity. Rather, duration is diachronic, but a diachronic series in which all states are heterogeneous, and they influence each other. Moreover, what Rohrberger describes as the 'arrested time' and 'eternal and continuous present' of the short story seems to be the very kind of presentism that Bergson tries to avoid through the concept of a qualitative multiplicity. Nevertheless, certain aspects of the short story form do reflect this sense of duration in a Bergsonian sense, such as the moment of epiphany which contains within it the totality of duration of the entire story, 'parenthetically enclosed by the story's beginning and end, both of which are implicit in the epiphany and coterminous with past and future' (Rohrberger 9).

Rather than thinking of duration and the form of the short story as synchronic, it is perhaps more useful to treat them as a qualitative multiplicity. As Rohrberger notes, the complex substructure of the story, with its intricate series of resonating allusions and patterns, allows the story to contain within it and reconcile opposed and contradictory states. The short story can, by virtue of this form, contain both 'unity and multiplicity at the same time' (Bergson *An Introduction to Metaphysics* 20), thereby operating within the qualitative multiplicity of duration (Rohrberger 8). It is this qualitative multiplicity of the short story that makes it best suited to engaging with the experience of modernity. It is also this qualitative multiplicity that renders the form, as Gordimer suggests, restless and transient. Moreover, this restlessness and transience of form of the short story allows a reader to intuit the nature of duration rather than reduce it to its constitutive concepts of magnitude.

The short stories in Gordimer's late collections, *Beethoven was One-Sixteenth Black* and *Loot, and Other Stories* characterise this sense of qualitative multiplicity. This is evident at two levels: on the level of the

individual short story, their style and form are such that they reflect the multiplicity of being both a diachronic succession of events and a larger unity of their duration. This qualitative multiplicity of time is particularly pronounced in the late style of Gordimer's works. As I will argue, the present moment of post-apartheid South Africa that Gordimer's fiction critiques is distinctly uneven, overlaid with the history of apartheid and racial segregation. These encroachments of the past are salient in the texture of Gordimer's prose, particularly in the way in which her narratives frequently shuttle between the past and present within sentences. But there is also a sense in which her stories' engagement with history, represented by physical signifiers of the colonial past in the landscape and through historical intertexts within the stories, further evokes this sense of the past within the present. In addition, I will argue that there is a further level at which Gordimer's stories demonstrate this sense of qualitative multiplicity, and that through their arrangement as a short story cycle. While each of the stories can stand independently as a work on its own, and they need not be read in any sequential order, there is a sense in which the works when taken together form a much larger structure. The short story cycle as a larger collection reconciles different and oppositional scales of time. It is by telescoping through these different temporalities that the short story cycle itself comes to embody a qualitative multiplicity beyond just the individual story.

In his account of the theory of the short story in his forthcoming book, Riach contrasts two approaches to the form of the postcolonial short story. The first is the essentialist view that the short story is uniquely adapted to articulate postcolonial critique (especially when compared with the novel)[3]. The second is the relativist view that there is nothing inherent in the form that confers upon it this advantage, rather the difference is in how individual writers have employed the form to serve a political purpose. Gordimer's view is unequivocally the former. In her lecture on the South African short story,

[3] Although Riach's book on the subject is still forthcoming, he summarises his argument in an interview about his doctoral research. See Riach, Graham. 'The Postapartheid Short Story.' Interview by John Gallagher, Cambridge PhDcasts, 19 November 2013 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdDc22n3DSU, 16 October 2020.

collected in *Telling Times*, she argues that there is 'a general and recurrent dissatisfaction with the novel as a means of netting […] the quality of human life' (*Telling Times* 168). She adds that one response to this dissatisfaction was the modernist and postmodernist crises in language and meaning, that words had lost their meaning in a capitalist modernity because of their abuse by advertising and political creeds. An alternative to this crisis, for Gordimer, is the renewal of the short story form, as she holds that the 'short story as a form as *a kind of creative vision* must be better equipped' to capture this reality of human life in a modernity in which this reality is increasingly obscured by 'the discoveries of science and the proliferation of communication media outside the printed word' (*Telling Times* 169).

The reason for this, she adds, is that the short story form 'always has been more flexible and open to experiment than the novel' (*Telling Times* 169). In contrast, the novel is confined by the 'prolonged coherence of tone' and a 'consistency of relationship' between characters and the reader, both of which are 'false to the nature of whatever can be grasped of human reality' (*Telling Times* 169). Gordimer's views of the short story align with positions held by a number of other critics who are part of a much wider debate on form, particularly György Lukács, whom she refers to later in the lecture and whose vocabulary (like the term 'ultimate reality') she uses consistently throughout the piece. Charles E. May, drawing from the Russian Formalist critic Boris Eikhenbaum, also argues that while long fiction assumes the primacy of 'experience', as constructed and mediated through the interaction of characters with their environments and the relationship between the reader and the text, the concise, fragmentary form and the simultaneous completeness and unity of the short story give primacy to '*an* experience' that is '*directly* and *emotionally* created and encountered' (133, emphasis mine). The coalescing of multiple events into unindividuated 'experience' contained within the structure of the novel attempts to impose a coherence and order that is at odds with the chaotic and fragmentary state of modernity. May's argument derives from post-Kantian phenomenology and psychology, which holds that one's notions of reality are determined by the categories of

expectations that are innate in one's mind. The singular experience contained within a novel, May adds, is characterised by what the phenomenologist Alfred Schutz calls the idealisations of our encounter with the world that all perspectives are interchangeable and different systems of meaning are congruent, and that therefore people would perceive the world the same way if they saw things each other's vantage point (see May 136-7). However, these idealised assumptions about grasping reality do not hold because perspectives are nonuniform and incongruent. The short story presents an experience of heightened intensity in a manner that is individuated and self-contained, thereby reflecting the nature of intersubjective encounters with reality in a manner that avoids the fallacious idealisations that Schutz identifies. It is through this primacy of a plurality of experiences, manifested in individual situations of heightened intensity, that the short story accommodates the varied, incoherent, and uneven experience of modernity.

It is a caveat worth noting that Gordimer phrases her critique in the present perfect tense, speaking about the form of the short story and the novel as they were until the time when she delivered the lecture in 1968, rather than asserting that these assumptions about the two forms apply indefinitely and universally. This guards against a particular criticism against what Riach describes as the essentialist view of the postcolonial short story, the criticism that the novel and short story forms are malleable and porous, and far from being static and unchanging they often influence each other. Later experimental novels do engage with these epistemic and formal questions of language and modernity. But even then, no matter how readily novels suspend plot, fragment their structure, dissolve their perspectives, or debase meaning within their language, they are still unified by an overarching narrative structure.

Gordimer's analysis of the short story form has a radical implication for how the form represents reality. She argues that its 'fragmented and restless form' (*Telling Times* 171) is an alternative to nihilistic scepticism with language and reality that became, for Marxist critics, pitfalls of modernist and

postmodernist poetics. By allowing for conflicting and provisional perspectives on language and reality, the short story form can critique the ways in which regimes of political ideology or capitalist production inflect language in different contexts without the wholesale abandoning of either the possibility of language to grasp reality, or the existence of this reality in the first place. This becomes especially important in postcolonial contexts in which the experience of the present is deeply uneven, and continues to be striated by the injustices, inequalities, and racial politics of the colonial past. In the context of Gordimer's post-apartheid short stories, time is fragmented, contradictory and nonuniform. The colonial past continuously encroaches upon the post-apartheid present.

The titular story of the collection *Beethoven was One-Sixteenth Black* operates through this multiplicity of time within the narrative. The protagonist, a white academic and former activist named 'Frederick Morris', searches for black relatives in order to claim what he considers as privilege through kinship with the new dominant class in post-apartheid South Africa. To this end, he speculates that his great-grandfather would have had affairs with black women when he was in Africa mining for diamonds, and he goes to Kimberley to explore the possibility that he would find his great-grandfather's mixed-race descendants from these illicit affairs. But his search for supposed family in the present is overlaid with the tumultuous history of apartheid racial politics and colonialism, even when he performs the most mundane of tasks like looking up 'Morris' in a Kimberley telephone directory:

> The telephone directory didn't give much clue to where the cousins, collaterals, might be found living on the territory of diamonds; assuming the addresses given with the numbers are white suburban rather than indicating areas designated under the old segregation which everywhere still bear the kind of euphemistic flowery names that disguised them and where most black and colour-mixed people, around the cities, still live. (*Beethoven* 11-2)

What is ostensibly a statement about the present — that 'the telephone directory didn't give much clue' to where these cousins might be found — is encroached upon by signifiers of the colonial past: the diamond mines and

apartheid racial segregation. The tense of this sentence further complicates the way in which time operates. While the main verb of the sentence is, like the rest of the narrative, in the present tense, the relative clauses subsequently change tense. The neighbourhoods that Morris is searching are described by the phrase '*designated* under the old segregation', with the past-tense verb and the modifier 'old' alluding to a past of colonial racial segregation. At the same time, these neighbourhoods '*still* bear the kind of euphemistic flowery names' and are places where black and mixed '*still* live': the adverb 'still' in both cases suggests continuity, both in the sense that the present-tense verbs are continuous, even if they are not syntactically given in the present continuous tense, and that there is a continuity in these forms of injustice and segregation alluded to in the previous clause. By alluding simultaneously to the past and to the continuous present, this run-on sentence has the effect of invoking the entire sequence of historic events in a single moment, but rather than flattening it into a single, present moment, it preserves its diachronic sense of motion. The present tense narrative here, far from being even or uniform, is variable and interpenetrated by the past. Not only does this sentence show the way in which the present moment is striated by the racial and economic divisions resulting from the colonial past, this constant shuttling between tenses creates within the present a sense of multiplicity of the subjective experience of time.

Similar to the texture of the prose, the story's relationship to history, invoked here through historical events as well as musical intertexts, is one that further augments this multiplicity of time in the present moment. The story opens by quoting a radio presenter who claims, like the title, 'Beethoven was one-sixteenth black' (*Beethoven* 3). This line is isolated as a single paragraph, and the continuing diegetic information that qualifies this quote, that this was a linking announcement prior to the playing Beethoven's string quartets op. 130 and 135, is split into a second paragraph which begins mid-sentence. This signals the ambivalent temporality of the story: time is at once continuous because of the linear syntax of the sentence and arrested when

the sentence is split between two paragraphs. The opening section of the story continues to emphasise different times of during and after apartheid:

> Once there were blacks wanting to be white.
> Now there are whites wanting to be black.
> It's the same secret. (*Beethoven* 3)

The narrative flits back and forth within successive sentences between the past and present. What this passage highlights succinctly is the different forms of identity politics from during and after apartheid: black people wanted to be white to be liberated from the persecution and systematic oppression they faced during apartheid because of the colour of their skin, and white people in post-apartheid South Africa claimed black genealogy to legitimise their position or claim kinship with the blacks.

The suggestion that 'it's the same secret' is highly suspect because it attempts to equate the blacks' desire for freedom from oppression and the whites' pretence at authenticity and appropriation of other identities. This is rendered ironic by focalising through the protagonist: he is a white academic and former activist from during the struggle, and in his present moment of post-apartheid transformation he imagines himself as having mixed-race relatives, speculating on whether or not his great-grandfather had had an affair while he was prospecting for gold. He searches in Kimberley for the possibility of having mixed-race relatives from these affairs in an attempt to create for himself a past which would give his present a sense of belonging and authenticity within this new society. He notes ironically that this past 'is valid only in relation to whether the present recognises it' (*Beethoven* 7). This quest for a connection to black identity, however, ends in frustration, as he admits that this was a 'try at privilege' to claim kinship with the new ruling class rather than a sincere belief in such a genealogy (*Beethoven* 15). But regardless of how contradictory or hypocritical these claims of black identity and kinship are, the fact that the protagonist sees his attempt at assuming black identity as a similar kind of 'trying at privilege' as black people desiring to be white during apartheid shows the extent to which the race relations in the present are inflected by the past. Of particular significance is that Frederick's great-grandfather, to whom Fredrick traces his genealogy, is

ironically named Walter Benjamin Morris (*Beethoven* 5): Fredrick's search for his great-grandfather turns him into a dismayed caricature of Walter Benjamin's angel of history, as his gaze is backward-looking — as he attempts to create for himself a past to legitimise his present life — while at the same time being propelled into a new and contradictory future.

Similar intrusions of the past into the present characterise other stories in Gordimer's late collections, like 'Mission Statement' and 'The Diamond Mine' in *Loot, and Other Stories*. The spaces that the characters traverse in 'Mission Statement' evoke the colonial past in various guises. The story follows Roberta Blayne, Assistant to the Administrator of an international aid agency, as she embarks upon an affair with Gladwell Shadrack Chabruma, Deputy-Director in the Department of Land Affairs. Blayne's grandfather, it transpires later in the story, was the manager of a mine in South Africa. There are instances where the politicians and aid workers are critical of the depredations of the colonial past, like when they denounce colonial game hunting for the decline in wildlife in the country (*Loot* 24) or in the shame that Blayne feels for the fact that her grandfather ran his mine like a slave plantation and addressed his black housemen in terms that were racist and dehumanising (*Loot* 56). Both Blayne's act of confessing her ancestry to Chabruma and the financial aid that Britain provides through the Agency are characterised as expiation for historic wrongs, and Blayne reads Chabruma's reticence about voicing overt criticism of colonialism as his 'strength of character', that he does not dwell in the past but instead merely pursues 'the way forward' out of his 'largesse of forgiveness' (*Loot* 24). However, the relationship with the colonial past is far from a uniform sense of atonement, as there is a simultaneous reiteration of previous hierarchies of power and control. The institutions of power and governance that are central to the plot, like the various ministries in the Government or the aid agency, occupy colonial buildings: Blayne is housed in a suburban bungalow from colonial times (*Loot* 10), and likewise the official residence of Chabruma and other cabinet ministers and diplomats lived in suburban houses with manned guard-houses, swimming pools and tennis courts (*Loot* 39). It is especially

revealing that following a long meeting, Chabruma and Blayne retreated to a bar where

> But from his [Chabruma's] side, the conversation in the beer-reeking dingy nook built during colonial rule in nostalgia for an English pub was being conducted as a continuation of the afternoon meeting where the Agency's agenda […] and the Government's counterpart were trawling for accommodation. (*Loot* 16)

The features of these houses are reminiscent of spaces of racial segregation where black people were historically denied entry. They are now repurposed into signs of wealth and status for the new political elite. The way in which these signifiers of a colonial past are reiterated in the echelons of power and administration are far from that of a straightforward moral or political equivalence between colonial rule and the new government. Rather, the implication here is that the new political class has moved into the spaces previously held by white colonial administrators and has begun employing the various inequalities of class and status — represented here through the architecture of houses and the value of property — in ways that serve both the political interest of the independent state, but also the private wealth and power of the ministers involved.

In addition to the material signifiers of the apartheid past and post-apartheid present, there are further layers of time — that of subjective memory and narrative — which further creates a sense of unevenness and heterogeneity in the present. In 'Beethoven', this is signalled only momentarily at the beginning of the story through an extradiegetic intervention by the narrator within parentheses, addressed directly to the reader: '(of course that's not his name, you'll soon catch on I'm writing about myself, a man with the same initials)' (*Beethoven* 3). This intervention complicates the story's sense of time: the narrative is written in the present tense as if the events were unfolding immediately within the experience of the protagonist, but this remark by the narrator implies a distance in time between the narrator and the reader, as if to split the present of the story and the present in which the story is being written and read. That the name of the protagonist is a fiction implies that the endeavour of the narrator searching

for an identity is a process of fictionalisation. The specific purpose of this is personal gain, as Fredrick desires the supposed privilege and authenticity that would come with having mixed-race family. But it is also in some sense an attempt at reconciling the past of apartheid and the struggle against it with the present, where his place within this new society is drastically undermined by the change in the balance of power. It is through the act of writing a genealogy that the narrator tries to bring together these disparate pasts and presents into a unified subjective experience. These multiple temporalities that are held together by a single narrative voice represents what, in Bergson's sense, is the 'qualitative multiplicity' of the subjective experience of time: the past and present are at the same time discrete moments in history, in this case when the balance of power shifts from the whites to the black ruling class. Nevertheless, these moments continue to implicate each other, as the protagonist attempts to construct for himself a past that gives authenticity to his present.

There is a similar treatment of time within the different layers of hypodiegetic narratives in 'The Diamond Mine'. The story takes place in the present, as the narrator addresses the reader in the second person as the soldier from the story. At the end of the short opening paragraph, the narrator associates 'call[ing]' a character by a name with 'call[ing] them up' as if reaching out across space and time through a telephone but also as if it were an act of conjuring them up. The framing of the narrative becomes a performative speech act in which the memories of the past are conjured and recreated within the present. But the plot of the story is entirely a flashback to the 1940s, thereby embedding within the present a time that is entirely asynchronous within it. The difference in time also registers a specific moment in South Africa's colonial history. In the story, the sixteen-year-old daughter of the mine owner has a brief relationship with a soldier who was a distant family friend and receives marching orders to fight in North Africa during the Second World War. In the climactic moment of the story, the soldier has his hand down the girl's skirt and is stimulating her in secret in the back seat of the family car when the family took them out for a picnic to see

the diamond mines. During this time, the girl's father is recounting to his family the history of diamond mining in South Africa. He alludes to the discovery of 'one of the biggest diamonds in the world after the Koh-i-noor's hundred-and-nine carats' (*Loot* 131). It is unclear to which diamond he is referring because the Cullinan diamond, perhaps the most famous and historic diamond to be found in South Africa and possibly the one to which he alludes, is both the largest rough diamond ever found and was also cut into the largest clear diamond, rather than merely being one of the biggest after the Koh-i-Noor. Nevertheless, all the diamonds to which he alludes were used to adorn the British crown jewels, representing the way in which the colonial wealth is exploited for the adornment and splendour of empire. It is especially significant that this flashback is set during the Second World War, when the soldier was fighting for the Commonwealth, representing the way in which it is not just the gemstones that were taken but also the soldiers who were conscripted into the Allied war effort. These diamond mines, which are forms of multinational capitalist industry today, are part of a much longer history of colonial exploitation, and the experience of it in the present moment is a qualitative multiplicity that is overlaid with contradictory movements of the narrative voice between the past and the present.

A further point worth emphasising is that it is the specific form of the short story, particularly its concentration on a single moment and its independent, self-contained structure, that allows for the story to create this qualitative multiplicity within the experience of the present. This is particularly prominent in 'Mission Statement', whose opening paragraph is the anecdote shared by Blayne's grandfather about the black servants whom he treated like enslaved people on a plantation when he used to manage the Buffalo Mine. The story shifts immediately and seamlessly into the present day, and it becomes unclear what relevance that opening passage has to the plot as none of the characters or events are mentioned again, until the passage is repeated again later on, this time rendered in italics as it focalises through Blayne's narrative, as she drives past the mine (*Loot* 41-2). Just like in 'Beethoven' or 'The Diamond Mine', the narrative seems to be contained

within a loop, only here it is the past memory and its reiteration that frames the experience of the present, rather than a hypodiegetic narrative in the present conjuring up the past. It is at this reiteration of the anecdote about the mine that the opening passage's relevance to Roberta's life is first implied, before she confesses the same explicitly to Chabruma later on, creating a dramatic reveal for a reader that draws into coherence subtle details that were introduced earlier on, like her relinquishing her maiden name or her shame in being British motivating her aid work. The story presents two different moments of epiphany: one for Blayne as she confesses and repents the guilt and shame of her ancestry, and the other for the reader for whom this sudden reveal creates the effect of a single moment that brings together all of Blayne's past and gives meaning to the entire arc of the narrative, both past and future. Epiphany is central to the form of the short story, and is created through its condensed aesthetic, parabolic structure, and instantaneous temporality.

The longer, diachronic structure of a novel would not allow for a complete narrative arc to be suspended within a singular temporal loop like in these stories. The need for the novel to develop and resolve characters and relations between them and their surroundings would force the story to emerge from their singular focus on individual events. This contrast between the short story and novel is most apparent in the tension within the narrative and temporal structure of *Get a Life*, which I will discuss in detail in a later chapter. But to summarise briefly, this novel attempts to represent the uneven temporality of multinational capital and industrial development through a fragmented narrative: it is divided into four sections, each section corresponding roughly to some aspect of the protagonist Paul Bannerman's diagnosis with cancer, his becoming radioactive, his recovery and his activism. Paul has epiphanic reveries throughout the novel, but these reveries are different from the moment of epiphany as in a short story: because of the accretive structure of the novel as it progresses through different stages of Paul and his family's life, these epiphanic moments do not give meaning or coherence to the entirety of the novel, but become contained

within their individual sections. The form of the novel does not create a sense of qualitative multiplicity through its use of epiphany in the same way that a short story does.

This qualitative multiplicity is particularly prominent in Gordimer's late style through her use of intertexts. The allusion to Ludwig van Beethoven and his presence as an intertext, particularly the Op.130 and Op.135 string quartets, Riach argues, 'positions Gordimer's work in dialogue with his, and with his lineage of artistic lateness' (Riach 'The Late Nadine Gordimer' 1092). These quartets are particularly renowned as exemplars of Beethoven's late style, according to Adorno and Said, because of their stylistic difficulty and their defiance of contemporary aesthetic tastes, particularly the Große Fuge movement that was the original finale of the Op.135 quartet and the Heiliger Dankgesang that is the centrepiece of Op.130. Moreover, as per Johan Jacobs' reading of intertextuality in Gordimer's fiction, the use of an intertext further complicates historicity within the story: to quote a work as an intertext is to fragment and distort it from its original utterance and thereby challenge this history (35-6). In addition to signalling late style discourse, the Beethoven quartets further signify the politics of taste, in this case representing the edifice of western classical music and high culture which used to be the preserve of the white elite in the apartheid past. Gordimer alludes to this racialisation of the appreciation of music in a later story in the collection, 'The Second Sense', where the musician protagonist notes that 'Bach, Mozart, Hindemith, Cage, Stockhausen, Glass are no longer regarded in the performance world patronisingly as music blacks neither enjoy nor understand, don't play' (Beethoven 161). The irony of 'Beethoven was One-Sixteenth Black' is that, far from making Beethoven seem like something blacks did not understand, the radio presenter tries to claim a trace of black ancestry to elevate the status of Beethoven's work. The use of Beethoven as a historical intertext creates this temporal doubleness by both evoking and undermining the historicity and status of these works. This ironic inversion serves to interrogate history and the political context within which such works of art were appreciated. Through their combined use of intertext, metafiction

and allusion to the colonial past, what these short stories represent, is the way in which the present moment is striated by the combined and uneven development of capitalism and colonial history, and how the inequalities of the colonial past are still manifested within post-apartheid society.

The Telescoping Perspectives of the Short Story Cycle

In their analysis of literature in the global capitalist world-system, the Warwick Research Collective advance a framework of 'combined and uneven development' which they trace from the works of Engels, Lenin and Trotsky to Fredric Jameson and Franco Moretti. Within this framework, the global capitalist economy is striated into regions of cores and semi-peripheries whose development is combined in that they are dependent upon each other and mutually implicated within a larger macroeconomic structure, and 'uneven' in that these relationships are asymmetrical and hierarchical, in which core regions benefit from the exploitation of peripheries and semi-peripheries (Deckard et al. 10-2). The various forms that this capitalist world-system takes, manifested in different macroeconomic structures and institutions such as multinational corporations, international aid, or global finance, operate simultaneously in the present across different scales. For Sharae Deckard, et al, an aesthetic that is critical of this world-system must

> mediate sensoriums of the contemporary as profoundly uneven and heterogeneous, structured by the asymmetries of uneven and combined capitalist development that striate the global North and South, in which history is represented as synchronic and multi-temporal (2).

The apprehension and critique of such complex polygonal relations poses distinct formal challenges, as Deckard, et al observe. They note three approaches that are inadequate as aesthetic responses to these structures: maximalist novels that try to accommodate simultaneity and multi-focality at the level of the sentence become unreadable and incomprehensible; encyclopaedic novels which attempt to reproduce totality within themselves end up being bloated; mere linear chronological approaches to history are schematic and hollow, with mechanistic plots, flat characterisation and

reductive psychologisation (3-4). It is difficult to find a formal strategy that is multi-focal and simultaneous while at the same time not compromising the complex interplay of human subjectivity, desire, and agency within these structures of capital. In light of this critique of the challenges faced by a globalist novel, I argue that the short story is a form that by its nature accommodates simultaneity and synchronicity of capitalist modernity, while also allowing for the complex interaction of subjectivity, desire and agency within this modernity. By presenting a succession of different short stories, each narrated from a different vantage point, a short story cycle is able to telescope between different perspectives. This renders the short story cycle as what Deckard describes as a multifocal and multi-temporal form that allows it to engage with the different temporal and geographical scales at which these forms of combined and uneven development are manifest simultaneously. The qualities of the short story that make it particularly suited to articulate postcolonial critique in a capitalist modernity operate not just on the level of the short story cycle, but at the scale of the individual story. By virtue of the heightened aesthetic intensity of a single moment or event, the short story itself is intensely perspectival in its focus and conveys an experience of a multi-temporal present. In Gordimer's stories, this present is striated by the combined and uneven development of capitalism.

Paul March-Russell identifies some of the key approaches to the short story cycle, the first being that of Forrest Ingram and Susan Garland Mann that short story cycles have a formal unity constituted by recognisable patterns and the elaboration of consistent themes, the second being that of Robert Luscher and J. Gerald Kennedy that it is an accumulative process of the progressive development of themes and motifs through a particular sequence of stories, and the third by Maggie Dunn and Ann Morris that the short story cycle is a 'composite novel' that blends genres and modes (March-Russell 104-5). Any kind of commentary on the short story cycle is made difficult by the fact that short stories are usually published as standalone pieces in periodicals and only later anthologised into a collection. So, it is difficult to make formal assumptions about their composition. But

each of these strands of critical opinion on the form of the short story share the intuition that the short story cycle is in some ways greater than the sum of its parts, and they only differ on the details of how this is the case, whether to read them by looking for patterns between stories that are independent of each other, or to treat them as a sequence whose meaning is cumulative. I would resist the temptation to consider the meaning of short stories as a 'sequence', as this would entail the need to read the stories in order and drastically undermine the flexibility of the form that is its unique advantage. Nevertheless, especially in the case of Gordimer's works, there is a sense in which her late story collections have a sense of unity in terms of the patterns created by themes and motifs that are addressed in her works. They are also to some extent composite works, mixing different modes like fantasy (like in 'Dreaming of the Dead'), allegory and parable ('Loot' and 'Tapeworm'), metafiction ('Beethoven'), or social realism ('Mission Statement'). And even though most of these stories were originally published as standalone pieces, the editorial process of their anthologising and the authorial control over them would support reading them as singular works with a sense of unity of purpose.

The stories in *Loot* converge on different meanings of the title: 'loot' as wealth that is acquired through plunder, the very act of exploitation or 'looting' and the greed that attends to these acquisitive desires. In an interview with Hermione Lee, Gordimer describes the title story, 'Loot', as a 'political fable', containing a little bit of both a 'moral fable' and 'political allegory' (316). Riach elaborates that this story was originally published in *The New Yorker* in 1999, around the time when Thabo Mbeki assumed the office of the President ('The Late Nadine Gordimer' 1086). During this time of regime change, 'Loot' is a parable that serves as a warning against greed and corruption.

It is worth clarifying the differences between the modes of fable, allegory, and parable. According to Gerard Steen, a parable is an anecdote with a specific moral teaching. It operates through allegory, or the use of sustained metaphor to convey a meaning other than what is being described. However, while an allegory need not necessarily have an overt moral

purpose, a parable's objective is moral teaching. A parable is similar to a fable in this regard. However, a fable has a pithy explication of the story's moral in the end, whereas a parable does not have this explication and leaves its meaning more open-ended. Whether 'Loot' is a fable, as Gordimer suggests, or parable depends on how one interprets the closing line: 'Full fathom five' (*Loot* 6). This allusion to the oft-quoted line from *The Tempest* is a pithy recapitulation of the warning that this story gives: as the looters were drowned by the returning sea, their greed was their own undoing. However, as Riach notes, this last line was absent in the original version of the story and only added upon later revision of the story as it was being anthologised ('The Late Nadine Gordimer' 1089). Moreover, far from rounding off the moral teaching of the story through this explication, this invocation of *The Tempest* as an intertext seems to open up further questions — to do with Prospero's hubris, his vow in the end to bury his staff and books, the figure of Caliban and its significance in the context of postcoloniality — and thereby leaving its meaning open-ended. Because of its lack of the distinguishing moral explication of a fable, Gordimer's story is, in these narratological terms, more of a parable than a fable.

What defines the mode of a parable, according to Gila Safran Naveh, are its didacticism and allegoricity while simultaneously obscuring truth (6). It is this obscuring of truth that makes a parable enigmatic and indirect. Inherent in this is two kinds of doubleness, the first is one of its didactic purpose: a parable is intended to instruct while at the same time obscuring the truth that it needs to convey; the second is of is treatment of reality: the parable must refer to the reality of the real world but only do so indirectly through allusion. In 'Loot', the mode of parable, then, engages with these structures of the capitalist world-system through metaphor. The target domain of this metaphor, Mbeki's presidency and the workings of his administration, are rendered here in abstract terms, such that the correspondence between them is not immediately apparent or signalled within the text. The source domain of this metaphor is that of the people of a coastal town looting the riches of the sea at lowering of the tide during an

earthquake. The way in which the parable works, through this use of metaphor, is by revealing simultaneously both the similarities and dissimilarities between the source and target domains. Doubleness, as I will discuss in the chapter and in the conclusion, is an especially salient feature of Gordimer's late style. A similar doubleness between the reality of South African politics and the fictional, fantasy of the parable is signalled by the opening line of the story, 'Once upon *our* time' (*Loot* 3, emphasis mine): although uncannily reminiscent of folklore, fantasy and fairy tale, this phrase, through the pronoun 'our', resists the convention of these modes of narrative to set the story in a non-specific time with the indefinite article 'a', and instead grounds the story within its immediate history. The pronoun 'our' further gestures towards a shared collectivity between the narrator and reader, thereby creating a compact between them.

Central to Naveh's account is the parable's reliance on the appeal to a truth that transcends the real world, like that of an all-powerful 'Other' authority like a god in order to obtain a moral lesson (7). This act of god is manifested in the novel through the tidal wave that drowns the looters as punishment for their greed. The story seems to be reaching towards an objective and transcendent moral authority. However, the form of the modern parable particularly is circumspect about its affirmation of an objective truth. Naveh notes this is particularly significant in the works of Franz Kafka, whose parable-like stories, through their doubleness of surface and implied meaning, simultaneously articulate a 'covert attack on metaphysics' (149). For Kafka, as well as Jorge Luis Borges, modernity was characterised by a cosmic failure of the human subject to grasp reality and gain knowledge, characterised by spiritual desolation and isolation (Naveh 159). It is worth noting that Kafka's works are likewise central to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of a minor literature which I will discuss later. One could perhaps argue that the deterritorialization and linguistic indeterminacy of minor literatures make them especially suited to articulate such metaphysical crises, however as I had outlined previously my approach is concerned with

an analysis of the formal characteristics of the short story rather than the contexts of publication that render it a minor literature.

A similar metaphysical crisis is evident in 'Loot': while the story is an objective, moral condemnation of greed and corruption during Mbeki's assumption of the presidency, it nevertheless operates through a mode that foregrounds its fictionality. Gordimer's use of parable is characterised by doubleness of political stagnation: there is a search for a new form of sustained political commitment, manifested in a didactic purpose of the story, while nevertheless harbouring a nascent and subdued sense of betrayal and disaffection with the new political order. The paradox of this narrative contingency that nevertheless appeals to an objective moral authority is a sophisticated response to the epistemic crisis of modernity that Gordimer feels the novel fails to address: the short story embodies a form of commitment which, while acknowledging its epistemic and perspectival limitations, resists resigning its metaphysics to nihilism, but instead reaches outward towards the possibility of political critique.

Moreover, by engaging with the politics of Mbeki's presidency through allegory, the story critiques the South African government and its regime in terms that are metaphorical, abstract, and distant. The scale on which this story operates, therefore, is a universal and non-specific one concerned with morality rather than the material reality of the ways in which institutions of power work. However, 'Mission Statement', which follows on immediately after 'Loot', is the opposite: it is not abstract or allegorical in its meaning, but is a realist interrogation of the nexus through which foreign aid and tenders for government projects are brokered. The characters are all agents within the various institutions at play, government ministries, aid agencies, UN bodies, private companies, et cetera. Moreover, unlike the abstract scale at which the 'Loot' operates, 'Mission Statement' is grounded in the specific dealings of macroeconomic structures of capitalist expansion. It is a direct form of critique as it refers to United Nations agencies, Government departments and ministers, foreign aid agencies and multinational corporations and the nexus in which they operate.

While ‘Loot’ appeals to an external morality, ‘Mission Statement’ foregrounds the contingency of its meaning through the metafictional undermining of its own perspective. A greater part of the story is bookended by the anecdote about black workers’ necks that Blayne’s grandfather would share to entertain his guests at parties. The opening anecdote frames the story within the legacy of mining and the guilt of this colonial inheritance. But the way in which the anecdote is reiterated in Blayne’s mind (*Loot* 41-2), and the way in which she rejects her grandfather’s story and criticises it for its colonialist language later on signals a metafictional gesture that undermines the ontological fixity of its own narrative. But in contrast to the parable form, there is no greater moral force like an act of god that gives the story a moral meaning. The story ‘Visiting George’ also employs similar metafictional devices that undermine the distinction between the real and the fictional in order to dramatize the conflict of loyalties that leads an émigré to leave South Africa. The story follows an unnamed narrator, ostensibly a radical socialist from South Africa, who remembers visiting a fellow comrade in London, only the narrator reveals at the end that they might have ‘dreamt this’, and instead says ‘what makes it real? […] Writing it down’ (*Loot* 72). This sense that the story creates of not knowing whether the narrative is true or false, and whether or not the narrator is reliable, embodies the dilemma that the characters face of disillusion and corruption with socialism at the sight of collective pig farms in the USSR (*Loot* 70).

There is also a further absence of a didactic intent in the story. This is particularly salient when Blayne wrestles with Chabruma’s proposal and the prospect of entering into a bigamous marriage: the thought of bigamy is something Blayne finds abhorrent and contradictory, even though it is acceptable within South African society amongst black members of the Cabinet, such as the Minister of Environment and Tourism (*Loot* 62). What bigamy represents here is a conflict between a Western view of modernity and traditional values and customs. There are complex hierarchies of gender and power that striate these questions: the traditional marriages that these politicians have render their wives as subordinated and domestic, like ‘a

simple woman who takes care of the kids […] shops for the official residence […] and has nothing to say to him [Chabruma]' about politics (*Loot* 63). In comparison, Roberta seems emancipated by this western modernity that afforded her an education and a high-ranking diplomatic job. However, the narrative is circumspect about making such comparisons, partly because of how dangerously close it veers towards conventional colonialist notions of modernity and primitivism, but mostly because it remains agnostic from any kind of didactic meaning. The story makes no claims about this apparent conflict in the practice of bigamy between modernity or traditional values. The ending offers no resolution of this particular problem, as Blayne avoids the question entirely by emigrating for different reasons, particularly to do with her guilt for her grandfather's mine.

If one were to read these two stories in succession, the sudden and drastic change in scale and perspective would have a disorientating effect. While these stories vary in their perspective and mode, and are all independent of each other, there is a sense that, when taken together, their meaning is more than the sum of their parts. These varied yet congruous perspectives allow the form of the short story cycle to be a qualitative multiplicity that depicts simultaneously the different scales of space and time at which these conflicts and injustices persist in the newly-independent state: abstract parables, personal lives, family histories, government institutions, university campuses, et cetera. Each story correspondingly operates on a different scale at which it registers the underlying racial and social contradictions of this society, for example 'The Generation Gap' follows a group of siblings in a middle-class, white family who deal with their shared outrage at the news that their father has left their mother and begun a relationship with a woman who is the same age as the youngest sibling. The four of them are confronted by their own racial prejudices when they are appalled at the thought that this woman already had a child from a mixed-race father, and their father would now be looking after him (*Loot* 84). 'Look-Alikes' is set in a university campus that has homeless black squatters, and the story represents the state of anxiety and disorder surrounding the

dissolution of boundaries of race and class within ideological state apparatuses like university campuses and academia. Likewise, in *Beethoven*, the title story is about an academic navigating his personal ancestry. Each of these narratives is complete in and of itself, thereby avoiding the pitfall of reductive or schematic plots or characters. The stories within the cycle are further unified by their shared theme and concern with the critique of the forms of combined and uneven development in post-apartheid South Africa. However, the disorientation caused by the frequent changes in scale and perspective has the further advantage of depicting the sense of ethical and epistemic flux that characterises literature of the periphery.

The Polygonal Form of the Postcolonial Short Story Cycle

The short story form has been the subject of some dispute in the context of postcolonial writing. On one hand, critics and scholars see the short story form as 'particularly suited to the representation of liminal or problematised identities' (Hunter 138). Critics such as Adrian Hunter and Paul March-Russell regard the short story as what they term a 'minor' form, drawing from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, a form which 'deterritorialized' and therefore 'suitable for strange and minor uses' (Hunter 139; March-Russell 248). While commenting on Kafka's works, Deleuze and Guattari define a minor literature as that which 'a minority constructs in a majority language' (16). The defining characteristics of a minor literature, they continue, are its 'deterritorialization' — i.e. a displacement of language due to colonial domination — that it is always politicised — as the exigencies of empire compel writers of a minor literature to engage directly with politics — and that everything has a collective value as the scarcity of talent and the charged political landscape mean literature will take on a collective, revolutionary function (16-8).

For March-Russell, this 'minor' status through their publication in little magazines — being separate from the bourgeois form of the novel and the moral influence of institutions such as libraries — enables the short story form to be subversive and heterodox (67). It is this 'minor' status, Hunter

further argues, that various writers have deployed as a vehicle for postcolonial dissent. Crucially, for Hunter, this is not something that is inherent to the story. He is agnostic about whether or not the short story form is 'uniquely adaptable or amenable to the colonial or postcolonial context as a whole' (139), arguing that there is very little evidence for this claim. He dismisses, for example, Frank O'Connor's suggestion that the short story form speaks to and about people within ruptured colonial and postcolonial societies (see Hunter 138). He compares Chinua Achebe and James Kelman, both subjects of a later chapter in his book, and argues that Achebe's account of the postcolonial reality of Igbo culture and Nigerian society and Kelman's critique of inequalities of class in Britain are rendered more precisely, suggestively, meaningfully or exhilaratingly in their celebrated longer fiction than in their short stories (138). So rather than see the short story form as being inherently suited to represent the experience of postcoloniality, he proposes the weaker claim that the short story form has been used effectively by specific writers in these contexts to advance a critique of empire. Subsequent accounts of the postcolonial short story, such as that by Barbara Korte, appreciate this emphasis on particularity as it suits the heterogeneity of different colonial and postcolonial contexts (42). This framework of minor literature and deterritorialisation similarly informs the discussion amongst contributors in the collection on the postcolonial short story edited by Maggie Awadalla and March-Russell.

Hunter's comparison between the novels and short fiction of Achebe and Kelman finds echoes in the scholarship on Gordimer and the ebb and flow of her reputation as a short story writer. Early critics regarded her primarily as a short story writer, as Robert Haugh for instance lauded the poetic intensity and technical perfection of her short stories, and deemed her novels technical failures in comparison (see Head 160). This changed quite dramatically later on: Stephen Clingman, whose 1986 monograph on Gordimer's novels was immensely influential in determining the scholarly consensus around her work, argues that the formal differences between the

novel and short story make the former a more significant form in its engagement in history because:

> the novel is both intensive and more extensive historically than the short story could ever be; it is a question of degree; but one that approaches 'kind'. […] [B]ecause the stories are by definition shorter, and expressions of a more coherent moment of conception, they are more easily susceptible to what is normally called aesthetic 'perfection', a feature for which Gordimer's stories are rightly renowned. For us, however, this is a disability; we need the significant contradictions, silences and gaps revealed in the longer work. And the novels, due to the sheer expanse of their exploration in space and time, of necessity investigate their social and historical situation in greater depth and at greater length. Their project is more substantial historically, their need to make meaning of history more decisive. (19)

In contrast to Clingman, Dominic Head in his 1994 monograph finds value in Gordimer's short stories, noting that the features that are integral to her novels — 'contradictions, silences and gaps' (163) — are found in her stories as well. But even he privileges the novels over the short stories, conceding that the scale of the novels makes them more expansive, involved and sustained in their engagement with social and political questions. So, the difference between her stories and novels, far from being one in 'kind' as Clingman suggests, is a difference of degree. As if to confirm the minor status of short stories, it is only short story specialists like Charles May, March-Russell, et cetera, rather than Gordimer scholars, who give prominence to Gordimer's short fiction and evaluate their significance within the field of the postcolonial writing. For the most part, Gordimer scholars like Head and Clingman are broadly dismissive of the form and of Gordimer's works on grounds which short story theorists would dispute. Contrary to what Clingman and Head say, practitioners of the short story, including Gordimer herself, argue that the short stories are indeed suited to engaging with the politics of modernity because of their brevity and perfection, and conversely that the intensiveness and extensiveness of the novels are also the novel's weakness. It is worth mentioning that Judie Newman, in her short book on Gordimer, acknowledges this value and the importance of the works, but excludes them for pragmatic reasons to do with space and focus of her book,

suggesting instead that they would merit a separate study. While some scholars like Graham Huggan see the possibility of social critique in Gordimer's short fiction, real sustained attention to Gordimer's short stories in recent scholarship has only been in Riach's forthcoming work that I discussed earlier.

What is at stake here is not just the appreciation of a significant part of Gordimer's oeuvre (she has published more collections of short stories than she has novels) but a much broader question of the critical attention given to short stories, specifically in postcolonial contexts. The purpose of this section will be to respond to Hunter's original question about whether or not a short story can be uniquely adaptable or amenable to postcolonial critique and to defend the stronger claim that the form of the short story is in fact uniquely suited to engaging with the vicissitudes of empire, particularly in the sense of empire as the combined and unequal development of late-capitalist modernity. My motivation for this approach is a two-fold dissatisfaction with the framework of minor literature that Hunter and March-Russell employ: the first is that the reading of the short story as minor literature is dependent upon circumstances of literary production and consumption which, although they do play a significant impact in determining the politics of the form, are nevertheless contingent circumstances that are subject to change with the changing landscapes of the literary production. This is what March-Russell calls the 'legitimation crisis': as the short story becomes more widely-accepted in the academy or what is considered the mainstream of literary production, thereby losing its marginality, then it will lose this subversive edge (68). This would not provide a stable or reliable critical framework for understanding the politics of the short story form. Besides, in the context of Gordimer's short fiction, it is unclear that the category of 'minority' applies to her as she does not write in the majority language — or language of the minority, ruling elite — of Afrikaans, but writes in English. Moreover, this category would not apply to writers who use their native language like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o.

Secondly, this emphasis on 'minority' does not adequately engage with the theory of the short story form that many of the practitioners themselves advocate. While the material contexts of publication are important and constitutive to the form and its politics, it is important to avoid overdetermining the politics of the short story purely in terms of these material conditions of its marginality. Is important therefore to understand how the aesthetic of the short story form and the experience of reading it influence the way in which it engages with the politics of empire and capitalist modernity. Moreover, *pace* Hunter, there is strong evidence to suggest that the short story as a form is indeed uniquely suited to the critique of empire in ways that novels are not. While Gordimer's works are a prominent example of this, the politics of the short story here apply not just to Gordimer's fiction but are applicable in more general terms to the postcolonial short story: the specificity of the way in which Gordimer uses these modes is one inflection of the way in which the form is used, but nevertheless the form itself is better equipped to engage with certain aspects of capitalist modernity than novels are.

Already, most critics including Hunter acknowledge that the short story is the form that is most 'up to speed' with modernity (3). This modernity is straited by systems of global capital that are manifested simultaneously across different temporal and geographic scales, forming what the Warwick Research Collective describe as asymmetrical world-systems of combined and unequal development. The unevenness of the present within a capitalist modernity is evident in Gordimer's stories not just at the level of individual short stories, but more widely at the level of the short story collections themselves. As each short story adopts a different perspective, the short story cycle is a multifocal form that cuts across the issues of race, class, political corruption and inequality across different structures and institutions, such as multinational capital, foreign aid organisations, the Government and civil service, and the university. The combining of these different perspectives within a short story cycle accommodates a complex, multifocal and synchronic temporality that makes it particularly suited to the critique of

empire in postcolonial contexts. Whether or not the novel in contemporary fiction is adequately 'novel' in the way it reinvents itself to engage with this reality is a debate that is open and ongoing. Nevertheless, it is by virtue of the short story cycle's restless, synchronic form that it is already adapted to engaging with the combined and unequal development of empire in a way that the novel has yet to adapt. In Gordimer's case, her short story collections *Beethoven was One-Sixteenth Black* and *Loot* have, as a result of their form as short story cycles, a unique and finely-adapted mode of engaging with the politics of imperialism in post-apartheid South Africa as manifested across multiple different structures and institutions simultaneously in a way that her novels do not.

Conclusion: Diachronic Time and the Stopped Clock of Modernity

The form and style of Gordimer's late short stories thus embody and engage with the structures and forms of combined and uneven development in post-apartheid South Africa across different geographic and temporal scales. What remains an open question in Gordimer's late works is the extent to which her works critique the workings of this capitalist modernity as opposed to merely registering it. This is a distinction made by the WReC between texts whose forms and themes are inflected by the combined and uneven development of capitalism, and those which self-consciously align themselves in opposition to it. This is an adaptation of Theodor Adorno's notion of the 'criticality' of modernism: for Adorno, a select few works of literary and artistic modernism came to represent a form of dissent and opposition to the political and philosophical crises of modernity during the inter-war and post-war periods. But rather than consider literary works as categorically dissident as Adorno does, Deckard, et al. acknowledge that the 'literary "registration" of world-systems does not (necessarily) involve criticality or dissent' (20). They add immediately afterwards that because of how universal the capitalist world-system is, for Deckard, et al. the 'effectivity of the world-system will *necessarily* be discernible in any modern literary work', although this '"registration" of the world-system will be more self-

evidently marked, more transparently at issue in some works than in others' (20). To suggest that the nature of this world-system is evident in the form of Gordimer's short stories is a weak claim. I make the stronger claim that the short story form is more adept at registering self-evidently the structure of this world-system, and moreover that Gordimer's stories are a self-evident interrogation of these structures of neo-liberal capitalism in which the nature of capitalist modernity is critically at issue within the form as well as the plot of the stories and short story cycles. This is evident in Gordimer's own views about the form of the short story, views shared by other critics of the form which holds that it is uniquely adapted at apprehending modernity.

But while Gordimer's stories are consciously registering the nature of this modernity, it is ambiguous whether or not her works are oppositional, dissident, or critical of this world-system. That is not to say that there is no critical alignment within her works: far from it, a story like 'Loot' shows a dissident stance towards the presidency of Thabo Mbeki, while a story like 'An Emissary' foregrounds the inequality in the wealth, access to healthcare and standard of living between Europe and Africa made salient by the malaria epidemic. While Gordimer's stories critique specific leaders, political parties and institutions, there is a sense in which the extent of her critique is a lot more restrained: it does not extend to a larger critique of this capitalist world-system. Gordimer's short stories do not, in Deckard's terms, imagine alternative possibilities of organisation, or advance revolutionary politics as a way of getting 'the clock of humanity running again' (84). This is particularly pronounced in Gordimer's late style.

Gordimer's late works are characterised by a sense of disillusionment with the new dispensation of the post-apartheid present, disillusionment resulting from the failure to achieve the ideals of the freedom struggle and the persistence of racial and class divisions in this new society. This is manifested in the way in which the apartheid past continues to encroach upon the post-apartheid present, as evident in the uneven temporality within the stories. But the sense of ennui and disillusion are made most salient in the attitudes that some of the former revolutionary characters have, such as

Frederick Morris in 'Beethoven' who was an erstwhile activist, or the former revolutionary George and the unnamed protagonist of 'Visiting George', both former members of the Communist Party who emigrated to London as they grew disillusioned with the politics of the South African freedom struggle. These exiles in London, in 'Visiting George', seem to maintain some nominal allegiance to the Left by being critical of Thatcher's government; however, they seem to make no mention of South African politics, suggesting a complete sense of exile and abandonment of their home country. Likewise, in 'Beethoven', the ambiguous race relations of the present and the absence of any linear plot suggest that the protagonist's sense of belonging, identity and political commitment have become untethered.

At the same time that some of the protagonists of Gordimer's stories are feeling disillusioned, other stories in the collection seem to retreat into the personal domain rather than the political or public. This is perhaps enacted rather subtly in 'Mission Statement', where Roberta Blayne's aid work gradually gives way to her personal crisis of atoning for her colonial ancestry and is subsequently displaced by her affair with Chabruma. Meanwhile, stories like 'The Generation Gap' and the 'Alternative Endings' sequence in *Beethoven* (comprising three stories about the senses) withdraw into the private lives of families, emigrant academics, musicians and the wealthy owner of an airline. These stories continue to register, self-consciously, the inequalities of this capitalist world-system by demonstrating a subtle awareness of the unequal mobility of immigrants from different countries, the difference in race and class in the appreciation of art music or the inequalities of wealth as represented by rich businessmen. One story that stands out is 'Dreaming of the Dead', as it imagines Gordimer's late husband having a posthumous conversation with other prominent writers and critics like Said or Sontag, is an intensely personal withdrawal into Gordimer's own life. Nevertheless, this withdrawal into the personal does not adequately imagine an alternative future or a revolutionary break from the capitalist world-system. Instead, these are inflections within a capitalist society that are directed towards the local and isolated critique of specific forms of inequality.

