"existed in an anxious flurry of promiscuity. He had affairs with the wives of colleagues; he picked up tourists in bars on the waterfront or at the Club Italia; he slept with whores" (7) Peggy Lindsey offers an explanation for the real mission of Coetzee in the novel:

> True, this story is bleak - - - Coetzee offers no happy quick fix for this post-apartheid South African where white men who arm themselves and build security fences are expected to get a bullet in the back eventually and solitary white women are brutalized. And David's rise from disgrace is by no means complete. He has fallen far