Such a withdrawal is accompanied by a disruption in the experience of time and the present. This disruption to the experience of time lays the foundation for many of the other aspects of Gordimer's late style that I address in the subsequent chapters. In particular, in my next chapter, I will consider how this sense of withdrawal, the overlap between the past and the present, and the erosion of the white protagonist's sense of place within their society reflects an epistemic crisis for the white subject and their ability to know their immediate environment. In the chapters that follow, I will further elaborate how these metaphysical and epistemic crises in Gordimer's late style develop into an idiom that foregrounds the phenomenological question of the self and how it is brought into being by its immediate material and political environment. While Gordimer's late style is marked by a withdrawal from a public ethics or politics, there is a sense in which her late works provisionally imagine a personal ethic of care. While Gordimer's short stories provide a foundation for the characteristics of her late style, and are a good starting point for understanding what her late style is, a more detailed examination of the development of Gordimer's late style as well as its changing ethical dimensions is nevertheless clearer when examining her novels in a chronological sequence, as I shall demonstrate in the subsequent chapters.

2. The Epistemic Friction of Cynicism in *The House Gun*

In my previous chapter, I considered the features of Gordimer's post-apartheid works that characterised her late style. So far, I have discussed the ways in which certain aspects of lateness in Gordimer's works, particularly when augmented by the multi-temporal and multi-focal form of the short story, make them especially suited to addressing the forms of political inequality in post-apartheid South Africa. In the context of Gordimer's longer fiction, however, her late style shows a more complex development. Throughout her late novels, different aspects and characteristics of her late style become more pronounced as successive novels consider different political, ethical, and phenomenological issues pertaining to the post-apartheid dispensation and the place of a white person within it. Having so far sketched the stylistic aspects of Gordimer's late style, in subsequent chapters I will consider with more nuance the individual developments of this late style throughout the course of Gordimer's novels. I will read the novels chronologically, examining the moment each novel presents in the wider development of Gordimer's late style as well as in her political thought. There is some extent to which what I am presenting is a chronological development: there are clearly some ideas and themes that become more sophisticated and developed in Gordimer's successive works, such as the cynical disconnection of the white subject from their political milieu or the sense of epistemic uncertainty in apprehending their environment, which carry over between novels like *The House Gun* and *The Pickup*. Moreover, where there were phenomenological questions about what constituted the self and its sense of place in *The Pickup*, some of these questions are answered, provisionally, through the ecological rootedness in *Get a Life*. Nevertheless, this is not to present Gordimer's late style as a straightforward teleology. Rather, different issues take prominence in successive novels, and the

development of Gordimer's late style still carries with it unresolved political and ethical contradictions.

In this chapter, I will examine the first of Gordimer's novels written after apartheid, *The House Gun*, and its treatment of cynicism and disconnectedness of the white subject within post-apartheid South Africa. In doing so, I will first consider the changes in Gordimer's own sense of political responsibility and how her politics developed a sense of self awareness of her place within South African society. In particular, I will examine the fundamental epistemic question at the heart of Gordimer's writing, of how she as a white writer can know and represent the experiences of racial injustice faced by black people in South Africa without being complicit in their erasure. I will subsequently examine the novel's use of cynicism, and the way in which this cynical mood is related to the racial and class positions of the protagonists. I will examine the ways in which the characters' lack of understanding and knowledge of their environment is the result of regimes of power and knowledge that keep them separated from the violence and conflict within their political milieu. Finally, I will evaluate the epistemic and ethical dimensions of this cynical disengagement, and interrogate the forms of epistemic injustice such cynical dispassion presents. I will further consider ways in which the novel is critical of this cynical idiom through metafictional devices that draw attention to the contradictions and shifts within the dominant perspectives of the white characters. In this chapter, I argue that it is through the cynical mood of Gordimer's late style that the novel exposes the contradictions and epistemic friction within the perspectives of white characters, and it is through the metafictional reconciliation of this friction that it acknowledges and engages with forms of violence and injustice in which white subjects are complicit.

Avoidance and Confrontation

In his study of *The House Gun*, Simon Lewis draws attention to a specific transition in Gordimer's style from her apartheid-era novels to her post-apartheid works: he argues that the changes in the direction of her work

have close corollaries with the political changes in the new post-apartheid dispensation (64n1). In particular, he elaborates, Gordimer's post-apartheid works show a subtle shift in the conditions of knowledge during this transition: during apartheid, her works 'accept[ed] a static, intransitive knowledge', that 'a knowable object, apartheid, is a bad thing, and one's overriding political and personal obligation is to oppose it' (65). In Gordimer's later fiction, there is a reconsideration of this kind of objective knowledge under the political and social conditions of an independent South Africa. If the freedom struggle was a truth around which Gordimer's fiction organised its politics in the past, then the persisting social and political injustices in the present call this truth into question. It is not only the (ontological or ethical) truth of the struggle that is in doubt, but the very possibility of an objective, intransitive knowledge that is rendered untenable. The injustices in post-apartheid South Africa are engineered not by a single, colonial regime, but a dispersed network of politicians and commercial interests within a wider nexus. As a result, the cause of these injustices is no longer hypostatised into a stable, intransitive, knowable object like apartheid, but is rendered a more abstract and vague notion, the apprehension of which is inflected by one's own racial and economic subject position. For Lewis, this manifests in Gordimer's fiction with an understanding that 'the object of one's search will never be quite what one thinks it is and will change continually' (65). It is these transitions that characterise the distinctive lateness of Gordimer's fiction.

Lewis' theoretical approach situates the uncertainty of knowing within the poststructuralist epistemology of deconstruction, and the impossibility of an objective truth with a postmodern ontology of scepticism towards the metanarrative of decolonisation as well as the self as a figure of resistance. He contrasts two particular instances of Gordimer's conception of her political self and her position within South Africa, the first being an essay in 1963 titled 'A Bolter and the Invincible Summer', where Gordimer characterises her childhood as a 'bolter', or a rebellious girl who kept running away from school (*The Essential Gesture* 19-28). Lewis notes that the voice, speaking in the

first person, is 'untroubled by issues of colour, and Eurocentric assumptions about schools, professions, writing and so on abound' (65). Gordimer's account of this is quite vivid:

> I was a bolter, from kindergarten age, but unlike most small children rapidly accustoming their soft, round selves to the sharp angles of desks and discipline, I went on running away from school, year after year. I was a day scholar at a convent in Springs, the Transvaal gold-mining town where we lived, and when I was little I used to hide until I heard the hive of voices start up 'Our Father' at prayers, and then I would walk out of the ugly iron gates and spend the morning on the strip of open veld that lay between the township where the school was and the township where my home was. I remember catching white butterflies there, all one summer morning, until in the quiet when I had no shadow, I heard the school bell, far away, clearly, and I knew I could safely appear home for lunch. (*The Essential Gesture* 19-20)

In addition to the apparent lack of concern or awareness about the assumptions that Lewis recognises, the prose here more readily ignores the social and political conditions of the time and place that it evokes. The tone is light and effervescent, evoking a sense of childish hijinks, escaping the drudgery of school with its 'sharp angles of desks and discipline' and instead running off to the veld and chasing butterflies. This voice is seemingly 'untroubled', as Lewis suggests, by the evocation of a prominent landmark of settler colonialism — 'the gold-mining town' — and the injustices that accompany it. The 'iron gates' are 'ugly' only because they infringe upon the young Gordimer's freedom, not because of what they represent as a wider regime of racial segregation and control. As Benji Hart notes, one's ability to transcend the pain and suffering from violence reflects one's ability to ignore the intricacies of oppression and violence rather than scrutinise them closely (16-7). The lightness and frivolity of the tone in this passage reflects this. While this characterisation of herself as a 'bolter' during an 'invincible summer' does, as Lewis suggests, reflect a certitude in a sense of self as rebellious figure that is somewhat untroubled by the contradictions in society, I would add that, further to his reading, there is an element of self-awareness in the way Gordimer characterises herself in this passage. While Gordimer does not avoid the injustice or atrocities of colonialism and apartheid — her

writing was, after all, driven by the struggle against it — what she does avoid is her situatedness within this history, and how her perspective would be imbricated within the wider collective. This avoidance is not because of deliberate neglect or indifference, but because of a lack of a conceptual framework with which to do so.

In contrast to Gordimer's avoidance of her political and social reality in 1963, Lewis presents one of her lectures as part of the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard University in 1994, 'That Other World that was the World', in which she describes herself as more situated within her social and historical context. For Lewis, this is an example of the development of Gordimer's conception of her self into one that is explicitly historically contextualised. The subject of this lecture, he argues, is how Gordimer 'began to make sense of her self as a white South African writer and citizen' (66): 'using Camus' notion of the First Man [as] "the constructor of his own consciousness", Gordimer writes about the difficulty of forging an identity when one belongs nowhere' (Lewis 66-7). In her lecture, Gordimer compares herself to the protagonist child Jacques in Albert Camus' novel *Le Premier Homme*, who, though born and living in Algeria, claims France as his homeland (*Writing and Being* 117). Just as how Jacques claimed France as his homeland, Gordimer said that, when faced with the same question, she would answer England despite being born in South Africa a year before the end of its status as a British dominion. Within this sovereign South Africa, she continued, Britain was still 'the focus of inculcated loyalty, of allegiance, identification for English-speaking South Africans' (*Writing and Being* 117). However, despite this sense of belonging, this Britain to which English-speaking South Africans remained loyal was still remote, alien and in a different hemisphere. It was a place where the South Africans 'did not count' (*Writing and Being* 117). Moreover, their immediate surroundings were one where they clearly did not belong: they were removed from these surroundings 'by law, custom and prejudice' (*Writing and Being* 119).

This contradictory sense of belonging is one which Gordimer finds as characteristic of the white writers to whom she compares herself, Camus and

Marguerite Duras. Gordimer refers to these writers as 'colonial', highlighting specifically their position within a settler-colonial society. For Gordimer, these comparisons are revealing of her own position of privilege within a settler-colonial society in South Africa, when she sees 'in her [Duras'] colonial childhood in Indochina [her] own in South Africa' where they both benefited from the privileges and deferential treatment reserved for white colonials (*Writing and Being* 118-9). Crucially, this was for them a 'natural reality' that they never questioned, at least not initially (*Writing and Being* 119). In this autobiographical lecture, Gordimer recognises that this privilege kept her safely sequestered from the reality of racial segregation and violence around her. She cites an example of how her parents never talked politics, as a result of which she was 'not even dimly aware of the preparation for the struggle for political power that was beginning between Afrikaners […] and English-speaking South African whites' (*Writing and Being* 118). She extends this kind of life 'ordered, defined, circumscribed by the possession of a white skin' (*Writing and Being* 122) beyond just the childhood, domestic innocence of one's parents not talking politics to a wider landscape of racial segregation where white people are kept isolated from the political reality around them through sports clubs, religious groups, tennis courts, dance halls, weddings, bridge clubs, bake sales and golf clubs (*Writing and Being* 122). Because of such a life which, according to Camus, 'had no other project but the immediate' (qtd. in Gordimer *Writing and Being* 122). While she does subsequently describe her desire in adolescence to break out of these confines and to interrogate her reality, in a later section of her lecture she interrogates the simplistic depiction of different forms of prejudice in some of her early works. In particular, she critiques what was an epistemic boundary in her own understanding as her understanding was entirely mediated by European literary or cultural antecedents that she lists: Rainer Maria Rilke, Anton Chekhov, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Marcel Proust, and W.B. Yeats (*Writing and Being* 122). As Gordimer notes, she could not make sense of her experience from these literary sources, writing out of a 'parenthetically limited knowledge of the people and the country where she lived' (*Writing and Being*

123). Her moving to Johannesburg, she acknowledges, was a moment of realisation of the limitations of such a Eurocentric understanding, and her moving brought her closer 'not to Europe, but to the discovery of what could be [her] own country' (*Writing and Being* 127). While the use of the word 'discovery' is somewhat dubious in the assumption that such a knowledge of the country or its people as being known for the first time or being discovered by a white knower, it nevertheless does reflect Gordimer's awareness of the limitations of her positionality. In addition to recognising her privileged position, Gordimer attempts to reach a sense of commonality beyond such isolation. She also expands her literary references beyond a gamut of white writers to incorporate a black contemporary, Es'kia Mphahlele, as well as Archbishop Desmond Tutu. As Lewis notes, Gordimer's account of her development as a writer, as well as her own idea of the act of writing, are rooted in a political coming-of-age in an understanding of the historical contingency of her own subjectivity.

There are a couple of themes further to Lewis' reading of this lecture that are worth noting. The first is that the white writers who are the most prominent of Gordimer's intertexts, Camus and Duras, are deeply concerned with issues of exile the displacement of the subject. Beyond just the material questions of identity and belonging, there is a further epistemic question that resonates with Gordimer's fiction, in particular the matter of how such a displaced subject can know and apprehend the reality around them. Gordimer's critique in her lecture of her own early story 'The Defeated' reflects a similar critical concern, as she examines literary idiom through which she depicts her social reality. In particular, she is critical of her story for drawing equivalences between the oppression of poor white immigrants who were fleeing persecution in their own home countries with that of black people facing racial prejudice and discrimination in South Africa resulting from a 'muddled desire to juggle justice where there was none' (*Writing and Being* 124). Gordimer's remarks about the way in which 'in [her] stories [she] was continuing to turn over […] events in the conduct of [her] narrow life that had seemed to have a single meaning' (*Writing and Being* 125) reveal a self-

conscious reflection on the epistemic problem of how an individual can apprehend their immediate reality through language and representation, a problem that Brian McHale argues is the epistemological crisis that is the 'dominant', or the focussing characteristic, of Modernist fiction (9). The answer to this problem, for Gordimer, is through entering into a commonality with the life within and around her through writing, what she describes as the 'essential gesture'[4] of writing prior to any display of political commitment.

In addition to Gordimer's concern with this epistemic problem, another theme in her lecture is her framing of these problems using a language of alterity. The title of the essay, as well as a frequent metaphor through which she characterises her state of remoteness and alienation, is taken from Italo Calvino's description of the sound of American films as 'the call of that other world that was *the* world' (qtd. in Gordimer *Writing and Being* 116 italics mine). For Gordimer, this other world was not one of American films but one of fiction, specifically books by white writers, like Dickens' and Virginia Woolf's London, Proust's Paris, or Faulkner's America. The use of the definite article in naming the fictional world of films or novels as 'the world' makes a normative assumption, that this world as presented in a white literary canon is a privileged, real world from which her own present is other and outside of it. What she evokes here is not just the epistemic question of how one can know of the surrounding reality, but a more fundamental ontological one of what this reality is in the first place. Gordimer acknowledges the damaging nature of such Eurocentric assumptions of a literary canon, and uses the same language of alterity to describe her aforementioned privileged isolation from her social and political environment. It is because of this isolation that Gordimer's reality is one from which she was, in her words, 'absent', as black people scarcely entered her consciousness (*Writing and Being* 128). By framing this realisation of the contingency of the self within its historical position in the language of alterity, Gordimer expands the previous epistemic concerns into an ontological one,

[4] Gordimer's idiom of writing as an 'essential gesture' is one that dates back to her Tanner Lecture at the University of Michigan in 1984.

resonant with McHale's understanding of postmodernist fiction as characterised by a shift in the dominant from these epistemic questions to such ontological ones (10). This ontological problem calls into question Gordimer's earlier idea of the essential gesture through which the writer strives to enter into a commonality with their social and political environment: the self that apprehends this reality is compromised by the historical and political circumstances that produce it. The self as a condition of possibility for knowledge of one's political reality is on unsteady foundations. Lewis situates Gordimer's post-apartheid writing within a postmodern epistemology and ontology. There is a sense in which the critical and metaphysical concerns of Gordimer's works warrant such a move. Moreover, these issues speak to a wider question raised by Dominic Head about the value of postmodernism as a critical framework when approaching Gordimer's works. However, my present interest is not in the ramifications of using postmodernist theory in illuminating Gordimer's fiction, but specifically in how these ontological and epistemic uncertainties manifest stylistically in the tone, form, and texture of her prose. I address Head's question of postmodernity in Gordimer's works in more detail when I draw my account of her late style together in the Conclusion to the thesis.

If Gordimer's earlier stance on her writing as characterised in 'A Bolter and the Invincible Summer' is one which avoids the reality of how her subject position is situated within her immediate historical context, then the contextualisation of her self within her background and the recognition of the ways in which her subjectivity is constructed by her environment in 'The Other World that was the World' reflect her confronting that same reality at a later time of her writing. It is through this confrontation that Gordimer develops an idiom through which she can acknowledge the ways in which the self may be compromised by its privileged position while nevertheless striving for a commonality with those who are marginalised. This idiom is what characterises Gordimer's late style and the mode through which it engages with the social and political concerns of post-apartheid South Africa. But such introspection is not without pain or difficulty, as evident in the despondent

and lacerating tone in which Gordimer criticises her own 'absence' from her reality and her privileged isolation. As a result, the idiom through which Gordimer engages with her political milieu throughout her late style is one that is characterised by an affective register of ennui and cynicism. This is especially stark in a novel like *The House Gun*, in which Gordimer's idiom is characterised by a sense of cynicism and melancholy, manifesting in a disconnectedness from the social and political injustices of her social environment. In the subsequent section, I will examine the cynical mood of *The House Gun* and this sense of withdrawal into solitude and interiority because of a failure of the white subject to adequately engage with politics or society.

The Cynical Affect of *The House Gun*

Timothy Bewes defines cynicism as a 'refusal to engage with the world as much as [it is] a disposition of antagonism towards it, a flight into solitude and interiority and an abnegation of politics on the basis of its inauthenticity' (1). This, he elaborates, is a 'condition of disillusion' (1) with contemporary political life that is typical of a postmodern figure who is, because of the aforementioned epistemic and ontological crises, alienated from both society and their own subjectivity. The particular mood of cynicism, characterised by a 'melancholic, self-pitying reaction to the apparent disintegration of political reality (in the form of "grand narratives" and "totalizing ideologies")', is, for Bewes, 'the result of a […] "reification" of postmodernity' (7). This reification is an extension of the metaphysical anxieties around authenticity and the impossibility of objectivity onto the political sphere. For Bewes, this cynicism represents a confusion between metaphysical concerns with political questions, and between individual ontological speculation with collective action in public life. In this section, I will evaluate Bewes' understanding of cynicism as a disengagement from politics in relation to the novel, particularly in the way in which this cynical mood is circumscribed by Harald and Claudia's position as middle-class, white people who are physically sequestered from the conflict and violence around them.

The narrative voice in *The House Gun* is one which embodies this mood of melancholy and withdrawal. This idea of cynicism is one which Gordimer revisits in her final novel, *No Time Like the Present*, as evident in her epigram from Keorapetse Kgositsile's poem 'Wounded Dreams':

> Though the present remains
> A dangerous place to live,
> Cynicism would be a reckless luxury

This admonishing of cynicism as a 'reckless luxury' is similarly clear in *The House Gun* where narrative devices and metafictional cues that suggest dispassion and disengagement with the story that is being presented. This is particularly salient in its opening:

> Something terrible happened.
> They were watching it on the screen with their after-dinner coffee cups beside them. It is Bosnia or Somalia or the earthquake shaking a Japanese island between apocalyptic teeth like a dog; whatever were the disasters of that time. When the intercom buzzes each looks to the other with a friendly reluctance; you go, your turn. It's part of the covenant of living together. (*The House Gun* 1)

On the surface, the narrative seems to suggest a quiet domestic scene, the protagonists Harald and Claudia Lindgard watching the television after dinner or arguing lazily over who answers the door, which terrible event disrupts violently. However, the alarming declaration that begins this passage is rendered ironic by the bathos of what follows. As the narrative focalises through Harald and Claudia's perspective, it reveals that the reason for their domestic peace is a deliberate neglect of political and humanitarian crises around the world. As stories of violence, genocide and natural disasters are named in quick succession, like brief vignettes in the evening news, the glibness with which the narrative mentions them, and subsequently conflates them as 'whatever were the disasters of the time' reveals a wilful neglect.

The dispassion is evident in the ambiguity of the names and pronouns used and the vagueness with which events are evoked: the narrative voice is never clear about whom or what it is referring to. The passage does not immediately reveal what terrible event that 'something' is. Likewise, the 'it' that Harald and Claudia were watching is never specified, and is instead a

vague list of events. The vagueness with which the narrative evokes specific place names or events reflects how Harald and Claudia were not playing attention to the news, and likewise were not moved by the tragedies that they saw. The narrative suggests, by situating Harald and Claudia in their suburban dwelling and presenting the contemporary disasters through the news, that these immediate events are never part of their immediate reality. Instead, their encounter with them is mediated through the television. There is a subtle implication here that their social and political reality is constructed by regimes of knowledge and political power that the news media seeks to serve. Implicit here is an ontological interrogation of their social and political reality, and how their perception of their reality is a product of their subject positions — a position which, as I will examine shortly, is the result of racial and socio-economic segregation. By drawing attention to their sequestered lifestyle and the presence of a world of disaster outside, the novel opens by calling into question the realities that their characters inhabit as well as their understanding of the social and political issues that inflect them.

This ontological questioning is rendered more salient through metafictional cues in the novel. The narrative voice notes later that

> This is not a detective story.
> Harald has to believe that the mode of events that genre represents is actuality. (*The House Gun* 16)

Comparing *The House Gun* and Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* to the genres of detective fiction and courtroom dramas, Lewis notes that these novels make significant departures from the conventions of these genres, and rather than examining who committed the crime or how, they

> [probe] instead the significance of the murder. By explaining the exact forensic details of the crimes at the outset and then repeatedly worrying about the meaning of those apparent facts, both books self-consciously subvert the rationalist epistemology embodied by conventional murder stories. (71)

He elaborates that Gordimer 'uses the convention of forensic investigation and judgement to deny ultimate knowability' (72), especially in the way that contradictory interpretations of the same facts are presented by forensic psychologists at Duncan's trial. Reflecting on the psychological models

presented at the trial, the narrative, again focalising through Harald and Claudia, describes this as a 'model of their son put together, as a human being is comprised in X-ray plates and scans lit on a screen, by the dialectic method of a court and the knowledge of experts in the mystery of what is felt and thought and acted by the model' (*The House Gun* 229). Lewis' insights about this passage are especially illuminating about the distance between the representations of objects as models and the objects of knowledge themselves, as well as the regimes of power and knowledge inherent in the 'dialectic method of a court and the knowledge of experts' in the construction of this knowledge. But a further point to be made here is the specific kind and object of knowledge with which the narrative is concerned, something evoked in the difference between physical traits which can be seen through X-rays and scans and the psychiatric diagnoses that rely on interpreting patterns of behaviour.

There is a subtle contradiction in Gordimer's use of a simile between the psychological models that the expert witnesses present and the 'X-ray plates and scans lit on a screen': the compared elements in the simile represent two fundamentally distinct forms of inferences. Physical symptoms and injuries of the kind that can be seen by scans appear as externally verifiable and therefore more reliable facts of one's reality. The inference made here is proportionate to the evidence that is immediately available. In contrast, the psychiatric diagnoses that the physicians present — of 'personality conflict' because of his bisexuality, a 'neurotic personality with complex self-destructive tendencies', et cetera (*The House Gun* 229) — are speculations about the interior workings of Duncan's mind based on an interpretation of his outwardly behaviour. The inference here is ampliative in that it makes claims beyond that which is immediately apparent. Moreover, the kinds of evidence that the psychiatric diagnosis uses — behaviours and actions — and the kinds of conclusions it draws — thoughts and motives — mirror closely a method of reading a work of detective fiction or courtroom drama. This, in particular, is a metafictional device through which the novel

self-consciously subverts the epistemology of detective fiction, as Lewis argues.

However, I would take Lewis' reading further and draw attention to the way in which the novel holds both modes of reasoning as equivalent through the simile. Against the backdrop of these contradictory models, the narrative voice characterises Duncan as a 'doppelgänger', pondering the question 'is this you, my son?' (*The House Gun* 229). The novel does not just deny the epistemic 'knowability' of the facts of the case by presenting contradictory accounts, but further rejects the ontological possibility of such a thing as Duncan's being. Instead, it posits that all the proceedings can establish through this forensic cross-questioning is a doppelgänger that is constructed by these proceedings, a representation that is a shadow of the 'truth' inflected by the regimes of power embodied by the law. Truth is never the object of the novel. Indeed, for Harald and Claudia, these proceedings described not as a matter of determining the truth, but about finding the answer that they want, as it becomes clear that they are frustrated by the proceedings because 'Not even what he [Duncan] has said in court has given them *what they want*' (*The House Gun* 235-6, italics mine). Fundamental to this novel, then, is an ontological crisis that is characteristic of postmodernity, a crisis which, according to Bewes, gives rise to the cynical mood in the novel.

What is important, however, is not the ontological or epistemological indeterminacy of the political reality, but the mode in which the characters react to these conditions. Harald and Claudia are just passive observers. They are uninterested in the political events around them and powerless against the legal proceedings that Duncan faces. Going back to the opening of the novel, it is especially jarring that the imagery in this passage evokes the severity of a disaster like the earthquake in Japan, using a horrifying figure of an apocalyptic dog shaking an island in its teeth. For a brief moment, this turn of phrase creates a distance between the narrative voice and the perspectives that the couple take on these events. This distancing is marked more prominently by the use of a semicolon when the narrative

returns to focalise through Harald and Claudia again, indicating that the clause 'whatever were the disasters of that time' stands separately from the preceding imagery of an apocalyptic dog. Yet the narrative voice only responds to this vicious imagery with an indifferent withdrawal by reverting to the domestic comfort of a married couple arguing affectionately over whose turn it is to answer the door. The metaphor of the dog precludes the possibility that the tragedy of these events were minimised by their depiction in the media, as it suggests that the horrors of the disasters were portrayed in a manner that was graphic and horrifying. The dispassionate withdrawal from these events, and the lack of emotional engagement with or sustained attention to these disasters, is not then just a result of how these events are framed in the media, but a withdrawal on the part of Harald and Claudia from having to engage with them.

Their distance from these disasters therefore is not framed as a problem of information, but as a characteristic of the way in which their racial and class position inflects their empathy for and understanding of these events. This dispassion towards violence and suffering is situated within a specific social and economic environment that the passage evokes. The narrative describes them as recently having moved into 'this townhouse complex with grounds maintained and security-monitored entrance' (*The House Gun* 1). The predominantly white suburban spaces that these characters live in are sites of persisting socioeconomic and racial segregation resulting from structural inequalities of wealth and political access that persisted from the apartheid regime, spaces which are built using private security and surveillance. The novel not only gestures towards the forms of segregation in effect, but also draws attention to the specific ways in which their subject positions inflect their perception of their surroundings by focalising through their characters. The intercom that Harald and Claudia argue over answering is characterised as one of the many amenities that their townhouse complex comes with. However, these enclosed compounds and security-monitored entrances are instruments of a wider regime of social segregation by class and race. By contrasting the depiction of the intercom

as something Harald and Claudia argue over with the estate agent's jargon of 'security-monitored entrance', the narrative counterpoises the couple's blissful ignorance with a more sinister politics of social and economic segregation. Recalling my discussion of Gordimer's short stories in the previous chapter, this treatment of space as overlaid with the history of the apartheid past, wherein amenities in housing become signifiers of the privileges of race and class, is a prominent feature of Gordimer's late style that renders the present moment as a qualitative multiplicity wherein the apartheid past casts a long shadow into the post-apartheid present.

Similarly, Harald and Claudia's perception of the prison system, from the perspective of passive observers, is characterised as a result of their race and class. When they first visit their son in jail, whilst he is awaiting sentencing, their encounter with the prison system is one that is acutely inflected by their position as a white family, as:

> they were received with the kind of courtesy that is learnt in public relations training of a new police force intended to obliterate the tradition of the racist and brutal authority of the past. Anyway, the officer in charge is an Afrikaner, himself a middle-aged man with all that implies of adult children, parental burdens, family sentiments etc. he would assume in common with a white couple (*The House Gun* 29).

Their experience of the prison system demonstrates the irony at the heart of this reform intended to obliterate the legacy of the racist past while the agents of the system nevertheless give white, middle-aged couples special treatment over a perceived sense of commonality. The syntactical ambiguity of the first sentence in the passage above is especially revealing of this irony: it is unclear what the subject of the verb 'intended' is, whether it is the 'new police force' that is intended to obliterate racist and brutal traditions of the past, or whether it is the 'public relations training', or even the 'courtesy' with which they are received. It is clear from the ironic conflation of these three subjects that the prose assumes a perspective that diminishes solution to the political problem of police racism and brutality in the service of a colonial white ethnostate from a complete reform of a 'new police force' to a superficial exercise in public relations training or a mere matter of inter-

personal courtesy between the people in charge and white people interacting with it. Either way, it is clear that Harald and Claudia are kept unaware of the lived experience of incarceration by those imprisoned, as during their visit they acknowledge that 'the echoing corridors from the night's darkness are there but these are ways they will not go down' (*The House Gun* 29). Moreover, it is even because of their whiteness that the warden allows Claudia to bring Duncan a bowl of salad and some cheese. Harald and Claudia's concern is not the crime that Duncan committed, but more so how he is being looked after in jail, and they and the warden turn their attention to talk about his diet or what to do with his washing (*The House Gun* 29).

The privileges that white characters are afforded from the legacies of apartheid-era racial prejudices shape not just Harald and Claudia's experience of the prison system, but also Claudia's medical practice. Claudia is a physician who works in a state-funded clinic and a private surgery, and she moves through environments that are racially mixed but increasingly polarised. She is acutely conscious of her difference from other people, regarding the group as 'colleagues who would have to form an attitude to what set her apart from them' (*The House Gun* 50). The names and ranks of the staff become verbal signifiers of racial difference and social hierarchy, such as Queen the sister-in-charge of the clinic and the receptionist Mrs February, 'whose ancestors had been dubbed with the name of the month in which they had been bought into the slave market' (*The House Gun* 50). The nature of Claudia's work further reiterates the emotional disengagement from the opening of the novel, as she 'had difficulty in retaining the personal interest in patients' lives which she had always held as essential to the practice of healing' (*The House Gun* 50). In contrast, it was Mrs February who, as the receptionist, did the emotional labour of being empathetic towards the patients 'with the mournful eyes of a traditional dignified guise of trouble borne, in lieu of the doctor herself taking this on' (*The House Gun* 50).

The racial division in Claudia's workplace, however, is most intense in the way in which she perceives her own private space. This makes the

specific ideologies of Claudia's subject positions come to the fore. She describes her room in the clinic and surgery as

> an unchanged enclosure of her life, a safe place; people who are surrounded by encroaching danger may be precariously protected for a time in areas declared as such by those outside threat, some agency of mercy. (*The House Gun* 50)

Her emphasis on her room being 'an unchanged enclosure' and a 'safe place', when contrasted with the diversity of the staff, reflects a reactionary resistance to change, one which implies that this diversification is a threat. This implication plays out in the rest of the sentence. The terms 'encroaching danger' and 'outside threat' here take on a double-meaning, referring both to the disruption to her life by the legal ordeal of Duncan's arrest but also more subtly to the persisting and unspoken racial prejudice that still shapes her worldview. Harald shows a similar prejudice when first entertaining the idea of their son being represented by a black lawyer. The way in which the narrative focalises through Harald and Claudia's perspectives draws attention to the way in which their background and environment shape the ideologies which in turn inflect the language through which they perceive and construct their surroundings. The distance that they create from the political and humanitarian crises of their surroundings are a result of their subject position and a wilful disinterest in these concerns.

But what makes *The House Gun* especially cynical is not just the antagonistic withdrawal from reality, but the specific mood with which this withdrawal is presented. For Bewes, there is an affective dimension to these metaphysical anxieties that gives rise to a particular mood of self-pity and melancholy. In that regard, the cynicism that Gordimer depicts in *The House Gun* is evident not just in the ontological crisis that the novel's focalising embodies, but also in the mood and syntax of the prose itself. This is evident in Claudia's perception of her workplace, where the history of slavery behind Mrs February's name is evoked briefly and then summarily disregarded. The extent to which this narrative voice indulges Claudia's self-absorption is evident in the way that Mrs February's history is rendered marginal in the passage, presented here through a dashed parenthesis. Moreover, there is a

tension between Claudia's awareness of this fact and her apparent insensitivity towards the people around her. The expression that Mrs February has, a 'mournful eyes of a traditional dignified guise of trouble borne', is ambiguous about the kind of trouble to which it refers. On one hand it could allude to the weight of Mrs February's past and history, in which case the description of this past as 'traditional' and the scope of this as a 'trouble' seems to minimise what is a historical atrocity that spans generations. On the other hand, the phrase could refer to Mrs February's role as a receptionist, as she bears the emotional burden of empathy for the patients in lieu of the physician. This ambiguity suggests that Claudia is drawing an equivalence between the burden of having to reconcile a troubled history with having to listen to a patient's experience in a way that diminishes and neglects the depth of Mrs February's own experience. It is significant that she is given no voice in the novel, and this account of her is a matter of speculation on Claudia's part. As I will elaborate in the next chapter, this device becomes more prominent in Gordimer's next novel, *The Pickup*, in the way the narrative voice focalises through the protagonist Julie Summers and subsumes the perspective of her black partner. This diminishing of Mrs February's history is accompanied by a syntax that is overwrought, with long, listing sentences with several disjointed clauses, creating an effect of a much slower, plodding narrative.

The tedium of this prose is augmented by the vagueness of the pronouns, as evident in the passage where Claudia reflects self-consciously on her difficulty empathising with her patients:

> The first identification with another whose son is imprisoned soon disappears in the crowd of those who are in misfortune; once truly jostled, become one among them, there has to be a sense that if I had to listen to your trouble you would have to listen to mine (*The House Gun* 50).

The melancholy that this passage evokes is apparent in the use of phrases like 'crowd of those who are in misfortune'. But it is the specific shifts in the use of pronouns in this passage that reflects a heightened state of distress with great intensity. This passage is, once again, ambiguous: one reading, it

suggests that Claudia identifies with another patient whose son has also been incarcerated. However, there are few mentions of other patients besides the phrase 'the crowd of those in misfortune'. Moreover, this one person who is the object of the 'first identification' is characterised as distinct from this crowd, and so it is unclear whether or not it is another patient with an incarcerated son that Claudia is describing some sense of empathy with. A second reading would be that Claudia refers to herself momentarily in the third person, as '*another* whose son is imprisoned' (*The House Gun* 50, italics mine). This momentary use of the third person to refer to herself, before returning to the first-person use of 'I' later in the sentence, reflects a state of dissociation from her self, as if she were observing herself from outside. Regardless of whether or not Claudia is referring to herself as she is dissociating or she is empathising momentarily with another patient whose son has been imprisoned, she nevertheless feels an acute sense of alienation and vulnerability when the 'another' with whom she identifies disappears in a crowd. The way in which the texture of the narrative voice reflects Claudia's distress characterises the particular emotional excess of melancholy and self-pity that Bewes sees as characteristic of cynicism.

A similar sense of self-pitying melancholy is expressed through Harald's interactions with the legal system. When he attends the session of the Constitutional Court, as it is hearing an appeal over the constitutionality of the death penalty, the chapter opens with a bold sense of idealism that contrasts with the foreboding opening line of the novel I examined earlier. This chapter begins 'Everything is changed' (*The House Gun* 131) and proceeds to elaborate the tremendous moral and juridical significance of what the Constitutional Court represents. While the court is characterised as the 'antithesis of the confusion and disorientation of the fevered mind: it is to be the venue of the furthest extension of measured justice that exists anywhere' (*The House Gun* 131), contrary to this elevated idealism of what the institution represents, it is clear that Harald's experience of the legal system is purely that of confusion and disorientation. He feels 'alone as he never has been alone in his life' and is 'intensely aware of the extraordinary presence

he is, in his reason, unbeknown to all these people, for being among them' (*The House Gun* 134). As the narrative focalises through Harald, it emphasises his feeling of alienation in this milieu, as he 'does not know which carpeted area to follow' (*The House Gun* 132), is 'shunted from one unfamiliar place to another' (*The House Gun* 132), is 'asked to move from the [empty seat] he has chosen' (*The House Gun* 133) and 'does not know any of [the people around him]' except those whom he recognises from the news (*The House Gun* 134). Harald's disorientation stems from the fact that he and his wife 'never belonged in the public expression of private opinions' (*The House Gun* 134), but he now finds himself in a position where the public dissection of a political question has an inescapable impact on his and Claudia's private lives. The drastic change in the tone of the novel from the bold, elevated opening of this chapter concerning the Constitutional Court hearing to track Harald's self-pity and alienation closely reflects the novel's cynical disengagement from public moral and political questions into the inner workings of a white couple finding themselves alienated in this climate. This is a cynicism that is made possible by the particular kind of racially and socio-economically sequestered spaces that she inhabits, both at work and at home. In *The House Gun*, a cynical detachment from one's political reality is a response which is conditioned by specific social and economic privileges that afford seclusion and indifference. Harald and Claudia's political withdrawal is further inflected by prejudiced anxieties about a threat to their positions of privilege from the change brought about by the new social and political order.

Cynicism and Epistemic Friction

What remains to be seen, however, is whether *The House Gun* is a cynical novel or a critique of cynicism. This question arises with much of Gordimer's late style in *The House Gun* and *Get a Life* and the way these novels focalise almost exclusively through the melancholic and listless perspectives of their white protagonists in the face of new circumstances, often to the exclusion of the more radical voices of their black characters.

Gordimer's late style registers a mood of cynicism that is a response to different kinds of white South African experience in this new dispensation — the affluent conservatives who are indifferent to political change, the white liberals who are complacent with the new regime, and the former activists who feel betrayed at the continuing injustice. In addition, I argue that this late style turns this cynical disposition upon itself, interrogating the various hierarchies of power and epistemic assumptions prevalent in these subject positions. Crucially, Gordimer does not reject cynicism as a mood or a disposition towards her political environment; rather, it remains central to her style of critique in her late novels, contrary to Bewes' treatment of it.

The freedom to be indifferent to one's political environment is only afforded by the privilege of one's subject position. The same can be said of the liberal white protagonists in Gordimer's novels, who are able to sequester themselves from the political issues which affect black people more directly, in contrast to the black people who are directly affected by these political questions. This contrast is most staggering when considering the juxtaposition of the different attitudes to the question of the death penalty being given to two black prisoners in *The House Gun*. The narrative seems to briefly attempt to take the perspective of the black prisoners, Themba Makwanyane and Mvuso Mchunu, as it recognises that 'The Death Penalty is a subject for dinner table discussion for those, the others, who will drift back into the Court as Harald will' (*The House Gun* 138). The narrative evokes a similar atmosphere of domestic comfort as the novel's opening, alluding to a dinner table discussion, once again situating itself within a very specific context of class and racial privilege. This is reinforced when the narrative evokes other similarly polarised spaces like the coffee bars. The language through which the narrative considers the question of the death penalty assumes a lofty register of moral rightness or religion, characterising this as a philosophical debate about murder or retribution between the retentionists and abolitionists. The legal debate is concerned with 'that ancient edict. Thou shalt not kill' (*The House Gun* 136), and the rhetorical and sophistication of the debate makes Harald feel like he is drawn 'onto a

higher plane' (*The House Gun* 136). This shift in the register makes a number of assumptions about education and knowledge. An understanding of the intricacies of these legal and jurisprudential questions that are mentioned in this passage requires an intimate knowledge of the law and of legal procedure. Earlier in the novel, however, Harald acknowledges that such knowledge was denied to black people because of the racial prejudice of the old regime (*The House Gun* 38). Within this context, this passage and its assumption of legal debate being elevated to a 'higher plane' — detached from the social and political milieu of the people whose lives hang in the balance — foregrounds the ways in which structures of inequality and privilege structure the access to legal knowledge.

It is this privileged position that licenses a cynical antagonism towards the legal system. This cynicism is evident in the way in which the narrative abstracts these questions of law and morality into metaphysical speculations about religious doctrine or by hypostatising the state into a moral actor distinct from the political institutions and people that constitute it. There is a clear conflation of these metaphysical and epistemic concerns of distorted interpretations of a God's word with that of the political problem of state-sanctioned violence against people who are least represented in these institutions. Moreover, white characters experience these questions from a distance. Harald's drifting into and out of the Court is like that of a passive observer rather than someone either affected directly by the verdict or advocating for either party. It is clear from this passage that the stakes are drastically different for white people like Harald than they are for the prisoners as 'their concern […] is objective […] Nothing personal' (*The House Gun* 136). This is just another 'issue' that the white elites talk about, one which they regard with a 'dispassionate value' as 'it is unthinkable that the issue would ever enter the lives of these men and women' (*The House Gun* 136). The white characters' attitude towards the death penalty is coded with a language of emotional and personal detachment from the consequences of the decision, consequences which are literally a matter of life and death for black people facing the death penalty. This kind of cynical dispassion and

metaphysical speculation is only made possible by the privileged subject position of white characters.

The way in which Harald characterises these matters as abstract 'issues' for conversation commits what Miranda Fricker describes as an 'epistemic injustice', or 'a wrong that is done to someone specifically in their capacity as knower' (1). Fricker makes a distinction between injustices where the epistemic inequality is incidental (such as an unequal distribution of information or education because of socioeconomic disparities) and epistemic injustices that are specifically to do with an individual or a group's ability to make sense of their social experiences. By reducing the pressing social and ethical question of the death penalty to an abstract philosophical issue, Harald's position erases the lived experiences of those who are affected by these laws. For Fricker, this would constitute a 'testimonial injustice', or an injustice where 'prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word' (1). These epistemic injustices, she argues, are the result of power as a structural phenomenon where certain social group's ability to constitute not just their own political reality but the political reality of social others is privileged over the self-determination of subordinated groups. Fricker uses the term 'credibility' and the degree of belief accorded to different groups to describe the extent to which they can shape or construct knowledge within a political reality. Middle-class white elites like Harald have what Fricker terms a 'credibility excess', or a disproportionately greater influence over knowledge production, while the black prisoners have a 'credibility deficit' (17). Through this credibility excess, Harald constructs the experiences of the black characters through a colonist's gaze.

Feminist philosophers like Elizabeth Spelman and Maria Lugones further interrogate the ways in which the other is excluded through specific knowledge practices by the white self. Spelman describes what she terms as the 'boomerang perception' of the other, 'I look at you and come right back to myself' (*Inessential Woman* 12). She argues that no matter how progressive, specific white characterisations of black people have fundamentally been

distorted reflections of the self. One particular example of this was a tendency by well-meaning white progressives that 'black people were just like us—never, however, that we were just like blacks' (*Inessential Woman* 12). The fundamental assumption is that 'underneath that black skin is a white man' (*Inessential Woman* 13). Lugones elaborates Spelman's interrogation of the mutually intersecting divisions of gender and race alongside Said's account of orientalist discourse. For Lugones, the object of the Western/white gaze is a

> distorted image: image both in the sense of imagined and in the sense of reflection, an imitation. The imagination wavering between fear and delight construes us in its image, but as terrific, dangerous, monstrous distortions of its own familiar visage and as fulfilling its unspoken desires (158).

The way in which Harald characterises these black characters embodies a testimonial injustice where his position of social and epistemic privilege enables him to construct the lives and experiences of these characters in a manner which is a reflection of his own prejudices and ideologies.

A further kind of epistemic injustice, in contrast to testimonial injustice, is what Fricker terms 'hermeneutic injustice', or the injustice that occurs at a stage prior to testimonial injustice when 'a gap in the collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences' (1). A hermeneutic injustice is when material inequalities prevent an individual from developing a meaningful understanding of their social relations. Fricker gives an example where 'you suffer sexual harassment in a culture that still lacks that critical concept' (1). In addition to the testimonial injustices that Harald commits, there are also hermeneutic injustices that are alluded to in the novel. Knowledge of the law and access to the courtrooms are characterised as racially polarised. In particular, Harald describes the black prisoners and their families as having less of an understanding of their situation because of their poverty and illiteracy, because of which they are, according to Harald, unable to understand the nature of the moral questions that they face or come up with

strategies of advocacy (*The House Gun* 137). The perspectives of these black prisoners are hermeneutically marginalised.

These epistemic injustices are evident in the novel's opening, when Harald and Claudia are able to diminish the significance of humanitarian catastrophes to remote events that do not affect them. The material and economic conditions of their privileged lifestyle afford them the luxury to be unaffected by these crises. The credibility excess that they have entails that they never have to consider the people devastated by these catastrophes as real people, allowing them to remain emotionally distant and disengaged from these events. This difference in credibility is embodied in the narrative voice as it focalises through Harald and Claudia's perspective, and renders their experience of their political reality as normative. It is Harald and Claudia's disaffection with their political reality that gives the narrative its cynical mood. Likewise, when considering the constitutionality of the death penalty, Harald's tendency to regard it as an abstract 'issue' rather than acknowledging the deeper ethical and biopolitical significance of the death penalty is itself an act of injustice because of the way in which it marginalises the experiences of the black prisoners. The fact that they can consider this question in purely abstract terms, unaffected by any real stakes in the matter, reveals not just their blithe ignorance of the issue itself, but an ignorance of their own ignorance. José Medina draws attention to the ways in which knowledge and power are structured not just through people's attitude towards knowledge, but their 'meta-attitude', or their attitude towards these attitudes (192). It is the resistance of this meta-ignorance that becomes a focal point of Medina's philosophy of epistemic resistance. Likewise, this meta-ignorance and the conflicts between different ways of seeing become fundamental aspects of the modes of framing and narrative voice in Gordimer's late works. These frameworks of epistemic injustice and resistance draw attention not just to the ways in which the operations of power construct knowledge, but also how the construction of knowledge is itself an exercise of power. Fricker, Lugones, Spelman and Medina's critiques of epistemic injustice expose how the creation knowledge is a

political act, and their framework illuminates how the modalities of cynical antagonism create the space for an interrogation of these structures of knowledge and power.

While Bewes' analysis of how metaphysical crises spill over into political discourse provide an illuminating framework for interpreting the cynical mood of *The House Gun*, and his particular emphasis on the aesthetic features like a mood of disillusion, indeterminacy, melancholy, self-pity and withdrawal do in many respects describe many aspects of Gordimer's late style, I remain cautious about the fundamental assumptions Bewes makes in his disentangling of metaphysics from politics. He is rightly critical of purely metaphysical speculation of postmodern ontologies like deconstruction, noting that they offer 'neither the possibility of nor the space for the development of a political agenda' (11-2). In that regard, his critique of the passivity of a purely cynical, introverted disposition is quite pressing, especially because a cynical disinclination from political action merely serves to entrench the injustices of the status quo. However, the problem is that he makes a bigger claim about the mutual exclusion of metaphysics and politics. A political agenda, he argues, requires a disregard of these metaphysical concerns, concerns which he sees as incommensurable with political action. By rejecting these metaphysical concerns about the nature of the self, Bewes neglects to engage with the vital political problem of an individual's own positionality within their political environment. The thrust of postmodern ontologies is to interrogate the discourses and structures that constitute one's self and an individual's apprehension of their political and social reality. Cynicism is one possible response to this interrogation, albeit one which leads to inaction, and is therefore not the right one. But what he posits as an alternative, a radical disregard of these concerns, is arguably not the right one either as it does not acknowledge the modalities through which one's own political action is inflected, nor the structures or hierarchies in which individual actors are complicit. The 'antagonistic disregard' of these concerns in one's political action is to replicate the epistemic violence of race and class immanent in the cynical dispassion in the first place, as it does not

adequately address the meta-attitude of a certitude in one's own epistemic position or privilege.

In response to the epistemic injustices enacted by this cynical disposition, Gordimer's novel presents an alternative epistemology where this cynicism is brought in conflict with the hermeneutically marginalised perspectives. This alternative epistemology is a prominent subject of both Fricker and Medina's works. Both Fricker and Medina take a virtue ethical approach to knowledge practices, arguing that epistemic injustices like hermeneutic injustice and meta-ignorance are epistemic vices, in contrast to which they posit epistemic virtues like hermeneutic justice and meta-lucidity. For Medina, meta-ignorance can be countered by 'meta-lucidity', which 'can be achieved through the epistemic friction of two conflicting perspectives: the experience of not being seen can produce the painful experience of cognitive conflict between two ways of seeing — the subject's own gaze and the social gaze that does not see him' (192). Gordimer's late style embodies what Medina describes as a 'double consciousness' for the white subject, or a capacity to entertain two perspectives in a way that emphasises the internal contradictions between them in order to foreground the contingencies of their own nature. I acknowledge that there is irony in applying this idea of double consciousness, a concept emerging from the works of W.E.B. Du Bois, to represent the experience of the white subject. I address this later when I elaborate how Medina develops this idea of epistemic friction. Nevertheless, the use of focalising in *The House Gun* depicts this capacity to shift back and forth between perspectives of the privileged whites and the marginalised black characters in a way that is instructive through its critical tension.

The narrative style of *The House Gun* foregrounds this epistemic friction between the perspectives of the white, middle-class characters like Harald and Claudia and the experiences of people in the prison system by emphasising the lapses in their knowledge of the environments that Harald and Claudia navigate. When the couple first visit the prison, they are struck by a sudden realisation that:

> […] Prison is a normal place. That is what they don't know; the officer has a computer and several kinds of telephones, regular

> and cellular, in his bureau and there is a basket of flowering indoor plants with its bunch of plastic ribbons that has no doubt marked an anniversary or other celebration. The echoing corridors from the night's darkness are there but these are ways they will not go down; they are led by the strong buttocks of a young black policeman to a nearby room. It is right there that there is nothing to characterize that room; if there is, they don't see it. (*The House Gun* 29)

As I discussed previously, Harald and Claudia's experience of the prison system is one that is fundamentally structured by the hierarchies of race and class, especially in the way that the injustices of the prison system are ameliorated through superficial public relations exercises or that the prisons are still run by white Afrikaners who make special allowances for white prisoners. In addition, what the novel demonstrates in the passage above is that this inequality is not just a condition of the white characters' experience of these environments, but are constitutive to the characters' knowledge of these environments: Harald and Claudia fundamentally 'don't know' that 'prison is a normal place', described here as a mundane office space with computers, telephones, bureaus, office plants bearing markers of the officers' personal lives. But even this 'normalcy' is one that obscures critical experiences: the narrative further alludes indirectly to things that Harald and Claudia are going to remain ignorant and oblivious of, such as 'echoing corridors from the night's darkness' that 'they will not go down', or aspects of the visiting room that they do not see. In particular, The narrative describes the particularly unknown characteristics of these spaces as either deserted and echoing in shadow in the 'night's darkness' or as a featureless space where 'there is nothing to characterize that room', conveying with it a sense of discomfort and alienation that Harald and Claudia experience. This evokes the uncanny experience that Harald and Claudia have in visiting the prison, and encountering a space that is physically consistent with what they have expected, but eerily unlike what they know because of how their knowledge and expectations have been conditioned by their racial and class position.

This kind of epistemic friction is evident in this passage where Harald considers the fate of the black prisoners. By presenting the contradiction

between the perspectives of the black prisoners with that of Harald's dispassionate and abstract contemplation of the issue of the death penalty, the narrative presents a number of metafictional gestures that undermine the white characters' cynical distance from these political issues. To begin with, white characters like Harald are momentarily characterised as 'the others' as the narrative attempts to take the perspective of Makwanyane and Mchunu. It momentarily allows the marginalised perspectives to take the subject position, bringing the marginalised voices in direct contradiction with the hermeneutically privileged one. Although the narrative does position itself from their subject position, it does not focalise through them or give access to their immediate experiences or inner workings. This reversal of perspective and this othering of the white character who is normally the focaliser for the narrative is a momentary interruption, as Harald attempts to imagine himself from the perspective of these prisoners. This intrusion disrupts the fixity of Harald's perspective. The juxtaposition of these two perspectives, the black prisoners' and Harald's, gives Harald's voice an emotional charge. In contrast to the impersonal language of religious speculation or legal principle earlier in this paragraph, the end becomes deeply invested in the issues at stake:

> Like him, like Claudia and him, it is unthinkable that the issue would ever enter the lives of these men and women — who is there among them or theirs who would be so uncivilised as to kill as a solution to anger, pain, jealousy, despair? The retentionists fear death at the hands of others; the abolitionists abhor the right to repeat the crime by killing the killer; neither conceive they themselves could commit murder. (*The House Gun* 136)

The denigrating rhetoric in this outburst, describing those sentenced to death — the two black men in particular — as 'uncivilised as to kill as a solution to anger, pain, jealousy, despair' is charged with racial division. It even goes as far as to evoke colonial stereotypes about these black men, characterising them as barbarous and emotional, giving in to feelings of anger, pain, jealousy and despair, in contrast to the cool, dispassionate dinner table discussion described earlier. However, the same can be said of Harald's son, and this irony presents Harald a moment of realisation that 'they themselves could commit murder'.

The affective charge of this intrusion and the dissonance in the narrative voice between these two perspectives reflects the way in which the style of the novel embodies this manner of epistemic friction. The narrative frames these voices as contradictory, and thus creates tension in the perspectival assumptions of the narrator in order to draw attention to the hierarchies between the characters involved. It is this contradiction that ameliorates Harald's understanding of his and of Makwanyane and Mchunu's positions. The way in which his realisation is worded, that 'they themselves could commit murder' speaks to what Spelman identifies as the coloniser's gaze, as discussed earlier. Recalling Spelman's account of the construction of black Others by white subjects, even well-meaning and progressive notions of equality construct black people as like white people, but never as white people like black people. In contrast, Harald's realisation here that white people themselves could commit murder, and thus be like the two black prisoners whose death sentence is being reviewed by the Constitutional Court, contradicts the colonialist ideology that structures the construction of the black Other as a site of differentiation from the white self. This epistemic friction undermines the lack of reciprocity that is fundamental to the construction of race. It is this reciprocity and coevalness that then becomes the foundation for Harald's sense of commonality with these people whom he had previously ignored.

Harald's realisation presents a possibility to move past his cynical dispassion, as he feels he could seek kinship and 'common cause' with the parents of Makwanyane and Mchunu, people for whom this is 'not an issue but at home with them' (*The House Gun* 136-7). Harald shows an awareness of the inequalities and barriers that prevent their parents from engaging with the legal system, noting that,

> It was unlikely these parents would be among the crowd in court, almost certainly they are poor and illiterate, afraid to think of exposing themselves to authority in a process incomprehensible any other way than whether or not a son was going to be hanged one daybreak in Pretoria. (*The House Gun* 137)

Despite his sense of a common cause with them, the tone Harald takes when describing the parents is still patronising and demeaning, especially in the way he projects fear, vulnerability or ignorance onto them. Moreover, all of this is speculation, characterised by Harald's prejudices and anxieties. His vague account of 'authority' obscures the structural and political causes of these inequalities during the apartheid regime. Despite this, there is a tentative awareness of the kinds of social and economic issues that intersect with the ethical matter of the death penalty's constitutionality, and the difference in what is at stakes for people unlike himself. What is especially revealing, however, is his account of the legal process as 'incomprehensible': while initially he attributes this to their illiteracy and poverty, it is clear that his understanding of events despite his wealth, privilege and education does not help his situation. Although he might understand the law and legal proceedings, the process itself is one which eludes his control. This presents a moment of shared vulnerability between the people whom Harald imagines to be the families of these black prisoners and himself. However, this shared vulnerability is with imagined people, and is nevertheless framed through Harald's ideological position. The dissonance in the narrative voice between the patronising, demeaning tone that evokes Harald's subject position as a white South African and the shared sense of vulnerability with black people who are discriminated against exposes the instability of Harald's privileged subject position when confronted with the material realities of the changing political landscape. This device presents a possibility for sensitivity and ethical awareness that moves beyond cynical dispassion, while simultaneously drawing attention to the modalities of the subject position from which one apprehends this reality.

In contrast to Harald's own actions, the extradiegetic critique of Harald's perspective — by foregrounding the contradictions between the white characters' ignorance and the perspectives that have been marginalised — exerts a narrative friction that makes clear that his worldview is untenable. Harald and Claudia's ignorance takes on an ethical significance, especially when situated within the epistemic injustices that structure their political

environment. Medina argues that ethical actors have an epistemic responsibility to 'be minimally knowledgeable about one's mind and one's life, about the social world and the particular others with whom one interacts, and about the empirical realities one encounters' (127). For Medina, this baseline cognitive minimum is contextual to social positionality. Because systems of epistemic oppression produce barriers to knowledge as well as ethical and political responsibility, epistemic failures are unevenly distributed between social groups (131). Writing about school segregation in the United States, George Lipsitz observes that 'unequal educational opportunities play a crucial role in racializing life' (33). The same can be seen in the context of segregated schooling during apartheid, and in particular Harald's assumption of the black prisoners' families not knowing about the law demonstrates how the social and structural inequalities of race, education and access create a condition of ignorance. In contrast, Harald and Claudia are white, wealthy and educated, and they have access to the information through media outlets like televised news. Considering the epistemic advantages that Harald and Claudia have, Medina's argument would hold that they bear a heightened epistemic responsibility. Despite this, their attitude towards the news demonstrates a strong sense of detachment and indifference, one which is foregrounded, rendered ironic and thereby critiqued in the narrative. Their lack of knowledge is specific epistemic failure for which they are morally culpable, whereas the black prisoners and their families cannot be held responsible for their ignorance in the same way because their lack of agency and knowledge products of the same structures of injustice.

Epistemic friction in the novel arises from the tension between Harald and Claudia's culpable ignorance and the peripheral perspectives that infringe upon it. Drawing on the works of W.E.B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon and Paul Gilroy, Linda Alcoff suggests that white identity 'needs to develop its own version of "double consciousness,"' that

> requires an ever-present acknowledgment of the historical legacy of white identity constructions in the persistent structures of inequality and exploitation, as well as a newly awakened memory of the many white traitors to white privilege who have struggled to

> contribute to the building of an inclusive human community (222-3).

Medina develops Alcoff's sense of a bifurcated white consciousness further to include 'internalising underprivileged perspectives that can exert epistemic friction and offer epistemic resistance from the inside' (Medina 199). In addition, Medina argues for a 'kaleidoscopic consciousness' (222) that accommodates a multiplicity of marginalised perspectives. The formal devices through which Gordimer subjects Harald and Claudia's perspectives to critique suggests a bifurcated double-consciousness, one which calls into question the persisting legacies of racial injustice and inequality that structure the way in which a white South African subject apprehends their political environment and also incorporates within it an awareness of the voices of marginalised characters like the two prisoners and their families. In particular, the ironic devices through which the narrative focalises through Harald and Claudia's perspectives frames their ignorance and insensitivity as an ethical failure. Their cynical dispassion from events around them reflects a failure to meet the epistemic responsibilities expected of them by virtue of their race and socio-economic status. While the trial that constitutes the focus of the plot is concerned with determining Duncan's guilt for his crime, the narrative itself holds white characters like Harald and Claudia culpable for their failings within the context of persisting epistemic injustices.

There is, nevertheless, a sense later in the novel that Harald and Claudia realise the vicissitudes of violence and injustice of which they were previously unaware. After Harald has attended hearings at the Constitution Court over the constitutionality of the death penalty, his perspective is drastically and irrevocably shifted from this earlier sense of isolation. Harald becomes aware that 'there is a labyrinth of violence not counter to the city but a form of communication within the city itself. They no longer were unaware of it, behind security gates. It claimed them' (*The House Gun* 141). Harald and Claudia are faced with the realisation of not just the continuing forms of state violence within their society — that there '*is* a labyrinth of violence' — but that this state violence is specifically consistent with the socioeconomic

injustices of their society — that it is 'not counter to the city'. The way in which this passage measures this violence as well as Harald and Claudia's unawareness of it in terms of the city or in terms of suburban gated communities evokes the hierarchies of race and class that are embodied within segregated spaces. As I discussed previously, the 'security gates' that Harald and Claudia live behind, as well as the suburban gated communities with modern amenities, are symbolic of hierarchies of race and class that are contiguous with previous forms of injustice from the apartheid era. Describing the legal system as 'not counter to the city', moreover, emphasises that far from redressing the injustices of race and class that are embodied within the urban landscape, the court system is another medium through which such injustices are articulated.

As the above passage makes clear, Harald and Claudia's experience of their son's trial displaces them from the privileged epistemic position that is sequestered within their suburban dwellings. This epistemic shift is made further apparent as the narrative describes the shift in their modes of knowledge and understanding, as they see that

> Duncan is contained in that labyrinth along with the men who robbed and knifed a man and flung his body from a sixth-floor window — today's news; tomorrow, as yesterday, there will be someone else, one who has strangled his wife or incinerated a family inside a hut. […] The context into which their own context, Duncan, Harald, Claudia fits, it's natural. It is in the closed air of a living-room at three a.m. with dry breath of wool from the carpet, the whiff of coffee dregs and creak of wood under atmospheric pressures. The difference between Harald and Claudia as what they used to be, watching he sunset, and what they are now is that they are within the labyrinth through intimate contact with a carrier of a nature other than the ones Claudia cited. (*The House Gun* 141)

While on one hand the narrative here is evocative of the domestic scene at the novel's opening, through the emphasis on domestic interiors of the smell of wool, the whiff of coffee, the creak of wood, or watching sunsets, there are nevertheless many revealing contrasts between the kind of deliberate ignorance that I analysed earlier and the acute sense of awareness that Harald and Claudia show here: the narrative pays close attention to Harald

and Claudia's modes of knowledge. The description of how the story will play out in the news cycle is reminiscent of the rolling news from the novel's opening. Contrary to their boredom and indifference in the novel's opening, by virtue of their comfortable and gated lifestyle, they now find themselves being the subject of that very news coverage of violence. In particular, it is not just the fact of Duncan's committing murder that situates them within this labyrinth of violence, but what they keep describing as their 'context'. This emphasis on context refers to the modality through which their perception of their son and his crime are constituted. Furthermore, these perceptions of Duncan's character are not described as traits of his nature as such, but are specifically phrased as natures that Claudia 'cited'. This emphasis on citation has multiple meanings: firstly it underscores the perspectival nature of the truth of Duncan's personality, being intrinsically linked to Claudia's perspective and experience; secondly, it refers to the act of giving evidence in legal proceedings; finally, it signals a metafictional interrogation of the way in which characters' testimonies and perspectives define truth in the novel.

In that regard, Harald cites, just like Claudia, significant intertexts within the novel. He frequently returns to his old books, developing what the novel describes as a pathological dependence on them to make sense of his experience. Earlier in the novel he quotes Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, from which the character Naphta 'spoke to Harald in the silences that accompanied him everywhere […] The off-hand manner of the girl, at the lawyer's chambers' (*The House Gun* 72). The passage from Mann that he quotes is a cynical reflection on a character's nature, that 'the man is as he has wished to be, and as, until his last breath, he has never ceased to wish to be. He has revelled in slaying, and does not pay too dear in being slain' (Mann qtd. in Gordimer *The House Gun* 71). Harald similarly tries to get Duncan to read *The Magic Mountain* whilst he is in prison (*The House Gun* 102). In contrast, after having gone through the ordeal of watching his son's trial and the Constitutional Court's hearing on the death penalty, he quotes a passage about the tumultuous transition to a new society from Hermann Broch's *The Sleepwalkers*:

> The transition from any value system to a new one must pass through that zero-point of atomic dissolution, must take its way through a generation destitute of any connection with either the old or the new system, a generation whose very detachment, whose almost insane indifference to the suffering of others, whose state of denudation of values proves an ethical and so an historical justification for the ruthless rejection, in times of revolution, of all that is humane… And perhaps it must be so, since only such a generation is able to endure the sight of the Absolute and the rising glare of freedom, the light that flares out over the deepest darkness, and only over the deepest darkness. (qtd. in Gordimer *The House Gun* 142).

Harald's interpretation of this passage is that the only way people in the present can make sense of and endure the brutality of the past is by rejecting all that is humane in the immediate present, manifesting in the tumultuous conflict and violence that continues to rend society in the independent South Africa. He is very uncertain in this interpretation, evident in the way the narrative voice asks 'is that what this text is saying to Harald?' (*The House Gun* 142). It is at this point ambiguous whether or not Harald commits to this as a justification for violence, and this ambiguity is resolved later in the paragraph. This violent rejection of 'all that is humane' is framed as a context for the kind of senseless violence that Duncan perpetrated. Moreover, the 'indifference to the suffering of others' can similarly describe Harald and Claudia's own indifference and detachment to the violence and conflict in their society, which in itself is a form of epistemic violence that erases and marginalises the experiences of black.

As he continues to reflect on the quote from Broch, Harald comes to a realisation near the end of the paragraph that 'violence desecrates freedom, that's what the text is saying. That is what the country is doing to itself' (*The House Gun* 142-3). This passage represents Harald's thought process as he works through an interpretation of the text. Compared with a cool, dispassionate, academic approach to the quote, his meditations become charged with images of violence and revolution, as he alludes to 'hut burnings and assassinations', 'hijackers who take life as well as the keys of the vehicle', or 'fearsome necessities of that revolution' and the training camps where militant carders would use dummies for target practice (*The*

House Gun 142). As the cynical apathy gives way to such violent imagery, this passage marks a moment of realisation for Harald about the nature of violence in his present political moment, as something 'the country is doing to itself'. It is especially revealing that this precipitates in an interpretation of the text that is somewhat in tension with the quote itself: Harald's conclusion that 'violence desecrates freedom' does not treat it with the same semblance of fatalistic justification that Broch originally does when he suggests that 'perhaps [such violence] must be so', or that a society can only comprehend freedom if it is subjected to such brutality or violence. Moreover, Harald comes to realise his and his family's own complicity within such violence, as he immediately 'knows himself as part of it, not as a claim that what his white son has done can be excused in a collective phenomenon […] but because violence is the common hell of all who are associated with it' (*The House Gun* 143). It is through the changing intertexts and the shifting tone of the prose that the novel embodies the shift in Harald's knowledge of his political reality. The epistemic friction that the novel foregrounds thus culminates in this moment of realisation wherein Harald is forcibly dislodged from his earlier position of privileged disengagement with the violence of his time to finding himself intimately aware of his own place and complicity within the 'common hell' of violence in his society. Harald's realisation of his complicity within racial violence presents a semblance of what Medina describes as a 'meta-lucidity' to counter epistemic injustice, as Harald learns to accommodate diverse perspectives in his worldview, and while this contrasting use of intertext and tone are an extradiegetic device through which the novel accommodates these epistemic frictions.

It is clear then that although *The House Gun* embodies this epistemic friction as a way of interrogating structures of epistemic injustice represented by Harald and Claudia's privileged indifference, the tenor of its critique is still constrained by the limitations of its own politics. Although there is such an amelioration in Harald's perspective, this amelioration is not straightforward or conclusive. There are several hierarchies that persist in his knowledge or understanding of his complicity within violence. In assuming violence to be a

'common hell of all who are associated with it', he flattens the responsibility between perpetrators and victims of violence, and further neglects the different degrees or scales of atrocities committed across a wider history of colonialism. Likewise, even earlier in the novel when Harald begins to see the legal proceedings from the perspective of the black characters awaiting sentencing, his tone towards these characters and their experience remains patronising. Considering Medina's distinction between a double consciousness and a kaleidoscopic consciousness, it is clear that the novel does not attempt to reconcile a multiplicity of perspectives, but is limited to at best depicting a double consciousness of white protagonists being contradicted by the indirect allusions to the experiences of marginalised characters. While the tensions between the narrative voice and the characters' perspectives that are exposed through the free indirect style and the use of focalisation suggest that Harald is to some extent conscious of and sensitive to different perspectives, his patronising dismissal of them seems to contradict this. This tension becomes clearer when elaborating Medina's account of epistemic friction, especially when considering the two principles which render it an effective virtue. The two crucial features of epistemic friction are, for Medina, the 'principle of acknowledgement and engagement' and 'the principle of epistemic equilibrium' (195). The principle of acknowledgement and engagement requires that the subject be sensitive to different cognitive perspectives. In that regard, both the novel and Harald's own voice, through this moment of realisation, seems to acknowledge and engage with aspects of racial violence of which the protagonists were previously ignorant.

The novel presents a more difficult problem when considering the principle of epistemic equilibrium. This principle requires that one perspective does not overpower or exclude the other, even when it has been acknowledged. The fundamental point of epistemic equilibrium, Medina notes, is not a relativistic demand of giving all perspectives equal weight, but the 'desideratum of *searching* for equilibrium in the interplay of epistemic forces, without some forces overpowering others, without some cognitive

influences becoming unchecked and unbalanced' (195, italics mine). Medina's characterisation of this principle as a search is especially crucial, as it shows that epistemic virtue is not a characteristic of the knowledge or the knower, but a process by which different forms of prejudice and discrimination are countered and rectified. In that regard, as evident in the patronising way in which he speaks of them, Harald's attempt at finding common cause with the families of the black prisoners is framed through his own prejudices, as well as the social and political hierarchies through which these people have been marginalised and denied knowledge of and access to the law and legal systems. Harald's modes of kinship and common cause are matters of tactical benefit and self-interest, as when he considers the appointment of Hamilton Motsamai, a black lawyer, for his son's defence an advantage purely for its tokenism and optics, especially if there was a black judge on the bench (*The House Gun* 33). Likewise, after his momentary reflection on what the two prisoners' families would be going through, he forgets about them entirely and centres himself on his immediate experience. Although he acknowledges different cognitive perspectives, he does not actively search in good faith for ways of mitigating his own prejudices in his actions.

The requirement of epistemic equilibrium entails a further epistemic responsibility for the aforementioned search for marginalised perspectives and the equitable interaction between them. In *The House Gun*, the interaction between the different voices is far from equitable: it is clear that while Harald and Claudia acknowledge marginalised perspectives of black characters, their framing of them represents white perspectives overpowering and subordinating black voices. This is clear in the use of indirect speech to describe Mrs February's family history of being sold into slavery, where a traumatic, violent history of colonial oppression as enacted on human lives and bodies is rendered in a passing mention to characterise Claudia's own racial insecurity in her workplace. Likewise, Harald acknowledges the racial inequality in the stakes of the Constitutional Court's ruling on the death penalty for white South Africans who regard this as an abstract topic of

discussion and black prisoners who are persecuted by the justice system. He also shows an awareness of the structural causes for Makwanyane and Mchunu's families' ignorance of the law and of legal proceedings. However, the narrative never fully allows for these characters to develop their own voice. Instead, their voices are framed within a narrative that focalises through Harald's perspective, as Harald momentarily reflects upon his own position from their gaze. For the most part, the language with which these characters are depicted is coloured with a coloniser's gaze, and the way in which Harald describes Makwanyane and Mchunu denigrates them to having no agency in their circumstances. The novel does not present these characters any differently. While it does imply the failures of Harald and Claudia's subjectivities, it does not present an alternative interaction between these epistemic forces in which the marginalised characters' perspectives are not dominated by white subjects. Hamilton Motsamai's voice is the only alternative presented in the novel. However, the novel's depiction of Motsamai's work is always mediated through Harald and Claudia's perceptions of it, which is in turn inflected by their own racial prejudices and tactical exploitation of the optics of being defended by a black lawyer.

Conclusion: Cynicism and the Search for Sincerity

The House Gun bears the hallmarks of Gordimer's late style in the way it adopts an idiom of postmodern melancholy and cynical idiom to embody the epistemic frictions of the white South African experience of this changed political environment. In that regard, I am sceptical of Lewis' characterisation of Gordimer — following from Dominic Head — that the purpose of her work is the '*chronicling* of white experience in South Africa' (70, italics mine). Rather, in the way it embodies a specific disposition of white characters, Gordimer's novels subject this subject position to a critique of its own complicity within racially-structured epistemic injustices through the form of the novel and the ways in which the narrative frames, focalises through and contradicts the voices of white characters. This critique is rooted within Gordimer's reconsideration of her own positionality within the social and

political landscape of post-apartheid South Africa. The changes in Gordimer's conception of herself as a writer and her own practice of writing reflect a subtle self-consciousness of the intervening modalities of her subject position. It is this self-awareness, particularly of her own sense of benefiting from the racial and political injustices that she opposes, that calls into question the epistemic and ontological assumptions of her fiction, namely how she can know of and represent in good faith the perspectives of black South Africans, and how her sense of self and of an objective political reality may be compromised.

Gordimer's late style presents a subtle working through of these political and metaphysical concerns. In particular, the cynical mood that colours her prose and characterises the disposition of her white protagonists towards their society is one prominent idiom through which she engages with these concerns. Cynicism becomes a two-fold device, one which characterises a specific epistemic failure of white South Africans in fully apprehending the vicissitudes of racial and social injustice, but also draws attention to its own epistemic friction in order to critique this failure. It embodies an acute consciousness of a postmodern ontology that is sceptical of the transcendental conditions of possibility of one's political reality. Gordimer's use of cynicism does not so much represent a listless disavowal of political commitment. Rather, her late style uses cynicism to articulate a form of resistance that is circumspect of its own modalities. The affective charge of this cynicism, through its use of irony and antagonism, creates a sense of friction in the ways in which different characters interact. Moreover, the persistence of racial and social injustices places an epistemic responsibility on individual subjects to be knowledgeable of their own positionality as well as the material and social conditions that give rise to these inequalities. The use of cynicism as an idiom allows for the white characters' knowledge of these conditions, or lack thereof, to be called into question. An objective style that disregarded these metaphysical concerns would not adequately register these modalities, and thus this risk replicating the same epistemic injustices.

Nevertheless, the epistemic frictions that Gordimer's cynical idiom in *The House Gun* foreground do not lead to an epistemic equilibrium between this white subject position and the perspectives that it subordinates. There remains a persisting inequality how these different voices are regarded in the narrative. This renders its political gesture incomplete. In this regard, Medina's characterisation of the principle of epistemic equilibrium as a 'search' for marginalised perspectives as well as an equitable mode of representing them is particularly illuminating. This idea of a 'search' would suggest a continual process of epistemic realignment. Crucially, this search is never completed, and this incompleteness is evident in the idiom of *The House Gun*. While the novel embodies and critiques many of the problems with cynicism and culpable ignorance, it does not adequately accommodate the subordinated voices of black characters in a manner that avoids replicating the very epistemic injustices that it seeks to critique. If this search is an ongoing process in Gordimer's late style, then it is one which develops further over the course of Gordimer's later novels. *Get a Life* and *No Time Like the Present* present alternative responses to these epistemic frictions which accommodate these problems of the white self and its complicity within its political reality, while nevertheless seeking a mode of engagement that allows for critique of its political environment. *Get a Life* imagines how the human self and greater-than-human ecosystem share strong affinities of mutual vulnerability in the wake of ecological catastrophe, and *No Time Like the Present* presents a tension between the continued radicalism of black activists still fighting for equality and disillusioned white liberals languishing in self-pity. While *The House Gun*, as the first of Gordimer's post-apartheid novels, contends with issues of cynicism and dispassion without fully presenting a mode of epistemic justice or equilibrium, Gordimer's subsequent works engage with society through other modes, using a style that pays close attention to the phenomenological re-configuration of the white self within the post-apartheid dispensation.

3. The Subversion of Empathy and Desire in *The Pickup*

The cynical and melancholy prose in *The House Gun*, as the protagonists Harald and Claudia are forced to confront the legacies of past injustices from which they were sheltered by virtue of their whiteness and their wealth, foregrounds the epistemic fissures in the position of the white subject. In my previous chapter, I argued that Gordimer's use of cynicism embodies the epistemic friction as Harald's perspective comes into conflict with the lived experience of black characters as well as his own complicity in structures of racial injustice. Gordimer's subsequent novel, *The Pickup*, takes this critique of the white subject even further as it turns its attention from the apathetic, wealthy whites who were the subject of *The House Gun* to a younger generation of progressive liberals who had taken for granted a spirit of Bohemian cosmopolitanism and liberalism in the post-apartheid present. The characters from this younger generation around whom the novel centres believe that they have distanced themselves from their past and what it represents, and in doing so act in ways that would have been in defiance of past race laws and taboos. However, what *The Pickup* explores is the impossibility of a white subject bridging that gap between themselves and the outsider, whether it is through desire, intimacy, or empathy. This is manifested in two particular inflections of Gordimer's late style: to begin with, the novel presents a narrative voice that is fragmented and polarised by the internal contradictions of the white subject. Gordimer's depiction of a frustrated narrative voice in its attempt at depicting and empathising with the figure of the outsider foregrounds the perspectival impossibility of the white subject knowing the experience of its other. Subsequently, as I will discuss in a later section of the chapter, the novel presents a turn towards the spiritual, something which evolves further and in different directions in Gordimer's next novel. There is, moreover, a sense of self-awareness of Gordimer's own writerly position. In my previous chapter, I discussed Simon Lewis' reading of

two of Gordimer's critical reflections on her own writing, and how in her Charles Eliot Norton Lecture in particular she shows an emerging appreciation of her situatedness within history rather than her rebellious escape from it. In a similar manner, one can see elements of an autobiographical critique of her position and the exploration of a nuanced and circumspect mode of understanding the position of the outsider in *The Pickup*.

With all of this in mind, in this chapter I will firstly examine the refusal or disavowal of the legacies of the past that *The Pickup* takes as its main focus, and I will situate this within the context of Gordimer's sense of her growth both as a writer and as someone engaged with politics. I will examine how the figure of the protagonist, Julie Summers, represents a turning inward of Gordimer's critical attention to consider her own subject position, and how Julie's relationship with an undocumented migrant is a re-evaluation of whether a personal defiance of political barriers within relationships is a meaningful mode of resistance in the new South Africa. Subsequently, I will return to the themes of epistemic injustice I discussed in my previous chapter and consider the injustices that result from empathy being used as a mode of knowing the outsider. In particular, I will interrogate the epistemic violence committed when a white subject assumes that the experience of the other is fungible, and that they can empathise with them uncritically. Then, I will examine how sexual desire further eclipses the autonomy of the other. What this novel presents is not just the epistemic friction between the white self and experiences which have been marginalised, but a further phenomenological problem that calls into question the very conditions of possibility of the white self understanding the experiences of the outsider. Against the backdrop of such contradictions, however, *The Pickup* speculates about a realignment of the self in a manner that can understand the experience of the outsider without eclipsing the outsider's autonomy with categories or figures of the white subject's desires or assumptions. This, in particular, is represented not just by Julie's becoming an outsider herself in

her husband's home country, but moreover through the ecological and, what some critics argue, spiritual reconfigurations of the self.

The Position of Refusal

The context of Gordimer's late style in a work like *The Pickup* is that of a refusal of the ideologies embodied in the milieu of *The House Gun*. Recalling my discussion in the previous chapter of Simon Lewis' reading of her Charles Eliot Norton lecture 'That Other World that was the World', Gordimer's later critical reflections on her own writing present a re-evaluation of her own positionality as a writer. She is highly critical of the assumptions of her previous works, as she chastises herself for the 'effrontery to think that we could write a poem or compose a song that would be "good enough", over there' as she was writing from 'a place secure and comfortable, so long as one kept to simple rules, not walking by too close to the compound where the black miners lived' (*Writing and Being* 121). Reading *The Pickup* along these lines, there are a number of revealing autobiographical parallels between Gordimer's own life and the protagonist Julie Summers' political disposition, in particular when considering their refusal of their past, alienation from the people who were outsiders to their societies, and their desire to make bonds with these people. Published in 2001, *The Pickup* seems to pick up from where *The House Gun* left off. The characters in *The Pickup* come from the same social milieu and background as in *The House Gun*, evident in the way that Hamilton Motsamai — the criminal defence lawyer who represented Duncan Lindgard — is introduced as 'the black lawyer who saved the son of the Summers' great friends' (*The Pickup* 47). The protagonist, Julie Summers, is a white media executive living in a position of privilege and financial security thanks to her race, her stable career and her family's largess. There are a number of revealing autobiographical parallels between Julie's life and Gordimer's. The background from which Julie hails, and the parties at her parents' house that she attends, parallel many aspects of what Gordimer describes of her own youth in her Charles Eliot Norton lecture titled 'That Other World Which was the World' as 'a life ordered, defined,

circumscribed by the possession of a white skin', which was embodied in the social relations that were expressed in racially segregated spaces: attending weddings, bridge afternoons and cake sales with other white women, or white men meeting in golf clubs (*Writing and Being* 122). As I will discuss later, the way in which the novel focalises through Julie's perspective bears many markers of the epistemic friction between the perspective of white characters and the experiences of people whose perspectives are alien to them. What is interesting in *The Pickup*, in contrast with *The House Gun*, is that this perspective is not that of an apathetic elite, but a younger generation of liberal progressives.

This sense of a generational shift is further manifested in Gordimer's reflection on her own lack of belonging in her lecture, where she describes her sense of being as caught between two poles:

> The whites were not my people because everything they lived by—their claimed racial superiority and the methods they were satisfied to maintain as if it were truth—was the stuff of my refusal. […] Refusal was treason.
> The blacks were not 'my people' because all through my childhood and adolescence they had scarcely entered my consciousness. *I had been absent*. Absent from them. (*Writing and Being* 128).

While Gordimer's disavowal of the politics pursued by whites in her society alienated her from them, the fact and the material benefits of her whiteness as well as the epistemic boundaries that whiteness circumscribed alienated her from the people who were, to her, previously outsiders. But the response to such an alienation, she reflects, was a desire to forge new bonds with these people. Julie and her friends are similarly suspended between these two poles of belonging, and in both Gordimer's lecture and in *The Pickup* a culture of Bohemian cosmopolitanism in Johannesburg becomes a space for later generations to disavow their past and make bonds with each other. Julie and her friends persistently try to distance themselves from their backgrounds of wealth and privilege that are embodied in their family ties. The first half of the novel centres around the relationships and interactions between Julie's coterie of well-off, liberal friends, named collectively as 'The Table' after their usual seat in a café. The owners of this café, the narrator

notes, got mixed up between Los Angeles and San Francisco when naming the cafe (*The Pickup* 5), commenting on which Andrea Spain notes the irony in this confusion between two kinds of Californian subculture, the utopian vision of beat poetry in San Francisco with that of glitzy, superficial and privatised suburbia of Los Angeles (757). Julie and her friends at The Table are essentially distancing themselves from the milieu that Harald and Claudia represented in *The House Gun*.

The interaction between the different generations in the café becomes a microcosm of a particular, idealised view of the social and political transitions in South Africa: it is a 'place for the young' (*The Pickup* 5), for people of Julie's generation who enjoyed the freedoms won in an independent South Africa. Julie regards her friends as 'elective siblings who have distanced themselves from the ways of the past, their families, whether these are black ones still living in the old ghettoes or white ones in The Suburbs' (*The Pickup* 23). This bohemianism further parallels what Gordimer describes as her own experience of Johannesburg in the Fifties, as progressive whites lived by breaking taboos, with 'black musicians, teachers, journalists, aspirant writers [meeting] their white counterparts to talk, drink and dance—the two latter rituals standard as the preparation for many different kinds of human intercourse' (*Writing and Being* 129). It is a similar vein of rebelliousness — against her family and against the oppressive immigration regime of her country — that Julie begins a relationship with Abdu (whose real name is later revealed as Ibrahim),[5] an immigrant mechanic who comes from a non-specific, unnamed North African country and has overstayed his visa, living now in a state of precarity and secrecy. There is, nevertheless, a crucial difference between the Bohemian cosmopolitanism of the Fifties that Gordimer reflects upon in her lecture and the culture in an independent South Africa that she represents in her novel. While in the Fifties, the breaking of the taboos of race and segregation, the inter-mingling of different peoples,

[5] The narrative voice reflects Julie's relationship by calling him Abdu in the section set in Johannesburg, and subsequently Ibrahim in the latter half after he and Julie emigrate. I shall be following the same style and refer to him as Abdu or Ibrahim depending on the context in which I am discussing his character.

and the relationships forged between them were political acts of defiance because they were in violation of the law, the context in which Julie and her friends live is one where this act does not have the same degree of gravitas, as it takes for granted the freedoms that had already been won. Instead, the new act of rebellion here is the navigating of an impersonal, hostile immigration bureaucracy through her relationship with an undocumented migrant.

In the same way that Gordimer's critical reflections on her writing re-evaluates her own positionality as a white writer, this representation of The Table re-contextualises Bohemian café culture as a mode of resistance in the struggle and situates it within the present moment of an independent South Africa. In doing so, it interrogates many of the underlying assumptions that the café represents. Much of Gordimer's own reflections on Bohemianism draw attention to its many limitations with regard to meaningful political action. Reflecting on her own politics, she acknowledges that she 'did not join or commit [her]self formally to a liberation movement' out of fear as well as a 'lingering colonial conditioning that revolution was the blacks' affair' (*Writing and Being* 130). She is cautious not to romanticise or exaggerate the radicalism of the Bohemian act of refusal, instead taking a more humble position that her co-mingling with black artists and writers presented for her a way of '*learning how to think* outside the way [her] society was ordered' (*Writing and Being* 130, italics in original). For Gordimer, these Bohemian communities presented an 'adventure: a prelude to commitment to revolution' (*Writing and Being* 129). While calling this an 'adventure' does carry with it a sense of romanticism, it is nevertheless significant that Gordimer's characterisation of this is that of a '*prelude* to commitment': in other words, it is not a revolutionary act in itself but the beginning of an emerging consciousness. The same can be said of Julie's own experience at The Table: her being part of this diverse cross-section of her society is not in itself a radical act, but represents a process of learning, a process by which she interrogates and re-aligns her ways of knowing the experiences of those who are not 'her people', people who had scarcely entered her consciousness

previously. As Julie represents the vestiges of the Bohemian disavowal re-contextualised in the post-apartheid present, Gordimer's depiction of the contradictory position of Julie's position reflects a critique of what it means to be a white subject who, even after the end of apartheid, struggles to reconcile her refusal of the injustices that construct whiteness while also struggling to bond with and be present in the lives of outsiders.

Gordimer's treatment of Julie's relationships present not just a re-evaluation of Bohemianism as a refusal of a previous generation's politics, but a further interrogation of the way in which personal relationships — especially when they are transgress boundaries and divisions — can be the basis of ethical or political action. The way in which Julie's relationship with Abdu is for her a political awakening parallels Gordimer's early novels, such as *The Lying Days* and *Occasion for Loving*, in which white women protagonists navigate the racial divisions of their society through cross-racial sexual relationships. However Julie's relationship with Abdu presents a sharp contrast from those earlier novels, as her sense of self and her relationship with Abdu are fraught with the contradictions of her subject position, such as her sense of alienation from her own background as well as the people with whom she shares no common experience, her privileged and sheltered upbringing, and the ultimate failure of empathy and desire as a way of knowing Abdu/Ibrahim. These contradictions in Julie's perspective represent an epistemic friction analogous to the contradictions between Harald and Claudia's voice and the voices of black characters in *The House Gun* that I had discussed in my previous chapter. The distinction here is that the subject of this epistemic friction shifts from being an older generation of apathetic middle-class white couple to a young, progressive liberal born out of this social milieu who rebels against this past while still being its beneficiary.

Moreover, Gordimer's revisiting this narrative of a sheltered white woman's political coming-of-age, alongside her own self-critical reflections on her fiction and political activity in her lectures, suggests that *The Pickup* is a re-evaluation of the politics of her earlier fiction. This manifests a self-awareness of what Dominic Head and Stephen Clingman characterise as the

crisis in her belief in liberal ideals (see Clingman 100; Head 77), as I had discussed in the Introduction. Her interrogation of her subject position in her lecture and in a character like Julie in *The Pickup* present an interrogation of the limitations of such an awakening through personal relationships, and whether or not such a political awareness is indeed complete or possible. *The Pickup* thus depicts the friction and internal contradictions of Julie's perspective as a starting point to imagine different ways of constituting the self and knowing the experience of the outsider. In the subsequent sections, I will examine the ways in which the novel is critical of Julie's ability to empathise with Abdu and emphasises the fundamental unknowability of his position to someone in Julie's position. Julie's attempt at knowing Abdu through intimacy and empathy are ultimately frustrated as she only ever knows a correlate of her own desire, and her image of him occludes his individuality and experience. She further fails to grasp the specific kind of violence and discrimination that he experiences at the hands of the immigration system, knowing it only indirectly by being caught within its orbit when he is being deported. In contrast to her failure to know Abdu through intimacy in the earlier half of the novel, it is through the material reorganisation of her life by her emigration in the latter half that she beings to understand Ibrahim's experience. There are tensions in the way Julie sees herself upon emigrating to Abdu/Ibrahim's home country, seeing herself through the romanticised, pastoral ideal of a white settler, and only managing to settle there because of her access to her family's wealth. Nevertheless, despite these contradictions, Julie's emigration presents a reorganisation of her life because of which the outsider's experience of displacement is no longer vicarious, but becomes grounded in an understanding of the material inequalities that constrain Abdu/Ibrahim's freedoms and discriminate against him. What this novel presents, then, is a move beyond a gesture of refusal of a past generation's politics through Bohemian intermingling or empathetic companionship. It reflects how the act of making bonds with the outsider that Gordimer describes in her lecture are not just about a gesture of refusing the past or of intimate companionship. Rather, such bonds require a sustained

act of disavowal embodied in the material re-organisation of one's life to ground oneself in the experience of an outsider. It is through her re-organising of her life into being an outsider in her husband's home country, and through her integrating herself within the community and material economy in which he lives that Julie develops a renewed understanding of the idea of belonging that is grounded in the politics of exile and exclusion.

The Problem with Empathy

As the ideal of Bohemian cosmopolitanism allowed white liberals to reject their past and empathise with black outsiders within South African society, *The Pickup*'s critique of Julie and The Table calls into question whether such a mode of knowing the experience of these black people with whom white progressives share a space is itself adequate or ethically tenable. In that regard, Gordimer's use of metafictional devices to call into question Julie's perspective characterises ways in which her late style presents a critique of cosmopolitan progressivism and empathy or intimacy as ways of knowing the outsider. In this section and the next, I will consider the two ways in which Julie Summers' initial way of knowing Abdu's experience is complicit in forms of epistemic violence that further exclude or alienate his perspective. I will firstly consider the Julie's attempt at empathising with Abdu, and the limitations of empathy that render the Other as fungible and reducible to vicarious experience. In the next section, I will examine how Abdu/Ibrahim is reduced to an object of sexual desire, and thus a correlate of internal categories of Julie's own subject position. In doing so, I will evaluate the ways in which *The Pickup* emphasises the epistemic friction within Julie's perspective, and by alluding to Abdu/Ibrahim's own sense of individuality as being fundamentally unknowable to Julie, it pushes against the contradictions of Julie's reductive ways of knowing him. It is through the stylistic devices of the novel that foreground the indeterminacy of the white subject position and the internal contradictions of the narrative voice that the novel presents a critique of the idea of empathy and the complicity of the white subject within epistemic violence.

As Julie witnesses Abdu's travails at the hands of the immigration system, she is motivated by her sensitivity to his pain and her relationship with him to help him navigate this system and secure permission to remain in the country. Her empathy for his plight, however, is not without its problems. In *Fruits of Sorrow*, Elizabeth Spelman presents an insightful examination of the pitfalls of the ways in which individual subjects engage with the suffering of others. She cautions that 'compassion, like other forms of caring, may also reinforce the very pattern of economic and political subordination responsible for such suffering' (*Fruits of Sorrow* 7). She subsequently identifies a phenomenological problem whereby the self disempowers the other by reducing it to a correlate of its own, vicarious imagination. However, such a phenomenological problem has an even greater thrust when situated within social and biopolitical hierarchies of race and power. In extending this critique along these lines, Saidiya Hartman's rejection of empathy in *Scenes of Subjection* is especially pertinent and compelling.[6] She describes the forms of terror used in the racial subjection of enslaved people in America, and questions the value of empathy as a basis for emancipation of the subjugated person. According to Hartman, the fundamental problem with empathy is that it assumes the Other is knowable vicariously through the imagination and it renders the Other as merely the projection of the self (19-20). The epistemic hierarchies immanent in these attempts at empathising privilege the self and enact a form of epistemic violence. Both Spelman and Hartman are sceptical of a theatrical depiction of suffering that a subject is made to identify with. Spelman is wary of compassion and empathy degenerating into pity. As Sara Ahmed notes, the problem with negative emotions like anger and sadness that are evoked in response to others' pain is

> not so much that we are 'with them' by feeling sad; the apparently shared negative feelings do not position the reader and victim in a relation of equivalence. … Rather, we feel sad *about* their

[6] It is important to acknowledge the origin of Hartman's work, and that her writing is concerned with slavery and the rape and subjugation of black women. I note that there are some specificities to Hartman's critique of the subjugation of black bodies in chattel slavery will not translate as readily to this context of liberal white progressives attempting to empathise with and know an irregular migrant in post-apartheid South Africa.

> suffering, an 'aboutness' that ensures that they remain the object of 'our feeling' (21, italics in original).

The object of empathy is ultimately rendered fungible.

With regard to Hartman's argument, this fungibility of the other further elides racial subjugation and the dehumanisation of the enslaved Black people. Writing about what she calls the 'difficulty and slipperiness of empathy', Hartman considers John Rankin's epistle about the horror of slavery, and in particular a passage where he describes imagining himself, his wife and his child as enslaved people who are whipped by a capricious master (18). Rankin's vicarious experience of the brutality and violence of slavery is an evocative passage, the thrust of which is to excoriate the abuse of power by the slave owners. Although the purpose of this narrative device is to depict slavery as an abomination and to expose its fundamental inhumanity, empathy, as Hartman notes, 'in important respects confounds Rankin's efforts to identify with the enslaved because in making the enslaved person's suffering his own' as 'Rankin begins to feel for himself rather than for those whom the exercise in imagination presumably is designed to reach' (19). Fundamentally, representing the enslaved person's suffering by feeling for himself characterises a failure to appreciate the materiality of the black body and the agency and selfhood of the enslaved person who is, for Rankin, a metaphorical vehicle. This not only occludes the other who is suffering, but it further obscures the social and political hierarchies and injustices that bear the responsibility for such suffering. Such empathy, with its uncritical indulgence of vicarious feeling, neglects the structures of racial violence that act upon the suffering body.

Similarly, the attitudes that Julie and her coterie of friends have towards Abdu strain the well-intentioned, liberal, progressive sense of empathy for him. The novel focalises through these characters and foregrounds their attitudes through its use of a free indirect style. Their language in referring to Abdu draws attention to many of the biases that these white characters have. Early in Julie and Abdu's relationship, her friends gossip, suggesting 'our girl's really gone on that oriental prince of hers. Where was it she picked him

up, again?' (*The Pickup* 36). Not only does this language evoke a discourse of Orientalism, but the use of possessive pronoun to describe Julie as 'our girl', in contrast to which Abdu was an 'that oriental prince of hers', draws a clear distinction between them about who belongs in their space. Moreover, this distinction is evident not just in the hierarchical nature of these pronouns' referents, but in a qualitative difference of what they describe: referring to Julie as 'our girl' gives her a sense of belonging and regards her as an equal, while Abdu is characterised in the dismissive afterthought as a possession that Julie picked up.

In a later instance, when she arrives at The Table before him, her friends begin speculating once again and assume that 'she's seen through her oriental prince and told him, enough' (*The Pickup* 57). That they regard her with 'gazes of alarm' (*The Pickup* 57) and jump to the conclusion of some duplicity and malice on Abdu's part that Julie has just realised conveys a prejudice that Julie's friends have about Abdu, a prejudice that resonates with particularly gendered dimensions of discourses of Orientalism. On one level, this renders the Other as a passive object of desire and seduction, framing Abdu in terms that Said notes were conventionally associated with, expressing 'unlimited sensuality', being 'more or less stupid', and 'above all […] willing' (*Orientalism* 207). For Said, the project of orientalism is linked to a gendered and racialised position of white masculinity, one which is expressed through the sexual acquisitiveness of Oriental women as a method of subjugating the Other. While this dynamic between male and female figures is somewhat inverted in the way Julie sees Abdu as an object of her desire, there is nevertheless a similar dynamic of whiteness expressed as a sexual desire for the Other. This is especially clear in the way Julie reminisces about Abdu's sensuality immediately after she sees his deportation order, with attention lingering on his 'dark nipples' and 'soft-curled black hair' (*The Pickup* 56): not only does this convey some semblance of fetishism about his racial difference, but it demonstrates how Julie cannot comprehend Abdu's circumstances outside of seeing him as a correlate of her sexual desire. I will discuss the specific nature of seduction

and the reduction of Abdu's autonomy to an object of Julie's sexual desire further in the subsequent section. In the meantime, it is worth highlighting how the specific eroticism about Abdu being Julie's oriental prince frames him through the biases of white observers and displaces his subjectivity with that of the white onlooker.

The way in which Julie responds to Abdu's grief with a reminiscence of her first sexual encounter with him further characterises this epistemic displacement. In addition to his characterisation of the masculine nature of the orientalist project, Said further notes that the figure of the Oriental male is 'considered in isolation from the total community in which he lived' (*Orientalism* 207). Julie and her friends have a similar lack of regard for the circumstances in which Abdu lives, seeing him instead as either a sexual object — a 'pickup' — or as someone with duplicitous ill intent, someone whom they later describe as 'a disaster from the beginning' who 'just needed a meal ticket' (*The Pickup* 92). This sense of a threatening otherness of Abdu's body further underscores the orientalist fetishism of Julie and her friends. By focalising through these characters and their prejudices, Gordimer's style draws attention to the contradictions and biases in the position and attitudes of these white characters and the immanent tensions in the way they empathise with Abdu.

The same contradictions are prevalent in the way they characterise their bohemianism and their refusal of the past. The characters at The Table and the other patrons of L.A. Café have claimed it as a space of diversity and egalitarianism from a past of racial segregation: the third-person narrator focalises through Julie and describes the café as a cross-section of a wider society, 'a place for the young; but also one where old survivors of the quarter's past, ageing Hippies and Leftist Jews, grandfathers and grandmothers of the 1920s immigration who had not become prosperous bourgeois, could sit over a single coffee' and where 'Prostitutes from Congo and Senegal sat at tables with the confidence of beauty queens' (*The Pickup* 5,6). When seen in light of Gordimer's autobiographical reflections on bohemianism and political commitment, and her re-evaluation of her own use

of the white woman's coming of age in her earlier fiction, Julie's voice conveying the biases of a white subject in understanding the experience of an outsider is a particular inflection of Gordimer's style in relation to the changed political and ethical landscape of post-apartheid South Africa.

There are tensions within the language, one which the narrative voice, focalising through Julie, does not understand. The lengthy account of the history of the café's patrons alludes to several divisions and injustices across South Africa's history that the patrons ostensibly subvert in the new, independent South Africa: 'the quarter's past' is a euphemism for racial segregation during apartheid. Julie's friends at The Table include people who are black and white, representing a marked departure from that past. Moreover, this passage evokes the different social and political issues arising because of immigration in particular, especially in the way it depicts diverse groups of immigrant communities representing different kinds of immigration. The ageing Hippies represent the various counter-cultural movements in the West during the late twentieth century. Moreover, the 'grandfathers and grandmothers of the 1920s' refer to not just European colonial settlers but also Indian migrants, all of whom settled in South Africa for financial gain but did not achieve the same level of prosperity and thus remain divided along the lines of class and socioeconomic status. The politics of the members of The Table is what R. Radhakrishnan describes as 'precarious posturing and aggrandizement of ethical subjectivity into an absolute commitment' (127), as they are depicted as having abstract conversations without actively engaging with the inequalities that persist.

As a further example, the language with which the narrator describes this café culture distances the present culture from the past reflects what Spain argues is the paradoxical mature of postcolonial exceptionalism in South Africa. Drawing from the work of Giorgio Agamben, she argues that the apartheid-era state used mythologies of race to create a state of exception wherein the rights of blacks were undermined (755). In response, the independent South African state presented new narratives of

> exceptionalism—the African Renaissance, the New South Africa, the Rainbow Nation' that 'assert[ed] a decisive break from vicious

> states of exception and work to distance the country from the authoritarianism of failing postcolonial state. Yet […] there is cooperation between discourses of exception and exceptionalism (Spain 755).

Spain cites the crackdowns on migrant workers in Johannesburg in 2008 as an example of where the citizenry and politicians lay claim to supposedly exceptional values of inclusivity and non-violence at a time when their actions call such values into question. The same can be said of the kind of milieu The Table represents: the friends at The Table have, as David Goldberg describes in his study of contemporary articulations of race in neo-liberal society, a 'conviviality about its intermixture' while at the same time beneath it there 'lurks the legacy of deeper separations, residentially, educationally, commercially and medically' (311). While the patrons of the café embody the unity and interaction of people in a new society who were victims of the violence and segregation of the past, immigrants like Abdu continue to be persecuted and dispossessed.

This language nevertheless reveals a superficiality to this encounter between different generations, one which reflects a naïve understanding of the history of segregation, discrimination and injustice faced by members of this community. Although it is a more subtle reference to immigration, the mention of 'Leftist Jews' is most revealing. As Milton Shain notes, despite some initial discrimination between Jewish immigrants and other European settlers, the upwards mobility of Jewish settlers, their identifying as white, and their benefiting from the colonial race-based regime meant that Jewish migrants consolidated their position as whites within a racially-segregated South African society (93). Gordimer's emphasis on Leftist Jews, however, evokes two particular contradictions in the history of Jewish migration to South Africa. The first is that of Zionism as a determinant of cultural identity. According to Shain, Zionism 'gained a rapid and relatively easy cultural ascendancy' amongst Jewish communities in South Africa, with several Zionist societies emerging and meeting regularly in the earlier half of the twentieth century (91). However, there was significant opposition to this movement of Zionism from 'the Eastern European Jewish Left with its

universalist outlook' (Shain 91), suggesting friction between different political groups within a wider Jewish community. Gordimer's emphasis of Leftist Jews thus highlights a very particular political orientation amongst the people who frequent the café, one of progressive politics and a liberal, universalist ethics.

Moreover, the term itself is a political dog whistle which further evokes a history of discrimination and oppression faced by Jewish immigrants in South Africa. Eastern European Jews were 'stereotyped as devious, filthy and, after the Bolshevik Revolution, subversive' (Shain 91), their immigration into the country was curtailed by xenophobic policies that described them as 'unassimilable', and they were faced with eugenicist fears of race mixing primarily associated with South African blacks (Shain 92). Shain further quotes a piece of anti-Semitic propaganda in a rural South African newspaper from 1921 that said, 'International Socialists, Bolshevists, Revolutionists, Communists and all the elements of the conglomeration of "workers" who do not work and only stir up agitations and turmoil and ill feeling are not wanted' (91). The Leftist Jews that Gordimer describes, then, are a group that has faced persecution, discrimination and racial hatred in a manner similar to black people towards the earlier part of the century. Eventually, however, Shain notes that the different groups within the Jewish community — despite political or ideological divisions — went through a process of homogenisation through 'collective embourgeoisement, the displacement of Yiddish by English (and tellingly not Afrikaans) as the vernacular, a comfortable coupling of Jewish identity, rooted in respect for tradition, with an emerging sense of a broader (white) "South Africanness"' (92). This is not to say that anti-Semitism subsided with the homogenisation of the Jewish community: rather, it emerged more prominently in the Afrikaner Right in the 1930s and 40s and continues to the present day. However, the specific positionality of the 'Leftist Jews' that the narrative voice in the novel evokes is one of a vacillating position from racial otherness and persecution to homogenisation and integration within a colonial apparatus of whiteness. By evoking this kind of internal contradiction in the language,

Gordimer foregrounds the naïveté in Julie's political outlook and the obliviousness to these complexities in the milieu of liberal whites of which she is a part.

In some respects, the egalitarianism with which the café's diverse patrons, many of whom from communities that face persecution or discrimination, can share a table reflects an act of solidarity amongst different constituencies. This resonates with what Gordimer described as the spirit of cosmopolitan bohemianism that became the method of her refusal of the prejudices and injustices of whiteness. The immigration regime that serves to exclude and prosecute Abdu parallels segregation laws of the past in the way it attempts to control, marginalise and denigrate bodies of people considered outsiders. By having him at The Table, and by taking him along to gatherings, and by using their marriage as grounds for appealing his deportation, Julie resists his exclusion. However, the way in which this solidarity is presented is double-edged. This liberal white progressivism fails to engage with the very people whose equality it seeks to defend. The narrative focalises through the perspective of a young, white, well-off protagonist who is oblivious of the difficult material circumstances of the immigrants whom she encounters. For Julie, these people are at best fungible tokens of diversity in the present society, or at worst objects of curiosity and desire. This is evident in the way that the narrative lists all of these different groups of people in a single breath, neglecting the specific forms of inequality and discrimination they would have faced. This neglect is evident in the way that the complex histories of immigration and discrimination are merely alluded to obliquely, and then presented are presented as analogous because of the age of the people in question: they are 'old survivors', 'ageing Hippies' or 'grandfathers and grandmothers'. Julie's sense of self, and her sense of place within South African society as reflected by this café, is an aspirational one where the younger generation seemingly moves beyond the injustices faced by its forebears, but without a sense of the complexities of the different social and political problems. This lack of understanding is especially salient when considering Julie's wealth and security: not only did she and her family

benefit from the racial inequalities of the past, but those social and financial advantages are what insure her against the precarity and vulnerability experienced by immigrants and black people.

This tension is apparent in the language used to describe the 'prostitutes from Congo and Senegal' who also frequent this café. That they are from Congo and Senegal evokes a wider politics of immigration and racial exclusion in South Africa. By singling them out, the narrative resonates with a discourse of xenophobia in South African society which Loren Landau describes as South Africans 'ecumenically label[ing] almost any poor black from elsewhere on the continent as an alien or kwerekwere' (131). That these immigrants have taken up sex work speaks to structures of discrimination within the formal labour market that compels them to work in informal economies. Despite this, however, they are not just able to sit at a table in this café, but are described in terms that are positive and supposedly emancipatory, of having the 'confidence of beauty queens'. But this rhetoric is double-edged: by describing these immigrants as beauty queens the narrative voice singles them out for their otherness, and by elevating the beauty of their outward appearance it glosses over the precarity of the material and social conditions in which these people would be living. As the narrative voice focalises through Julie's perspective closely, it reflects how she and her friends are apathetic towards the material reality of these immigrants' experiences despite their progressive politics and bohemian cosmopolitanism.

This elevation of the beauty and confidence of Senegalese and Congolese immigrant sex workers reflects how discourses around seduction obfuscate the ways in which black women are disempowered by hierarchies of race and gender while simultaneously presenting an illusory reversal of such hierarchies through the ruse of desire. Hartman, drawing from Jean Baudrillard's account of seduction, notes that seduction 'contends that there is an ostensible equality between the dominant and the dominated' (Hartman 88). When Baudrillard argues that seduction 'plays triumphantly with weakness, making a game of it, with its own rules' (83), he assumes that the

dominated manipulate the dominant through their allure. The language Gordimer's narrator uses to depict these immigrants — by emphasising their 'confidence of beauty queens' — depicts them as what Baudrillard terms the effigy of the seductress. Baudrillard's account of the figure of the seductress assumes that sexual allure 'eclipse[s] any will or context' (85), wherein other relations and questions of truth are undone. In that regard, the elevation into 'beauty queens' similarly eclipses the hierarchical, exploitative social and economic relations within which they would exist as precarious, irregular migrants in an informal economy. For Baudrillard, material questions of hegemony are meaningless as they are confined only to the domain of the Lacanian 'real', whereas the interplay of artifice and reality in seduction asserts mastery of the 'symbolic universe' (8).[7] His deferral to a metaphysical discussion about the real and symbolic serves to obfuscate the contradiction between a material hierarchy between individuals while further elevating the figure of the seductress as having some kind of agency or power that supersedes the material terrain on which hegemony operates. This is most revealing in his notion that the seductress 'turns desire itself into an illusion or trap' (85).

But this sophistry merely belies the material hierarchies of power that operate in these contexts: black sex workers who immigrated from conflict-torn countries in the region occupy precarious positions within a community that discriminates against and criminalises them. Baudrillard's reversal of power, Hartman observes, serves to 'discredit the force of violence through the assertion of reciprocal and intimate relations' and thus 'secures the fetters of subjection, while proclaiming the power and influence of those shackled and tethered' (89). Sex workers in such conditions are provided little security or protection from violence. Moreover, the racist and xenophobic immigration policies which later in the novel dispossess

[7] I acknowledge that Baudrillard's view of gender, especially his view of the feminine, is deeply reductive and patronising: it not only denies 'female' agency and desire, neglects the material conditions of oppression, and denigrates the feminine to a position of reactivity to masculine impulses, it further presumes to 'instruct' women to accept this characterisation as a strength. As much it needs redress, thorough critique of all of the problems of his position would distract from the main focus of my argument.

Abdu/Ibrahim would similarly harm these people. This precarity of black immigrant women by virtue of the mutually constitutive structures or racial and gendered oppression is deliberately obscured in the narrator's elevation of them through the discourse of seduction. Moreover, the narrative is one that reiterates colonialist stereotypes of black lasciviousness. Nevertheless, the conflation of sexual allure with agency, and of sexual desire with empathy, are driving forces behind Julie's relationship with her husband, Abdu/Ibrahim.

The lapses in the white progressive attitudes towards structures of racism and institutional antisemitism are revealed through these gaps in the language through which the narrative voice presents these issues. In addition, there are lingering colonialist prejudices in these characters' attitudes towards race, evident further in a passing remark that described hair from a barber's improvised shop as 'the human felt of African hair' (*The Pickup* 6) and likewise their subsequent conversation about the attitudes of black and white men during a traffic jam. The conversation is immediately racialised, as one of Julie's friends suggests 'nothing gives a white male more of a kick than humiliating a woman driver' (*The Pickup* 6). In response, Julie asks her black friend to translate some abuse that she got in the middle of the traffic jam:

> —Someone else shouted something … like *Idikaza* … *mlungu* … What's that, 'white bitch', isn't it?— Her [Julie's] question to the black friend.
> —Well, just about as bad. This city, man!—
> —But it was black men who helped me, of course.—
> —Oh come on—for a hand-out!— (*The Pickup* 6)

The narrative depicts these different voices as flowing into each other, and it does not clearly demarcate who the speakers are. Julie's voice is made obvious by the content of the speech. In contrast, it is ambiguous who the other speakers are. The narrative gives prominence to the presence of a black person at the table when Julie questions them directly on the translation of the swear words, and it is implied that they then respond to Julie's question that the slur was 'just as bad'. That the characters mention race or racial epithets in this conversation suggests that there are unspoken

assumptions between them about how black and white men behave. That Julie adds immediately that black men helped her in the traffic jam, however, is an attempt to ameliorate this representation of black men, one which is summarily dismissed by one of her interlocutors as being motivated purely by personal gain. It is at these lines that the characters proceed to generalise about black people helping white women in a traffic jam, suggesting that they are ill-motivated and only interested in helping for a hand-out. The interweaving of these voices creates a space where underlying racial and class prejudices are difficult to detect, but are nevertheless assumed by implication.

The ambiguity of the voices is further compounded by an apparent invisibility of bodies. Black bodies are central to Hartman's critique of empathy, being the site at which the racial violence of slavery operates and thus the basis of the enslaved Black peoples' experience. It is the specific difference in embodiment of this trauma, one which resists the possibility of an imagined, vicarious experience, that renders empathy an untenable affective or imaginative basis through which to motivate ethical action. The narrative voice, focalising for the most part through Julie, only ever intimately knows the body of one non-white character, that of Abdu/Ibrahim. However, this intimacy is only ever felt in the context of sexual desire. In the same way that the narrative voice of *The House Gun* demonstrated, through its cynical mood and orientation, the inherent discordances in a white liberal protagonist's apprehension of their political environment, the style through which the third-person narrator inflects Abdu/Ibrahim's intents and experiences through Julie as the principal focaliser foregrounds a similar kind of epistemic friction prevalent in white subjects' attempts to empathise with black people and migrants who are marginalised and alienated by structural racism.

Just as how Radhakrishnan characterised the liberal progressivism of The Table as an aggrandisement of ethical subjectivity, this process of knowing of Abdu's struggle through empathy is mired by a similar elevation of subjectivity to the exclusion of the materiality of violence against a black

body. As a result, the object of one's empathy is characterised as a correlate of one's internal categories and prejudices, to the exclusion of their own agency and autonomy. In the subsequent section, I will examine further how sexual desire and intimacy further eclipse and negate the other. The conflation of sexual desire with empathy is an especially pointed evocation of the ways in which the allure of non-white bodies to white subjects is characterised as an illusory form of agency which merely re-enacts racial hierarchy. Not only does the language through which Julie describes Abdu conflate seduction with subjugation, but the terms of her relationship with him take the form of similar inversions of agency. I will examine this further in the next section, and consider how, through the character of Julie, the novel presents a critique of the white liberal failure to understand the ethical significance of black bodies.

The Conflation of Desire and Agency

Julie's ignorance of Abdu's precarity takes the form of her conflating of her derogation of Abdu's individuality into the object of her own sexual desire. The language through which Abdu is described, especially in moments of intimacy, characterises him as seductive and alluring. As I discussed previously, this evokes a sense of an orientalist mystique about his black body. This allure is inverted into an imagined power that he has over her. However, one especially significant aspect of the nature of this seduction is, as Hartman observes, that

> Seduction erects a family romance — in this case, the elaboration of racial and sexual fantasy in which domination is transposed into the bonds of mutual affection, subjection idealized as the pathway to equality, and perfect subordination declared the means of ensuring great happiness and harmony (89).

This account of seduction is especially reflective of the plot of the novel as well as the nature of Julie's understanding of Abdu. With regard to Hartman's notion of seduction as 'family romance', it is through Julie's sense of her seduction by Abdu that she asserts her relationship with him as a form of rebellion. Moreover, as Abdu's relationship with Julie becomes the means

through which he access legal representation and protection — relying on her family's legal connections as well as their marriage as a basis for his appeal against his deportation — his apparent seduction of a white woman is implied to be a method of gaining or exercising power. 'Seduction', Hartman adds, 'professed that power and protection were acquired through surrender' (90), and it is this seductive representation of Abdu that the novel employs to further expose the epistemic friction in the way in which Julie's desire occludes Abdu's individuality.

The epistemic friction between Abdu/Ibrahim's experience and Julie's understanding of it is embodied in the novel's form. As the narrative voice focalises through Julie, its representation of Abdu's voice and inner workings is inflected by her assumptions about him. In particular, this inflection is expressed through caveated expressions that suggest uncertainty. When Julie and Abdu argue about why she drives an old, dilapidated Land Rover, the narrative describes his response to her as follows:

> He screwed his eyes, very liquid-black in the sun, authoritative. Because it can be a danger for you to drive. Something can fail that can kill you. I can't see (he seemed to reject a word, probably that came to him from another language—he paused uncertainly)—know to stop that, in my work. (*The Pickup* 9-10)

The free indirect style used to represent this conversation presents a blurring of the boundaries between both characters' voices and selves. Nevertheless, Julie's parenthetical intervention in the depiction of Abdu's voice where she speculates on his use of different languages is an instance of how, despite the overlapping of these voices, it is predominantly her perspective through which both these voices are inflected. Moreover, it is clear in the epistemic assumptions made in the narrative that Julie's voice does not have an omniscient access to Abdu's inner workings. Julie's intrusion regarding Abdu's choice of words is purely speculative, and its emphasis on uncertainty is further emphasised by the use of an adverb like 'probably'. Julie's suggestion that Abdu 'paused uncertainly' thus reflects her projection of an uncertainty immanent in the syntax of her own understanding of him.

Likewise, in a later conversation when Abdu joins The Table, Julie continues to speculate about his thoughts and inner workings, noting

> Perhaps he wasn't going to speak again: it was patronizing after all, this making free encounters out of other people's lives, a show of your conviction of their equal worth, interest, catching the garage mechanic in the net, EL-AY Café. When he had taken a last swallow and put down the cup he'd get up and say thank you and go—so she had to think of something to say, quickly, to mend, justify, the pickup. (*The Pickup* 11)

As before, there is a similar use of an adverb 'perhaps' to suggest ambiguity in Julie's view of Abdu. In this case, moreover, Julie's imagination of Abdu is speculative in two ways. To begin with, there is a sense of self-reflexive speculation by which she imagines him being critical of the condescending liberalism that she and her friends embodied. Abdu himself gives no indication of voicing any such criticism, and it is once again Julie who projects this impulse on him. Moreover, as indicated in the narrative's change to a conditional tense, Julie continues to speculate what Abdu's response will be after he has finished his drink. The speculative nature of Julie's syntax further demonstrates an uncertainty in her understanding of his thoughts, and it reflects her projection of her own assumptions onto him.

The style of the narrative further emphasises this uncertainty of Julie's narrative voice with a subtle use of framing devices to undermine her position. The novel itself opens with a distant, omniscient third-person narrator. However, shortly before the end of the brief, introductory chapter, there is an interjection by a different narrative voice, one in the first person, and it is unclear which perspective this voice is taking. There are, however, two defining characteristics which, later in the novel, makes clear who the focaliser is, as evident in its assertion, 'I know because from the sight of her I'll find out—as a story—what was going to happen as a consequence of that commonplace embarrassment on the streets' (*The Pickup* 4). The use of the first person and the method of knowing Julie as a story are devices that recur later in a monologue by Abdu when he considers emigrating back to his home country with Julie. Prior to his monologue, the narrative voice makes clear that 'what the woman Julie looks like through his [Abdu's] eyes' (*The*

Pickup 93). Abdu's ensuing monologue further alludes to poems by Arabic poets Imru' al-Qays and Antara ibn Shaddad (*The Pickup* 93). The first-person perspective and allusion to literary works like stories and poetry suggest that the interjecting voice in the opening chapter is Abdu's. This story, in turn, is that of Julie's meeting with him and its consequences. Thus, this framing device is a subtle metafictional gesture that, in addition to the uncertainties of Julie's own syntax, calls her epistemic authority into further question.

Julie's perspective, moreover, is one which constructs Abdu as an object of her own sexual desire. Her descriptions of Abdu when she first sees him in the garage and when she brings him to The Table are revealing of her conflation of her attraction to him with an imagined sense of his inner workings. She not only projects her assumptions onto him, but the assumptions that she projects are specifically coded as aspects of her sexual attraction or desire. In the first instance, her impression of Abdu as 'screw[ing] his eyes' is an early instance of her attraction to him. Not only does she romanticise his physical appearance as being 'liquid-black in the sun', she further elevates this physical allure to an aura of being 'authoritative', notwithstanding his being highly qualified with a Masters degree. These affections, and their implicit assumptions of a consensual reciprocity of attraction, serve to, as Hartman argues, erase the material actions of structures of race, gender and class in a manner that presents an imagined equality between both figures. Moreover, the epithet 'liquid-black', with its allusion to oil, has a double meaning, evoking not just his profession as a mechanic but also foreshadowing his brothers' departure from their home countries to work in oil fields. This alluring depiction of oil fetishizes capitalist extraction, and while such an image romanticises his physical labour it further derogates his individuality as one which is fungible within a capitalist economy. As his precarious immigration status is the result of such a capitalist labour economy, and as his work as a mechanic is the result of a particular circumstance wherein he is forced to work in an informal economy because of his lack of appropriate work permits, this imagery is especially

perverse in the way it elevates and romanticises the very structural violence that discriminate against him into an object of sexual fantasy.

In their aforementioned conversation at The Table, Julie once again allows her desire occlude Abdu's individuality. Against the grain of what she projects as his indignation at white liberal condescension and an accompanying sense of patronising benevolence by including an immigrant mechanic in their fold, Julie continues to see Abdu as a casual partner whom she has picked up. Moreover, in response to his indignation, she hopes, in a troubling turn of phrase, to 'mend, justify, the pickup', as if the problem at The Table was not the precarity of someone in Abdu's position but the discomfort caused to him by his presence here. Moreover, one of the most revealing aspects of Julie's ignorance of Abdu throughout the first half of the novel is her inability to see the extent to which, for him, his relationship with her was for the ulterior motive of gaining a visa. That she only sees him as her pickup renders him an object of her desire, one which is separated from the material and social conditions in which he lives. That she assumes that her relationship with him cannot just mend the discomfort he experiences at his being a marginal figure amongst privileged elites who would otherwise patronise him, but also provide some justification for his presence further reflects an arrogance that Julie has in her pursuit of a relationship with him: it diminishes the severity of the breach that Julie has projected onto him as something that can be repaired through intimacy alone.

It is worth noting that Julie's attempt at mending and justifying the pickup backfires: when continuing the conversation with Abdu she becomes self-conscious of reiterating the same patronising, superficial feigning of interest that she was imagining him to be indignant of in the first place, as her interest in him 'came out god-awful as Showing Interest, and she thought she heard him take a breath in order to deal with it, with her; but he only put out his hand for the sugar-bowl' (*The Pickup* 12). Julie's impression of Abdu is once again framed with uncertainty, while the passage emphasises a contradiction between what she thought his response was and his action of reaching for the sugar-bowl. It is through this discrepancy between her

thoughts of him and his actions that the novel makes clear his independence from and resistance to Julie's representation of him. Moreover, Julie acknowledges immediately afterwards that 'he would keep silent if he wanted to, he could speak if he wished, it wasn't up to her' (*The Pickup* 12). There is a sense in which Julie is self-aware of these lapses in her knowledge of Abdu, and moreover she is sensitive of instances where he defies her representation of him.

This dynamic between Julie's representation of Abdu through her desire and his subversion of it resonates with the imagery of their first sexual encounter: Abdu was drenched by the rain one day as both of them retreated to Julie's flat where Abdu took a long bath. The language of Abdu's visit emphasised a sense of wetness, as Julie heard the sounds of 'the slap of water against the bath sides as his body displaced it, the little groan of pleasure as he wallowed, the gush of a tap turned on again' (*The Pickup* 27). This wetness recalled Julie's earlier description of Abdu's eyes as 'liquid-black'. This sense of cohabitation and intimacy made Julie feel like her flat became a home. However, even this romance between Abdu and Julie is framed in terms that are inconsistent and ironic. The narrative voice, focalising through Julie, emphasises an ambiguity in their affection, that 'if they really had desired one another so much it had not evidenced itself before' (*The Pickup* 27). Just like how Julie's earlier encounters with Abdu was framed with the language of her attraction to him, her attraction is similarly caveated with adverbs that suggest uncertainty: she attributes the reason for a lack of any outward display of affection between them to Abdu, '*probably* due to him, some tradition or inhibition in him, foreign to her' (*The Pickup* 27, italics mine). Moreover, the narrative shows an awareness of her incomprehension of this with regard to the foreignness of any inhibition to showing affection.

The moments after their sexual encounter, Julie further allows her feeling of sexual ecstasy to shape her impressions of Abdu. The novel uses a poem by Jorge Luis Borges as an intertext, as Julie squats by her bookshelf

and reads the poem which she felt expressed a new-found awareness in herself, that

> Whoever embraces a woman is Adam. The woman is Eve. Everything happens for the first time. … Praise be to the love wherein there is no possessor and no possessed, but both surrender.[8] (*The Pickup* 28)

The physicality conveyed by the emphasis on her squatting posture reflects the sensuousness of her present state of being. This in turn shapes sense that her and Abdu's embrace was one where 'there is no possessor and no possessed', characterising it as an imagined equality through mutual 'surrender'. This resonates with what Baudrillard describes as a rhetoric of seduction wherein surrender and weakness are inverted into the power of allure. As per Hartman's critique, this characterisation of seduction creates an artifice of equality between two unequal actors through an imagined sense of mutual affection that occludes any material hierarchies between them. Julie's imagined sense of equality in her and Abdu's surrender to each other similarly neglects the stark difference between them in terms of their rights within South Africa, the difference in their socioeconomic status, and the precarity of Abdu's life.

Julie's romanticised speculation is undercut harshly by a sudden juxtaposition with Abdu's austere and squalid life. The passage that follows returns to Abdu's room in the garage that is 'redolent of fuel and grease' (*The Pickup* 28). His reflection on his and Julie's encounter is much more ambiguous, described as 'the calm and passing content that follows love-making as it does not, he recognises, what her friends round The Table call a fuck' (*The Pickup* 28). Although he does not dismiss it as a casual encounter and he recognises these feelings that he has for her, he nevertheless does not give those desires a name or expression, alluding to them instead only through a negative. Unlike Julie, who sees their relationship as a form of mutual surrender, Abdu 'resists residue feelings of tenderness towards this girl' (*The Pickup* 28). In this passage, moreover, the narrative voice shifts to

[8] This is an excerpt from Borges' poem 'Happiness'.

focalise through Abdu. That this voice, once separated from Julie's, resists the same sense of elated surrender that she experiences foregrounds the epistemic friction between her representation of Abdu in her narrative and his representation of himself. The novel is thus critical of the fantasy of seduction that Julie constructs around her relationship with Abdu as well as of her representation of Abdu as an object of her desire.

The superficiality of Julie's understanding of Abdu's experience is further embodied by narrative voice's depiction of the white characters' ignorance of Abdu's circumstances. This is evident in the nonspecific nature of Abdu's home country: it is never made clear where Abdu is from, and critics have differed in their interpretation of it being either in the Middle East or North Africa (see Dannenberg 79; Dimitriu 127; Genty 86; Mount 106). Noting this ambiguity, Stéphanie Genty argues that the indeterminacy of place reflects an ignorance of the white South African characters in the novel, as Abdu's 'homeland does not exist for the citizens of developed nations' (86). Genty's framing of this as an aspect of geopolitical striations of development perhaps neglects the more subtle racial dimension of ignorance amongst liberal whites within South Africa. Nevertheless, the relation she makes between the vagueness and non-specificity of Abdu's home country within the narrative with that of a ignorance of the conditions of Abdu's home country is illustrated in The Table's discussion of it in the following passage:

> He named a country she had barely heard of. One of those partitioned by colonial powers on their departure, or seceded from federations cobbled together to fill vacuums of powerlessness against the regrouping of those old colonial powers under acronyms that still brand-name the world for themselves. (*The Pickup* 12).

The novel's ironic tone emphasises Julie's ignorance in a way that holds her culpable for it, suggesting that her lack of knowledge is itself a form of epistemic injustice. Not only has Julie not heard of this country, but she treats it in generic terms that renders it entirely interchangeable. She glosses over a wider complex history of colonialism, decolonisation, secession and geopolitical reorganisation in a single breath, and the glibness in her tone

further reflects the sense that the specific details are of little consequence, and the particular political and social issues entirely fungible.

Moreover, despite Julie's self-consciousness of the ways in which Abdu defies her assumptions and characterisations of him, the same device of a caveated and ambiguous framing of his inner workings is repeated in several instances throughout the novel. When Julie's friends at The Table learn of their friend Ralph being diagnosed with AIDS, her friends offer vague homilies to console and reassure him. Julie, however, notes that Abdu 'does not join them; *perhaps* he didn't quite understand this is just not a matter of this model of athletic good health being HIV positive' (*The Pickup* 24). Even after they are married and they move to his home country, Julie fails to understand Ibrahim when they discuss the living and sanitary arrangements at his home, as once again she notes that 'she was not aware that he had offended his sensibilities' (*The Pickup* 112). Julie's ignorance is not just confined to Ibrahim's sensibilities, but also cultural practices of the country where she is now living, as on the matter of covering her head around members of Ibrahim's family she assumes that 'it's enough, for these people, that she goes about with an uncovered head—that they can tolerate with a white face, maybe' (*The Pickup* 123). Julie's incomprehension of Abdu/Ibrahim and his worldview is a recurring concern in both the substance and style of the prose. Julie continues to project her speculations of Abdu's inner workings onto him, and the use of caveats in the narrative voice foregrounds the epistemic friction implicit therein.

In addition to being critical of Julie's treatment of Abdu as an object of her sexual desire and the consequent characterisation of seduction as a form of agency, the novel further depicts Abdu and Julie's relationship in a manner that is subversive of the representation of seduction as a ruse to power. This is most prominent when, as Abdu is due to be deported, Julie surprises him with a pair of tickets, announcing that she would accompany him back to his home country. What is most important about this moment in their relationship is that it does not depict their relationship solely as a means for Abdu's settlement. Rather than become a route to acquire a visa, their

marriage is transformed into a shared experience of exile and vulnerability. This presents their relationship — one which transgresses the divisions between them — as a space for solidarity and mutual support, which becomes the site of a material transformation of the self and of one's sense of place. This provokes Abdu to submit to the desires he had for her which he was previously resisting, as he realises that 'this foreigner [Julie] made him whole', and he 'made love to her with the reciprocal tenderness […] that he guarded against […] couldn't afford its commitment, in his situation' (*The Pickup* 96). An important contrast between Julie and Abdu is that, unlike her naïve fantasy of their relationship, he is acutely aware of the complexities of their condition and the problems that both of them face from the South African immigration authorities, as well as the societal expectations of his home country. Nevertheless, for both Abdu and Julie, this relationship reflects transformation of their self, as the engage in 'the kind of love-making that is another country, a country of its own, not yours or mine' (*The Pickup* 96), an allusion to a poem by the British South African poet William Plomer.

To a great extent, then, *The Pickup* critiques the epistemic friction in Julie's depiction of Abdu in the first half of the novel: through its use of metafictional devices to call into question the authority of Julie's perspective as well as adverbial caveats that further render her depiction of Abdu uncertain, the novel draws attention to the lapses and inconsistencies in her knowledge of Abdu. Moreover, it critiques the way in which she conflates her representation of him with her sexual desire. Despite this, however, Abdu and Julie's relationship presents, for Julie in particular, a transformation of the self. In this section and the one previous, I examined the contradictions of the elevation of the white subject in knowing the other through empathy and desire, and the resultant epistemic frictions. Recalling her re-evaluation of her autobiography and political activity, particularly of her bohemian years, Gordimer describes the kind bohemian cosmopolitanism as a prelude to a commitment. In that regard, *The Pickup* presents a similar coming-of-age for Julie, as she undergoes what is a similar prelude of commitment through bohemianism and an inter-racial relationship that transgresses immigration

laws. In the latter half of the novel, however, it moves from such a prelude of seeking bonds and relationships to a sense of political and ethical action that is grounded in a material economy. Julie's migration to Abdu's home country represents the commitment that the prelude was leading to: on the level of her relationship it presents a course of action that represents her commitment to her marriage, to emigrate and be with Abdu/Ibrahim. On a more abstract level, it depicts an emerging political understanding of the position of the exile and the meaningful engagement with her ecosystem. In the subsequent section, I will examine the way in which Julie's migration to Abdu's home country and a material sharing of the forms of vulnerability that Abdu experiences presents a new and altered understanding that goes beyond a distanced, vicarious imagination of Abdu's experience. In emigrating to Abdu's home country and adapting to a new life there, she gains an understanding of the particular material forms of alienation and dispossession entailed by Abdu's circumstances. If her initial depiction of Abdu rendered him a fungible figure and collapsed the specific hierarchies of power and agency between them, it is through her labour of adapting to life in his home country that she gains an understanding of his experience that is grounded in the material realities of exile and precarity.

Grounding in a New Ecology

If Julie's bohemianism and her attempt to make bonds with Abdu in the first half of the novel is a prelude to commitment, then their relocation back to his home country marks the a transformations for both characters that becomes an act of commitment. Abdu, now referred to by his real name Ibrahim, is in constant pursuit of a better life by emigrating to the West. He is completely given over to an aspiration of a better life by migrating to America. In contrast, Julie goes from a position of relative security and belonging to one of exile and dispossession. She casts off her fantasies and her romanticised assumptions of what life would be like in Ibrahim's home country as she assimilates in her new environment. While the first half of the novel reflects the internal contradictions in Julie's perspective, it is in the

latter half after her relocation that Julie has experiences that enable her to go beyond a limited understanding of her place within her environment, and to develop a sense of rootedness. Gordimer's style in the second half of the novel similarly presents a number of prominent shifts in Julie's understanding, and in this section, I will examine the ways in which Julie's new-found awareness emerges throughout the narrative. Crucially, this distinction does not come across in a change in the style through which Julie regards Ibrahim. Rather, the stylistic contrast between the first and latter halves of the novel is in an emergent ecological or spiritual understanding of her changed circumstances. Critics have noted, in particular, a spiritual turn in Gordimer's works that is reflected in Julie's epiphany in the desert (see Dimitriu 128) and an ecological turn to the connectedness with the land (see Mount 116-7) as personal transformations which awaken in her an ethical realignment that is rooted within her immediate environment. Consequently, following her relocation to Ibrahim's home country, the referent of her understanding shifts from a black body devoid of its rootedness in its environment or context to a wider ecosystem that becomes Julie's new place of domicile. I will examine these realignments in Julie's perspective and argue that they go beyond the pitfalls of empathy or romantic fascination that sees the other as fungible. Rather, the novel lays the foundation for what critics describe as a 'spiritual turn' in Gordimer's fiction, something which develops further in Gordimer's later novels.

As I argued in the previous section, in the earlier half of the novel, Julie's understanding of Abdu and his background is inflected by her desires and orientalist assumptions about him. However, after emigrating to his country, Julie sees a side of Ibrahim's life and family that had been unknown to her previously. As she is presented to Ibrahim's family, she observes their lifestyle from which she gleans insights into her husband's life. She is especially sensitive of Ibrahim's changed manner, as she notes that 'people sat around small tables on the carpet and cushions and ate—the way Ibrahim had given up, in the company of The Table—agilely with their fingers' (*The Pickup* 120). This cultural difference in table etiquette is overlaid with a sense

of lost identity, as Ibrahim is described as having given up this habit of eating with his fingers at The Table. It is in this passage, described by the narrator while focalising through Julie as 'a kind of wedding feast as well as a son's home-coming' (*The Pickup* 120-1), that Ibrahim is visibly a figure that is inscrutable to Julie. This is especially poignant in the moment when Julie's attempt at gesturing to Ibrahim from across the room is frustrated in a way that insinuates a latent tension in their sense of intimacy, when:

> to signal her closeness she had lifted her glass to him, down there among the men, calling for his rare and beautiful smile—but it did not come, his glance met her a moment but he was apparently answering questions from his father and brothers. It was the Uncle whom made him smile, booming laughter through a full mouth as he told what must have been a joke or made a salacious remark (*The Pickup* 120)

What, for Julie, is a gesture of intimacy, of communicating with her husband with a quiet gesture from across a crowded room, remains unrequited. This brief moment takes place in the midst of a much longer passage that is replete with overwhelming sensory details of Ibrahim's house, the feast before them, and Julie's interactions with his family. The cumulative effect of such an overwhelming passage, punctuated with this momentary disconnect between Julie and Ibrahim, conveys a sense of Julie's own isolation within this new environment. Julie is forced to confront the inadequacy of her understanding of Abdu through intimacy and desire, as Ibrahim now becomes alien to her. It is worth noting that the syntax of the narrative reflects the earlier, tentative and speculative framing, Julie guesses at what kind of joke or remark from his uncle would have made him smile. The narrative voice suggests here that, much like before, there remains an epistemic friction between Ibrahim's perspective and Julie's representation of it in her voice. However, the hierarchy from before, when Abdu was meeting Julie's friends and family, is reversed, as it is Julie who is now isolated in an unfamiliar environment, where the most meaningful conversation she has is described as a 'phrase-book exchange' (*The Pickup* 121).

Despite the superficial inversions between these two events — when Abdu meets Julie's family and when Julie meets Ibrahim's — there is

nevertheless a much more pressing difference between them. When Abdu was in the company of Julie's friends, she notes that he is 'always absent, elsewhere, entering whatever discussion only now and then, when confronted' (*The Pickup* 45). In contrast, when he was meeting her parents and their wealthy friends, he engaged them in conversations about venture capital, equities, and speculation on currency and oil prices closely, 'listen[ing] to this intimate language of money alertly and intently—as he never listens at the EL-AY Café' (*The Pickup* 45). Julie fails to understand Abdu, and she feels guilty and embarrassed at the thought of him judging her and her family. However, Abdu is more in his element in these discussions than Julie is when she meets Ibrahim's family: he ingratiates himself with the wealthy friends of Julie's family over shared aspirations of wealth and acquisition, aspirations which did not interest Julie in the slightest. Julie's alienation from Ibrahim's family is in part because of their difference in language and etiquette. However, when she fails to get a smile from Ibrahim, she does so because of Ibrahim's fixation on his financial interest. Ibrahim is engrossed in a conversation amongst the men of his family. Soon after, it becomes clear that Ibrahim's uncle has agreed to loan him a car and gives him a job in his garage. Like how he was discussing the 'intimate language of money' with Julie's family, he is implied to be talking business, which Julie misunderstands as salacious jokes amongst men. The disparity in their interest in money continues to be a rift in Julie's relationship with Ibrahim, although this is one which further embodies the difference in both their upbringing: Julie, having benefited from her family's largess, never had to think of money as a problem. The novel presents a contrast in the kinds of alienation that Julie and Abdu experience when meeting each other's friends and family. Abdu is alienated from Julie's friends because of how she only ever saw him as an object of her desire. In contrast, Julie is alienated from Ibrahim here because Ibrahim, rather than being attentive to her, is intent on pursuing his immediate financial interests, either getting a job and a car in his village or, as becomes the case later, preparing to emigrate.

That Julie still does not understand Ibrahim and misunderstands what the conversation between him and his uncle are about suggests a continuing epistemic friction between Julie's understanding of Ibrahim and his own actions. This epistemic friction is because Julie and Ibrahim respond to their changed circumstances in different ways: Ibrahim is still adamant to emigrate to America and pursue aspirations of material comfort and a wealthy lifestyle in the West, while Julie, in contrast, tries to find a new mode of belonging in her new surroundings. Julie's search for belonging in Ibrahim's home brings about immense personal transformation: in her quest for belonging, she adapts to a new lifestyle by teaching English to girls in the village as a mode of income. She also has what is characterised as a spiritual transformation, as she observers her in-laws' faith and encounters Islam, and she also has an ecological epiphany when she encounters the desert.

In his review of this novel, J.M. Coetzee characterises this as an example of what he calls a 'spiritual turn in her [Gordimer's] thought' (*Inner Workings* 252). For Coetzee, this spiritual turn is a development of a previous observation he made about Gordimer's writing and politics in his 1989 review of *The Essential Gesture*, that Gordimer 'is not even, in a fundamental sense, a political writer. Rather, she is an ethical writer, a writer of conscience, who finds herself in an age when any transcendental basis for ethics […] is being denied in the name of politics' (*Doubling the Point* 387-8). Coetzee's contrast between politics and ethics speaks to a distinction in the focus of Gordimer's works from wider political narratives to private ones. It is important to qualify Coetzee's dichotomy between public politics and private ethics in Gordimer's works: this is not to suggest that Gordimer's works have eschewed addressing political or historic issues. Rather, Gordimer's treatment of these political questions in her fiction has been embodied through the private, ethical lives of individual characters. Whether or not it is fair to characterise such 'political' and 'ethical' fiction as mutually-exclusive, as Coetzee does, is an open question, and arguably a dubious one as Gordimer's fiction demonstrates the overlap between the public/political and the private/ethical. Nevertheless, within this characterisation of Gordimer as an 'ethical' writer,

the spiritual turn that Coetzee describes suggests a distancing from politics, and a withdrawal into private matters where a nascent spirituality is presented as a basis for ethics. Ileana Dimitriu situates this spiritual turn in Gordimer's works within a similar framework, contrasting it with the invocation of large-scale historic events in her earlier works, and characterising it as a feature of the works which I consider examples of Gordimer's late style. Dimitriu argues that Gordimer's works from after the end of apartheid 'explore the nuances of a civil imaginary in "post-ideological" times', and that Julie's moments of epiphany in *The Pickup* are particularly illustrative of what Coetzee describes as Gordimer's 'spiritual turn' (127). The changes in Julie's attitudes and perspectives in the latter half of the novel present such a 'spiritual turn', as she ostensibly eschews Ibrahim's materialist fixation on wealth, acquisition and emigration to a promise of a better life, and instead is invested in finding a way of belonging in her environment and turning the desert green. This spiritual turn, moreover, is not a just an abstract fantasy, but she actively pursues a tangible and pragmatic course of action in achieving this.

Dimitriu situates the concept of a spiritual turn within a wider critical movement in literary studies that challenges the reductionisms within postcolonial studies (120,n1). This spiritual turn, she continues echoing, is 'a less politically driven, and more critically reflective phase in postcolonialism' that includes 'a turn to the affective, as well as a new strand of affirmative utopianism' (120). Dimitriu situates this spiritual turn within Janet Wilson, et al's idea of a 'utopian turn' (6). This utopianism, for both Dimitriu and Wilson, et al, is not just an abstract ideal, but is a pragmatic, ethical and practical project concerned with the possibilities of what is yet to come. This utopianism is embodied most vividly in Julie's dream of the desert:

> The desert. No seasons of bloom and decay. Just the endless turn of night and day. Out of time: and she is gazing—not over it, taken into it, for it has no measure of space, features that mark distance from here to there. […] All drifts together, and there is no onlooker; the desert is eternity.
> What could/would thrust this back into time? Water.
> An ice age—if that were to come. Water is a lost memory: memory the passing proof of time's existence.

> Ice to cover the sands and melt them back into time with its own melting, over millennia. Drinking an ice age; after the ages when all life-juices had dried away to purity—only that which is inactive can attain purity. Nullity is purity; detachment from the greedy stirring of growth. Eternity is purity; what lasts is not alive. When the ice age melts, this will be forced to *become* again: become the vast grassland it was how many thousand years ago? (*The Pickup* 172)

Julie here imagines a utopian possibility, that of irrigating the desert and transforming it into a grassland. This is a dream she attempts to realise through her later investment in a project of growing paddy in an oasis. Crucially, the kinds of possibilities Julie imagines is starkly different from what Ibrahim pursues. Reflecting on Ibrahim's aspirations, Julie notes that 'A possibility: his [Ibrahim's] favourite dream-word: "there are possibilities" in whatever country will let him pass through its barriers of immigration' (*The Pickup* 213-4). While Ibrahim is only concerned with the possibility of wealth and material comfort, the possibility that Julie seeks to realise are of a 'detachment from the greedy stirring of growth'. Julie begins to, as Spain notes, 'live within the realities of place' and '[relinquish] her white neoliberal ideals' (767), neoliberal ideas which Ibrahim still aspires to through his quest of emigrating to America.

Moreover, the language of Julie's epiphany in the desert takes on a spiritual significance, something which, as Coetzee argues, presents as a transcendental basis for a new ethics: she imagines the desert as a space that transcends space and time, and sees herself — an onlooker — as effaced within the vast expanse of this eternity. The sublimation of her desire into this imagined 'nullity', 'purity', and 'eternity' of this landscape presents a realignment of her self that is rooted within the wider landscape. When Julie says she 'dreamed green' (*The Pickup* 173), she imagines not just a physical transformation of the landscape — manifested through the greening of the land — but she also presents a burgeoning awareness of the dynamism of the ecosystem across a geological scale. Dana Mount draws attention to how during her reverie at the desert 'Julie self-consciously distances herself from the stereotype of the British imperial traveller' by mocking the fetishization of

desert tropes and the condescending adoption of local dress (114). In contrast to this, Julie insists she 'wrapped herself in black robes only when it was necessary for protection against the wind' (*The Pickup* 198). For Mount, this suggests that Julie's appreciation of the landscape is not solely a romanticised, pastoral fantasy. Rather, it posits a more complex relationship with the land itself. Julie's phenomenological experience of the land reflects a sense of 'spatial closeness, cognitive understanding, emotional attachment, and an ethic of responsibility and "care"' (Heise 33), which for Ursula Heise is a prerequisite for environmental awareness and action. This utopian, transcendent language, with its emphasis on a landscape that is 'out of time' and 'has no measure of space' characterises a distinctly spiritual turn in Gordimer's prose: it characterises the environment as one which is at the same time defined by its specific ecology, but also transcends its own material bounding, permeating vast temporal scales such as the last ice age, as well as profoundly personal experiences of memory and dreaming.

The use of a dream to explore memory and the boundaries of the self within its relationship with others is a device Gordimer employed in her story 'Dreaming of the Dead', and the introspective and ethereal quality of Julie's dream of the desert presents a very particular inflection of Gordimer's late style. This nascent spiritualism becomes a mode of commitment that emerges out of the frictions and contradictions of Julie's earlier position. While there remain persisting epistemic frictions between her understanding of Ibrahim, this spiritualism presents a realignment of the white self that forms the basis of a new mode of understanding the material contexts that Ibrahim and his family are embedded in. The difference in perspective of the possibilities which Julie and Ibrahim pursue is manifested in intensifying marital conflict. As Julie wakes from her dream, the narrative voice focalises through Ibrahim and depicts the rift in his and Julie's perspectives as well as his failure in understanding her. His opinion of her is reductive, dismissing her as 'Her kind; that Café' (*The Pickup* 173). In a drastic change from the vulnerability he showed when she announced that she would emigrate with him, Ibrahim berates their relationship — and Julie by extension — for failing

to provide him with a route to permanent residence through her wealth, nationality, whiteness, and family position. Unlike Julie, Ibrahim further strengthens his resolve in his neoliberal aspirations to emigrate for a better life. This marital discord is embodied formally in the way in which Ibrahim's framing of Julie's feelings, where he imagines her dissatisfaction, is a projection of his own insecurities which are incongruent with her experiences and aspirations.

Julie's response to this green dream is to begin growing rice in the desert. She and her in-laws go to a rice farm owned by a friend of Ibrahim's family, and Julie has a similar spiritual encounter with this new landscape that echoes her previous encounter with the desert:

> The desert is mute; in the middle of the desert there is this, the infinite articulacy: pure sound. Where else could that be? That coexistence of wonder. A break in the rice-canes, just at the side of the walkway; a low private glaze of fallow water. A heron awaited there, standing; she paused and stood; the bird dipped its beak. Ringingly deafened with the music of this sphere she did not hear human voices calling to her and took her own time to make her way back. (*The Pickup* 211).

The sensory experience of this encounter is similarly overwhelming as her reverie in the desert, one which effaces her own sense of self as a human observer. Just as there was no onlooker in the desert, there is a similar disappearance of human voices, as she is overwhelmed by what she perceives as the 'infinite articulacy' and 'music' of the oasis. What is especially captivating to Julie is the particular 'coexistence of wonder': where waterfowl like herons can coexist with the vast, mute and arid landscape of the desert. Julie shows a burgeoning awareness of not just a vast, anachronistic landscape that goes beyond time and space, but also the intimate interactions between creatures and plants in these ecosystems. Inspired by this, Julie goes on to use the money from her trust fund to buy land on which to cultivate rice. The novel's depiction of Julie's experience of the desert is one which decentres her sense of self and characterises her as a small part within this wider ecosystem. Her dreaming green is characterised as one of the infinite possibilities contained within the desert —

through its memory of water and ice — rather than a fantasy that she imposes on it. The scale of her actions to grow rice in the desert is always modest and constrained by her limited means and the harsh reality of Ibrahim's relatives selling arms.

There is, nevertheless, a great deal of irony to Julie's interest in growing rice. Ibrahim is immediately derisive of her, characterising this as 'another adventure to hear from her, from her rich girl's ignorance, innocence' (*The Pickup* 216). Indeed, as Mount cautions, Julie's attitude towards rice cultivation is that of an ecological fad: she has no experience in agriculture, and instead relies on her trust fund to behave like an ecological tourist (118). Mount accurately notes that the irony of the novel is in that Julie's efforts can be read as both the self-indulgent fantasy of a trust fund kid that in itself is an act of ecological imperialism, or that it is a selfless reassessment of one's relationship to one's environment in response to the feeling of placelessness in a globalised world. While the novel emphasises Julie's spiritualism regarding her new environment, it nevertheless foregrounds her whiteness and her wealth in the way her position, even in such a circumstance of exile, determines the conditions of possibility of her future action. Despite having elected exile with Ibrahim, she remains a beneficiary of the very inequalities that she attempts to refuse, as she naïvely attempts to invest that capital for the building of her ecological vision. Such a foregrounding of an irreconcilable tension within Julie's subject position characterises the contradictory and irresolute nature of Gordimer's late style, as there is no clear or satisfying resolution to such a tension from within Julie's own compromised position.

The style of the novel is such that it makes both of these contradictory readings possible at the same time. This is evident in what Hilary Dannenberg identifies as the novel's subversion of the genre of the desert romance. For Dannenberg, *The Pickup* is an example of a postcolonial text that 'rework[s] and "write[s] back" to the narratives generated by colonial discourse' (77). Central to the genre of a desert romance is a white heroine whose quest for non-romantic freedom is displaced by a non-white male

lover who becomes the centre of all of her affections (Dannenberg 76). In contrast, *The Pickup* presents a re-working of these tropes through the inversion of the dynamics of Julie's and Ibrahim's relationship, and her subsequent disobedience of him by refusing to emigrate to America. While Dannenberg's reading of the novel's subversion of the desert romance focusses on its treatment of gender roles and cultural identity, she notes that the radicalism of the novel extends further to the way in which it represents the desert: rather than being a passive backdrop, the desert itself becomes an active entity with which Julie develops a meaningful connection. Dannenberg's reading of the novel's subversion of the tropes of the desert romance can be extended further to consider the ways in which *The Pickup* interrogates the colonial ideologies that are embodied in the pastoral idioms of the genre. This interrogation is alluded to in passing in a subtle shift in Julie's attitude towards Ibrahim. Near the end of the novel, Julie describes Ibrahim as an 'Oriental Prince' once again (*The Pickup* 266). However, unlike the orientalist language that the phrase evoked earlier in the novel, as I discussed in a previous section, in this instance the phrase is very clearly grounded in the material reality of their lives in Ibrahim's home: Ibrahim is an oriental prince in relation to his stepfather, whom Julie describes as the 'casino king' (*The Pickup* 266) at whose behest they would end up living. Julie is sensitive of the humiliation that Ibrahim would have to go through in continuing to live here, and the tensions of the reality in which she lived. By foregrounding these contradictions, the novel undermines the pastoral and orientalist assumptions that were the basis of Julie's earlier understanding of Abdu.

Writing about the genre of white South African pastoral fiction, Coetzee notes that the idiom of the pastoral gives 'transcendental justification of the ownership of land' (*White Writing* 106). In some respects, Julie's fascination with cultivating rice in *The Pickup* is a reinvigoration of the same pastoral myths: it is a self-indulgent fantasy that sees her acquisition and ownership of the land as one which is reminiscent of the trope of husbandry that Coetzee sees as defining the pastoral novel. However, the novel complicates Julie's

fantasy and renders it ironic through its subversions of these pastoral idioms. Mount reads the representation of the desert as an instance of the 'spectral pastoral' (107), which for Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin is a genre that is 'aware of the suppressed violence that helped make its peaceful vision possible, and [is] always engaged with the very histories from which it wants to escape' (101). The idiom of the spectral pastoral is most salient in the way Julie's idealism and fantasy of cultivating rice in the desert is compromised by the fact that the rice concession is a front for a small arms smuggling ring. As much as Julie imagines new possibilities that are separate from the neoliberal ideas that she tried to leave behind, the novel undercuts this with the sharp focus on the inescapable violence and corruption within her surroundings.

In light of her realisation of the truth beneath the surface of the rice farm, Julie's response is to confront herself and face the complicity of her family in similar businesses that have had a human cost:

> Why should I be so shocked at this story; how many guests at Nigel Ackroyd Summers' [her father's] Sundays are involved in deals that are not revealed, and if known are not talked about with the price of Futures—not arms deals; but why not? Perhaps even those, passing by remote control through the sale of diamonds in Angola (*The Pickup* 216-7).

Julie is having to confront how her own position of wealth and privilege are because of transnational flows of illicit arms and diamonds. In this moment of crisis, she finds that she has not just failed to escape the milieu of the wealthy white upper-class to which her family belongs, but that even in the remote country where she has established herself she is caught within a similar web of a capitalist economy. The tone of her realisation is one of exasperated resignation, where not only is she not shocked by this revelation, but imagines naïvely afterwards that were she to acquire a rice concession, it 'wouldn't have anything to do with all that [the arms trade]' but will be 'just growing rice' (*The Pickup* 217). There is a further irony that, regardless of the purity of Julie's intentions, the money that she will buy this with is tainted with the same conflict that she wants to avoid. Julie's utopian vision is thus ruptured by what Huggan and Tiffin describe as the awareness

of violence that made such a vision possible, and an inescapable entanglement within the history that it attempts to go beyond.

In the same way that Julie's bohemianism and desire to make bonds in the earlier half of the novel present a revision of Gordimer's use of the device of a white woman's political coming-of-age through her relationship with a black man, such a presentation of unresolved contradictions in the latter half of the novel is a compelling revision of Gordimer's own sense of what political writing entails. Julie's efforts to irrigate the desert and grow rice has many parallels with Coetzee's 1983 novel *Life & Times of Michael K*. For example, the sensuous experience Julie has in holding a handful of rice mirrors the delight that Coetzee's gardener-turned-farmer protagonist takes in eating the first batch of pumpkins he grew in the land he recovered. Similarly, Julie's spiritual reverie about greening the desert mirrors the elevated tone of the ending of Coetzee's novel, as Michael K imagines using a bent spoon tied to a string to draw water from a well to water plants on the ground left behind after violent conflict (*Life & Times of Michael K* 184). These parallels are especially revealing considering Gordimer's scathing critique of the politics of this novel in her review of the novel in 1984. Gordimer takes Coetzee to task for his underestimation of radical politics in resisting apartheid and for the passivity of all characters against the backdrop of the violence they face. In particular, she notes that nobody in Coetzee's novel 'has any sense of taking part in determining that course [of history]', which for her 'denies the energy of the will to resist evil' (*Telling Times* 401). She continues that the novel 'does not recognise what the victims, seeing themselves as victims no longer, have done, are doing, and believe they must do for themselves' (*Telling Times* 402). The novel's politics, she argues, is compromised by its own (which she sees as the author's) 'revulsion against all political and revolutionary solutions' that 'rises with the insistence of the songs of cicadas' (*Telling Times* 402). Gordimer thus critiques Coetzee for eschewing meaningful political action in favour of a fantasy of returning to nature.

When compared to her critique of Coetzee's novel, *The Pickup* seems to show many affinities with these aspects of *Life & Times of Michael K*.

There are many crucial differences in the political vision of both novels, in particular when considering the agency of black characters in determining the course of history. Abdu, for instance, attempts to fight his deportation, although he is for the most part reduced to a passive object of Julie's desire rather than an individual actor showing his own agency. Ibrahim's family, moreover, have their own work that they do. Nevertheless, the most striking parallel between the two novels is their affinity for what is the spiritual as a way of answering the contradictions with which they are faced. For Michael K, the prospect of re-growing the land — and all the affinities with life and the ecosystem that that conveyed — was a way of rebuilding after the mutual destruction of whites and blacks in violent conflict. For Julie, the spiritual turn to the desert presents a form of commitment. It presents a tangible and material course of action for her to undertake, and in so doing grow from her initial point of refusal of her past to a rooted sense of belonging in a new space and environment. In so doing, her commitment represents a process of becoming where she actively strives to transform herself and her environment using whatever resources she had at her disposal rather than merely posturing as a bohemian youth rejecting her past. In the context of Gordimer's late fiction, then, this spiritual turn in *The Pickup*, manifested in its formal emphasis of internal contradictions within the white subject position and its poetic use of evocative and metaphysical language, presents a mode of transformation of the white self in order to embody a rooted sense of commitment in a new ecology. It further marks a revision of Gordimer's political idiom, and the place within it for the spiritual.

Conclusion: from the Spiritual to the Ecological

As evident by its characters belonging to the milieu of wealthy, upper-class whites and the intertextual references between both novels, *The Pickup* expands upon many of the epistemic and phenomenological concerns that Gordimer raises in *The House Gun*. The style of the novel, through its free indirect speech and its close focalising through white characters, embodies the epistemic friction that is immanent in Julie Summers' perspective on her

immediate political environment, the bohemian café culture that she and her friends are part of, and her understanding of her partner Abdu/Ibrahim. The novel depicts this epistemic friction through its persistent use of irony and self-negating qualifiers to draw attention to the ignorance and limitations of the white characters' understanding and thereby undermine their perspectives through which its narrative voice focalises. For the most part, the novel tracks the perspective of Julie — a well-off, white woman whose family's largess keeps her in relative comfort — as she navigates the political and social realities of her partner's deportation and her subsequent migration to his home country. Julie's perspective, however, is depicted as being untenable because it is deeply compromised by her position of wealth and privilege, and the ironies with which the novel presents her voice subjects this perspective to a thorough-going critique.

To begin with, Julie's attitude towards those around her is one of naïve empathy. The ethical categories through which she and her friends see Abdu are still beholden to Orientalist assumptions and stereotypes, rendering him as a passive object of their own desires or a menacing figure of Otherness. She shows an awareness of the violence and conflict that people had suffered under South Africa's apartheid past. However, these violent histories of conflict that these individuals embody are nothing more than a passing detail in her recounting of them. The empathy that Julie shows for these people, and the aspiration that she has for the equality in the new society of independent South Africa, renders them as fungible. The glibness of Julie's language in particular is undercut by the more troubling aspects of the history of these characters which, though implied through her use of phrases like 'leftist Jews' or her friends referring to Abdu as an 'oriental prince', are never subjects that she is aware of, or subjects that she reflects on in much depth early in the novel. Julie does not acknowledge, for instance, the specific histories of Zionism and anti-Semitism in South Africa, nor is she sensitive of the way in which she fetishizes Abdu because of what she considers his exotic body. Julie's sense of her partner further characterises him as a passive object of her desire. The language of sexual attraction that the novel

uses to describe Abdu/Ibrahim is one which plays with ambivalence of power within discourses of seduction. Abdu/Ibrahim is thus reduced to a passive object of Julie's desire, and his actions and behaviour are depicted as resisting Julie's reductive representation of him. Thus, Julie's perspective, in the initial half of the novel set in Johannesburg, is one which occludes the autonomy and selfhood of those around her. It furthermore embodies the problem immanent in the elevation of the white subject through empathy and assumption that the pain of the other can be known vicariously, and it further exposes the epistemic violence of recreating the same prejudices of an Orientalist fetishism of black bodies.

But Julie's desire to remain committed to Abdu by emigrating to his home country, and her desire to forge bonds with him through a culture of bohemian cosmopolitanism, are what Gordimer describes as a prelude to commitment, a prelude that is followed by a process of re-constituting the self and its relationship with its environment through the experience of shared exile. The epistemic friction that the novel presents in the earlier half similarly serves as a prelude to developing a form of political commitment that is rooted in a new place. In the latter half of the novel, set in Ibrahim's home country, it presents an alternative vision of one's sense of place, belonging, and ethical responsibility that is grounded in changed material realities. This is most apparent in Julie's encounter with the desert and subsequently her desire to grow rice in an oasis. For Julie, this encounter with this environment prompts her to relinquish her previous liberal ideals and colonial fantasies, and instead develop what resembles an environmental consciousness. The novel presents this consciousness through its hypostatisation of the desert into a spiritual presence and its subversion of the tropes and ideologies immanent in white pastoral fiction. This is what some critics like J.M. Coetzee have described as a spiritual turn in Gordimer's fiction. This spiritual turn is perhaps the most significant development in Gordimer's late style as presented in *The Pickup*. I will argue in the next chapter that this turn is perhaps more suitably a phenomenological or ecological turn. While *The House Gun* does not present a straightforward emancipation of the

perspectives which are otherwise marginalised in that of its white protagonists, *The Pickup* tentatively advances this environmental consciousness as a basis for an ethic that goes beyond the contradictions and injustices of the perspectives that it adopts. Nevertheless, while these ethical realignments are powerful and pressing, they do not present an appreciable political action.

There are persisting ironies in how *The Pickup* presents this ethical vision: Julie's idealised future of rice farming is compromised by her complicity in corruption and illicit trade in arms and conflict diamonds. Moreover, it is unclear whether or not such an ethical realignment is an adequate form of action or change. At the end of the novel, Julie chooses to remain in Ibrahim's home country rather than emigrate to America with him. As Mount emphasises, 'although staying put [in Ibrahim's home country] may fulfil Julie's personal sense of place, her turn towards the land is not a politically satisfying solution' (121). Gordimer, incidentally, makes a similar critique of Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K* and the novel's 'revulsion against all political and revolutionary solutions', and in its place its presenting the protagonist's devotion to gardening as an ambivalent hope for future possibilities. In the same way that the novel's treatment of Julie is a revision of Gordimer's use of the idiom of the white woman's political coming of age in her early fiction, *The Pickup* presents a reassessment of Gordimer's critique of the spiritual or metaphysical speculation in Coetzee's idiom of gardening. Gordimer's handling of Julie's growing of rice in the desert is, contrasting with Coetzee, rooted within the material and political ecology within which it is based rather than eschewing history in its entirety. Nevertheless, Gordimer's late style turns to such spiritual speculation as a way of presenting a similar sense of ambivalent hope that Coetzee's novel does, rather than a clear or defined political solution. This spiritual speculation in *The Pickup* is a burgeoning ecological vision in Gordimer's works through the speculation of an unrealised future within a compromised present. This ecological vision, moreover, is further developed and finds its clearest articulation in her subsequent novel *Get a Life*.

4. The Nuclear Uncanny and Phenomenology of Form in *Get a Life*

As I discussed in my previous chapter, *The Pickup* marks what critics describe as a spiritual turn in Gordimer's writing. This spiritual turn, in the context of her late style, is part of a wider re-evaluation of her political subjectivity as a white writer. She revisits the device of a white woman's political coming-of-age through inter-racial relationships, which was central in her early fiction, as well as her own autobiographical reflections on bohemian cosmopolitanism as ways of interrogating these assumptions. In *The Pickup*, the spiritual turn is manifested in Julie's encounter with the desert and her sense of embeddedness within a wider ecology that transcends the boundaries of space, time, and the human self. For Coetzee, what is critical about Gordimer's spiritual turn is that it characterises a new, transcendental basis that serves as the foundation for ethical thought and action. Thus, through the spiritual turn, *The Pickup* lays the groundwork for a new direction for political commitment in Gordimer's fiction, one premised on the realignment of the self in relation to a wider ecology. Crucially, this transcendental, spiritual basis — manifested in the ecology of the desert — is external to the white self, and thus requires its re-constitution. This is why the style of Gordimer's fiction tracks closely the epistemic frictions and contradictions of the white subject.

This idiom is developed further in Gordimer's 2005 novel *Get a Life*. Much like her previous works, the novel is concerned with the crisis in the subject position of a white protagonist upon confronting his vulnerability, mortality, and the inter-penetrability of the lives of himself, the people around him, and a wider ecosystem that exists beyond his sensory experience. Gordimer's ecological focus is more salient in this novel, as well as a self-conscious critique of the ideologies of race and class that constitute discourses of environmentalism. In this chapter, I will examine these developments in Gordimer's style as manifested in this novel, and I will

evaluate how her spiritual turn develops in new directions. In particular, I will consider Gordimer's ecological slant and her engagement with the wider political context of nuclear extractivism and slow violence. Furthermore, I will examine the way in which Gordimer's late style embodies the phenomenological questions that arise from an encounter with the incipient threat of nuclear death. To do so, I will first situate the novel within a wider history and context of nuclear energy and colonialism in South Africa. I will expand on this and further consider not just the material conditions of a nuclear state, but also the way in which the technological transformation of the society brought about by nuclear power presents a fundamental reconstitution of the self. I will subsequently examine Paul's feeling of ennui, and the way in which Gordimer's style, focalising through his frustration and listlessness, presents a state of sensory confusion that results from a confrontation with the nuclear uncanny. In doing so, I will pay close attention to the contradictions within Paul's subject position and the tension between his indulgence of his ennui and the privilege afforded to him by virtue of his class and his whiteness. Finally, I will examine the way in which this shared vulnerability with the non-human ecosystem of which he is a part allows him to go beyond these limitations within his perspective and becomes the basis of a new form of ethical commitment. It is specifically Paul's embodying of this shared vulnerability through his irradiation that allows him to form ethical bonds with an ecosystem that vastly exceeds that what he can represent or know in his immediate experience. This inflection of Gordimer's late style marks a phenomenological turn that is a development of and a departure from the spiritual turn in her earlier works, as she is deeply concerned with the constitution of the self and of Paul's shared vulnerability within its environment. *Get a Life* thus presents a two-fold development of the spiritual turn that Coetzee and others have identified in Gordimer's works, manifested as an ecological turn in her ethics that takes human relationships with the ecosystem as the its basis, as well as a phenomenological turn in her style that calls into question the way in which the white self is constituted.

Nuclearity and the Transformation of the Self

Nadine Gordimer's 2005 novel *Get a Life* follows the quarantine, recovery and rehabilitation of its environmentalist protagonist, Paul Bannerman, after he becomes radioactive following treatment for thyroid cancer. The narrative gives prominence to Paul's existential reveries about being a radiation risk to those around him, as his own nuclear toxicity mirrors the campaign against the Pebble Bed Modular Reactor in which he is professionally involved. Nuclear energy in South Africa is inextricably entangled within a history of settler-colonial mining and apartheid imperialism. The historian of nuclear power Gabrielle Hecht has investigated the connexion between colonialism and nuclear power most prominently in her 2012 work *Being Nuclear*. Following the Second World War, she argues, nuclear power came to be regarded as the 'white race's superweapon', as French and British leaders regarded the atom bomb as not only a 'substitute for colonialism as an instrument of global power', but also a 'means of preventing their own colonization by superpowers' ('Nuclear Ontologies' 252). Against this background as well as the fraught political anxieties of the Cold War, the attempts by transnational bodies to limit and regulate the proliferation of nuclear technology and control the trade in nuclear fuel was a political attempt by the West to maintain monopoly on nuclear fuel mining. Moreover, the requirements for membership of the International Atomic Energy Agency, as well as the restrictions and mandatory IAEA inspections placed by the Treaty of Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons were regarded as an attempt by Western nations to perpetuate colonial inequalities and dominate the global South by writing the rules in their favour (Hecht 'Nuclear Ontologies' 255).

In South Africa, construction of the Koeberg Nuclear Power Station began in 1976. However, Hecht considers South Africa a nuclear state since long before then. In the bulk of her work, she interrogates what it means be a nuclear state, arguing that the 'nuclearity' of a nation — or the degree to which a state counts as nuclear — is never straightforward, but is a technopolitical spectrum of ever-shifting parameters (*Being Nuclear* 14;

'Nuclear Ontologies' 251). Hecht considers as 'nuclear' not just those nations which have developed either civilian or military nuclear power, but also those are part of the supply chain of nuclear ore mining, extraction and purification, even if they have not developed the capacity to harness nuclear power for their own civilian or military ends. To that end, South Africa had been a source of uranium since the 1950s, to the point where by 1956, uranium production and exports to America and Britain were vital for the South African economy. That nuclear mining was vital to the economy of apartheid-era South Africa reflects the industry's history of complicity with colonial racial hierarchies (see Hecht 'Nuclear Ontologies' 257). The mines provided no special protections from radiation for its black workers, who were not only exposed to radiation while mining using hand tools, but also worked in precarious conditions and transient jobs. Moreover, the meticulous apartheid-era system of record-keeping — which was an instrument of control by white mine owners to surveil black mine workers — was used as evidence in medical research for determining a 'permissible dose' of radiation, below which threshold exposure was deemed to be harmless. This notion of a permissible dose persisted until as late as June 2005, when an American National Research Council report concluded that there is 'no threshold of exposure below which low levels of ionizing radiation can be demonstrated to be harmless or beneficial' (Hecht 'Nuclear Ontologies' 257). Mine operators used the transience of the black workers' labour to argue that the Radon exposure that they suffered was not sufficient to cause lasting damage, and so the mines did not need to provide any further protections. Uranium mines started being subject to health regulation only as recently as 1999. This logic of colonial extractivism is further contiguous with the human exploitation of the non-human ecosystem in the interest of capital, as both shared an instrumentalist ideology through which, according to Val Plumwood, 'the colonized Other is reduced to being a means to the colonizer's ends' just as how 'in anthropocentric culture, [non-human] nature's agency and independence are denied, subsumed in, or remade to coincide with human interests' (59).

Although none of it is mentioned explicitly, Gordimer's novel is embedded within this colonial history of nuclear extractivism as well as its resistance. It focalises predominantly through a white character, rendering his black colleagues peripheral to the main narrative. However, these characters are also the site at which the novel stages the conflict of their visibility, exposure and radicalism. Paul's colleague Thapelo, for example, is a former member of the Umkhonto we Sizwe, the militant wing of the African National Congress. This organisation had bombed and sabotaged the Koeberg power station during its construction. Paul, Thapelo and their fellow activists are conscious of the historical continuities of the injustices of nuclear power from the apartheid era to their post-apartheid present, represented by the proposed construction of the Pebble Bed Modular Reactor. Paul and his colleagues are involved with campaigns against various forms of multinational capital that seek to exploit their country's natural resources. Nuclear power projects such as the PBMR are a similar reiteration of old colonial hierarchies in a neo-imperial capitalist world-systems. While the Koeberg Nuclear Power Station is run domestically by the South African public utility Eskom, and most of the uranium is mined in South Africa, future nuclear developments projects announced by the South African government in 2014 and 2015 involve importing engineering and design from France, China, Russia, America and South Korea (World Nuclear Association). This represents a continuing nexus between foreign capital and the national government, one predicated upon a hierarchical trade between core, semi-peripheral and peripheral regions, trade not of resources but of technologies and engineering. This asymmetrical transfer of technology represents, for Don Ihde, an aspect of neo-imperial hierarchy in the contemporary geopolitics (132).

These neo-imperial technological transfers affect not just a change in the material circumstances of energy production, but also bring about a change in one's phenomenological understanding of the environment. For Ihde, all technology belongs within a context of 'some set of culturally-constituted values and processes,' what he terms a 'context of involvement'

(126). Ihde's phenomenological approach draws primarily from Edmund Husserl's notion of a 'lifeworld', which though complex and ambiguous can be sketched briefly as the combination of the *a priori* beliefs and categories that constitute a subject's experience of their world, and also the system of senses and meanings that constitute their language and experience of the world (Beyer). Any transfer of technology represents not just a transfer of technological objects, but also a transformation of the lifeworlds within the place that receives these technologies. For example, Ihde describes how Puluwateans adopted the use of the magnetic compass to navigate the seas as a result of colonial trade, which led them to forget their traditional method of navigating using wave perceptions. Ihde's examples are problematic, and hence best avoided, as they are heavily reliant on Orientalist discourses of Pacific island societies, adopting uncritically unilateral, fatal impact narratives of colonial encounter, and critiquing his examples would distract from the main thesis. A better example would be the impact of GPS-enabled Unmanned Autonomous Vehicles in contemporary warfare. Because these drones can be deployed quickly, covertly and at much lower cost and risk to personnel compared to ground forces or piloted aircrafts, this technology drastically changed not just the tactics or methods warfare, but also one's understanding the value of life or losses in armed conflict. For regions targeted by drone strikes, the threats of death and military assault become a perennial presence rather than confined strictly to the conduct of conventional warfare. The detailed and accurate mapping of the globe using GPS is an example of what Ihde calls a 'hermeneutic technics', or a relation with technology in which an artefact transforms the world into a text which is then interpreted by a human subject (80). This contrasts with what Ihde calls an 'embodied technics', or one which is integrated into the self such that it is undifferentiated from the observer when experiencing the world like when 'my glasses become part of the way I ordinarily experience my surroundings', becoming a 'symbiosis of artifact and user within a human action' (73).

Throughout the course of Ihde's *Technology and the Lifeworld*, his approach to the question of human relations to technology is

phenomenological, drawing from Husserl and Heidegger. This is why although he argues using examples of technology transfers that are grounded in material histories of colonialism or capitalism, his emphasis is on abstract 'culturally-constituted values' rather than, for instance, tangible material circumstances or differences in labour, capital or means of production with different societies. Nevertheless, it is clear from Ihde's examples how these values are mutually constitutive with particular material conditions within society, so it is possible to take his analysis further into a materialist reading. This is most prominent in his other example, of the transfer of steel knives and axes to New Guinea with the arrival of the first Australian gold prospectors in the 1930s.[9] Ihde himself gestures towards this materialist reading briefly as he mentions the relation of economic dependence that the importing of steel will bring. That the New Guineans found steel goods to be desirable because its means of production were outside of their control, and these artefacts would have to be obtained through trade. Furthermore, this exchange was also underwritten by a hierarchy of power, particularly the fact that the Australian-European prospectors brought with them rifles that allowed them to kill any New Guinean who attempted to raid them.

The adoption of new technologies and the consequent change in values dramatically alter the ways in which people relate to their world. Ihde's objective in *Technology and the Lifeworld* is to examine the phenomenology of technology and the ways in which these artefacts mediate and constitute the ways in which people experience and apprehend their world. It is this phenomenological step that makes Ihde's reading of technology transfers particularly illuminating. It is not just the patterns of labour and value of certain skills in an economy that are altered by this colonial encounter, but

[9] I have omitted one aspect of Ihde's account of this example — his account of the New Guineans' initial perception of white Australian-European settlers as otherworldly deities (125) — because of how heavily it is coded with a self-aggrandising notion of colonial power. When using this historical example, Ihde is uncritical of the epistemic and discursive hierarchies in his sources, and the necessary critical intervention to address this orientalist characterisation (as well as Ihde's neglect towards the vicissitudes of colonial encounters that I mentioned in his other example) would distract from my main focus here.

also a more fundamental way of seeing the world. What makes Ihde's analysis valuable is his understanding of technology as a cultural instrument and the understanding of neocolonialism as an unequal pattern of technological transfer. If the transfer of technologies can bring about a transformation of values and conditions within a society, then regimes of technological exchange can in turn be used to shape or alter the values within these societies. For Ihde, the difference in technological development and concentration between the 'first' and 'third' worlds can be explained as a 'massive failure to transfer precisely these aspects of a culture that would support furtherance of high technology' (132). India after its independence, he argues, attempted to adopt modern forms of industry in order to assert its economic and political autonomy in an international economy, however this objective was incompletely met (Ihde 133-4). He remains agnostic about whether or not these failures of transfer are good or bad. However, characterising this as a 'failure' of transfer obscures the ways in which these inequalities are deliberately maintained by capitalist cores, either through predatory economic relations or soft power. Ihde's agnosticism does not adequately reflect the extent to which these failures of transfer often deliberate strategies employed to maintain hierarchical relations between 'first' and 'third' world regions, and to enforce distinctions between the human and non-human, or colonial self and colonised other, because of contiguous ideologies of exploitation. It would be more accurate to describe this as an 'unequal transfer' rather than a 'failure of transfer'.

The South African state in *Get a Life* is in a similar position: its adoption of nuclear energy situates itself within a similar position in a capitalist world-system, that of a semi-peripheral state that is adopting nuclear energy in an attempt to secure a strategic partnership with Western core regions. The nature of this technological change goes beyond just the geopolitical interests or soft power relations between nation-states. It has a drastic impact on the ecology, as the environmental impact of the nuclear power station becomes a political battle ground. But even more so, the advent of nuclear technology and the development of South Africa into a nuclear state have a

pronounced phenomenological impact on the protagonist Paul Bannerman's conception of his self as well as his experience of and relation with his environment. The change in the lifeworld that is instigated by the import of nuclear technology reflects a transformation of the self due to the anxieties surrounding the imperceptible and persistent threat of death and long-term contamination as a result of nuclear fallout.

Joseph Masco argues that the advent of nuclear technology in Western society was responsible for a profound shift in the phenomenological understanding of death, disease and health. 'Incipient death,' he argues, 'has become a form of health itself, both normalised and rendered invisible as a new form of nature' because of how widespread catastrophic risks like instant mass death, individualized cellular mutation, and radiation-induced disease have become ('Atomic Health' 339). The psychic effect of this is one that is similarly invisible, normalised and widespread: Masco examines a correlation between the Cold War anxiety around nuclear crisis in the 1950s with the rise of the marketing and prescription of antidepressants in the United States as documented by the psychiatrist Jonathan Metzl ('Atomic Health' 346). These fears of nuclear catastrophe have 'colonized psychic spaces and profoundly shaped the individual perceptions of the everyday', producing moments of recognition which Masco terms the 'nuclear uncanny' (*The Nuclear Borderlands* 28). This nuclear uncanny

> exists in the material effects, psychic tension, and sensory confusion produced by nuclear weapons and radioactive materials. It is a perceptual space caught between apocalyptic expectation and sensory fulfilment, a psychic effect produced, on one hand, by living within the temporal ellipsis separating a nuclear attack and the actual end of the world, and on the other, by inhabiting an environmental space threatened by military-industrial radiation. (*The Nuclear Borderlands* 28).

Masco's reading of the nuclear uncanny and the psychic effect of radioactive toxicity is perhaps limited to some extent by his emphasis on military deployments of nuclear power, such as 'nuclear attacks' and 'military-industrial radiation', as opposed to moments of meltdown or rupture of civilian nuclear reactors, such as Chernobyl or Fukushima. However, what is most

limiting in his understanding is the necessity of a 'temporal ellipsis' between this moment of catastrophe — military or civilian — from an actual end of the world. Because the effects of nuclear contamination are invisible, diffuse and distributed over an enormous time scale and geographical reach, it becomes impossible to suggest that there is any such ellipsis. In the case of Chernobyl, there was the initial security breach on 26 April 1986 which was followed by a series of events that unfolded — and still continue to unfold — over multiple time scales: the response from Mikhail Gorbachev and the Soviet government took eighteen days, meanwhile the radiation plume was carried across Europe and beyond, and radiochemical poisoning in Ukraine and Belarus affected soil, crops, meat and breastfeeding women, and continued to have an impact on children born decades later (Nixon 49). Radiation contamination and the *longue durée* of its genetic and geological effects are what Rob Nixon describes as a 'slow violence', one which lacks spectacle and is dispersed over large scales of space and time (2). The scale on which this impact is felt is a contradictory one, as it is at once at the cellular level through the mutation of the genomes of living species, and at the same time it is transnational as the fallout spreads across continents and oceans through wind and ocean currents. While Masco's reading of nuclear anxiety is confined to the context of military and geopolitical aggression, the slow violence of civilian nuclear power and its threat of catastrophe reflects a more dispersed structural violence of neoliberal society on the non-human environment.

The phenomenological shift that Masco seems interested in is primarily concerned with one's understanding of death and catastrophe following the development of nuclear weapons. However, the slow violence of nuclear contamination on the environment is a further provocation to re-examine the phenomenological understanding of the non-human environment and the place of the human self within it. The prevailing Cartesian view of the relationship between human society and non-human nature is one of dualism: capitalism extracts value from or exploits resources in nature and humanity is separated from it. However, as Jason W. Moore argues, a more

sensitive history of capitalism reveals that rather than a dualism, capitalism and human society exist with the non-human nature and environment in a dialectic of 'dual internality', of an overlapping of the 'humanity-in-nature/nature-in-humanity' and a mutually-constitutive relation between 'nature' and capitalism (12,42-4). The shared vulnerability of the human self and the non-human environment to the invisible and dispersed effects of radiation contamination renders this dual internality especially palpable. Recalling Ihde's analysis from earlier, the phenomenological change brought about by new technologies can be categorised as either 'hermeneutic technics', that is instruments which alter the way in which a subject interprets their lifeworld as a text, or 'embodied technics', technologies that integrate themselves within the human self and fundamentally alters the way in which the subject perceives their reality. Capitalist extractivism thus presents a dual internality of nuclear power, reflecting its transformation from a hermeneutic technic where death is an external risk to an embodied technic in which radiation and mutation become part of the human self. This fundamentally changes the way in which individuals relate to their environment as they are deeply entangled within the shared fate of nuclear catastrophe.

This encounter with this dual internality is, however, not without its epistemic challenges: the enormous scale of this slow violence across both time and space makes this difficult for the human imagination to apprehend or represent. Ecological catastrophe at this scale is what Timothy Morton describes as a 'hyperobject' in the sense that the dimensions of space and time across which these effects manifest are so vast that they defy comprehension and representation by the human subject (*Hyperobjects* 1). The hyperobject itself, according to Morton, is invisible to human subjects. Instead, what we can see are local manifestations of the hyperobjects that are not the hyperobjects themselves. Furthermore, there is no metalanguage that can describe these hyperobjects without being contaminated by them (Morton *Hyperobjects* 2). In that regard, the slow violence of nuclear contamination is one such hyperobject, of which only a single cross-section is visible, like the immediate meltdown of the Chernobyl reactor or the observed

epidemic of thyroid cancer resulting from mutations over the following decades. It is difficult, then, to find representational strategies that can apprehend and represent these forms of slow violence, the deep ontological entanglement of the human and non-human in nuclear catastrophe, and the phenomenological shift in the way in which a subject understands and relates to their environment. It is because of the spectral presence of these hyperobjects within experience that the mode through which one conceives of the nuclear is primarily through the uncanny, characterised by tension, irresolution and confusion.

Get a Life's treatment of nuclear power, through the phenomenological turn in its form, is set against this wider landscape of the politics and phenomenological realignment of the self in response to the transfer of nuclear power. In the subsequent section, I will examine the style of the novel and its emphasis on ennui, and how this ennui is a response to the sense of the nuclear uncanny. The form of the novel thus responds to the aesthetic and epistemic challenges of representing a hyperobject like the slow violence of nuclear catastrophe that resists imaginary representation. Moreover, as I will further argue, this presents an understanding of such a catastrophe not through imaginary representation, but the embodied experience of the shared vulnerability of the human self within the ecosystem within which it is situated. The embodied technics of nuclear death is not just a consequence of the technological transfer of nuclear power, but is furthermore the site at which the ethical and ontological assumptions that were the basis of colonial extractivism are resisted. It is through the embodiment of this vulnerability that the novel presents a new mode of ethical engagement with the ecosystem that is grounded in the dual internality of the human and non-human, and thus rejects the ideologies that were the basis of colonial acquisition.

Ennui and the Nuclear Uncanny

Against the backdrop of the phenomenological shifts in the understanding of the self and of incipient death because of radiation,

Gordimer's style adopt in *Get a Life* adopts an idiom of ennui as a way of responding to and understanding the phenomenological crisis that such an encounter instigates. Recalling Simon Lewis' account of the stylistic shift in Gordimer's post-apartheid works that I had discussed in an earlier chapter, a defining characteristic of Gordimer's late works is shift in the ontological assumptions of her works. Commenting on *The House Gun*, Simon Lewis draws attention to the shift in the conditions of knowledge in the transition to post-apartheid society, from a 'static, intransitive knowledge' that 'a knowable object, apartheid, is a bad thing, and one's overriding political and personal obligation is to oppose it' to a realisation in this new society that 'the object of one's search will never be quite what one thinks it is and will change continually' (65). This shift is contiguous with what Graham Riach describes as the salient characteristics of Gordimer's late writings, such as a sparse plot with neither a linear development nor any resolution, uneasy vacillations between past and present, and a protagonist's sense of confusion about their own racial identity and place within South African society. This is underscored by a mood of melancholy and ennui, all of which colour the prose of *Get a Life*, but also novels like *The House Gun* and *No Time Like the Present*.

In the context of *Get a Life*, ennui is not a resignation or withdrawal from politics. Rather, it represents a complex and conflicted state where her protagonists struggle to realign their political commitments when faced with the confusion of incomprehensible forms of violence and injustice. In contrast with the earlier, static, intransitive, and knowable injustice of apartheid, the threats that Paul Bannerman faces in *Get a Life* are of a different order entirely: as nuclear contamination and ecological catastrophe become hyperobjects that defy comprehension and representation, the conditions of knowledge that were the terrain of Paul's earlier political commitments are no longer tenable. As the conflicts in the novel are scattered across multiple different actors, including environmental activists, indigenous leaders, multinational corporations, advertising companies, and Government agencies, the novel presents a shift in the political focus within post-apartheid

South Africa. It is no longer concerned with a single political question or regime. Rather, its critique manifests in more diffuse and indirect forms of opposition against the nexus of the state, private enterprise, and multinational capital. If, in Gordimer's earlier works, the freedom struggle presented a truth around which her fiction organised, the persistence of such injustices in the post-apartheid calls this truth into question. It is the conflict and tension between these shifting frames of reference and the incredulity towards the erstwhile truth of revolutionary struggle that evoke the sensory confusion and listlessness that are characteristic of ennui.

This ennui is most salient in the way Paul frequently dwells on his loneliness and isolation during his quarantine and in his reverting to a child-like state in the garden of his parental home. During his isolation, he contemplates ringing his wife at work, however he fails to do so because his mind is prone to what he describes as 'haphazard ridiculous wanderings' (*Get a Life* 16). He finds himself especially isolated from his wife, Berenice, as he finds himself separated from her by an 'infinitude between how he lies and the module console-desk, Corbusier lookalike chairs, leather sofas for clients, professional flower arrangements, blown-up images of improbably beautiful or famous people and landscape paradises, from award-winning advertising campaigns' (*Get a Life* 15). Immediately afterwards, it is clear that this separation between Paul and Berenice is reciprocal, as 'when he was in a wilderness her city place did not exist for him, as at her console in that city space his wilderness did not exist for her' (*Get a Life* 15). This growing rift between them is implied to be a routine part of their marriage, and, as I discuss later, comes to represent a deeper ethical rift between the capitalist ideology that Berenice's firm represents and the environmental concerns for which Paul campaigns. Nevertheless, in Paul's current, irradiated state, these rifts take on a deeper existential and phenomenological significance.

Paul finds himself overwhelmed by the extent of his isolation from his wife, separated by what he feels is an 'infinitude'. The style of the prose further evokes the overwhelming nature of this separation with its prolonged, weighty syntax that lists all the furnishings of Berenice's office in detail. In the

same way that it describes Berenice's office, the narrative contorts itself to simultaneously describe Paul's work: he thinks of his colleagues, Thapelo and Derek, and the work that needs doing in their campaign against the pebble-bed reactor, as well as his experiences of the wilderness while he is away on fieldwork. This entire paragraph, characterised by elaborate lists, is bookended by inaction and paralysis: Paul feels hesitant to call Benni at the start of the paragraph, and in the end neither Paul nor Berenice call each other, 'both equally unreachable' (*Get a Life* 15). This inaction characterises a listlessness that is central to Paul's experience of his quarantine.

What makes the characterisation of ennui in this passage especially significant is the way in which the novel uses its focalising characters: for the most part, this passage reflects Paul's interior monologue as he considers ringing Berenice, or things about his work and isolation. However, there are fleeting moments when the narrative appears to change its perspective, focalising instead through Berenice's point of view, such as when it admits that his wilderness did not exist for her, or that he was 'the receded […] Far away' (*Get a Life* 15). These momentary intrusions of Berenice's thoughts within Paul's interior monologue are perhaps complemented by similar intrusions made by his voice in the sections of the novel that focalises through her. The implication here is that Paul, in his interior monologue, attempts to imagine what Berenice feels of his condition, and likewise Berenice tries to imagine what Paul's fieldwork in the wilderness would be like. But the juxtaposition of the two focalising voices in this manner is rendered especially ironic in this context as there is a failure to communicate, as both of them ultimately fail to make the phone call to the other. Both Paul and Berenice's attempts at imagining the life of the other is frustrated by an acute sense of disconnectedness. It is particularly significant that it is not a material isolation that prevents them from communicating — they have phone and fax lines installed in their respective rooms and desks already — but more of an emotional unwillingness, a sense of being overwhelmed by the loneliness and having an acute aware of their isolation from each other. This irony has a subversive effect on the focalising voices: the juxtaposition

of both Paul and Berenice's thoughts with their frustration in communicating with each other pushes against the limits of either character's perspective and foregrounds, for both characters, their disconnectedness from the other's world. Paul becomes acutely conscious of this disconnectedness, which is expressed in his hyper-awareness of Berenice's office furnishings in his imagination.

As the narrative voice focalises through his interior monologue and follows his thoughts as they divert into tangents. The overwhelming listlessness of these haphazard wanderings are sharpest when he is kept in quarantine, where he is

> allowed no purpose but something his mother has called 'recuperate'. […] in that university library, naturally, he'd read up everything about the thyroid gland, that hidden nodule in your neck he could put a hand up to feel for, if it hadn't been removed. It is a vital factor in growth along with the pituitary, which is hidden behind your forehead, he wouldn't have come to adolescence, physical and mental maturity, without it. […] So, demonstrably, the gland has an effect on emotions aside from its necessary physical manifestations if it decides to go erratic, an excess of thyroid gland production causes tachycardia, a rapid heartbeat. (*Get a Life* 20-1)

This passage, with its list of characteristics and functions of the thyroid gland, further reflects Paul's desperate attempt at learning as much as he can about his condition. The weighty syntax of the prose, with its numerous clauses and lists, is similarly frustrating, giving the narrative voice a laboured and listless feel. Paul is overwhelmed by this listlessness, leading him to a state of passivity and inaction: he feels infantilised when his mother does not allow him to do anything, and he fails to make the phone call to Berenice that he contemplated earlier in the novel, and when she does call he is unable to sustain the conversation beyond idle smalltalk, only saying 'I was in the garden' (*Get a Life* 23).

Paul's sense of ennui, in his phone call with his wife and his reading about the thyroid gland, characterise the material effects, psychic tensions and sensory confusion that Masco highlights as characteristic of the nuclear uncanny. Paul's suspended state in the garden of his parental home, where he is at once an adult with a family but also infantilised and under the care of

his parents and their domestic help, represents a state of his being when time is out of joint. What is especially revealing about these passages is that Paul's anxieties are displaced: the condition he is in is almost entirely because of his irradiated state. The reason he is living with his parents, away from his family, is because they see themselves as an acceptable risk in the interest of protecting their grandson. However, the subject of Paul's frustrations in these passages never refer to radiation directly, but instead refer to it indirectly by evoking the physiological consequences of Paul's treatment like the removal of his thyroid gland, the material circumstances of what his marriage to Berenice represents, or the psychic effect of the impact this has on his emotions. Because nuclear contamination is a hyperobject that goes beyond Paul's ability to represent it, it is only ever gestured to through its negative. He is caught between the threat of possibility of his recuperation within the security of his quarantine and the apocalyptic threat that radiation entails. This apocalyptic vision manifests later in Paul's anxieties around extinction as he appreciates that 'maybe we see the disaster and don't, can't live long enough (that is, through centuries) to see the survival solution' (*Get a Life* 93). His reflections on extinction are situated within the vast timescale of extinctions over millennia, such as the white rhino, dinosaurs, and mastodon (94). Paul's sense of the enormous and dispersed temporal scale of this disaster, as well as its relative invisibility because of its constant nature, reflects the form of slow violence that nuclear fallout presents, and it characterises the fundamental nature of what makes nuclear catastrophe especially uncanny. Moreover, the relationship between his thyroid and his emotions characterises how this ennui is not just a psychological affliction that is a result of his frustration and disillusionment, but is rather a consequence of his physical health. The somatic language of his existence demonstrates how this nuclear uncanny is not just perceived but also embodied.

This embodiment of the nuclear uncanny and his erosion of his sense of self upon being infantilised give Paul's condition and his feeling of ennui a phenomenological significance. Ennui is a particularly important emotion for

Morton. They describe the interaction of the human consciousness with a world greater than itself as existing as part of a 'symbiotic real' (*Humankind* 67). This is an inflection of the Lacanian notion of the Real, that there is a reality that is external to the human imaginary which the subject can only access by way of representation through the 'symbolic'. This symbolic representation is never adequate or exhaustive of the object. The real is always known as an absence. However, this real is 'symbiotic' insofar as the relationship between the subject and this reality is not one of separation — the real being beholden to the interior structures and categories of consciousness and its symbolic representation — rather it is a reciprocal relationship in which nature is dependent upon itself, and the human subject is embedded within this nature. The symbiotic real is something which has entangled within it the human subject, and is part of a much larger, more-than-human ecosystem. Ennui is the affective mode through which a subject becomes aware of this symbiotic real that goes beyond just the human.

The spectral presence of this symbiotic real within experience and the consequent awareness of the gulf between the subject and this real lead to what Morton calls an 'evacuation' of affect. Because this 'real' can only be apprehended as a negative, the ability of the human subject to know and represent the symbiotic real is always frustrated. This makes explicit the gaps between human perception and understanding of the non-human and the presence of the non-human as an acting and autonomous being of its own right, independent of human representation. The presence of these gaps evacuates any pleasure or affect to be had from encountering the more-than-human environment, which is particularly evident in the way Paul's experience of sitting in the garden is especially dreary and desolate. It is this affectless experience of the real that characterises a profound, phenomenological ennui. In Paul's interior monologue, the ironic juxtaposition of his and Berenice's voices and their mutual separation from the other's world emphasises the sense that there is a symbiotic real outside of their understanding, a real that persistently defies their apprehension but is nevertheless present through an indication of its absence. Paul is aware of

Berenice's work and her admirable success in her career, but he persistently sees himself as receding from it. Moreover, their worlds are in an albeit strained symbiotic relationship, both allegorically through their marriage and biopolitically in terms of the various natural resources that Paul seeks to defend that Berenice's clients exploit. It is this spectral presence of a world outside of his apprehension that is central to his sense of ennui.

While Morton's account of the evacuation of affect upon encountering the spectral impression of the real is illuminating, their suggestion that ennui is a mode through which a subject attunes with the symbiotic real seems to put the cart before the horse: their characterisation of the real as a mode of attunement would entail that one encounters or the symbiotic real *through* ennui. This makes a phenomenological assumption about the mode of ennui that does not have adequate justification. To elevate ennui as a mode of phenomenological encounter would imply that the feeling of ennui is itself an ethical action. However, one of the characteristic consequences of ennui is a disinclination from acting: Paul's ennui during his quarantine renders him passive and overwhelmed, whereas his colleagues Thapelo and Derek are radical activists carrying on their political work. While Paul's perspectives on his vulnerability shift profoundly, his actions are never as radical in achieving meaningful change in comparison with his colleagues. It is unclear how the experience of ennui itself is what enables an individual to apprehend the absence of the more-than-human symbiotic real, and why this is a meaningful form of ethics. To accept ennui as an ethical encounter would license passive, self-indulgent immersion in a listless state as a form of ethical commitment.

This is especially problematic in the case of Paul Bannerman, for whom the ability to recover in quarantine is a privilege of his racial and class status. It is possible for a white, middle-class man who is married to an advertising executive and is the son of a corporate director and lawyer to have these conveniences: his father Adrian uses his contacts to get a fax line installed, his wife supports him through his treatment. The freedom to indulge ennui comes from the privilege of passivity that is afforded to the wealthy and

affluent who do not face any real or immediate threat of the consequences of environmental catastrophe. Anthony Vital notes the racial and class politics of this kind of environmentalism, while being valuable, is nevertheless 'limited by being associated with the sort of person Paul represents, economically secure, educationally privileged, and as a family member concerned primarily with those closest to him, those who are of his kind', for whom this kind of ecological consciousness is merely 'one among a range of activities undertaken to bring about personal satisfaction' (93). His attention to the environment is motivated by the pleasure he takes from it rather from a more sustained sense of ethical commitment. Meanwhile, however, people like Thapelo, who were former freedom fighters, are invested in the crisis without the same privileges and comforts, for whom this campaign represents a continuation of radical politics through 'another kind of combat in the bush' (*Get a Life* 60). This kind of simplistic characterisation, Vital notes, is the privilege of 'someone who has the luxury to be history's observer' that derives from his race and class (109).

The race politics of this is especially significant: while Paul's irradiated state is the central device through which the novel foregrounds an embodied sense of radiation risk and toxicity. Paul calls himself his own 'Koeberg experimental nuclear reactor' (*Get a Life* 60). He naïvely imagines wanting to protect Thapelo from his radioactivity, neglecting the different racial politics of radiation exposure for black and white people. Hecht chronicles a history of nuclear mining in Namibia, where the Rössing Uranium Mine was faced with contradictions of the rights and treatment of its black and white workforce which reflected 'deep tensions between managers who genuinely sought to challenge apartheid and those who fought to maintain their privileges by upholding its practices' (*Being Nuclear* 296). Although the Rössing mine tried to 'deracialize' its workplace in the 1970s and evaluate, appoint and promote workers based on performance and skill rather than race, this led to greater resentment between white superintendents and the newly-appointed black officers (Hecht *Being Nuclear* 298). Black workers, meanwhile, were working in conditions that subjected them to extreme radiation risks, and were often

working ‘with no protective clothing’ and ‘no guidelines setting limits on exposure levels’ (Hecht *Being Nuclear* 303). Although there were developments in the Rössing mine that emancipated these black workers to some degree, as the appointment of the white Namibian doctor Wotan Swiegers to devise occupational health guidelines led to the adoption of stringent guidelines on protection from radiation in line with international best practice, these policies were often imposed in a paternalistic fashion, reasserting a hierarchy between the doctor and the workers as ‘white and black. Oppressor and the oppressed’ (Hecht *Being Nuclear* 304). Black workers were denied access to their own medical records, and they were never told why they had to wear protective gear or informed of the nature and risks of radiation poisoning. Either the bodies of black workers were subjected to radiation, or when they were not the medical discourse around their protection is one that embodies colonial epistemic hierarchies, denying black workers autonomy and knowledge. Either way, the bodies of black workers, particularly when exposed to radiation, became the site of colonial and racial conflict. Meanwhile, while Rössing in Namibia made advances in protections for its workers, black workers in South Africa were given no such safety or precautions.

When Paul compares himself to the Koeberg power station, he overlooks the wider racial and colonial politics of an irradiated body that was inherent in the industry of nuclear mining. This is another simplification of history of the kind that Vital observes, where Paul takes the liberty to use the Koeberg nuclear power station as a metaphor for his being without acknowledging the harm nuclear mining caused to those people who were not history’s observers but were the victims of racial injustice. The racial and class politics of nuclear mining and extraction in South Africa has exposed to far greater and more toxic levels of radiation black workers whose voices are excluded from the novel’s main narrative. Moreover, as his irradiated state derives from his aggressive cancer treatment to which he has access because of his race and class, his irradiation is a further marker of his comfortable, privileged lifestyle. Vital draws attention to the way the novel is

self-aware of the perspectival limitations of its protagonists by virtue of their social position, and he draws attention to metafictional devices which indicate its agnosticism with endorsing its characters' point of view and perhaps even pushes against their dominant narrative, such as the black figures of the street-sweeper and gardener who emphasise the blind spots in Paul's consciousness (94-5). He subjects the novel to quite a thorough and exacting critique, noting quite accurately that one of the biggest limitations in Paul's perspectives is that his 'appreciation of nature's otherness, his pleasure in feeling "decentred," is inevitably tainted by his lack of imaginative interest in the "otherness" of people, and "otherness" that is the product of a shared national history' (100). Furthermore, the novel is limited by an ecological thinking that is deeply rooted in romanticist fascinations with nature as wilderness, or the garden as a recreational space, as the Bannermans remain oblivious to material circumstances of production and consumption within which their household and garden are situated (see Vital 108). Such an ideological configuration of Paul's garden is comparable to Julie's encounter with the desert in *The Pickup*, as she sees it as a romanticised space of adventure within which she feels decentred and part of a spiritual whole. There is a tension between Paul's inner life, secured by his privileged position, and the social action that he strives for which cuts across divisions of race, class and anthropocentrism. He struggles to represent in his inner life the experiences of black workers and environmentalists, or the damage to the non-human ecosystem. Even his ethical concerns ultimately come down to a form of reproductive futurism, as he is motivated primarily by kinship with his son. Vital's critique of *Get a Life* as well as the other limitations in its politics pose rather difficult questions about the novel's modes of engagement.

Domestic spaces like his family's garden are, as Rita Barnard argues, 'ideological apparatuses' in the Althusserian sense which serve as the means by which hierarchical relations are reproduced (49). The garden presents a 'dream topography' or a 'certain wishful and often deceptive fiction about the world' (53) constructed by the hierarchies that are embodied in the physical

enclosures. For Paul, 'the garden is where the company of jacaranda fronds finger the same breeze that brushed the boy's [his son's] soft cheek, where caught in peripheral vision a cent's worth of never-exterminated snail moves by peristalsis over a stone' (*Get a Life* 54). James Graham notes that Paul's isolation in his childhood garden in this passage evokes a consciousness of nature-in-itself that is unmediated by his professional and scientific language (199), thus eschewing a form of epistemic violence that reduces nature to the correlates of scientific jargon. Nevertheless, Paul's allusion to childish innocence and his evocation of bucolic images like the jacaranda fronds and garden snail re-inscribe a dream topography of the garden as a peaceful, suburban idyll. The ideological import of this is evident in the way that Paul's environmentalism is silent about the social inequalities between rich and poor that are created by the forces of a colonising modernity owing to his 'luxury to be history's observer' (Vital 109), as his suburban environment sequesters him from any real or immediate threat of the consequences of environmental degradation.

Meanwhile, for other characters, the campaign against the construction of nuclear reactors has more personal stakes: Thapelo was a member of the Umkhonto we Sizwe, the militant wing of the African National Conference, which had attacked and disrupted the construction of the Koeberg Nuclear Power Station during apartheid. The campaign against the Pebble Bed Modular Reactor represents a continuation of the freedom struggle in the form of a fight against ongoing capitalist extractivism, through what Paul describes ironically as 'another kind of combat in the bush' (*Get a Life* 60). Unlike Paul, who pursues a white ideal of conservationism and environmentalism, Thapelo advocates for organising indigenous resistance movements through the Amadiba Tribal Trust and by rallying the traditional leaders (*Get a Life* 85). Thapelo's tactics are thwarted by financial incentives provided to these traditional leaders by the multinational corporations that are building these projects, forcing Paul to later organise his campaign by manipulating the narrative around it through an advertising campaign (*Get a Life* 146). Despite its overt lack of success, Thapelo's perspective serves to

decentre Paul's insular and isolated engagement with the environment in the novel, and to contrast indigenous movements for environmental justice with what Graham describes as Paul's eventual capitulation to the promotional culture of multinational capitalism and neoliberal economic development (203).

It is these racial, class and ideological alignments of Paul's quarantine and the dream topography of the garden that render the elevation of ennui into a mode of ethical encounter, as Morton suggests, a compromised indulgence. The perspectival lapses that Vital identifies, such as Paul's failure to show an imaginative interest in the otherness of people, and his awareness of his own place within that history, presents the central dilemma in *Get a Life*'s politics and in Gordimer's late style: for Paul, as a white subject, to attempt to show such an imaginative interest in the other would risk the pitfall that Gordimer exposes in her treatment of Julie Summers in *The Pickup* that I discussed in the previous chapter, namely the attempt at representing the other as a correlate of his own inner workings rather than as subjects in their own right. It is for this reason, then, the novel is more focussed on the modalities of Paul's subject position and the knowability of the slow violence of nuclear catastrophe rather than representing this imaginative interest, lest it commit an epistemic injustice by marginalising those voices on whose behalf it speaks.

In representing these modalities, Gordimer's late style further emphasises the indeterminacies of political truths rather than assume their objectivity or certainty. The form of *Get a Life*, for example, does not allow for definitive conclusions or political positions. Rather, the form is characterised by ambiguity and uncertainty, while still being motivated by some semblance of political commitment. The narrative of *Get a Life* closely follows Paul's interior monologue although it never fully endorses it. As Vital notes, the novel uses metafictional devices to expose ambiguities in Paul's sense of commitment, foregrounding tensions between his environmentalism and his naïve romanticism: while he is invested in a protest against environmental degradation, he never truly engages with this outside of the comforts of his

family home. The novel gestures towards the characters who are outsiders to his subject position such as Derek and Thapelo, and by comparison with their actions exposes the limitations of his perspective. He remains oblivious to issues of race and class that fall outside of his understanding, whose absence the novel alludes to in subtle ways. By making questions of perspective and the social conditions of the narrators central to the narrative, the novel interrogates the possibility for a middle-class white South African of a liberal or radical persuasion to be able to represent or engage with the experiences of the other in good faith, whether they are the experiences of black people or the non-human environment. This phenomenological interrogation of the conditions of possibility of one's engagement with the other, and the ways in which one's representations and positions would be inflected by one's social position, are inherent in the formal choices in the novel. Compared to the formal innovation in one of Gordimer's middle-period novels like *The Conservationist*, which had a symbolic reclaiming of the white settler's land by black farm workers and a series of amaZulu intertexts to disrupt the white colonist's narrative, *Get a Life* does not seem to have any clear vision that can supersede the hierarchies of power with which it contends. But this is not to say that the novel's politics is inadequate or conservative. While the radical energies that inflected Gordimer's engagement with social change in her earlier works have dissipated, there is a greater deal of attention to much wider and more fundamental changes in modes of ethical thought. Instead, what the novel presents is a more subtle form of ethical realignment for the white subject that understands the self as mutually constituted by the greater-than-human ecosystem.

Considering these dilemmas in Gordimer's style with regard to the limitations of the white subject position, there is a need for a mode of ethical engagement that is circumspect about the constitution of the white self that nevertheless enables a form of commitment and action. Simply regarding the expression of ennui as a form of ethical awareness of the nuclear uncanny is inadequate in presenting a meaningful form of re-organisation of the self or indeed an act of resistance against nuclear extractivism. In the next section, I

will present a more productive way of reading the significance of ennui in Gordimer's late style, and argue that the novel's emphasis on Paul's embodiment of nuclear catastrophe and his corporeal sense of the nuclear uncanny form the basis of a new ethics moves past the hierarchies and assumptions of human extractivism. This serves to disrupt the dream topography of the garden that carries with it the ideological weight of the white suburban space, and furthermore resists the ideological separation of the human self from the non-human environment.

The Embodiment of Shared Vulnerability

In the previous sections, I examined the context of nuclear extractivism and its phenomenological impact on the self within which *Get a Life* is situated, as well as the mood of ennui that it uses in response to this. I further noted the limitations of ennui as a mode of engagement, particularly in light of the way Paul's privileged racial and class position enables him to indulge this ennui. Vital's critique of the novel presses on the privileges of class and race immanent in Paul's social position, particularly the luxury of being able to witness the history and politics of apartheid imperialism as an observer, and the indulgence of a naïve, romanticist fascination with the wilderness for his own pleasure. In this section, I will argue that the novel goes beyond just ennui, as Morton suggests, as a mode of phenomenological encounter with the wider ecosystem, but rather presents a fundamental reconfiguration of the self as embodying a shared vulnerability with its ecosystem. It is through the emphasis of this interdependency that the novel imagines new modes of engagement that go beyond the limitations of Paul's subject position. The novel's form, by registering the ethical and phenomenological shifts that come about because of technological changes as well as Paul's own frustration with his political inaction, evacuates this sense of pleasure within this privileged luxury which is the subject of Vital's critique. Vital notes that *Get a Life* recruits postmodernism's self-aware textuality for its political purpose (106), and considers the critiques I mentioned earlier as an omission that results from this stylistic choice. I would contend that the evacuated

affect of Gordimer's prose displays a further layer of self-awareness, one which exposes the complacency of the white liberal elites whom Paul represents.

The ennui that colours his narrative represents Paul's frustration with his present modes of engagement, and the narrative is driven by a desire for a renewed mode of understanding and political commitment that would get past these frustrations. Returning to Morton's account of ennui, their characterisation of this emotion as a form of ecological attunement is unsatisfactory as it seems to invert the emotional effect of a phenomenological encounter with the symbiotic real and the imaginative mode through which it is encountered. It would be more accurate to characterise ennui as an existential and emotional state that attends to the phenomenological frustration of failing to apprehend the symbiotic real. So rather than accessing the symbiotic real through ennui, the failure to apprehend this real is what evokes ennui. Gordimer's novel, then, does not attune with a non-human nature using ennui as Morton suggests, rather it uses ennui as a formal device to characterise Paul's frustration of attempting to understand with a greater-than-human environment. By following the shifts in Paul's understanding of his self and its relationship with the non-human ecosystem, the novel reflects a nascent mode of a much wider ecological awareness and a burgeoning mutuality and understanding for the other that Paul develops through his irradiated state.

The scale of nuclear contamination is what Morton terms a 'hyperobject' because the geographical and temporal scales of nuclear contamination far exceed what is comprehensible by the human imaginary. Any attempt at representation yields a limited cross-section of the hyperobject. When contemplating wider impact of his radioactivity, Paul has a significant moment of reverie:

> What is the threshold of risk to be decreed for different people—what about the paper plates touched by radiant saliva on spoons and forks, got rid of. Thrown away in the trash to lie on waste dumps picked over by kids from black squatter camps. What is 'rid of' in terms of any pollution, it's a life's work to inform us that it's

> not only what is cast into the sea that comes back to foul another shore, no matter whose it is. (*Get a Life* 60)

Paul is confronted by the enormous geographical scale of his personal radioactive contamination. Paul is quarantined in his parents' house as a way of keeping his family safe from his radiation, and he uses disposable crockery and cutlery to avoid contaminating members of the household and his parents' domestic help via contact. However, he becomes acutely aware that the radiation risk he poses cannot be localised, and he poses a threat to other people who are remote to him. The change in his register, to describe massive geographical features like the sea and the shore, contrasts with the physical confinement of his body, far exceeding the area in which the novel is mostly set, a garden within a suburban, middle-class household and a space of relative domestic comfort. The vulnerability of these remote regions and places intrudes upon the spaces in which the affluent elites exist with a comfortable distance and obliviousness towards the wider ecosystem. These regions are never addressed as a setting for the plot, and are instead only alluded to and implied in the language, reflecting how their presence is only ever known directly within the psyche and subjectivity of the white protagonists as an implied absence. This reverie presents what, in Barnard's view, can be considered a disruption to the dream topography that the garden presents, as a wider ecosystem intrudes upon the domestic enclosure, thereby undermining the hierarchical structures that domestic spaces reproduce.

It is especially revealing that the people and places whom he describes are entirely abstract, such as 'kids from black squatter camps' or 'another shore, no matter whose it is'. Neither of these terms Paul uses has a referent in the context of Paul's reverie. Likewise, his realisation that 'it's not only what is cast into the sea that comes back to foul another shore, no matter whose it is' is especially remarkable for its inability to name nuclear fallout for what it is: it compares the fallout to the dumping of refuse in the oceans, and how this refuse washes up on other people's shores. But the sentence stops short in naming nuclear fallout and stating that it also, like rubbish, circulates

across a transnational ecosystem. While Paul demonstrates an implied awareness of the material systems of ocean and wind currents that drive these ecosystems and circulate refuse and radioactive waste, these processes are never named directly. The lack of specificity reflects the diffuse nature of the contamination: there will always be regions that are unknown and unknowable that will be affected by nuclear contamination. The nature of this contamination is an unspectacular and dispersed form of slow violence whose large temporal and geographical scale resist the understanding of the human imaginary. This slow violence is a form of hyperobject whose magnitude far exceeds that which is representable. The frustrating vagueness of Paul's language reflects this resistance to representation of the symbiotic real within the imaginary. The ecosystem within which Paul is entangled is present in a state of perennial alterity, as it is never fully grasped by a human subject but exists in a state of otherness that eludes representation. This alterity of the ecological is characteristic of what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak terms 'planetarity', as the planet is an entity that constantly eludes the subject's grasp (see Spivak 291).

Although the planetary, in Spivak's terms, exists in a state of radical alterity, neither the idea itself nor its representation in the novel is to suggest the passivity of a non-human nature, or an anthropocentric need for representation and knowledge to a human subject. On the contrary, the implied awareness of the material process by which ocean currents circulate human refuse demonstrates a sense of autonomy and agency of the non-human ecosystem, one which is independent of but nevertheless deeply tainted by human activity. It is in light of this contradiction between an alterity that defies representation and a persisting sense of commitment and moral responsibility that Paul finds himself trapped and frustrated. It is at this juncture that the burgeoning environmental ethic of the novel is most apparent. Paul's inability to apprehend the symbiotic real and his incapacity to directly affect change, whether it is in dealing with nuclear radiation more abstractly or navigating the immediate political bureaucracy to oppose the construction of the PBMR, gives the narrative voice its characteristic sense of

ennui. He finds that his earlier vocabulary of liberal politics, scientific and conservationist jargon, and the prevailing critical responses to development projects through a materialist critique of the nexus of foreign capital, state power and neoliberal ideology, are ill-equipped to grapple with the moral questions of his own radioactive contamination as well as ecological catastrophe at such a vast scale. The indeterminacy of his moral frames of reference reflects a subtle point in transition between different modes of thinking about human ecological impact.

This development in Paul's ethical thought is most evident just before he leaves his quarantine: as Paul and Thapelo meet once again in the garden in his last week there, Paul notes that the way the two of them feel absorbed in their work in the gardens of the suburban quarter

> informs their understanding of the world and their place as agents within it, from the perspective that everyone, like it or not, admit it or not, acts upon the world in some way. Spray a weed-killer on this lawn and the Hoopoe delicately thrusting the tailor's needle of its beak, after insects in the grass, imbibes the poison (*Get a Life* 83).

Paul's understanding of his place within and the impact of his actions on the ecosystem is rooted in his lawn, making his experience in the garden especially formative in his ethical thought. He is himself aware of this, as he describes himself as 'a conservationist […] one of those new missionaries here not to save the souls but to save the earth' whose 'heresy is born of the garden' (*Get a Life* 94), and he further regards his immersion within it as being 'a microcosm of the macrocosm's marvel' (*Get a Life* 95).

In his reading of the novel, Byron Caminero-Santangelo draws attention to deep-seated contradictions in Paul's understanding of his work as an environmentalist, as on one hand, he develops a sense of his own place within nature and, on the other hand, he further experiences a sense of alienation from his professional identity (123). Although Paul's embodiment of nuclear radiation presents a sense of a dual internality of his self with nature, he is nevertheless confronted by the limits of discursive knowledge of nature itself when he reflects on the vast scale of the Okavango Delta, as he realises that he had thought of the ecosystem 'too abstractly, himself limited

by professionalism itself, too little of the grandeur and delicacy, cosmic and infinitesimal complexity of an ecosystem complete as this' (*Get a Life* 90). Furthermore, he becomes sceptical of the professional and scientific jargon that mediates his knowledge of nature, which he derides as a 'computerspeak label' (*Get a Life* 91). By calling into question the certitudes of ecological knowledge through such contradictions in Paul's thinking, Caminero-Santangelo argues, the novel 'embraces underlying principles of ecology' regarding the preservation of identity and life while further emphasising the '*necessary* restrictions placed on the study of ecology by the forms of political organisation and ideology that shape it' (129, italics in original). Further to Caminero-Santangelo's reading of the novel, I argue that Paul's immersion into the ecosystem through his embodied radioactivity in his garden — one which, as Graham notes, is unmediated by the neoliberal jargon of ecology — affirms the underlying principles of ecology by presenting an altered understanding of the human self as one that is embedded within its environment. This shift is not just an epistemological one, with regard to the limitations of ecological knowledge, but a phenomenological one concerning the way in which the human self, the non-human nature, and their relationship are constituted. It is through the transformation of nuclear radiation into an embodied technic through Paul's own becoming radioactive that the novel presents the human self and the non-human nature as mutually constituted in a relation of dual internality, resisting the Cartesian separation of the human self from the non-human nature that underpins its exploitation within colonial extractivism.

Paul's understanding of his place within the ecosystem and his shared vulnerability to catastrophe finds resonance with a wider conceptual shift in environmental thought about the form of relations between the human self and non-human nature. For Donna Haraway, the understanding of anthropogenic ecological change is caught between different conceptual paradigms such as the anthropocene, capitaloscene, plantationocene and, a term of her own devising, the chthulucene. Haraway's critique of the tension between the anthropocene and capitalocene in particular, and her strategic

favouring of the chthulucene as a result, are indicative of a shift in political alignments resonant with Paul's. For Haraway, the anthropocene and capitalocene 'lend themselves too readily to cynicism, defeatism, and self-certain and self-fulfilling predictions, like the "game over, too late" discourse […] in which both technotheolocratic geoengineering fixes and wallowing in despair seem to coinfect any possible common imagination' (56). In contrast, the chthulucene requires a certain degree of what Haraway terms 'response-ability' — a pun on the notion of moral responsibility that places emphasis on the capacity to respond to and make kin with the non-human — which requires that human subjects attend to the fact that their lives 'depend directly upon the ongoing integrity of these holobiomes [of the more-than-human world] for their own [i.e. human] ongoing living and dying as well' (56). This attention to the greater-than-human means, for Haraway, a sensitivity to live and die *with* the non-human through intricate and unusual forms of kinship. Paul's sense of ennui represents the overwhelming dismay and defeatism inherent in the purely-materialist critique of environmental catastrophe as characteristic of the capitalocene. This gives rise to a mode of ethical awareness in which he is more sensitive to the complexity of his entanglement within the non-human environment. This is not to suggest that the novel prefigures Haraway's mode of thinking or that it is a depiction of this kind of tension between conceptual paradigms: Haraway's writing comes from a historical moment where these ideas find much clearer articulation and are in more common parlance. Rather, there is a strong resonance between Paul's ennui at the incapacity of his previous political and ethical modes of thought — one which is specific to a particular historical moment of post-apartheid South Africa — and what Haraway later identifies as a dangerous tendency in purely-materialist critiques of capital. Paul's ethical position, and the novel's expression of his uncertainty, represent these ethical positions as they are still in a tentative, gestational stage, as these ideas have not been as fully formed as they were by the time of Haraway's writing. Nevertheless, despite this ennui, and despite the indeterminacy and vagueness of his ethical positions, Paul strives to maintain an ethical

obligation to the wider ecosystem, being aware and regretful of the risk he poses and the harm he causes within these ecosystems even though he does not yet know what he can do to resist this harm. His burgeoning consciousness seems to suggest a sense of 'response-ability' towards his wider entanglement within the more-than-human world. This sensitivity towards the agency of non-human activity like ocean currents, as well as the awareness of the reciprocal nature of his relationship with the greater-than-human ecosystem, characterise an emerging sense of mutuality and attention with the greater-than-human ecosystem which an otherwise-exclusive focus on the material conditions of race, class or transnational geopolitics would omit.

While there is an extent to which Paul's comparing himself to Koeberg and Chernobyl is a naïve simplification resulting from his privileged historical position, it nevertheless also represents this shift in Paul's sense of response-ability towards the greater-than-human ecosystem. Paul's awareness of the impact his actions are having on the environment, of causing nuclear contamination in an ecosystem that encompasses the sea, shores and the oceanic currents that circulate refuse, reflects a realisation of what Moore describes as the 'dual internality' of both the human-within-nature and nature-within-human, as human activity and the non-human world have a mutually-constitutive relationship in which one's actions has a direct and indelible impact on the other. Paul's identifying his radioactive state with the ecological catastrophe brought about by nuclear power projects in society reflects a burgeoning sense of empathy with those lives and worlds that have been irradiated. What makes Paul's awareness of this dual internality especially pronounced is the way in which it is an embodied experience. Crucially, the central mode through which Paul confronts his shared vulnerability and mortality with the non-human world is through being radioactive himself and considering the effect that it can have on is family.

These reflections on the dual internality of his self within his environment through a shared vulnerability gives Paul the impetus to affirm himself as a conservationist. In light of these concerns, Paul sees himself,

with some irony, as a 'one of the new missionaries here […] to save the earth' and finds refuge in his activism that began in the garden (*Get a Life* 94). It is his intimacy with his environment that forms the basis of his ethical response to these fears of extinction, reconfiguring his mode of thinking of the non-human ecosystem and of the slow violence of nuclear contamination as something that is internal to his being rather than something he can separate himself from. This is evident in his changing perspective on what nuclear energy represents: during the course of his environmental activism, nuclear energy was to Paul what Ihde describes as a hermeneutic technic, as it was a device external to him that affected how he made sense of his environment and the conception of risk, contamination and extinction. In contrast, as he became radioactive, nuclear technology became an 'embodied technic', or an artefact that was part of his being. This is salient in the way he uses the possessive pronoun to describe himself as '*his own* Koeberg experimental nuclear reactor' and '*his* Chernobyl' (*Get a Life* 60): nuclear contamination of the environment is not just something that happens externally to him, within nature, but it is something that becomes part of human life, as even remote individuals find themselves affected by it. His confrontation with his own mortality as the result of the cancer as well as the incident where his parents' home was broken into affirms his vulnerability, a vulnerability which in turn opens him up to empathise with the vulnerability of his larger ecosystem. It is precisely because this experience is embodied — articulated through his own irradiated state as he becomes a metaphorical nuclear reactor — that enables him to have an empathetic response to the moral problem of radiation poisoning, even though the issue itself is a hyperobject that defies his imagination. The prevailing Cartesian view of the relationship between human society and non-human nature is one of dualism: capitalism extracts value from or exploits resources in nature and humanity is separated from it. In Plumwood's critique of how the capitalist exploitation of nature is contiguous with a logic of colonialism, she argues that this logic is based on the hyperseparation of the human/white self and the non-human/black other that can be traced back to the dualism created by

the European Enlightenment, one which is consolidated by the denial of coevalness between the self and the other and a subsuming of the other into an inert background of human exploitation (see Plumwood 54-9). This interdependence between the human and non-human through an embodied experience of response-ability rejects the Cartesian binaries that Plumwood identifies as constitutive to settler colonialism. This shared vulnerability presents what Graham describes as 'an ethical awareness of the relation between endogenous environments and human-created nature' (198).

What is most revealing about Paul's ecological awareness is that it is deeply rooted in its moment in history and its particular place within South African politics. The sense of drift and frustration that Paul experiences at the inadequacy of the earlier modes of engagement is further exacerbated by the persistence of colonial-era hierarchies and racial injustices in post-apartheid society. The contemporary politics of South African society and Paul's social position within it frame his ethical and political ideas. While it is true that Paul's position as an observer of historical events and his freedom to sequester himself and reflect upon these issues in the comfort of his parents home are luxuries afforded to him by virtue of his position of racial and class privilege, his understanding of the ecological and ethical issues that shape his life does imply an emerging awareness of the wider colonial politics of nuclear technology. Paul Bannerman embodies what Stephen Clingman terms the 'split historical position' of opposing apartheid while also benefitting from the privileges of race and class that it brings (218). It is this split position, one which Clingman associates particularly with Gordimer's own position in South African society, is what augments the internal tensions and contradictions in Paul's narrative. As with his broader ethical notions, it is evident that these are views that are tentative and being worked through, so Paul never addresses these issues directly. Nevertheless, he does mention them in passing in his internal monologue, particularly the notion of the 'threshold of risk to be decreed for people': this alludes to the discourse of 'permissible dose', a notion which was informed by the racial hierarchies of apartheid-era mine ownership (see 'Nuclear Ontologies' 257). In addition,

Paul's quarantine parallels the separation of black and white bodies during apartheid, an analogy that Paul himself is aware of when he sees Thapelo's lack of concern for exposure to radiation as resulting from an exposure to a much graver 'quarantine of segregation' (*Get a Life* 61). When Thapelo hugs Paul in the garden, and subsequently continues to meet and drink with him, their proximity symbolically resists both the racial segregation of black and white bodies and the segregation of an infected body. It is especially revealing that Paul sees this hug as symbolic of a 'freedom fought for together amongst black men' from during the freedom struggle (*Get a Life* 60). Contrary to Vital's claim that Paul lacks imaginative interest in the lives of black people, his experience of exclusion and vulnerability form the basis of solidarity with black freedom fighters like Thapelo in the context of a shared struggle against neo-colonial extractivism, even if his ability to fully understand their position within anticolonial struggle is lacking within the framework of his historical consciousness.

This emphasise of the reconfiguration of the human self through the embodied experience of the mutually constitutive nature of the human and non-human marks a distinctly phenomenological turn in the basis for Gordimer's ecological ethics. This phenomenological turn is a development of and a departure from what critics have identified as Gordimer's 'spiritual turn'. Recalling my previous chapter, Coetzee and Dimitriu, amongst others, read Gordimer's novel *The Pickup* as an example of a 'spiritual turn' in her writing. For Coetzee, this marks a change in Gordimer's style where she moves from an objective truth of radical politics to a more private sense of spirituality as a transcendental basis for ethics in her writing. Dimitriu further elaborates that this spiritual turn is part of a wider movement in postcolonial thought towards a critically reflective phase marked by attention to the affective and of affirmative utopianism. However, *Get a Life* demonstrates complex and contradictory developments of these ideas in ways that complicate these notions of the spiritual turn. To begin with, Dimitriu's emphasis on affirmative utopianism is disrupted by the persistent threat of extinction as well as the ongoing process of slow violence that result from

nuclear contamination. While the novel does convey affirmative aspirations of the future — represented by Paul's child as well as the girl his mother adopts — this future is never unproblematically utopian as the novel exposes the precarities and vulnerabilities of the ecosystem as well as the persistent threats to it. Nevertheless, in line with Coetzee's argument, there is a search in *Get a Life* for a new transcendental basis for ethics. But rather than being driven by an abstract spirituality, it is clear from the pointed ecological concerns that Gordimer address that the shared vulnerability of the human within the non-human ecology forms this transcendental basis. This manifests, then, in what is a phenomenological turn in Gordimer's style, as Gordimer's fiction draws close attention to the way in which the white self is constructed and subsequently reconstituted when faced with the ways in which it is permeated by the wider ecosystem.

The phenomenological turn of Gordimer's style, with its close attention to the perspectival nature of one's understanding of and engagement with moral questions of social injustice and environmental decay, allows her late works to attend to what Ihde identifies as the phenomenological dimension of neo-imperialism and the radical changes in an individual's mode of encounter with an other that are caused by the altered contexts of social values under a capitalist world-system. The kinds of political and ethical questions with which Gordimer engages in her post-apartheid works are of a different order from her earlier works' emphasis on racial injustice and anticolonial liberation. Issues of environmentalism and nuclear technology, as in *Get a Life*, bring about a profound change in one's phenomenological understanding of non-human nature and one's ethical commitments to it. The formal changes in Gordimer's novel reflect this re-evaluation of fundamental ethical categories. However, its conclusions are tentative and fraught. These realignments are not without their frustrations and tensions, and attending to these internal contradictions within the perspective of the white protagonist is an overwhelming mood of ennui. This ennui characterises the second salient feature of Gordimer's late style. The form of Gordimer's novels moreover draw attention to the epistemic frictions within the protagonists' perspectives,

and gesture towards these realignments as a mode of achieving an epistemic equilibrium. Furthermore, this phenomenological turn in Gordimer's style is underscored by an ecological turn in her ethics. The dominant focus moves from that of political questions such as the apartheid regime to consider more abstract and diffuse conflicts such as the slow violence of nuclear catastrophe or the dispersed nature of multinational capital and colonial extractivism. Although this ecological focus does not develop further in Gordimer's last novel, *No Time Like the Present*, there is nevertheless an abiding sense of the phenomenological turn that continues further into Gordimer's late style.

Conclusion: Gordimer's Phenomenological Turn

Not only is nuclear energy in South Africa an industry that is entangled within its colonial past, but it also foregrounds the hierarchical exploitation of non-human nature by human extractivism. *Get a Life* is set against this background as it engages with not just the political dimensions of nuclear projects and the activism against it, but also the impact in the changed phenomenological understanding of the self and its proximity to radiation and extinction. As Vital notes, the novel's critique of nuclear power is driven by a tension between, on one hand, the recreational sense of environmentalism that motivates the white middle-class elites and, on the other hand, the scale of ecological harm and the need to oppose this kind of environmental excess. Nuclear energy is an industry which, in South Africa particularly, still represents many of the hierarchies and injustices of the colonial past, having been central to the economy of the apartheid government. The previous modes of political engagement, particularly a strictly-material liberation struggle concerned with immediate structures of racial and class inequality, prove inadequate in apprehending the scale and reach of a form of slow violence that is dispersed over the massive geographical and temporal scales of nuclear fallout. As a result, the politics of nuclear energy requires a realignment of notions of political commitment as well as a phenomenology of the non-human, such that a human subject can meaningfully engage with

the impact of human activity on a non-human lifeworld. The style of the novel further reflects the psychic tension and sensory confusion of this experience of the nuclear uncanny, and conveys the way in which the human self is fundamentally changed by the encounter with nuclear contamination. The style extends Masco's understanding of the nuclear uncanny beyond the realm of military nuclear technology, driven by singular events of nuclear attack, to further consider how the threat of disaster in civilian nuclear energy also characterises a form of incipient and persistent threat.

However, the vast temporal and spatial scale of nuclear contamination renders the previous discourses of environmentalism and political opposition to nuclear energy based on a critique of capital inadequate. Nuclear contamination is a form of slow violence that is imperceptible, unspectacular, and this defies representation and comprehension. *Get a Life* presents a tentative imagining of an alternative mode of engagement that can apprehend such levels of complexity and entanglement with the non-human world. This is most salient in the way in which the impact of nuclear contamination is embodied through Paul's experience. This embodied representation of radiation makes what would otherwise be a hyperobject that resists representation understandable within the scale of human life. There is an acute awareness of the scope of these entanglements with the non-human world, particularly in Paul's knowledge of the vast geographical, if not temporal, scale of the reach of his radiation. What this novel affirms, then, is a mutually constitutive relationship between the human and the non-human, and a shared sense of vulnerability and mortality between the two. This shared vulnerability goes beyond the radical alterity of the non-human, allowing for a shared sense of empathy with the greater-than-human lifeworld. But what makes Gordimer's style especially provocative is the way in which it stages the phenomenological challenge of being able to empathise with and apprehend that which resists representation within the human imaginary. This is staged formally through the way in which the novel focalises closely through Paul Bannerman's internal monologue and gestures towards the ways in which the human subjectivity cannot grasp either the

hyperobject of nuclear contamination or the wider symbiotic real of its relationship with the non-human ecosystem. This resistance to representation is what is present within the narrative through absences, and Gordimer's style draws attention to these absences, negative presences and spectral effects of these others, whether they are the black people who are excluded from Paul's perspective or the non-human world which defies representation. The failure to apprehend these others, manifested in their intrusions into Paul's consciousness and the ruptures in the narrative that they evoke, frustrate the narrative and evoke a sense of ennui, a feeling which is augmented by Paul's physical condition of illness and listlessness. Ennui is an especially important stylistic device in Gordimer's late works as it attends to these indications of absences, lapses and ruptures. It is at these points of rupture, however, that the novel imagines alternative modes of engagement.

If, as Ihde suggests, the colonial transfer of technology instigates a change in the constitutive values of a society, then these values are further a site at which such colonial transfers can be contested. In Paul's case, the advent of nuclear technology manifested in a drastic change in the understanding of the human self and the presence of the nuclear uncanny as embodied within the human self. However, his ethical re-alignments to affirm the mutuality of the human and non-human, and his sensitivity to their shared vulnerability, marks a further change in the constitutive values of his life world that motivate his actions as a conservationist. The phenomenological reconfiguration of the self as part of a dual internality between the human and non-human ecosystem serves to reject the hyperseparation of the human and the non-human which was the basis of colonial-settler ideology, and further motivates a form of anticolonial action that seeks to resist continued extractivism. This is made possible by Paul's embodied sense of response-ability towards the environment as a result of his having been radioactive himself.

Gordimer's late style thus marks a phenomenological turn that foregrounds the re-configuration of the self and imagines the self's

relationship with a wider ecosystem as the transcendental basis of its ethics. Crucial to this late style, however, is that none of these imagined ethical responses are definitive, and are instead tentative and irresolute, still provisional notions which the characters are working through. It is this tentativeness that makes this novel especially significant in its immediate political and historical moment within the post-apartheid dispensation, suggesting that its ethic is nascent and not yet fully realised. What remains an open question, however, is the extent to which these metafictional modes of engagement of absence as an indication of alterity are adequate forms of ethical commitment, and the extent to which a white writer who benefited from the very racial and class privileges she opposes can represent and engage with this changed landscape in good faith, without either retreating into self-indulgence or committing an epistemic violence in attempting to speak on behalf of those who have been marginalised. Such questions are taken further in Gordimer's final novel, *No Time Like the Present*, which develops the mood of ennui and melancholy, and interrogates the risk of white self-pity and defeatism in the wake of ongoing political struggle. Although the novel shifts from the ethical focus of *Get a Life* to political questions that are more familiar to Gordimer's oeuvre, there is nevertheless a continuation of the emphasis on interdependence between the self and the other as the basis of a public ethics.

5. The Dualities of Grief and Intimacy in *No Time Like the Present*

In the previous chapter, I examined Gordimer's use of melancholy in *Get a Life* and its representation of ennui in the context of a phenomenological turn in her style as well as an ecological turn in her ethics. Gordimer's late novels, starting with *The House Gun*, interrogate the place of the white subject within the political milieu of post-apartheid South Africa, exposing the continuation of past prejudices as well as their having benefited from those injustices. Both *The House Gun* and *The Pickup* foreground the limitations of the white subject position in knowing the experience and position of the outsider. However, over the course of *The Pickup* and *Get a Life*, Gordimer posits new and different ways of engagement for the white self to know the experience of the outsider. In *The Pickup*, Julie Summers undergoes a transformation of her self through the experience of exile, and has a spiritual affinity for the ecology of the desert. In *Get a Life*, Paul Bannerman finds his sense of self reconstituted to appreciate its mutual vulnerability and embeddedness within the greater-than-human ecosystem. The core thrust of Gordimer's ethics in her late novels is a transformation of the self and its political place within this new society alongside an ethical realignment that is based on interdependence and mutuality. While *Get a Life* is concerned with such a phenomenological and ethical transformation in the context of human relations with a wider ecology, Gordimer's final novel, *No Time Like the Present*, situates this ethic of interdependence back within the realm of public politics. *No Time Like the Present* is Gordimer's longest post-apartheid novel, and it chronicles a long period of transition from the apartheid regime to the new, independent South Africa. The novel seems to take stock of the end of the struggle, and how the ideals that were fought for still have not been achieved. In that regard, the expansive scale of the novel as well as its retrospective nature in taking stock of the struggle, seems to characterise what Michael Millgate and Helen Vendler both describe as either

a ‘testamentary act’ or a ‘last look’ at her previous works (see Millgate; Vendler). In that regard, not only does the novel bear many of the stylistic and phenomenological hallmarks of Gordimer’s late style, but within the context of Gordimer’s late oeuvre it further serves as a capstone that synthesises the ways in which her late style has developed.

No Time Like the Present further develops the melancholy of Gordimer’s style and explores it in the context of grieving the betrayal of the ideals of the freedom struggle. It is through the experience of grief and the expression of mourning that the characters in *No Time Like the Present* become aware of their own vulnerability and interdependence with those around them. The novel explores these relationships through an idiom of doubleness. This doubleness is manifested in the splitting of the narrative voice between the two protagonists, Steven Reed and his wife Jabulile Gumede. The novel pays close attention to forms of doubleness and duality as a way of emphasising the boundaries between the self and the other, as well as the porosity of these boundaries that gives way to the interdependence between them. It is through this doubleness that the novel explores how Steven and Jabulile’s selves are reconstituted within the context of their relationship as well as the domestic spaces that they inhabit within a biracial home. Moreover, it is through the doubleness of intimacy that the novel presents a burgeoning sense of care that forms the basis of an ethical transformation of the self in response to the vulnerabilities and interdependencies of grief. In this chapter, I will examine these particular inflections of doubleness and duality in Gordimer’s late style, and consider, firstly, how the implicit tensions of irony convey a sense of grief. This grief is expressed through an affect of cynical resignation, listless melancholy, and anger. The expression of this grief and the mourning of these losses forms the basis of affective bonds of intimacy and care between characters. I will subsequently explore the ways in which these affective bonds form the basis of an interpersonal ethic of care, one which is attuned to the vulnerabilities and interdependencies of the self with other people. This relationship of care plays out on the terrain of domestic spaces, and it is the doubleness of the

biracial domestic space in particular that serves to subvert the ideological construction of the home as the basis for settler-colonial ideology. I will then extend this framework of a feminist care ethics to consider the ways in which care forms the basis not just of intimate relationships, but becomes the basis of moral repair within public politics. To these ends, then, dualities in Gordimer's style in the novel embodies the contradictions of independent South Africa, and it is through the reconciliation of such dualities that the novel presents an ethical realignment of the self as well as one's sense of belonging within one's political context.

Irony as an Expression of Grief

In her epigram to the novel, Gordimer quotes Keorapetse Kgositsile's poem 'Wounded Dreams' to note that 'cynicism would be a reckless luxury'. I have discussed in a previous chapter Gordimer's engagement with the politics of cynicism in *The House Gun*. In revisiting this, I shall consider Gordimer's use of cynicism and irony in *No Time Like the Present* as an expression of grief at a particular historical moment, one where the radical ideals of freedom that were fought for in the struggle against apartheid were betrayed by continuing corruption and injustice in a new dispensation. Although the protagonists of the novel find themselves in a new future, one they were part of building through continued struggle, there nevertheless are several injustices that inhere in this new society, injustices which are the continuation of previous colonial hierarchies of race and class. For these characters, then, there is a sense that this struggle has not yet been won. As these former freedom fighters begin readjusting to suburban life in this new dispensation, there is a gradual dissipating of the radical energies of the past that galvanised the anti-apartheid struggle. In light of the continuing injustices of the past, *No Time Like the Present* presents these diminishing radical energies through an idiom of grief and mourning. The novel expresses this grief by embodying the dualisms and contradictions of these political ideals of a New Age and the injustices that still persist. Its style, moreover, presents an affective response to this grief characterised by a cynical irony whereby

characters feel frustrated and disappointed with the regime, a pervasive melancholy that makes them feel alienated from any meaningful course of political action, and an unrestrained anger that is directed at those around them. By focalising through these principal characters, and by foregrounding the contradictions between their perspectives, Gordimer's style uses irony to express a sense of grief and resignation at the new political dispensation.

No Time Like the Present is deeply invested in the ironies and contradictions immanent in the political landscape of independent South Africa. These ironies are evident in the gaps between the lofty register of the political ideals that freedom stood for and the dismal reality wherein they were not truly achieved. The specific historical moment that the novel chronicles is one of radical transition, whose momentous nature is clear in the opening of the second chapter of the novel:

> It seemed an Age was over. Surely nothing less than a New Age when the law is not promulgated on pigment, anyone may live and move and work anywhere in a country commonly theirs. Something with the conventional title 'Constitution' flung this open wide. Only a grandiose vocabulary can contain the meaning for the millions who had none recognised of the rights that go by the word freedom. (*No Time Like the Present* 4)

Steven Reed and Jabulile Gumede are a mixed-race couple who would have been considered illegal under the Mixed Marriages Act during apartheid. As a result, the mundane, domestic aspects of their personal lives were both the site of racial oppression as well as its resistance and subversion. The new 'Age' in which they now live, one of racial equality, is characterised as a moment of radical change, one in which even the most mundane activities that they engage in as a married couple throughout the subsequent paragraph — going to the cinema, eating in restaurants, staying in hotels — are invested with great political meaning. Similarly, this political change brought to Jabulile a number of civic rights that she had previously been denied like having a career, being able to rent property in certain neighbourhoods, and being able to give birth to her daughter in a hospital that would not have admitted her in the previous regime. But both Steven and Jabulile, having been part of the freedom struggle, are aware of the human

cost of this change, as they acknowledge that this new society was 'not a miracle. It was made by human struggle' (*No Time Like the Present* 4).

While the narrative voice seems to celebrate a New Age of racial equality and a new Constitution, it nevertheless evinces an ironic attitude towards these big political changes by undercutting this with a mocking register. The Constitution is an embodiment of the victories of the freedom struggle, having 'flung wide open' the injustices and racial segregation of the past. It is the basis of a new nation and enshrining in law the rights that millions of black people did not previously have. But the tone in which this narrative describes the Constitution seems dismissive of its political significance, referring to it glibly as 'something with the conventional title' which was ultimately a piece of 'grandiose vocabulary'. To call this Constitution 'grandiose' is to dismiss its role as the legal foundational of a democracy as affectation and rhetoric, implying that the scale of political change and the grandeur of this achievement are exaggerated. This tension between the passage's depiction of this revolutionary, new political age and its implication that this change is exaggerated characterises the ironic register of the narrative voice. For Linda Hutcheon, the semantics of irony is 'relational, inclusive and differential' (*Irony's Edge* 58). It is 'relational' in that its meaning depends not just on the relation between the two or more individual meanings of the terms, but also on the discursive community interpreting the speech act and ascribing intent, ironic or otherwise, to the utterance. But in terms of the meaning between the terms themselves, Hutcheon argues for a mode of interpretation that is 'inclusive': rather than the relation between the said and the unsaid meanings being disjunctive — in which what is said is negated and replaced by what is unsaid — an ironic meaning is the 'dynamic and rapid oscillation between' the said and the unsaid (*Irony's Edge* 61). The inclusive relation between the said and unsaid meanings creates a third, ironic, meaning which is simultaneously both and neither of the said and unsaid. Hutcheon characterises the semantics of irony in dialectical terms. This ironic meaning is given its critical edge through its 'differential' nature (*Irony's Edge* 64). Thus the way in which the narrative

characterises the 'Constitution' seems to suggest that it is a political and legal instrument that guarantees the hard-fought rights and equality of people in the New Age while simultaneously implying that such ideals have not been achieved universally or equally for all.

In contrast to the ideals of the New Age that the opening of the second chapter celebrates, it becomes clear throughout the course of the novel that the social milieu is one that is still rife with many of the contradictions of the previous age, and the new Constitution has been inadequate in heralding the social and political changes that the Freedom Struggle demanded. This is most apparent on the university campus where Steven works. The narrative voice, focalising through Steven, notes that 'the place of higher learning is open. The undenominational bible […] the Constitution, decrees this. But like most decrees it doesn't, can't ensure what's called "capacity" to benefit by them' (*No Time Like the Present* 64). The narrative's ironic treatment of the Constitution resonates with that from earlier, and this time is grounded in a specific problem, that of the rift between the broad ideals on which a new society is founded and the practical work of building this and ameliorating the injustices and inequalities of the past. Steven is confronted by the fact that black students who were disadvantaged by centuries of discrimination and unequal treatment under successive forms of colonial rule face systemic forms of exclusion from education that superficial policies of equality and scholarships will not fix. These inequalities of attainment in education are an aspect of persisting hierarchies of apartheid in this new society. In light of this, Steven dismisses the university's policy of providing 'bridging classes' to these students as a 'band-aid', and as he acknowledges the widespread 'chasm of poor schooling the students claw up from' he notes that 'The Struggle's not over' (*No Time Like the Present* 64).

In an effort to continue this Struggle, Steven attempts to assemble a delegation to the Department of Education to demand increased funding for programmes to better integrate disadvantaged students. However, all of his attempts were thwarted by institutional indifference and resistance to change. Steven notes that none of the senior professors of his university turned up to

any of the meetings he organised, and increasingly he was being dismissed as 'An upstart from "The Struggle" who doesn't know he's under a different command now' (*No Time Like the Present* 74). What is presented as a former freedom fighter's difficulty to adjust to civilian life is however indicative of a deep-seated political contradiction within the social institutions in the new dispensation. The complacency and self-interest of those in charge of these institutions, such as the old professors who comprise the board of the University Convocation, have ossified into deep-seated resistance to political action, culminating in the dismissal of any form of sustained struggle. The failures of the university in providing for its students eventually culminates in student protests on campus, resulting in the university getting vandalised. When Steven finally succeeds in organising such a delegation, the Department responds with vague jargon, committing itself 'intently to changes that will bring about development necessary for the times' (*No Time Like the Present* 91). This, it transpires, has little bearing on the material conditions of education, and instead merely presents the superficial re-naming of elements of education using the same kind of grandiose buzzwords as before: 'the children are now officially designated as and are to be referred to as "Learners". The demeaning "pupil" belongs to the discriminatory past. And what resolves in final examinations from the years of being a Learner is now called "Outcomes". Results no longer exist' (*No Time Like the Present* 92). It is through the rapid oscillation between these two meanings of the term — the superficial bureaucratic jargon that is said to represent a new future of education and the dismal material reality that remains unsaid — that the novel depicts the third, ironic, meaning of the conflict that is the continued struggle to redress the past inequalities. But this conflict is dispersed within the bureaucracy of institutions and policymaking, and thus obscured. In a similar manner, the novel's earlier irony regarding the grandiose vocabulary of the Constitution demonstrates the way in which the legal and legislative change was an obscuring of the material reality of the struggle and its aftermath. The rhetorical use of irony to allude to such a conflict embodies the oblique and obscured nature of institutional exclusion.

But this ironic register remains grounded in the material inequalities of educational provision and attainment through the disjunctive tension that emphasises the hollowness of the jargon. Thus, the novel's treatment of the political and social significance of the beginning of a New Age is fraught with the ironies of these changes not having come to pass.

These ironic dualities are further manifested in the novel's treatment of the political leaders within the new regime. In addition to the Government's failure to address racial and economic inequalities in education, the novel further critiques the ANC government under Jacob Zuma as deeply corrupt and kleptocratic. It foregrounds two major scandals involving Jacob Zuma during his tenure as Thabo Mbeki's Deputy President. The first concerns an arms deal worth several billions that was organised by Shabir Shaik, who was the Director of Procurements in the Defence Force. Shaik's company was the partner of a French arms firm that Zuma solicited bribes from, a company that subsequently won the contract. The scandal led to the subsequent dismissal of Zuma from his position in government. Nevertheless, what is especially revealing is the way in which the novel presents this scandal through the ironic tensions between the euphemisms with which the events are reported in the press and the various character's critical interpretation of what the jargon means. The novel presents this news story through the political conversations Steven and his friends Peter and Jake have in their suburban gatherings. Peter's friends were all formerly his comrades in the struggle. The characters note that there were financial irregularities found in 'industrial offsets', regarding which Steven 'knows what everybody in the outside world takes for granted': that it refers to 'bribes for government ministers' and 'government officials who decide tender awards' (*No Time Like the Present* 126). By framing this scandal through the perspective of these characters whose critical insights expose the contradictions within such euphemisms and the facts that they conceal, the novel presents it in a critical light that interrogates the language in which it is presented in the press.

The second scandal, which came out during the trial of the first, was an allegation made by the daughter of one of Zuma's comrades that Zuma had raped her. This scandal was exacerbated by the fact that Zuma was the head of the Moral Regeneration Movement, a campaign to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, and his response to knowing that the woman was HIV positive was that he had not used a condom, but instead 'took a shower afterwards' as a 'post-coital cautionary prevention of infection' (*No Time Like the Present* 133). During his trial, Zuma defends himself with the claim that 'it was traditionally incumbent in Zulu culture for a Zulu man to satisfy a woman who showed she was sexually aroused' (*No Time Like the Present* 134). Zuma is subsequently found not guilty in his rape trial. But the political environment that resulted from these allegations was one which was drastically polarised along the lines of various factions within the ANC. In the events following the trial, Zuma supporters had gathered en masse with photographs of the woman who accused him with threatening slogans of 'Burn the bitch!' (*No Time Like the Present* 134). Likewise, Jabulile's father, a fellow amaZulu, sees these events as 'all a plot to keep Zuma from becoming president' (*No Time Like the Present* 142). For Jabulile's father, Zuma represents tribal kin and a former ally from local government, and a venerated freedom fighter from during the struggle. However, like with its treatment of Shaik's connections within the arms trade, the novel inflects these accounts of Zuma's support through ironic narrative frames: the events of Zuma's trial and their demonstrations by his supporters in the immediate aftermath are narrated from Jabulile's perspective, and her father's belief in the conspiracy theories is presented in a conversation she has with Steven when she laments her frustration with her father's politics.

Through this kind of self-reflexive framing of its own narrative, the novel interrogates the ways in which prominent political figures like Shaik, Zuma, and other members of the Government appeal to their part within the freedom struggle as a claim to legitimacy in holding political office. As this scandal involving Shaik's company unfolds, Jake asks Steven and his other friends 'Who the hell is Chippy [Shabir] Shaik, anyway? […] No—but as

cadre in *Umkhonto*. What *was* he' (*No Time Like the Present* 125-6, italics in original). Similarly, Jacob Zuma's reputation is bolstered by his role as the 'Chief of Intelligence in the bush' for which he served ten years on Robben Island (*No Time Like the Present* 131). His public persona as a political leader is one that rests heavily on his amaZulu identity, something which he appeals to during his trial as a defence against the rape charges but also forms the basis of the support he gets from Jabulile's father. Recalling Hutcheon's characterisation of irony, the novel rapidly oscillates between these two political meanings, the surface-level political rhetoric of buzz-words or political slogans that appeal to their past role in the freedom struggle on one hand and, on the other hand, the underlying critique of corruption and injustice that persist in the new regime. By framing these political figures' actions through these characters' voices, and subsequently contradicting them through the accounts of these scandals, the novel renders these figures' reputation as dubious and based on lies. Both Zuma and Shaik's past as freedom fighters, and subsequently Zuma's heading of the Moral Regeneration Movement, are rendered ironic by their hypocritical actions in office.

The style in which the novel represents the state of the new South Africa is thus deeply ironic, manifesting not just in the duality of the style but also in the characters' own perception of their political reality. In the face of such persisting injustices and ironies, the main characters find themselves increasingly alienated from their political milieu. Thus, the characters' experience of these ironies is met with a feeling of grief and resignation. The style of *No Time Like the Present* uses the dualities and contradictions between the perspectives of the main characters as well as the rifts between the political ideals of the struggle and the reality that obtained in order to express the emotional reactions to the political environment. Thus, the style of the novel embodies the affective response to these persisting ironies, manifested through cynicism, melancholy, and anger. The cynicism is especially salient in Steven's self-pitying, ironic resignation that creates a melancholy sense of detachment from political action. This melancholy is

most salient in Steven's reaction to the student demonstrations that take place on his university campus. Steven had, until then, been reeling with his difficulty in assembling a delegation to the Department of Education, and he was contemplating drastic solutions. However, his plans were forestalled as

> before he could take up the conviction he has of his own strength of character an event on campus, of the campus, not of the faculty room, made a kick in the butt too late. The students commanded possession of the university with an authority that made their previous protests mere tantrums (*No Time Like the Present* 74).

The sudden radicalism that the students show catches Steven off-guard, and he finds himself in a position where he is yet unable to inhabit his convictions. As evident by the symbolism of the buildings, the university campus becomes a battleground on which the continuing legacies of colonial injustice are contested: the students gathered outside the 'colonial-classical façade of the Great Hall where graduation ceremonies take place' (*No Time Like the Present* 74). Not only is the architecture described as a colonial landmark, but the ceremonial purpose that the building serves is one that reaffirms the performative authority of the University Convocation. What follows is an account of the demonstration that focalises through Steven, and in doing so reveals that his perspective on the event is not straightforwardly sympathetic to its aims, but somewhat removed from it and, at times, even condescending and judgemental, as Steven is literally looking down upon the protests from the faculty room.

Just as with the narrative voice's treatment of watershed political events, there is a similar sense of mocking irony in the way the protests are described. The speeches made by the protestors are described as 'empty mouthings' that 'didn't matter at all' as the slogans were 'on placards, T-shirts, home-contrived banners even if some were ancillary […] to the overall purpose' (*No Time Like the Present* 75). Steven's attitude of writing off some of the concerns by various constituents within the protest as 'ancillary' — especially regarding issues around 'gay bashing criminals' diminishes the value of solidarity across different student and activist groups in the organisation of this protest. Moreover, the language with which he describes

the protest is derisory, characterising it as 'self-destruction that had seen people of their ghettos burn down the scrapheap of living begrudged to them' (*No Time Like the Present* 75), which he subsequently admonishes by claiming 'there's no gain in ransacking a university' (*No Time Like the Present* 77). Steven's description of the campus is one of violence and squalor, as 'trash is vomited from bins, lecterns are crushed like matchboxes, files rifled from the admission offices are danced around as they burn, on the sports fields the goalpost altars of the games the rioters themselves worship, are dragged up, tossed over' (*No Time Like the Present* 75). During this riot, Steven does not acknowledge the demands the students are making, nor does he reflect on the state of education that they are protesting, a political agenda which he himself was sympathetic of until the start of this passage. Such a characterisation of the protest as violent and vandalising, compounded by the neglect of its deeper political demands, betrays a latent conservatism in Steven's political leanings: his inability to inhabit his political convictions is the result of his having adjusted to life within the institution and the subsequent tempering of his radicalism, as he goes from a chemist who used to make explosives for the freedom struggle to someone preserving the status quo despite his liberal posturing.

But Steven's reflections on these riots are further tinged by a pervasive sense of melancholy and alienation. This is evident in the tentativeness with which Steven enters the fold: he does not align himself politically with the students, but instead finds himself drawn to it through an unspoken desire, as he hopes to claim 'some sort of recognition' with the students as a member of the academic faculty (*No Time Like the Present* 75). The vagueness of his political desire of 'some sort of recognition' rather than a sense of solidarity in common struggle is compounded by the tone in which the narrative presents his experience of the riot. The narrative shifts suddenly from Steven looking down at the protests from the faculty room to him jostling through the crowds trying to find his place within it. The jarring effect of this abrupt transition creates a sense of dislocation, one which is compounded by the increasing sense of a dissolution of the self within the crowd: Steven realises that 'in the

mass, you have no direction of your own' as 'he is carried along in a surge towards the main gates of the campus' (*No Time Like the Present* 76). The language with which this mass body is characterised is not one of unity or solidarity in the coming together of people in large numbers, but of personal alienation. Steven finds himself struggling 'against powerful currents' (*No Time Like the Present* 76) in the crowd. He, moreover, feels like he has lost his bearing, both in terms of his movement within the crowd and his own political alignment. He expresses doubt about whether or not he truly belongs in the crowd, despite his past work of using his scientific expertise to make explosives during the freedom struggle. This culminates in him asking himself 'Who the hell does he think he is' (*No Time Like the Present* 74), which is the very refrain used by his colleagues to dismiss him previously as 'an upstart from the Struggle'. This marks a self-awareness by which Steven realises the reactionary nature of his own position and the alienating disjunction between his past as a radical and his present liberal politics.

Steven's melancholy is further emphasised by the vagueness with which the narrative voice presents the details of the events. Protestors are not identified as people, rather they are presented as an undifferentiated 'swell of bodies' (*No Time Like the Present* 79) and a 'mythological entity of many limbs' (*No Time Like the Present* 80). Moreover, their actions are collectivised, as 'some black men and women [are] literally throwing their yelling weight about' (*No Time Like the Present* 76) or the students haphazardly throwing debris to retaliate to being hit by tear gas by the police. This creates the effect of the crowd's actions being disembodied, and the lack of clear or explicit detail in the commotion suggests that Steven seems to derealise in his encounter with the riot. This derealising, along with his sense of alienation and doubt in his own convictions, characterises his melancholy at having lost his political moorings in the face of such a demonstration. In response to this melancholy, Steven flees from the crowd, escaping into the faculty car park to carry on with his work, something which he nevertheless feels guilty about shortly afterwards as he feels the need to confess his actions to Jabulile. This withdrawal from the fray foreshadows

Steven's subsequent contemplation of emigrating to Australia in response to the state of the country following Zuma's election as President.

It is worth noting that Steven's melancholy, as an emotional reaction to his political milieu, is highly specific to his social and political position. While Steven seems ready to give up as his efforts keep getting frustrated, Jabulile is nevertheless critical of his defeatism. After Steven relates to her his frustration with organising a delegation to the Department of Education, the narrative focalises through Jabulile's interior monologue where she admonishes him by asking 'why does he give up' (*No Time Like the Present* 69). Jabulile notes a bigger history not just of the Struggle, but of resilience in the face of adversity, as she asks

> How could we have got to vote in '94 if we hadn't followed the banned Freedom Charter. How'd I have got to school ahead of my brother and then away from 'Bantu Education' to Swaziland, if my Baba had accepted that at Home females come second, for a black daughter education comes last. Hopeless. Why doesn't he just carry on. […] You only decide it's hopeless if you're used to having everything. If you've been white (*No Time Like the Present* 69).

For Jabulile such cynical irony, hopelessness and melancholy, all of which motivate a sense of distancing or detachment from political events, are characteristic of the privileged social and political position that white liberals occupy. By focalising through Jabulile, the novel is critical of the cynical and melancholic idiom that Steven presents. The stakes of the freedom struggle have been vastly different for the two protagonists between whom the novel splits its narrative voice. By alternating between their perspectives, the novel presents a perspective that is a synthesis of both of their individual voices, as representing the family unit. Nevertheless, it is clear from Jabulile's explicit account of the freedom struggle and the political barriers that black people had to overcome on matters like the vote, education and gender inequality, that there are deep contradictions between these constituent voices. The duality of the novel's use of two principal focalisers further emphasises the ironies in Steven's position, that while on one hand he presents himself as disheartened and betrayed, on the other hand the stakes of the freedom

struggle were far greater for characters like Jabulile. Yet it is Jabulile who still maintains a sense of commitment and action to struggle, while Steven indulges in his self-pity. Through this use of irony, the novel calls into question the political position of the white subject and its sense of belonging and commitment within this new society. It is through the reconciliation of this duality, as I will argue in the next section, that the novel presents a realignment of interpersonal ethics along relationships of care.

Moreover, when confronted with the contradictions of their political situation, the characters respond to such ironies with anger. Steven and his friends argue about politics at their frequent parties in the suburbs where they express their anger at how slow or inconsequential the change in regime has been to the everyday lives of people living under apartheid. Steven's tone is particularly agitated as he excoriates the prospect of Mbeki's presidency in a conversation with his brother Alan, as he notes:

> Mbeki's keeping up, so far. Except for what's unbelievable—that he takes it on himself *not* to believe AIDS is a virus. He appoints a Minister of Health who prescribes African potatoes and—what is it—garlic and olive oil as a cure. Mandela had to deal with the morning-after when we all woke up from the party, FREE-DOM FREE-DOM FREE-DOM. […] Not it's a different story … Government has to pick up the spade and tackle where we bulldozed apartheid. How long are whites going to dominate the economy? Who out of the handful of blacks who managed to gain knowledge, know-how that qualifies, will really be able to get into that powerful old boys' cartel? Who's going to change the hierarchy of the mine bosses—from the top. (*No Time Like the Present* 22-3, italics in original)

This anger, for Steven, serves a political purpose: the imagery here is one which foregrounds excavation and manual labour with its allusion to spades and bulldozing. There is a latent violence in this passage of the past regime being razed to the ground, a violence which Steven channels in his tirade. This feeling of anger that motivates his call for a more radical change in the organisation of the mining industry from top-down contrasts sharply with his apathetic, melancholic detachment from the anger of student protestors during the riots on his university campus. Nevertheless, as Steven channels the violence of bulldozing apartheid, it is clear that his syntax shows a similar

sense of agitation through the interjections he makes to his own speech, such as the disbelieving aside 'what is it'. Furthermore, the derisive use of the chant 'FREE-DOM' — rendered here with both syllables separated in a mocking imitation — emphasises his disdain for what he sees as Mbeki and other former freedom fighters' complacency with and figurative hangover from the freedom struggle when building a new nation. Not only is Steven being critical of the lack of meaningful change to the material hierarchies of race and class within the black mines, but the anaphoric nature of the successive rhetorical questions gives his speech a sense of a crescendo, one which comes to a head immediately afterwards in response to Jabulile for suggesting that black workers are becoming shift bosses and mine captains. Steven snaps at Jabulile that these mine captains work 'Underground! Kilometres down!' and that he is 'not looking at promotion at shaft levels, there'll be no real change until there are black chairmen of boards of directors. Black owners!' (*No Time Like the Present* 23).

Steven's anger is one which all other characters seem to share, as Jabulile notes that 'Steven's pissed off. We're all pissed off with what's becoming of this country' (*No Time Like the Present* 221). Similar to Steven, his friend Jake is furious at what he feels is the betrayal of the ideals of the freedom struggle by politicians who were, in the previous Age, freedom fighters themselves. In response to this, Jake 'brings knuckles down on the table, crushing something' and asks 'How's it possible to believe these same comrade leaders have forgotten what they were, what they fought through—in exchange for freedom as bribes, freedom as money' (*No Time Like the Present* 132). It is a similar sense of frustration and anger with the new leadership in South Africa that prompts Steven into a vociferous outburst at Jabulile when she confronts him about his plans to emigrate to Australia:

> Was this what it was for, what we did—The struggle. Comrades—reborn clones of apartheid bosses. Our 'renaissance'. Arms corruption, what's the nice procedure in your courts, the never-never—the Methodist dump just one of the black cesspots of people nobody wants, nobody knows what to do with—'Rights' too highfalutin' to apply to refugees—shacks where our own people supposed now to have walls and a roof, still living in shit, I could go on and on as we do, the comrades. I'm in the compound of

> transformation at a university, schools don't have qualified teachers—or toilets—children come to learn without food in their stomachs. (*No Time Like the Present* 223)

If cynicism is a response to the latent contradictions between the ideals of the Constitution and the persisting injustices in the new society, and melancholy is the response to political alienation within the new milieu, then this anger that Steven and Jake express is a response to a pointed feeling of betrayal of the struggle by former freedom fighters. Steven's syntax is once again disrupted, characterising his invective as a raw, emotional outburst. He speaks through a series of syntactic fragments. Meanwhile, his tone is crude and contemptuous, as he describes the places where black people live as 'cesspots' and shacks where they are 'still living in shit'. The dualities in Gordimer's style by presenting such contradictory representations of the political dispensation, on the one hand emphasising — albeit sarcastically — the watershed historical transition and, on the other hand, presenting the characters' cynicism, melancholy, and frustration in response embody the deep-seated reaction to the contradictory nature of the post-apartheid moment.

It is further revealing that Steven's angry outburst echoes many of the cynical ironies that characterised the novel's description of the New Age in the opening of the second chapter: the word 'renaissance' — here presented with a lower-case 'r' and in scare quotes — is a sarcastic use of the term to repudiate any such lofty fantasy of the nation's rebirth. Likewise, his scorn at the very concept of 'Rights' as being too 'highfalutin' echoes the earlier sense of the 'Constitution' being an element of a grandiose vocabulary. Steven's irony does not just call into question the political meaning of these elevated ideals, but it expresses his attitude towards the political project of building a nation on these foundations in the first place. His anger and contempt suggest that the very political project is a lost cause because of how empty these ideals are in real political terms. In that regard, this passage shows his cynicism and irony develop into a deep-seated anger and frustration at his political environment.

Just as Steven and Jake are angry at the betrayal of the ideals of the freedom struggle by the freedom fighters who were once its leaders, Jabulile expresses similar anger at the betrayal she feels by those whom she had previously thought were her comrades or kin. Her anger at her white comrades is most apparent. When Steven loses hope in his attempt at organising his delegation to the Department of Education, Jabulile, in her internal monologue, chastises him for giving up so easily, noting with some scorn that it would only occur to whites to give up this easily. The way in which she expresses this, however, is more measured than the vociferous invective that the men resort to. Rather, she internalises whatever expression of anger she has. Nevertheless, it is clear from the overt, confrontational nature of her response and the bluntness with which she calls into question Steven's racial privilege — that 'you only decide it's hopeless if you're used to having everything. If you've been white' (*No Time Like the Present* 69) — that her voice evinces the derision and scorn that express her anger.

Jabulile is further angered by her feeling of betrayal upon discovering Steven's secret plans of emigrating. When Jabulile tries to swat a moth on a bookshelf, she accidentally uncovers Steven's collection of brochures and leaflets about moving to Australia. Her sense of betrayal is palpable in the way she describes this, in her interior monologue, as 'hidden away as if they were love letters from some woman' (*No Time Like the Present* 220). It is ironic that although Steven had in fact had an affair with a colleague when he travelled to London for a conference, it is these brochures about Australia that seem to be the greater infidelity. Jabulile's response to this is of immediate disbelief, following which she confronts Jake, and subsequently Steven himself about these plans. Moreover, her manner is described as that of a 'lawyer woman produc[ing] the evidence to him' (*No Time Like the Present* 221) with a sense that something 'momentous is about to be raised, *to happen*' (*No Time Like the Present* 221-2, italics in original). In this confrontation, she remains sympathetic to Steven's anger at their political situation, as she notes wonders 'What does she want him to say. Steve's pissed off. We're all pissed off with what's becoming of this country' (*No Time*

Like the Present 221). This moment is shortly before Jacob Zuma's election as president. In some respects, she shares in Steven's anger. However, her sense of betrayal motivates her to confront Steven. Although her language does not have the direct, fragmented expression of anger that Steven or Jake's voices conveyed, there is nevertheless a sense of cold, forensic hostility in the confrontation between them as Jabulile assumes her professional, legal persona. This, coupled with her sense of betrayal and indignation, characterises what is a subtle and understated idiom of expressing anger. Jabulile's expressions of anger — either turned inward or indirectly towards something else — contrasts sharply with the way in which the men in the novel frequently express their anger through violent gesture, such as Jake crushing something with his fist, or verbal outbursts, such as Steven's many angry tirades. This gendered expression of emotion, as I will argue later, forms the basis of what the novel presents as an ethic of care through the creation of affective bonds.

The novel's use of irony to convey a sense of cynical resignation within the new society, a melancholy alienation from political action, and an anger at the frustration of desires for change characterise a profound sense of grief at the loss and dissipation of the political struggle the failure at making good on the promises of independence. The dualism of the novel's narrative voice conveys the contradictory nature of grief and mourning: while on the one hand grief can overwhelm and alienate, acts of mourning on the other hand can motivate the re-constitution of the self into ethical relationships of interdependence that acknowledges the mutual vulnerability of the self and the other. In their study of grief, mourning and violence in *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler considers grief as the basis for the 'reimagining [of] the possibility of community on the basis of vulnerability and loss' (20). Grief, they note, 'furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order, and it does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility' (22). In particular, our capacity to grieve demonstrates

> the thrall in which our relations with others hold us, in ways that we cannot always recount or explain, in ways that often interrupt the

> self-conscious account of ourselves we might try to provide, in ways that challenge the very notion of ourselves as autonomous and in control (Butler 23).

If grief is an emotional experience or expression that foregrounds our vulnerability to others within a complex web of social interactions, then the act of mourning is a process through which we make sense of grief and the relations that it reveals. According to Butler,

> one mourns when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly for ever. Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say *submitting* to transformation) the full result of which one cannot know in advance (21, italics in original).

Butler presents an insightful distinction between grief and mourning: grief is a feeling that reveals the contingency of the self and the dispossession of the self within social relations because of a shared vulnerability to pain. Mourning, then, is an act: it is the transformation of the self in response to such an experience of pain and vulnerability. Their emphasis on the sense of political community in grief and the submitting to the transformation through mourning suggest a decentring of the self, and the formation of what Sara Ahmed and Sasha Roseneil describe as 'affective bonds' (see Ahmed 184; Roseneil 69) between individuals. Thus the expression of grief itself becomes a political act, one which characterises the act of mourning in Gordimer's late works as what Cindy Milstein describes in the title of the eponymous collection as a form of 'rebellious mourning': while the whole gamut of loss and sorrows — ranging from colonialism to incarceration, climate catastrophe to poverty, rape to chronic illness, one's culture to one's dignity — is varied and disparate in their nature, magnitude and the way in which they play out on different bodies in differentially brutal ways, what is common to our response to all of them is that 'there is something uniquely connective in the sharing of personal tribulations' (7). Milstein's analysis follows the hierarchies of biopower that Butler interrogates in their question 'what counts as a livable life and a grievable death?', particularly emphasising the kinds of lives that people in power would not consider grievable, and the kinds of griefs that these people would render

invisible (Milstein 7). In light of this, the act of mourning of a loss becomes a political gesture, one which builds upon the commonality of the experience of loss which, despite the diversity or enormity of one's loss, forms the basis for solidarity and organisation.

This affective charge of mourning and the diffuse sense of loss in Gordimer's late style become particularly significant when considering the ways in which her late works engage with their political environment. As Benji Hart notes, one's ability to transcend the pain and suffering from violence reflects one's ability to ignore the intricacies of oppression and violence rather than scrutinise them closely (16-7). Hart critiques the complacency of white, middle-class elites in their understanding of the specific forms of oppression faced by people of colour in society, and argues that the public expression of grief and rage at instances of police brutality and the murder of innocent black people, for example, disrupts that narrative of complacency and the tendency to avoid the conflicts within one's social and political environment. Gordimer's melancholic style in *No Time Like the Present* expresses grief and cynicism in order to similarly disrupt the complacency of liberal elites. By foregrounding the ironies of Steven's cynicism when compared to Jabulile's abiding sense of commitment and action, the novel draws attention to and critiques the complacency of the white subject as it is confronted by the vulnerability of the non-white characters. The social and political milieu that *No Time Like the Present* represents is one of acute grief in the time of immense political conflict. Through their expression of irony, melancholy and anger, Steven, Jabulile and their allies grieve the failure of the political apparatus of the new nation to deliver the promised changes, their own personal sense of alienation and loss in the changed political landscape, and the betrayal of the ideals of the freedom struggle by the people who had previously fought in it.

This disruption caused by grief, however, also creates a space to explore how shared vulnerability to suffering can become the basis for reconciliation and a renewal of ethical commitment. The novel's style, through its use of irony and its bifurcated narrative voice focalising through

two characters with different outlooks on their society, attempts to reconcile the dismayed and self-pitying reaction to the political dispensation alongside an abiding commitment to making meaningful political change. Gordimer's late style, then, presents a juxtaposition of deeply contradictory emotional reactions to represent the reconciliation of similarly contradictory political impulses. These political impulses, Steven Reed's cynical resignation and Jabulile Gumede's belief in the struggle, are likewise constituted by the racial and class positions that the characters occupy. However, these dualities are not just aspects of the novel's affective register, but further constitute its wider sense of ethical commitment through a sense of intimacy. In the next section, I will examine the ways in which the novel further explores how characters respond to cynicism, anger and melancholy with care and intimacy. By reconciling the ironic tensions between Steven's cynicism and Jabulile's sincerity, the novel re-orients ethical commitment around affective bonds of mutuality, care and solidarity. Thus the expression of grief and the work of mourning in intimate spaces becomes the basis of forming affective bonds between characters. These bonds subsequently present the basis for a mutual ethic of care.

Intimacy as an Ethics of Care

In the previous section, I examined the way in which the style of Gordimer's novel foregrounds the contradictions of the political transition to independent South Africa trough the dualities immanent in its use of irony. In this section, I will evaluate these dualities in the context of intimate relationships, and how the intimacy between characters forms the basis of care and between them. If the dualities of irony embody contradictions between the fraught political impulses of resignation and struggle, then the dualities of intimacy represent these characters who embody these impulses reconciling through an understanding of vulnerability in the face of grief. This presents a moment of realignment in the interpersonal ethics into a relationship of care. This realignment is most salient in the domestic relationships in Gordimer's late fiction, and in particular her depiction of

marriage as a microcosm of the healing of social and political division. In *No Time Like the Present*, Steven and Jabulile's married life is one which, from the very outset, is invested with political and ethical significance from its illegality under apartheid-era segregation and indecency laws. The milestones of their married life, such as their first marital home, their moving to a new house, the birth of their children, and milestones in their careers serve to mirror the political development of independent South Africa.

But what is especially significant about this depiction of marriage is not its allegorical relationship with South African politics, but is itself the shifting terrain of their care for each other in both public and private ethics. The accommodation and mourning of grief in *No Time Like the Present* are presented mainly within domestic spaces. When Steven and Jabulile first move out of their flat in Glengrove Place, their first marital home where they lived illicitly during apartheid, the home itself becomes an object of loss and grief. Jabulile feels overwhelmed at the thought of leaving a place that had such great meaning, both personally to their lives and politically as a place where a mixed-race couple could live during apartheid. It represented a space of radical opposition to the past regime where the freedom struggle was manifested in the everyday lives of the inhabitants. Just as Steven and Jabulile were leaving the flat for the last time, however, she confesses 'I don't want to go' in a manner that 'resounded in his silence as if she had shouted' (*No Time Like the Present* 14). The way Jabulile expresses her feeling of loss puzzles Steven, as she 'didn't cry but took a few rough broken breaths' (*No Time Like the Present* 15). In being a loss that is grieved, it becomes associated with the shared vulnerability of both characters to grief and loss. Moreover, it is the particular orientation of caring relationships within these households that allows for it to become a space where Steven and Jabu care for each other. Domestic spaces in *No Time Like the Presence* and family relationships within them thus come to represent environments of care and restitution, becoming spaces where the protagonists can perform the collective act of mourning.

In her study on the impulse to repair and restore, Elizabeth Spelman regards the household as a 'multipurpose repair site' that offers a 'microcosm of the variety of repair activities humans engage in' (*Repair* 34). Spelman draws in particular from Arlie Hochschild's examination of the kinds of relational work done in family life, in particular what she describes as the main relational skill of 'the ability to forge, deepen, and repair family relationships' (210). For Spelman, tending to relationships is only one aspect of the emotional work of repair in family life, and she further adds the kinds of care work and repair that are necessary for day-to-day functioning, like the rest and repair of the human body, as well as the consolation of hurt feelings and relationships. Taken together, what Spelman proposes is that the home is a space for the rest and repair of the self in response to the injuries or traumas of one's life. The same dynamic is evident in Steven's relationship with Jabulile in *No Time Like the Present*, where their marital intimacy is characterised as a form of care and healing: Steven's interior monologue imagines finding sanctuary in 'that only refuge from what's happening elsewhere, another university—in bed again away from all intrusions' (*No Time Like the Present* 239), albeit this space is nevertheless fraught with his and Jabulile's disagreement over moving to Australia that is embodied in the 'tension to be felt in her' (*No Time Like the Present* 240). Steven imagines that to 'make love to her, would be the tender healing, most respectful acceptance of what she couldn't release herself of without cursing him in the wordless sense of what his skin represents' (*No Time Like the Present* 240).

This emphasis of intimacy as tender healing adds a further dimension to the way in which their relationship subverts the old hierarchies of race: their marriage represents not just a symbolic breaking of apartheid-era indecency laws, but the very act of intimate attention and care is one that allows for an unspoken dialogue that gives Jabulile the space to 'release herself of' the injustices of race that persist between them. The narrative describes this as a wordless, embodied conversation, where she 'draws away as if she were going to speak' and likewise their intimacy was a gesture of 'respectful acceptance' of her history and identity (*No Time Like the Present* 240). But

this healing and repair are facilitated through the emotional work of care, work which, according to Hochschild, entails 'noticing, acknowledging, and empathizing with the feelings of family members, patching up quarrels, and soothing hurt feelings' (210). The representation of intimacy between Steven and Jabulile contrasts sharply with the treatment of desire in *The Pickup*: while Julie Summers primarily saw Abdu as an object of her desire and her Orientalist gaze, Steven and Jabulile's intimacy is manifested in a more complex relationship that is troubled by the often conflicting contours of either partner's desires and agency. Hochschild further notes that this kind of emotional work in family life is particularly gendered, and in the cases of heterosexual marriages is usually performed by the woman who, as a wife and mother, manages the care of her husband and children. This dynamic between Steven and Jabulile is one-sided: Steven realises that he is unable to fully understand and empathise with Jabulile, and Jabulile rebuffs his advances of intimacy. In contrast, as he reflects on this moment when Jabulile pulls away from him later on, he further realises the particular kind of caring work that Jabulile does, both in her family life and professionally. He acknowledges, for example, that her resilience in the face of adversity is because 'now she has the resources she's earned, she's able after that initial retreat into victim along with the cleaning women, to use all these advantages combined within her' (*No Time Like the Present* 252), that Jabulile uses all of the advantages of her education, training and experience to care for vulnerable people. This aspect of their relationship, however, is embodied in Jabulile's gender and racial identity. Steven's reflection of Jabulile's toughness is expressed very much in corporeal terms, describing her as

> not tough, this gentle woman of his, soft flesh on her hips and more backside now, in confirmation of black women's femininity. No other ideal adopted; not conditioned like his mother, dieting to stay young behind successive stages. No, not tough, strong in the way he never could be of course. A matter of another conditioning, her people, her Baba, all the generations behind them have survived those centuries of everything determined to demean and destroy them (*No Time Like the Present* 252).

That she is not 'tough' but 'gentle' suggests a caring disposition, but one which is regarded here as a strength of character that someone like Steven, who is preoccupied with his own interests or ideas of justice rather than doing the work of caring, could never be. While this is expressed in terms of Steven's perception of Jabulile's sexuality, this kind of caring disposition is further inflected by Jabulile's racial identity. The contrast Steven sketches between his mother, who is conditioned by an ideal of a beauty standard that appeals to white women, and Jabulile, who is instead conditioned by the shared history of resistance with 'her people, her Baba, all the generations behind them'.

It is this gendering of the repair work in family life that, for Spelman, provides the basis of a feminist ethics of care. Carol Gilligan laid the foundation of care ethics in an empirical study of the comparative moral psychology of boys and girls, from which she extrapolated a wider difference in ethical dispositions between men and women. For Gilligan, men tend to base their moral judgements on a phenomenological separation of the self and other, whereas 'women replace the bias of men towards separation with a representation of the interdependence of self and other, both in love and in work' (170). She bases moral understanding on the psychological development of individuals, noting that

> the experiences of inequality and interconnection […] give rise to the ethics of justice and care, the ideals of human relationship—the vision that self and other will be treated as of equal worth, that despite differences in power, things will be fair; the vision that everyone will be responded to and included, that no one will be left alone or hurt. (62-3)

Ethicists who have followed on from Gilligan have noted two particular ethical orientations in what she describes. As Spelman observes, one of these is an 'ethics of justice' that is based on ways of acting from principle' in the interest of 'consistency and impartiality' (*Repair* 45). Such ethics of justice in traditional liberal political and ethical theory have been premised on the independence of the self as the norm for personhood, as established, for instance, in the political theory of Thomas Hobbes (see Whitney 555-6). In response to this ethics of justice, feminist scholars have rejected this claim

for the independence of the self and instead presented an 'ethics of care' that considers relationships of dependency, corporeal vulnerability and the need for care as integral to human life (see Whitney 560). Such an ethics, Spelman adds, emphasises 'the embeddedness and specificity of moral agents in relationships with others and embraces a kind of care for people that is unapologetically partial and apparently unconcerned with consistency across cases' (*Repair* 45).

It is important to be cautious of the language that Gilligan uses, in particular her emphasis on the moral impulses of men and women, as it presents a number of conceptual traps in development of an ethics of care. Joan Tronto identifies three problems that Gilligan's ethics of care faces: the questionable validity of the psychological paradigm within which her empirical work operates, the account of care that draws from traditional, sexist notions of gender roles, and the essentialism that situates such caring moral sensibilities as innate to women in particular (*Moral Boundaries* 84-5). These problems are present not just in Gilligan's writing, but in a number of other scholars or sources on feminist ethics who refer to it as 'women's' or 'feminine' ethics, or similarly gendered language. It is important to nuance our understanding of care ethics, as Tronto does, to avoid such conceptual traps. She observes that 'all philosophical theories grow out of the perspectives of the individual philosophers who are engaged in thinking' ('Care as a Basis for Radical Political Judgments' 144) and that the gendering of care theory is a 'function of the structure of social values and moral boundaries that inform our current ways of life' (*Moral Boundaries* 64). To these ends, the assumptions of the separation of the self and other and the subordination of the other by the self that are central to the ethics of justice to which Gilligan responds are the product of the race and gendered positions of the white men who developed these moral philosophies. Likewise, that the project of care ethics is advanced by feminist philosophers redresses the exclusion of women's voices within moral philosophy. Furthermore, the different ethical dispositions of boys and girls that Gilligan bases her argument on is not one which is innate to the individual subjects,

but is conditioned and shaped by the expectations of sexist gender roles that shape how we live today. Indeed, Tronto stresses the need to expand the analysis of care beyond gender and consider ways in which all humans are engaged in care activities ('Care as a Basis for Radical Political Judgments' 142).

The risks of essentialism and stereotyping are similarly present in the way in which Steven characterises Jabulile's caring disposition as an aspect of her sexuality. However, rather than consider such a feminist care ethics as something that is innately 'feminine', I would interpret this as an ethical theory that rejects the gendered assumptions of the separation of the self and other that are characteristic of liberal political philosophy. Such an ethics of care is feminine insofar as it rejects the assumptions that were previously considered as part of the normative white, male self. And I would similarly nuance my reading of Steven and Jabulile's ethical dispositions. While Steven does situate Jabulile's caring disposition on her embodying a 'black women's femininity', there is nevertheless an awareness that avoids essentialism by making explicit reference to how Jabulile, and in contrast his mother, have been conditioned differently by virtue of their race. It is specifically Jabulile's experience of a history of struggle as a black woman, rather than her blackness or womanhood, that 'conditions' her to use her advantages and education to care for and protect vulnerable people.

Moreover, the ethics of care as interpreted in western thought, Tronto acknowledges, is indebted to African and African American philosophy and theology (*Moral Boundaries* 83). Sandra Harding likewise notes the parallels between African moral thought and western notions of feminist ethics of care, that an '"African World View" is suspiciously similar to what the feminist literature has identified as a distinctly feminine world view. What they label as European or Euro-centric shares significant similarities with what we have been identified as masculine or androcentric' (299).[10] To illustrate this,

[10] Harding and other scholars are nevertheless wary of making homogenising dichotomies about conceptual categories like 'African'/'western' or 'masculine'/'feminine' thought, lest the use of such contrast schemas reiterate colonial and patriarchal epistemic hierarchies. See

Patricia Hill Collins emphasises the roots of care ethics in 'a tradition of African humanism' in which 'each individual is thought to be a unique expression of a common spirit, power, or energy inherent in all life' (263). Harding likewise cites the example of the work of black economist Vernon Dixon as an example of a specific phenomenological orientation in which 'there is no gap between the self and the phenomenal world,' where 'one is simply an extension of the other' (see Harding 301). The extent to which African modes of thought inform Gordimer's philosophical disposition is a question that invites further investigation, and there is precedent in her previous work like *The Conservationist* where she draws heavily on amaZulu mythology and folklore. My reading of the ethics of care in *No Time Like the Present* will not extend as far as to answer these questions as their complexity and breadth would be beyond the scope of what I can accommodate, but I will nevertheless note the specific, overlapping depiction of the racial and gendered dimensions of this ethics of care in married life as performed by Jabulile.

Central to an ethics of care is, according to Spelman, an

> intimacy of the knowledge of moral agent as problem solver: intimate both in the sense of having or seeking specific and nuanced and contextualized knowledge of the people involved in the situations they are in, and in the sense of acknowledging or creating a close relationship to the people involved (*Repair* 47).

It is this doubleness of intimacy that is embodied in the family life that is depicted in Gordimer's fiction. Such an intimacy, deriving from this wider ethics of care, presents a shift in Gordimer's late style from an ethics of justice — concerned directly with the politics of settler-colonialism and race relations in South Africa — to a more nuanced ethics of care. *The Pickup* marks this transition from an ethics of justice to an ethics of care, which is embodied through the life chosen by its protagonist Julie Summers: rather

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Harding, Sandra. 'The Curious Coincidence of Feminine and African Moralities: Challenges for Feminist Theory.' *Women and Moral Theory*, edited by Eva Feder Kittay and Diana T. Meyers, Rowman and Littlefield, 1987, pp. 296-315, Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses.' *Feminist Review*, vol. 30, 1988, pp. 61-88, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1395054, Tronto, Joan C. *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care.* Routledge, 1993.

than engage with concerns of justice, such as immigration rights or her positionality as a white settler in a North African state, she instead develops intimate relationships of care with her in-laws as well as with the wider ecosystem around her. *No Time Like the Present*, as I will argue later, marks the culmination of this transition and presents this ethics of care not just as a private matter of interpersonal relationships, but as a radical political basis for moral repair in the public sphere.

The novel, moreover, is especially attuned to the ways in which the home itself comes to embody caring relationships. Jabulile and Steven's relationship is played out in the domestic spaces that they inhabit. This is especially prominent in the way Jabulile discovers Steven's plans to emigrate to Australia. Her reaction to this is twofold: at first, the shock, disbelief and inability to find explanations led her to 'the door of the Andersons' to talk to their friends to try and understand what was happening (*No Time Like the Present* 220). Jabulile's speaking to her neighbours represents the way in which Steven's secrecy marked a breach of trust within their marital home, leading her to instead seek answers outside of it. Subsequently, when she confronts Steven about his plans, the narrative voice emphasises the way in which the domestic space of the house itself becomes polarised by their conflict. This confrontation is presented as a departure from their daily routine, after the children are persuaded to go to bed, and upon the broaching of the subject

> the room where the momentous is about to be raised, *to happen*, comes out of ignored familiarity, to a new focus that will be stored when paper cuttings have been eaten by silverfish moth and the change of existence they propose has either been effected—or never existed (*No Time Like the Present* 221-2).

Not only does the room come into focus within the narrative voice, but because the narrative voice focalises through Jabulile it further reflects her acute sensitivity to their domestic space. While this was a space that was previously taken for granted through an 'ignored familiarity', the addressing of this conflict between them changes the meaning that this space holds for them and makes it emerge more prominently in their awareness.

The impact of Steven and Jabulile's conflict over the question of emigrating is immediately conceptualised through the changes to the domestic spaces that it will bring about. Jabulile immediately recounts what these domestic spaces represent for her:

> The much-lived-in room of the house in the Suburb occupied since Glengrove Place, the chairs bought to provide missing comfort, the pictures painted by artists in the common kind of experience, one in Brazil, the others in Africa, shared with the house occupants, the school blazer left lying, face-down books, cracked tray with sunglasses among coffee cups and half-empty bottle of wine, a ballpoint pen with Mickey Mouse head: witness. She looked round in inventory as she took from somewhere in the cotton dashiki she liked to exchange for her court clothes, some of the cuttings AUSTRALIA. (*No Time Like the Present* 222)

This visual inventory characterises the way in which Jabulile's dilemma about emigrating plays out in the space of the household. Not only does the space convey political meaning and sentimental value, as the suburb and Glengrove Place represent the different regimes they lived under when they were at those respective houses, but her careful attention to individual household objects further conveys her sense of investment in the place as a space for comfort and care. This juxtaposition of the newspaper cuttings of advertisements to emigrate alongside her effects suggests that for Jabulile, the prospect of emigration plays out as a transformation of the domestic space. Moreover, she further is aware that this change in the meaning of space, as well as the change in their sense of belonging, will persist long after the conflict that instigated this.

It is especially significant that this tension in Steven and Jabulile's relationship plays out through the space of the home. The household itself comes to serve a specific moral and ideological purpose. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Rita Barnard notes that in Gordimer's post-apartheid works 'the house is represented […] as the quintessential colonial space; the most intimate of South Africa's many ideological enclosures' (48). She notes that apartheid was from its inception mobilised around racially segregated housing, as the Prime Minister D.F. Malan's election campaign in 1948 hinged on protecting white homes from the fear of *svart gevaar* or 'black

danger', and containing the influx of black people into cities following the Second World War. The house was not just a symbolic space, but it served a very specific political function. Barnard elaborates that Gordimer's houses 'are conceived of as ideological apparatuses […] by which individuals are trained so that they will "know their places" in the social hierarchy, and so that, from these "places," they in turn will help to reproduce its structures' (49). Barnard's study focuses on the representation of houses in Gordimer's semi-autobiographical novels, but the same can be seen in Gordimer's autobiographical essays. In her 1977 address at the University of Cape Town, titled 'What Being a South African Means to Me', Gordimer reflects that

> when you are a child, whatever is around you, in terms of human behaviour as well as physical environment, is the way the world is. Immutable. […] For this child there is a four-roomed house with a red *stoep*, a lawn in front and in the back yard a pepper tree, a room where a black servant lives' (*Telling Times* 276)

Within this illusion of a natural order, she further adds that 'the black does not enter through the white's front door' (*Telling Times* 277). These are truths that Gordimer notes she accepted 'subconsciously, and *innocently* — by which [she] mean[s] the subconscious was storing impressions and experiences that were taken at face value' (*Telling Times* 276, italics in original). Gordimer's emphasis on innocence and her disambiguation of its meaning as the naïve acceptance of ideologies at face value is a revealing play on words: she does not use 'innocent' in the sense of being absolved from guilt, and indeed her later reflection in the essay foregrounds the need for South African whites to undergo a 'second [birth] or rebirth' when they realise the contingency of the supposed truths of the structures of race and prejudice that they had learnt as well as their own complicity within them (*Telling Times* 277). In a previous chapter, I discuss Simon Lewis' examination of the development in Gordimer's sense of herself as a political writer as she goes from an avoidance of her social and political reality to a more intimate engagement with it. There is a similar sense in Gordimer's work of wanting to leave the confines of these domestic spaces, as evident in

her 1963 interview with John Barkham where she describes her desire to 'leave the house of the white race' ('Nadine Gordimer' 9). Thus, for Barnard, it is particularly significant that Gordimer's 'last novel from the apartheid era', which, in Barnard's reckoning, is *My Son's Story*, 'should conclude with the burning down of the family home' (48).

Barnard's study on the sociospatial significance of the house is particularly illuminating with regard to the racial and colonial politics reproduced within these domestic spaces, as well as the significance of their subversion. This is central to many of Gordimer's works throughout her career, and Gordimer's late works that I have considered here are united by a similar focus on marriage and domesticity as the primary sense of place and belonging. In these late works, however, there is a sense in which the house as a place is much more ambivalent: the apartment complex where the Lindgards live in *The House Gun* or the Bannerman's suburban house in *Get a Life* are ideological terrains that reproduce inequalities of race and class. Nevertheless, there subtle ways in which relations within these domestic spaces move away from the established forms of colonial and racial politics. For example, in my previous chapter I argue that Paul Bannerman's immersion within the suburban garden of his childhood home in *Get a Life* provokes an ethical realignment in his relations with the non-human ecosystem. The representation of a biracial house in *No Time Like the Present* marks a further departure from this idea of the white house, transforming the family home from the ideological apparatus of racial segregation to a space wherein these divisions can be reconciled through intimacy and interdependence.

These intimate relationships of care and interdependence are embodied in Jabulile's disposition to care for the people in her life, as she performs a caring role that is circumscribed by gendered expectations. In particular, there is a revealing doubleness within the biracial home: there is a subtle difference between the extent to which Jabulile is part of a white home, and Steven a part of a black home. These differences manifest in the way Jabulile is present for the Reeds' family gatherings, like Stephen's nephew's

barmitzvah, while Steven nevertheless keeps at a distance from the Gumedes. This doubleness in the sense of belonging both Steven and Jabulile have towards the home of their partner further characterises the subtle gendering in the expectations of care and of being present for another in their relationships. These dimensions of Jabulile's relationships are most apparent when she reconciles with the prospect of her immediate family's emigration to Australia. When Steven discusses with Jake and Jabulile the information he gleaned through various seminars about career opportunities in Australia, what follows is an exchange that highlights the complicated and contradictory nature of Jabulile's loyalties. Jake quotes from the immigration leaflets that Jabulile had found in Steven's possession, leaflets which for her represented her husband's betrayal, and he is critical of the scale of exodus of workers to Australia. In doing so, he echoes Jabulile's earlier apprehensions at the thought of doing so, and moreover alludes to Jabulile's 'shock with which she had found Australia calling him' (*No Time Like the Present* 231). However, Jabulile's position on the matter has shifted to accept as a positive that 'there's plenty of mechanics, artisans unemployed, factories laying off, here, if they can be assured of jobs' (*No Time Like the Present* 231). Jake is uncertain of her motivations behind this, and considers one possibility that she is 'showing loyalty to her man' (*No Time Like the Present* 231). Furthermore, Jake draws attention to what is fundamentally a career sacrifice that Jabulile is making in her husband's interest, as he notes that there are no labour shortages of lawyers listed in the opportunities. Whether or not Jabulile is accepting the prospect of emigration out of loyalty to Steven or a pragmatic change in her own position is unclear, and her inner workings behind making this decision are rendered ambiguous through their mediation within the novel through male characters that guess at her motives. What this demonstrates is a twofold gendering Jabulile's decision, that it is firstly one that is characterised by sacrifice and loyalty to her husband, and secondly that is othered and inscrutable by the male characters who attempt to apprehend it. But this loyalty to Steven is one which characterises a relationship that is oriented around caring for him, and making the sacrifices

that that entails. Jabulile's father similarly regards her decision as an instance of 'the orders of her Baba's community, she will live this time as ever on the decision of her man' (*No Time Like the Present* 240).

Likewise, Jabulile's relationship with her father is similarly shaped by the way she cares about what he thinks. It is interesting to note a contrast here between what Tronto describes as the different phases of care (see Tronto *Moral Boundaries* 106), as Jabulile cares 'about' her father — i.e. recognises her father's needs of her and that these needs would require of her actions to meet these needs — and cares 'for' her husband — which is the next step of caring wherein she makes sacrifices to meet his needs. Jabulile tells her father about Steven's plan of emigrating to Australia because she cares about him. There is a marked contrast in the different degrees of regard Steven gives to his family and Jabulile gives to hers, one which is once again characterised in gendered terms. For Steven, his family's opinion of him would be that he is taking 'a post in another country while civil engineers are needed for the future of this one' (*No Time Like the Present* 232): his actions would be seen in the light of an individual migrating out of self-interest, forsaking an assumed duty towards the future of the country he had fought to build. He does not pay any attention to the relationships he has with his family. In contrast, what matters to Jabulile is 'what Baba thinks in every decision for every move she makes in her life, the life he propagated and that is deep in her being as Sindiswa and Gary Elias were embedded in her womb' (*No Time Like the Present* 232). It is in a similar fashion that Jabulile justified her decision to emigrate, in the face of her father's objections to her obedience to her husband, by defending herself 'on the choice made for the children, hers and thereby Baba's lineage, children of Africa, of the Zulu nation' (*No Time Like the Present* 240). The way that her father's opinion mattered to her is specifically embodied through a familial lineage that culminates in maternal kinship. This presents a doubling in the narrative where her identity is circumscribed within gendered roles of being Steven's comrade wife and her Baba's daughter, while at the same time embodying a decentring of ethical frames of reference. Unlike Steven, whose

moral obligations and relationships are based on abstractions of self-interest and duties owed to the country, Jabulile sees her relationships through her embodied kinship whose intuitions are contrary to a masculine ethic that denies such interconnection.

Steven gradually comes to realise this difference between them when she rejects his advances in bed shortly thereafter. Their different ethical frames of reference and the different identities and relationships they embody strains the intimacy between them. He notes that 'a love between […] her Baba and her' is one which 'that other love, woman and mate, has not supplanted', particularly with regard to her sense of identity and belonging (*No Time Like the Present* 238). Steven becomes aware of the grief and loss that was at stake for Jabulile, as he appreciates the complexity and intricacy of the many bonds that she is leaving behind in emigrating. It is his burgeoning sensitivity towards Jabulile's grief, accompanied by his own, that makes him sensitive of the different ethical frames that he and Jabulile use to make sense of their decisions. This is especially salient when considering that Jabu's relationship with her father withstood the fracture of the political difference between them on the question of Jacob Zuma. These two kinds of relationships between Steven and Jabulile and Jabulile and her father come to represent very particular ethical dispositions that are rooted in her racial identity. Steven acknowledges that what is at stake for Jabu is

> the attachment tangle, strength beneath any acquisition of selfhood, of that history called "tradition" (didn't colonials dub as a basket of customs anything other than their own ways dealing with the events of life and death). The attachment, not in the sense of emotion but of a history alive in the present which he cannot claim to share with her and her Baba (*No Time Like the Present* 238-9).

The novel presents, through Steven's reflection on the colonial hierarchy in knowledge production with regard to these 'traditions' of attachment tangles, a self-awareness of a mode of ethical thought that Collins and Harding consider, as discussed earlier, part of a tradition African humanism with a phenomenology of the self and the other that is deeply interconnected. The emphasis on colonial separation between these modes of thought, moreover, emphasise the racialised distinctions between these ethical frames, and one

in which the dispositions of interconnectedness and care are devalued as 'a basket of customs' rather than treated seriously as an ethical worldview. Such a devaluing is, moreover, consistent with what Tronto identifies as a social and political problem of the undermining of care through its constitution through gender, race and class. Tronto notes that 'those who are least well off in society are disproportionately those who do the work of caring', and in colonial contexts in particular 'care has mainly been the work of slaves, servants, and women in Western history' (*Moral Boundaries* 113). The link with an African humanism, moreover, is reiterated through the characterisation of Jabulile's decision to emigrate as a betrayal and a breaking of these bonds, in particular described as a betrayal of 'herself, Ubuntu, her country' (*No Time Like the Present* 240). This link made between Jabulile, her country and the idea of Ubuntu situates her caring disposition within the traditions of African humanism, while, moreover, identifying her with a wider political question of belonging and identity. Thus, the role that Jabulile performs through her disposition to care, not just for Steven but also her family and kin, represents a realignment of ethical thought along the lines of race and class.

But the ethics of care is one which extends beyond just personal relationships to encompass a wider political project as well. Tronto in particular emphasises this overlap between the private morality and the public ethics in her rejection of what she regards a false dichotomy between care and justice. She argues that 'the separation of care and justice grows out of using the old moral boundaries as a starting point for describing moral live' (*Moral Boundaries* 167), that is a moral theory that is still predicated on the supposed independence of the self from the other to the denial of the complex interdependencies between individuals. For her, both of these are vital starting points: that 'justice without a notion of care is incomplete' (*Moral Boundaries* 167) and likewise that 'care needs to be connected to a theory of justice and to be relentlessly democratic in its disposition' (*Moral Boundaries* 171). To summarise her position, the emphasis of an ethic of care is not merely a re-articulation of communitarian ideals or relationships between

rights and responsibilities, but a much wider re-evaluation of our moral boundaries to be attentive to and engaged with the needs and vulnerabilities of those actors who are excluded. Social movements towards justice would be incomplete without the disposition of care, and moreover the provision of care would be unequal unless there exist conditions of justice.

In *No Time Like the Present*, there is a meshing of these notions of justice and care, as expressed in Jabulile's professional work as a paralegal aide. Jabulile describes her work at the Justice Centre as follows:

> I sat for hours with witnesses reading aloud to them, explaining the meaning of the terms, words. Many couldn't read for themselves. They were able to write their own name painfully. I used to think the pen was like a handle they couldn't get a hold on—it was awful, so embarrassing for them and for me, black like them. […] If I'd been white it'd have been natural I know everything they didn't. (*No Time Like the Present* 280)

Jabulile's role was to prepare witnesses for interviews and to teach them courtroom procedure. Her caring disposition is highlighted not just in the way she is empathetic to their pain and suffering, but also the ways in which she provides them with the support they need by reading to them and explaining legal jargon. This passage in particular highlights the nature of inequality in education and literacy that made the legal system inaccessible for poor black people. It is especially significant that Jabulile's career in the novel is not to work formally in the care sector, but to perform what is effectively a caring role within the legal profession. In doing so, the novel depicts care as an integral part of justice rather than circumscribing it within a conventional and depoliticised understanding of care work. In other words, a political philosophy of care is one where it is not just personalised, but also institutionalised. This draws attention to the ways in which the provision of justice, from the perspective of care work, needs to be attentive to and engaged with the needs of individuals. Elsewhere, Tronto makes an example of how theories of justice that do not take care or its assumption about the interdependence of moral actors into account treat individuals as abstract entities and do not adequately represent their voices, autonomy or agency. She uses the example of how 'egalitarian republicanism and slavery were

thought to be consistent earlier in American history by reducing the human status of African-captured slaves' ('Care as a Basis for Radical Political Judgments' 144). Furthermore, these needs that marginalised people like Jabulile's clients have are shaped by the material inequalities of race, class, and access to education in South African society. Jabulile describes the work she does in the justice centre against the wider problem of illiteracy in the country, in response to an article she and Steven read in the news that found that there were 'nine million illiterates out of a population of 48 million' (*No Time Like the Present* 280). As the needs of her clients are shaped by wider social inequalities, this passage further demonstrates that a complete theory of care must address wider problems of justice.

There are two particular dangers to the ethics of care that Tronto considers, stemming from an ethic of care that does not adequately consider a theory of justice, that are relevant to Jabulile's work. For Tronto, two dangers of care ethics are firstly a paternalism by which care-givers infantilise or undermine the agency of those in their care, and secondly the problem of parochialism whereby care-givers care for people in their immediate kin to the neglect of others more remote to them (*Moral Boundaries* 170-1). These tensions are evident in Jabulile's relationships with the people around her, and in her own sense of her racial identity and shared history with the people whom she encounters. As Jabulile is returning from the municipal library, where she has been studying the differences of the legal systems in South Africa and Australia, she has an encounter with beggars on the street that throws into sharp relief her conflict at the prospect of emigrating. She has her annotated study materials open on her passenger seat, which she glances at when stopped at traffic. During this time, however, she is distracted from reading about Australian law by 'a sight, summons' of 'the open mouth' (*No Time Like the Present* 303). The metaphor of the summons characterises the encounter with the beggar as a trial for Jabulile's convictions, and the open mouth is further coloured with imagery of emaciation and poverty, as it is described as 'the gaping down which the first finger of a hand is pointing to the wall of the throat that's where food is taken

in […] a bony articulated forefinger repeatedly stabbing through the empty mouth to the empty passageway' (*No Time Like the Present* 303). The elaborate verbiage of which finger the beggar uses, the specific direction in which it points, and the function of the throat in swallowing evokes a courtroom language, one where every matter of fact is elaborated on with forensic detail. The subsequent reiteration of the emptiness of the mouth and throat makes this beggar's starvation a pressing moral question for Jabulile.

The language with which Jabulile's internal monologue represents this beggar reduces him to an impersonalised, spectral figure of emaciation, as he is described as 'nothing behind jaws that have distorted all features; no face' (*No Time Like the Present* 303). This depiction of the beggar as someone with no face is, on the surface, a paternalistic and hierarchical representation in which his agency and autonomy is eclipsed by the grotesque sense of revulsion that Jabulile felt when seeing him. This paternalism, however, is contradicted shortly afterwards when Jabulile reflects on this on her drive home. At a deeper level, the explicit recognition of a 'face' further creates the space for a different moral framework with which to approach this encounter. For Emmanuel Levinas, a 'face-to-face' encounter with an Other forms the basis of one's ethical relationships with another being (*Alterity and Transcendence* 97; *Totality and Infinity* 43). This encounter happens prior to the Other being intelligible to the subject, as 'intelligibility … [is] a mastery exercised by the thinker upon what is thought in which the object's resistance as an exterior being vanishes' (Levinas *Totality and Infinity* 124). Even though Levinas' phenomenology of the self and the Other is inter-subjective and is predicated on the Other's autonomy and 'resistance', the fundamental assumption is that, despite this inter-subjectivity of how the self and the other are constituted through mutual recognition, the entities themselves remain broadly independent and separate. It is this separation of the self and Other that a feminist care ethics seeks to reject. In similarly characterising Jabulile's encounter with the beggar as a faceless person, the novel presents the ethics of her encounter in such a manner. Jabulile is aggrieved by the precarity of the beggar's life, as she says being

'dead is one thing, barely alive, that's another' (*No Time Like the Present* 303). However her reaction to the beggar is motivated not by the pathos of seeing the face of a being close to death, rather by an embodied sense of guilt at the implication of shared black skin. What makes the beggar's hunger difficult for Jabulile is her own vulnerability towards him, and their shared history and racial identity by virtue of 'the finger [being] black, like hers' (*No Time Like the Present* 303).

It is revealing that Jabulile identifies with the beggar through the colour of their skin, invoking a category of race that was created through colonial biopolitics. While on the surface this presents a risk of Gordimer homogenising different ethnicities into the category of blackness, it is evident from how Jabulile's amaZulu identity is the central focus of other relationships that the novel is acutely aware of the complexities of black characters' sense of belonging and identity. Jabulile's reflection of herself through the category of black skin rather than ethnic identity however presents an ironic moment for her to reassess the basis of her kinships. It exposes what is a deeply contradictory subject position that she occupies. On one hand, the sharing of black skin implies a shared history of oppression by a settler-colonial state. On the other hand, due to her education and class and her family belonging to the same ethnic group as Zuma, she also benefits from the legacies of colonialism. It is this uneasy contradiction that becomes the cause of her guilt.

The guilt that she experiences is to a degree in response to the hierarchical relation between herself and the beggar that is presumed by a paternalistic view of care. This hierarchy is signalled in the way Jabulile is inside a car as she encounters the beggar when she rolls down the window and escapes the encounter when the lights change, and she drives off. Scenes such as this, where white protagonists view their surroundings from inside a car, are familiar in Gordimer's works, whether it is Mehring looking upon the slag heaps in *The Conservationist*, Julie Summers being stuck in traffic at the start of *The Pickup*, or the various characters driving through the countryside in a short story like 'The Diamond Mine'. These scenes reflect

ways in which material privileges of wealth, race, and class serve to frame the protagonists' experience of their environment and serve to sequester them from what they see. The twofold inversion of this trope in *No Time Like the Present* — whereby not only is the protagonist black, but there is a physical transgression of these boundaries through the open window and the face peering through it — is especially significant. Jabulile is acutely aware of how she is occupying a position of whiteness, 'as she drives home to what is her own solution brought about by Baba getting her a white education, her marrying into Them' (*No Time Like the Present* 303-4). Jabulile's understanding of her own legal work and her prospect of emigrating to Australia, what she describes as 'her own solution' to the problem she sees accessed by her education and marriage, are both paternalistic dimensions of her ethics. What this presents, then, is a persisting contradiction in Jabulile's sense of ethics. There is no clear or straightforward resolution to the contradictions of her position of having entered into a white house, and her alienation from whom she sees as her own people. The novel's ethic of care and its juxtaposition of such dualisms is attuned to such contradictions. However, while it reconciles these poles, it does not resolve this conflict. Rather, the novel presents a deeply ambivalent acknowledgement of these modalities while nevertheless investing in relationships of care.

Furthermore, Jabulile and Steven framing their emigration as a means to provide opportunities for their children reflects the parochialism whereby they care for their own kin, but not the people in need who are outside of their immediate circle. Jabulile's encounter with the beggar evokes in her guilt for her own parochialism, as she recognises her own shared history and vulnerability with the beggar by virtue of their shared racial identity. This is not to say that Jabulile, recalling my discussion of Saidiya Hartman in an earlier chapter, renders the beggar's position fungible and assumes that she can share in the experience by virtue of her race. Rather, she realises her own complicity in the injustices that dispossess the beggar. Jabulile's guilt, both at her paternalism and at her parochialism, serve to complicate her ethics of care, exposing the fundamental need to nuance this ethic with a

need for conditions of egalitarianism and justice. For Jabulile, this manifests as strong emotions, as 'she finds herself expressing within what she hasn't, even in the detention cell: hatred of whites', which immediately motivate a desire for change, as she contemplates 'what will they do to wipe out, *make good* is the term, what whites did and blacks must change, pointed down the open mouth' (*No Time Like the Present* 304, italics in original). Jabulile's encounter with the beggar, whom she sees as faceless and unrecognisable, shifts her ethical impulses from being responses to the face of someone in distress to one which is sensitive of her own vulnerability, shared history, and obligation to the person in need. It further represents the sensitivity in her own ethics of care that seeks to redress issues of injustice fundamental to their society rather than merely reiterating the problems of paternalism and parochialism in the ethics of care. Jabulile's caring role within her legal work reflects, then, an ethics of care as a basis of a political ethic, responding to the problems of having an ethics of justice without an ethics of care. Meanwhile, her personal experience of her own racial identity and shared history, address the need of an ethics of care to have as its basis the conditions for justice.

Conclusion: Reconciliation and Moral Repair

Through its developing of many of the stylistic features of Gordimer's late style, as well as its retrospective chronicling of the transition from apartheid, *No Time Like the Present* draws together many of the prominent characteristics of Gordimer's late works. In particular, the novel's idiom is centred around the contradictions between as well as the reconciliation of conflicting dualities. It becomes clear to the characters that the lofty ideals and vocabulary of the struggle and the freedoms for which they have fought have not obtained, and the novel grieves the dissipation of these radical energies as well as the betrayal of these ideals. The irony of its idiom in particular allows for the expression of grief, through cynicism, melancholy and anger, at the persisting injustices and corruption within the post-apartheid dispensation. The novel's idiom, by focalising through two principal

characters with different racial positions within their society as well as different perspectives on the conflicts they see, further consolidates this sense of duality. The juxtaposition of these two positions and the foregrounding of their tensions through the ironic mode of the novel serves to emphasise the tensions and contradictions within the white subject position amidst a conflicted sense of belonging within the present moment. However, not only does the novel present such a duality to embody the conflict within post-apartheid South Africa, but it also attempts to reconcile such dualities within the space of a biracial home as well as in the context of intimate relationships as a way of developing an ethic of care and interdependence. This is most apparent in the novel's mourning of grief, as mourning and the expression of grief reveal the vulnerability and interconnectedness of every individual, as well as the mutual need for care.

This sense of mutual reconciliation through vulnerability and mourning, as well the development of relationships of care constitute the ethical realignments that are central to Gordimer's late style. It situates the white self within its political context and exposes the limitations of its commitment and belonging within a wider history of struggle. The novel further presents this ethic of care as the basis along which the self can be reconstituted in a way that is grounded within a belonging to the country and within a wider web of relationships of interdependence. Jabulile's disposition to care in the face of such grief presents an ethical realignment that responds to this vulnerability while also performing a more intricate function. It is through this depiction of collective care for shared grief that marriage in Gordimer's late works presents an idiom for what Margaret Urban Walker defines as a process of 'moral repair'. For Walker, 'moral repair is the process of moving from the situation of loss and damage to a situation where some degree of stability in moral relations is regained' (6). This involves a process involves 'restoring or stabilizing — and in some cases creating — the basic elements that sustain human beings in a recognizably moral relationship' (Walker 23). For Walker, this moral relationship

> refer[s] to a kind of relationship or mode of relating rather than to an order governed by a particular scale of values, set of

> imperatives, or system of role-bound obligations. […] Any such morality […] must be embedded in the responses, feelings, and attitudes, as well as the beliefs, of human beings in order to become and remain a functioning moral order in actual time and space. (23)

Jabulile's disposition to care for people who are dispossessed forms is one such basis for a morality that is embedded in responses, feelings, attitudes, and beliefs that are sensitive to the needs and vulnerabilities of other people.

What makes this ethics of care especially significant in the novel is that it presents a departure from previous ethical frameworks that are predicated on the phenomenological separation of the self from the Other, but rather situates the self as part of a wider web of inter-dependence centred around the mutual vulnerability to grief. Walker notes that the prospect of moral repair, especially in conditions of injustice, require such a paradigm shift, as 'where there are deeply embedded social patterns of disregard, subjugation, or violation among members of certain groups, the normative expectations of the powerful may be more or less understood as a rigged game by those dominated or oppressed' (27). Gordimer's late works, particularly a novel like *No Time Like the Present* where a protagonist's sense of political commitment is deeply rooted in an ethic of care, reflects a move away from an objective ethics of justice that constitutes such normative expectations of the powerful. In particular, it is especially compelling that such an ethic is embodied by the thoughts and actions of a black woman protagonist, situating this discourse of a feminist ethic of care alongside a wider lineage drawing an African humanist tradition of ethics. The protagonists' marriage and the nature of their household becomes a microcosm for the wider political landscape, wherein the function of care that Jabulile performs embodies a drastic change in the moral frameworks one uses to build such a society. In contrast to the household as a topography that reinforces white ideologies and hierarchies of ownership, Jabulile and Steven's household reflects one where the relationship of care between both protagonists serves as the basis of a relationship of moral repair. Such an intimate dynamic of moral repair thus fulfils a moral and social purpose that political movements

of truth and reconciliation, as idealised in the new, independent nation, sought to perform.

The emphasis of dualities in the style of *No Time Like the Present* embodies a similar paradigm shift in its focus on an interpersonal ethics of care rather than a normative ethics of justice. That is not to suggest that there is a dichotomy between these ethical principles. As both Tronto's work demonstrates and as the novel's treatment of Jabulile's disposition of care illustrates, both ethical theories of care and justice need to adequately address the moral questions posed by the other in order to be fully complete. Rather, Gordimer's novel presents a refocusing of moral questions of justice from merely creating conditions of equality or overturning institutions of injustice to fundamentally altering the way in which the self is constituted as well as the ways in which it relates to the other in order for moral and political restitution to be meaningful. This is expressed most clearly in the dualities of intimacy between Steven and Jabulile, and the way in which the dualities of the biracial home subvert the racial ideologies inherent in the idea of the white home that was the basis of settler colonial ideology. These dualities are reconciled through the novel's emphasis on intimacy and care; however, they are never fully resolved, and instead allowed to persist as tensions within the narrative. Indeed, the novel ends with a hopeful yet ambivalent gesture of Steven suddenly announcing his plans to cancel his family's emigration to Australia and to stay in South Africa, yet it does not speculate about what a renewed form of struggle would look like, or indeed what a better future would entail. In addition, the tension between the narratives of the two protagonists and the positions of racial and class privilege that they embody further emphasises the limitations of the past ethics of justice and the ways in which such normative ethics are, as Walker argues, 'a rigged game' of the dominant class. As Steven sees the significance of the bonds that Jabulile is breaking in order for them to migrate to Australia, he recognises his own positionality within this society and the limitations of his political understanding. It is through Jabulile's voice, and the tension between her perspective and Steven's, that the novel presents this ethics of care in a

manner that is circumspect of its own limitations, contradictions and problems. Steven's decision at the end of the novel to stay in South Africa represents such a realisation of his own obligations to care for the state of his country, and an acceptance of the morality that Jabulile's actions embodied.

Conclusion: the Negative Dialectic of Gordimer's Late Style

Gordimer and the Borders of Postmodernity

Over the course of my thesis, I have examined the stylistic changes in Gordimer's late works. I started with a study of her short story collections *Beethoven was One-Sixteenth Black* and *Loot*, and examined the ways in which the Gordimer's late style is characterised by prominent and recurring features like the lack of a linear plot, the uneasy vacillations between the apartheid past and post-apartheid present, and the lack of clear resolution. Likewise, the melancholy mood that colours her prose, in both her short story and her novels, is an emotional response to the contradictory nature of the transition to post-apartheid society where many of the past injustices still persist. In the context of the short stories in particular, these stylistic devices augment the sense of qualitative multiplicity inherent in the form of the short story, and thus register the inequalities of a late capitalist world-system across several temporal and spatial scales simultaneously. In that regard, Gordimer's late short story cycles are especially attuned to critique the polygonal structures of inequality and neo-imperial dominance in ways that her novels are not. But while her short stories are rooted in the prevailing material and political concerns of post-apartheid South Africa, there is a sense in which her novels seem to shift her focus away from politics into more private and personal speculations about the white subject's place within society and their complicity within prevailing injustices. They are more deeply concerned with the epistemic, phenomenological and ethical transformations of the self in the aftermath of such a watershed moment in history, yet one where the many ideals of the freedom struggle had not yet been achieved.

In each of my chapters, I have looked at Gordimer's late novels in sequence and charted the development and teleology of such a shift in her

writing. With *The House Gun*, Gordimer's late style drew attention to the limitations of the white subject position, the contradictions immanent therein, and the epistemic friction of the white subject conceiving of their place in post-apartheid South Africa. In my reading of *The Pickup* and the tensions in the narrative voice between what Julie sees and the Orientalist subtexts that undercut her perspective, I extended this discussion of the epistemic injustices committed by the white subject and examined the ways in which the novel critiques liberal empathy, bohemianism, and romantic desire as a way of knowing the figure of the outsider, as these modes reduced the outsider to a correlate of the white subject's own inner workings rather than seeing them a subject in their own right. Against such limitations of the subject's understanding of the other, this novel marks what critics have described as a 'spiritual turn' in Gordimer's fiction, which I argue avoids this reductionism by presenting a burgeoning ethic situated in rootedness within a place and the consequent reconfiguration of the self that such belonging entails. Subsequently, I expand upon this concept of the spiritual turn in Gordimer's works and examine the ecological turn in her ethics as well as the phenomenological turn in her style in *Get a Life*. In this chapter, I examine the crisis in the self that the narrative voice's sense of ennui and listlessness portray. The affective encounter with radiation toxicity presents a reconstitution of the self as interdependent with and mutually vulnerable to a wider ecosystem. This becomes the transcendental basis of a new way of conceiving of ethical relations. *Get a Life* thus imagines a mode of embodied vulnerability that goes beyond the epistemic limitations of understanding disaster of a vast scale like nuclear catastrophe, and enables the self to be embedded within wider ethical relations of response-ability to the greater-than-human ecosystem. The novel further demonstrates the decentring of white characters' positionality, drawing attention to the modalities through which such phenomenological encounters are constructed. Finally, in my chapter on *No Time Like the Present*, I examined how an ethics based on interdependence and vulnerability is central not just to Gordimer's ethical realignment as a white subject within post-apartheid society, but also to a

public politics that seeks moral repair. In this chapter, I examine Gordimer's emphasis on the household in her novels, and how the doubleness of intimacy and care within a biracial home forms the basis of such ethical transformations. The novel's treatment of several forms of doubleness — the two protagonists, the irony in the language regarding the new age of Independence, the doubleness of intimacy and care, and the significance of the biracial home — manifests the innate contradictions in the post-apartheid dispensation, the white subject's place within it, and in the desire for change. However, as characteristic of Gordimer's late style, these contradictions are reconciled through the novel's juxtaposition of such dualisms, but they are never resolved, and they instead persist as an ambivalent ending.

When compared to Gordimer's earlier works, there are some clear contrasts to be sketched. In particular, critics have noted the overt lack of a radical alternative vision of what a liberated future or an anti-colonial struggle would look like. While Gordimer's fiction has always been intensely personal through its reflection on intimate relationships and one's place of belonging, these reflections have in her earlier works paralleled broader political visions of a struggle against apartheid or a post-apartheid future. In her late works, however, while there is a profound sense of an ethical realignment of the self and an emphasis of interdependence and vulnerability — to the wider ecosystem or to grief — the novels do not so much speculate about a course of political actions as they interrogate the modalities through which the self is constructed. This is broadly aligned with two prominent drives in Gordimer's late style. The first is her own interrogation of her place as a white writer within South African society. I have discussed in my chapter on *The House Gun* how Gordimer's self-reflexive look at the position of the white subject is a prominent feature of the way she saw herself as a writer later in her life, in the context of her embeddedness within her political context. This contrasts sharply with her earlier characterisation of herself as a 'bolter' escaping her social milieu. In my chapter on *The Pickup*, I further elaborated on how Gordimer's treatment of bohemianism marks a revision of the style of her earlier works, and what she saw as the whiter writer's desire to make bonds

with her black compatriots. *The Pickup*'s critique of bohemianism calls into question the modalities within which such bonds can be formed and posits the extent to which the self would have to be transformed in order to have a meaningful sense of connection and belonging. Gordimer returns to this theme of affective bonds and intimacy in *No Time Like the Present* and situates the basis of such bonds within the transformation of the self through an ethics of care rather than a superficial indulgence of one's desires.

The second drive in Gordimer's late works is an extension of what Dominic Head identified in his coda to his monograph on Gordimer's works, and that is the burgeoning sense of a postmodern poetics in Gordimer's works. He describes Gordimer's relationship with postmodernism as a problematic one, arguing that she occupies a 'border position' that moves towards postmodernist expression but nevertheless is grounded within the influences of realism and modernism for the major part of her career (184). This is a theme that I had alluded to briefly in my introduction, and one which Head, Simon Lewis, Anthony Vital, Judie Newman, amongst others also raise. There is a sense in which Gordimer's later works incorporate devices such as metafiction, intertextuality, ironic cynicism towards metanarratives of emancipation or struggle, as well as a questioning of the provisionality and conditions of possibility of their perspective. In addition to a postmodern poetics, there is a further sense of a postmodern ontology. For Brian McHale, postmodernism as well as the philosophical assumptions that underlie it are best understood in contrast with modernism and its counterparts. McHale describes the dominant philosophical concern of modernism as an 'epistemological' question of how a subject can know of a material reality, and how an individual's psychology and use of language can inflect this knowledge (9). In postmodernism, these questions develop from the epistemological concern with how a subject apprehends such a reality into an 'ontological' one about whether or not such a reality exists in the first place, and rather than language and psychology inflecting the representation of reality, this reality is a text that is constructed by language (McHale 10). It is such an interrogation of the very possibility of reality that manifests in devices

that render reality as a text, such as metafiction or intertextuality, or call into question the way in which the narrator's subject position serves to create reality. Indeed, as I had mentioned in my chapter on her late short story cycles, it is clear from Gordimer's lecture on the short story form that she is dissatisfied this postmodern erosion of meaning as 'words have become hopelessly blunted by overuse, dinned to death by admen, and, above all, debased by political creeds that have twisted and changed their meaning' (*Telling Times* 168). Gordimer argues that the formal innovations of the short story offered a way out of such a crisis in meaning and as a way of capturing a material reality of experience. Head sees Gordimer as occupying this border position precisely because she eschews the 'ontological anarchism' that postmodernism assumes (185).

In much of Gordimer's late style, however, these postmodern ontologies in her fiction seem to take a much clearer shape. They extend not just to her short stories, as she claims in her lecture, but also to her novels. One instance of this is what Lewis describes as the postmodern melancholy of *The House Gun*, whose mood of cynicism and melancholy are a response to the erosion of an objective belief in the freedom struggle as a reality in which to ground one's politics. The ontological erosions that Head sees Gordimer as eschewing become more pressing in her late style. Furthermore, there is a far more intense focus on the role of the self. Head acknowledges that Gordimer's mature works are characterised by the fragmentation, decentring and alienation of the white self, but qualifies that by noting that her novels are still dominated by single, major protagonists and a formal centring of the self (183). In contrast, her late works demonstrate a far more intense and complicated decentring of the self, one where the self is no longer as dominant a figure but has their perspective undermined through the ironic foregrounding of the lapses in the perspective of the main characters. By focalising through these characters and contradicting the focalising voice, the novel's own textuality serves to expose the gaps and contradictions within the self's perspective. Novels like *The Pickup* and *Get a Life* mark a further shift in ontological dominant from a single, objective reality to a more

complex spiritualism of ecology that is grounded within the self's mutual and inter-connected relationship within a wider world. As Vital notes, *Get a Life* incorporates postmodernism's self-aware textuality as a mode of presenting a fragmentation of the white self and a critique of liberal environmentalism (106). Finally, *No Time Like the Present* marks an erosion of the dominance of a single protagonist, and instead foregrounds the contradictions and fragmentation of the cohesive narrative self. Its emphasis on grief and mourning, especially in the aftermath of the dissipating of the freedom struggle, embodies what Nicolas Bourriaud identifies as the characteristic of postmodernism as emerging at the 'end of history', specifically 'history considered as a linear narrative' (263). Bourriaud situates this end of history within the context of what Jean-François Lyotard describes as an incredulity towards metanarratives (72), in particular, as Bourriaud notes, a metanarrative of Marxism and radical politics (263). Thus, for Bourriaud, postmodernism is a 'philosophy of mourning, a long melancholic episode in our cultural life' (264), much the same way that *No Time Like the Present* is a novel about the mourning of revolutionary struggle suffused with mourning and melancholy.

None of this is considering some of the more experimental and interesting styles adopted by Gordimer's short stories. This is perhaps a greater limitation in Head's assessment of Gordimer's position within postmodernism. Head echoes Hutcheon in describing postmodernism as a mode that spans different forms of media, such as photography (Hutcheon *The Politics of Postmodernism* 141). In contrast, Gordimer's short story 'Beethoven was One-Sixteenth Black' serves to incorporate intertextual references to music as a way of self-consciously situating it within a discourse of late style. Furthermore, a story like 'Dreaming of the Dead', which sees Gordimer herself as a character dining with Susan Sontag and Edward Said, draws further attention to Gordimer's position as a storyteller, the story's nature as a text, and the relationships between different discourses and how they construct Gordimer's own subject position. Head's focus on Gordimer's novels leads him to underestimate the experimental

nature of Gordimer's fiction as he does not adequately note the complex forms and devices, as well as the ontological and epistemological questions, in Gordimer's short stories.

However, this is not to argue that Gordimer's late works represent her developing into more of a postmodernist writer. While there are certainly stylistic and ontological concerns related to postmodernism that are germane to Gordimer's works, I am cautious to make the stronger claim. This is because, as some critics have noted following Fredric Jameson, that the geographical provenance of postmodernism is predominantly North America and North European, as thus postmodernism as a nebulous array of concepts is more a reflection of the socioeconomic and political exigencies in western society, such as the crises of late-capitalist society and more diffuse forms of power and control (Nealon 92; Rudrum and Stavris xxv). In acknowledging this, David Rudrum and Nicholas Stavris are careful to qualify this line of reasoning by emphasising the more complex and pluralistic form that globalism has taken, one in which assumptions of Western dominance are not as tenable as critics like Jeffrey Nealon and Fredric Jameson would assume (xxvi). In that respect, Bourriaud, in his account of what he calls 'altermodernism', describes the present age as a 'new modernity' characterised by 'increased communication, travel and migration' and a 'new universalism' based on 'translations, subtitling and generalized dubbing' (253). This polemical introduction that he presents in his manifesto to altermodernism is nevertheless grounded in an insightful analysis of the impact of the global credit crisis, looking both at the ontological crisis that emerges from the development of an economy based on speculation rather than material value (261-2), as well as the integration of the world into a network of interconnectedness within a global economy (266-9). Bourriaud's sense of universalism is not a flat, idealised sense of integration and commonality, but rather finds more resemblances with what the Warwick Research Collective describe as the combined and uneven development of a capitalist world-system where regions outside the west are integrated, but in

hierarchical relations of dominance. Moreover, local catastrophes can have dispersed and remote impacts.

While there may be a certain global disposition to the material structures of capitalism, the philosophical ideas that constitute postmodernism — such as the erosion of a stable ontology and an investment in what constitutes the self — are limited to the west in terms of their provenance. In societies that are peripheral to the global north, the moral and political questions of identity, belonging and decolonisation are far more immediate and apparent. As much as Gordimer's influences are broadly European, as are many of the paradigms of Marxist politics and socialist realism within which she writers and operates, it is important to situate her within a context that is sensitive to its specific position as within a (semi-)peripheral region of a capitalist world-system. The immediate need for justice and the end to apartheid were such a prominent truth in Gordimer's earlier works that the speculation that there is no transcendental ontological basis upon which to ground one's understanding of the world was just inadmissible. Likewise, in her late works, although there is an erosion of that same truth of the anti-apartheid struggle, the continuing injustices within this society present a need for a similar truth upon which to base political action. Even if one were to emphasise the prominence in Gordimer's fiction of some of these postmodern concerns, such as the disillusionment with the metanarrative of the freedom struggle, it is important to acknowledge that these questions do not go as far as to entirely reject the very possibility of a transcendental reality or withdraw into a nihilistic ontology.

Thus, the extent to which the postmodern as a philosophical turn is manifested in Gordimer's fiction is qualified with very specific limitations. Instead of an anarchic ontology that rejects the possibility of a transcendental truth, what the phenomenological interrogation of the constitution of the self and its relationship with the other in Gordimer's fiction present are an interrogation of the hierarchies of power and the conceptual categories that are the conditions of possibility through which these truths are constructed. Gordimer does not so much reject the possibility of truth or of radical politics,

but instead interrogates what regimes of power — such as the whiteness of her protagonists or the world-systems of capitalism — constituted what were the previously accepted truth of the post-apartheid future that was the objective of the struggle. In doing so, her works expose the ways in which these regimes of power that served as the ideological terrain for such truths to be constructed subsequently served to corrupt and betray them, such as the ways in which the nexus of capitalist industry and political influence in her short story 'Mission Statement' or in *No Time Like the Present* reiterate previous forms of political corruption, and the dominance of wealthy white people in positions of influence in *The House Gun* or *The Pickup* perpetuate racial injustices of the past. The interrogation of these transcendental truths of political struggle serve not to reject struggle in its entirety, but to acknowledge and redress the immanent contradictions that perpetuate conflict in the post-apartheid dispensation. It is moreover an interrogation of the self, its complicity within these hierarchies, and its limitations in understanding the vicissitudes of these persisting contradictions, manifested in Gordimer's critical re-evaluation of her writerly position as well as her phenomenological re-evaluation of the position of her self in her late style. Thus the crisis in the truth of revolutionary struggle is not so much about whether struggle is possible or a legitimate political drive, rather it is a crisis in faith, in believing in struggle or in liberated futures, and believing in whether or not the white self can indeed be part of such a struggle. I would in this case return to Lyotard's formulation of postmodernism as an 'incredulity to metanarratives', and in particular stress the doxastic nature of his position: Gordimer's late style is not a rejection of revolutionary struggle outright, but a mistrust of it as well as a search for a new basis to ground one's trust.

In such a context, then, I would return to Head's initial question about whether or not Gordimer's works can be considered to occupy a 'border position' between postmodernism and realism, re-frame this along different parameters about how Gordimer's works might instead go beyond postmodernism. Ihab Hassan re-evaluates the many themes and strands

within postmodernism, particularly in the context of global crises in identities and anticolonial struggle, and the consequent need to

> discover new relations between selves and others, margins and centres, fragments and wholes — indeed, new relations between selves and selves, margins and margins, centres and centres – discover what I call a new, pragmatic and planetary civility ('Beyond Postmodernism' 19-20).

For Hassan, such an aesthetic of trust acknowledges that realism itself will not suffice as an idiom, while nevertheless acknowledging that the complete surrender of the real to textuality and artifice compromises postmodernism. What he speculates, then, is a middle position, one which many of the characteristics of Gordimer's late fiction serves to articulate: Gordimer's late style is deeply rooted in a realist materialism while nevertheless presenting a phenomenological critique of the modalities that constitute this reality as well as the self's perception of it. By focalising through white characters and then calling into question the stability of their worldview, Gordimer's late style presents what Raoul Eshelman describes as 'double framing' (118): it follows a rigorously monist narrative while nevertheless forcing the reader to question the coercive textual devices being used to maintain the authority of that narrative voice. This is most salient in Gordimer's contradictory use of white protagonists in *The House Gun* and *The Pickup* while at the same time exposing the epistemic friction that serves to undermine their position. If the persisting injustices of the post-apartheid dispensation led to a disillusionment and incredulity towards revolutionary politics, then the re-evaluation of these ideas and the position of the self presents the search for a new basis for one's trust. In Gordimer's case, what provides this new basis ranges from the spiritual re-evaluation of the self and its rootedness within place, the mutual vulnerability of the self and its wider ecosystem, and the precarity of the self in the face of grief within intimate relationships of care.

Thus, it might even be productive to consider Gordimer's works not in light of postmodernism, but the other neologisms of philosophical turns that have been regarded to come after it. Not only are there elements of postmodern poetics in Gordimer's late works, but there are also strains of

what Eshelman calls 'performatism' in her use of an aesthetic of double framing. Moreover, the complexities of globalisation and the intricacies of the capitalist world-system resonate with Bourriaud's notion of an 'altermodernism'. In their edited collection *Supplanting the Postmodern* Rudrum and Stavris consider, using their own metaphor, what they see as the many distributaries that emerge from that stream. They present not just an illuminating taxonomy of different critical approaches, and it may even be worth considering Gordimer's works on the border between not just postmodernism and realism, but also between each of these post-postmodernist ideas. However, just as with my assessment of Gordimer's works and their relevance to postmodernity, I remain cautious to avoid labelling Gordimer's works as belonging to any such category. This is because I remain agnostic to the wider philosophical paradigms of postmodernism as well as the many other frameworks that the contributors to the collection propose, and to their conceptual utility. My approach is a more pragmatic one, to consider the stylistic devices that constitute the poetics of such frameworks, alongside the cultural and political modalities that inflect them, when evaluating the text, without necessarily committing to the assumptions and theoretical frameworks of the wider idea. Thus my focus is to remain grounded within Gordimer's own works and the politics of her late style, and consider these categories such that they illuminate political aspects of her style or ethical or ontological shifts in her work, without fully admitting the wider gamut of ontologies and epistemologies that attend to them. Nevertheless, this question remains fertile ground, and one which may merit much closer investigation, especially because of the ways in which it expands the discussions of postmodernity and its postcursors in the context of anti-colonial politics in global peripheries.

Thus the specific orientation of Gordimer's late style, set against this terrain of postmodernity and its many subsequent variants, is a style of double-framing: of disillusion as well as a search for commitment, and of whiteness as well as its perspectival fissures. This double-framing characterises what Hassan describes as form of 'indetermanence', a

portmanteau of 'indeterminacy' and 'immanence' ('Beyond Postmodernism' 18). Indeterminacy, for Hassan, is what others have already identified as a crisis in knowledge and objectivity (*The Postmodern Turn* 47), while immanence is the nature of reality to be contained within language and representation (*The Postmodern Turn* 53). One crucial development Hassan makes is that he qualifies indeterminacy and immanence as 'antithetical, but not dialectical tendencies' ('Beyond Postmodernism' 18). This qualification that these tendencies are not dialectical, I would further emphasise, is to acknowledge that indetermanence does not represent a unification of indeterminacy or immanence into a higher unity, but is instead an acknowledgement of their antithetical nature and a juxtaposition of such a contradiction. Gordimer's use of double-framing similarly characterises a juxtaposition of impulses of immanence — the ways in which the novels focalise through white characters, and the political milieu that they describe are inflected by such a subject position — with the indeterminacies evinced by the contradictions inherent therein — such as the epistemic friction of the narrative voice in *The House Gun*, the Orientalist ideologies behind empathy and desire in *The Pickup*. But Gordimer's aesthetic of double-framing, particularly in a novel like *No Time Like the Present* that is characterised in its entirety by fraught dualisms, juxtaposes these dualisms without resolving them, and instead presents what is a contradictory reconciliation. This reconciliation is not a dialectical unity, but instead a negative dialectic that is attuned to the immanent contradictions.

The Negative Dialectic of Gordimer's Late Style

As I mentioned earlier, Stephen Clingman regards Gordimer's mature works comprising *The Late Bourgeois World*, *The Conservationist* and *A Guest of Honour* as a historical dialectic of revolutionary politics and the struggle against apartheid. Such a dialectical reading of Gordimer's fiction situates her within a specifically Lukácsian tradition of Marxist realism that sees history as a dialectic of materialist progress, as each successive and contradictory stage of history is unified into a totality of a higher order. This

dialectic of revolutionary struggle in Gordimer's earlier works is an affirmative one that is driven by an aspiration of anti-colonial liberation. However, the problems within the post-apartheid dispensation and the consequent disillusionment with the politics of the struggle characterise a sudden arresting of this dialectic and disruption of its positive, affirmative teleology. In such a case, contrasting with the dialectic of her mature period novels, Gordimer's late style manifests what Theodor Adorno describes as a 'negative dialectic'. The key distinction between Hegel's affirmative dialectic and Adorno's negative dialectic is the nature by which antithetical entities are unified. For Adorno, the core of Hegel's dialectic is its treatment of antithetical elements, what Adorno terms 'nonidentity'. According to Adorno, Hegel's dialectics achieves a sense of 'nonidentity' through 'identity', that is it allows for the understanding and representation of antithetical elements through their unity into a greater sense of identity (*Negative Dialectics* 157). When elements are unified into a greater whole, their differences, Adorno argues, vanishes. However, this vanishing of difference and this erosion unification into identity is coercive and totalitarian. He describes this identity as 'the primal form of ideology. We relish it as adequacy to the thing it suppresses' (*Negative Dialectics* 148). The consequence of this suppression is to extinguish the other. Adorno makes a decisive break with Hegel because 'to use identity as a palliative for dialectical contradiction, for the expression of the insolubly nonidentical, is to ignore what contradiction means' (*Negative Dialectics* 160). These contradictions inherent in non-identity manifest the autonomy and difference of the other that a sublation into a higher unity of identity erases. In contrast to Hegel's dialectic of identity between identity and nonidentity, Adorno's negative dialectic characterises a unity that preserves the contradictions of nonidentity.

Adorno's negative dialectic, with an ontology that thinks through contradiction, has a further, fundamental difference from Hegel's in that, contrary to Hegel's idealism, it is grounded in a materialist understanding of the world. He rejects the sheer inwardness of German idealism and instead posits that 'the need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth. For

suffering is objectivity that weighs upon the subject' (*Negative Dialectics* 17-8). The specific grounding of Adorno's philosophy in the ontology of suffering is especially revealing for not just the disavowal of the affirmative teleology of Hegel's dialectics, but also my wider consideration of the question of late style. As I had mentioned in the Introduction, Robert Spencer situates Adorno's reflections on late style as well as his magnum opus *Negative Dialectics* within the context of his exile and an abiding weight of having outlived European Jews who were killed in the Holocaust (229). This manifests the pervading sense of temporal exile, or a suspension of the linearity and dialectical progression of history. A catastrophic event such as the Holocaust, for Adorno, ruptured any belief in the possibility of enlightenment and history as a metanarrative of progress (see Horkheimer et al.). Thus, the specific philosophy of Adorno's negative dialectics is in itself a form of lateness. Considering Gordimer's late works a negative dialectic is especially apposite in two regards: as in Adorno's case, the persisting sense that the struggle has not yet been won present for Gordimer a disillusionment with the affirmative dialectic of revolutionary politics. Moreover, such a negative dialectic is for both Adorno and Gordimer a characteristic of their late work, and thus carries with it a sense of lateness, lateness in response to their personal sense of temporal exile within an arrested narrative of history.

By characterising Gordimer's works as a negative dialectic, I am not suggesting a pessimistic direction, nor am I suggesting an arresting of its drive for political change. As I have argued in each of my chapters, ethical transformation and the search for commitment remain central to the focus of all of Gordimer's works. Instead, what I am suggesting is an inflection in the way in which Gordimer enacts these ethical transformations: Gordimer's works present the future as one that is fraught with deep-seated contradictions, one where the struggle itself is not enough, but one would have to reconcile with all the contradictions and tensions that persist even in the post-apartheid dispensation. Her works, as with Adorno's negative dialectic, think through these contradictions and do not attempt to resolve them into a single unity, but accommodate for the nonidentity of these

contradictory elements. Gordimer's style is one which draws attention to such nonidentity. In her short story collections, the narrative frames are fragmented, and perspectives shift and telescope across the stories. The unified and multiplicitous sense of time further characterise ways in which the present moment contains within itself the contradictions of the present moment, the apartheid past, and aspirations of a future.

Subsequently, her novels characterise a similar negative dialectic whereby the white subject is confronted by nonidentity. Harald and Claudia's understanding of their political moment in *The House Gun* is shaped entirely by the secluded privileges of their whiteness and affluence. The narrative foregrounds the injustices inherent in their ways of knowing their political milieu, and as they are confronted by the reality of the state's violence through the death penalty the narrative demonstrates the contradictions between their worldview and that of the characters whose silences are made apparent. Similar contradictions are made apparent in *The Pickup* as Julie and Abdu/Ibrahim's relationship is one of profound non-identity. The language of the novel, with its allusions to Orientalist discourses, makes clear that the white characters' attempts at knowing of the other through the categories of their own experience merely reinscribes racial ideologies. The failures of Julie to empathise with her husband and know him through her intimate desire manifests a similar impossibility of identity between nonidentical entities and demonstrates her attempts at doing so as coercive and hierarchical. Instead, what the novel presents is a dissolution of the self through a rootedness in the spiritual, something which *Get a Life* develops further. What I have described as Gordimer's markedly phenomenological turn, then, is an acknowledgement of how such nonidentity frustrates the self and manifests in an overwhelming melancholy and ennui. What marks *Get a Life* as a particularly interesting stage in this negative dialectic is that it presents a way forward that imagines an ethic of interdependence but without assuming unity or identity within a higher state of sublation. Paul Bannerman's relationship with his environment is characterised by the reconfiguration of the self in order to be attuned to a shared vulnerability to

nuclear catastrophe. By reconciling the fraught contradictions between the human and non-human through the embodiment of precarity, the novel presents an idiom by which to give voice, as Adorno suggests, to the shared suffering between the human self, the wider ecosystem, and all the bodies that interact across vast expanses of time and space. This embodied aspect allows for the understanding of violence of such expansive scales that it would otherwise defy imaginative representation. Finally, *No Time Like the Present* works through the dualities in its form, through its focalising through two protagonists, emphasising the dualities of irony, of intimacy, and of the biracial home. The novel's style gives voice to grief and mourning, and in so doing presents a way of reconciling the contradictions of nonidentity without presuming to unify them.

There are, moreover, two crucial things to note: this negative dialectic is not a pessimistic one that denies any possibility for action or imagines a future of decline and decay. Far from it, it speculates new modes that can be the basis for renewed commitment. Particularly, it emphasises suffering — whether it is the suffering of the environment in the wake of nuclear fallout or the grief and mourning of the loss of revolutionary politics — as a way of building affective bonds and creating communities. *Get a Life* and *No Time Like the Present* both end on ambivalent yet hopeful notes of camaraderie and solidarity between people who are committed to social change. *Get a Life* emphasises children as figures that carry with them a promise for a better future as well as an obligation to make such a future come to bear. Likewise, *No Time Like the Present* ends with a surprising and sudden reaffirmation of one's sense of belonging, and a commitment to political work to challenge the injustices facing this new society. The political commitment to change in Gordimer's late works are all affirmative. What is negative, then, is the specific ontology of the dialectic: Gordimer's works are more circumspect about the modalities that constitute this ethical change. Yet there is an accretive sense of a burgeoning ethical subjectivity that presents itself in Gordimer's works. There is a burgeoning ethic of interdependence and vulnerability in response to suffering and disillusion. That ethic is most

apparent in her last two novels. *Get a Life* presents an interdependence between the human with non-human nature, while *No Time Like the Present* emphasises Jabulile's role as a someone who does the work of caring both within her family as well as in her legal practice.

Finally, the ontology of this negative dialectic is not a nihilistic or cynical rejection of reality or of political commitment. Rather, it is a deeply phenomenological investigation into the regimes of power that inflect the realities that the subject and the world inhabit. Harald and Claudia's worldviews, through which *The House Gun* focalises, is deeply constituted by their racial and class position. Likewise, the juxtaposition of Steven and Jabulile's perspectives — and in particular Jabulile's admonishing of Steven's readiness to give up as specifically a result of his whiteness — characterise ways in which the subject's position as well as their disposition towards their world, whether it is of callous indifference or jaded cynicism, are shaped by their socioeconomic position. The emphasis of nonidentity is not so much a rejection of the objective, but about foregrounding the positionality of the subject. As per Adorno's maxim, suffering is the objective truth that ways upon the subject, and Gordimer's late style, through its melancholy, ennui, or cynicism, always presents an affective response to suffering. That suffering, whether it is the threat of state violence, the pain of deportation and exile, the slow violence of nuclear fallout, or the persistent corruption and injustice within one's society, remains the truth. The possibility for interdependence becomes an ethical response to such a truth. The style of Gordimer's late works presents this ontology as textured with contradictions, presenting both the indeterminacy of the resolution between nonidentity as well as their immanence within the language and form. Thus, Gordimer's withdrawal into the realm of the personal and her emphasis on familial or intimate relationships are not an evasion of the public or political questions that her earlier works home to address. Instead, the mode through which she addresses these questions shifts from public ethics to the more fundamental realignments in one's moral or political thought.

Thus the indetermanence that is posed by such a negative dialectic, through its interrogation of the modalities of the self and its embeddedness within the other, presents in Gordimer's case a series of re-evaluations: a re-evaluation of her own place as a white writer within South African society to begin with but also what the significance of revolutionary politics is, what it means to have not fully won the freedoms that were fought for, and what further reconfiguration of the self that renewed action would require. The radical energies of her mature works give way to a sombre, reflective mood, one where Gordimer's works begin to question their own conditions of being as a way of interrogating their attendant assumptions and positionalities. When the aspirations of radical politics and struggle can no longer be trusted, Gordimer's works present a search for a new basis for hope and commitment. They are a response to having to re-align one's politics and ethics on the basis of suffering and mutual vulnerability. The supposed development of a postmodern idiom in her late works is an especially interesting question because it marks a very significant departure from Gordimer's earlier commitment to a Lukácsian aesthetic of socialist realism. Nevertheless, regardless of whether Gordimer's works is seen as postmodern in its stylistic turn, performativist in its framing, or altermodernist in its emphasis of global materiality, or any of the other formulations presented, three things remain central to her late style: it is deeply rooted in a politics and ethics of suffering and vulnerability; it is critical of the position of its own subjectivity without surrendering reality to an anarchic, nihilistic ontology; and it imagines deeply embodied and intimate forms of interdependence as the fundamental basis of a new form of ethics. It is this new ethics, then, that constitutes what Gordimer's narratives can trust, even if faith in the past idiom of revolution dissipates.

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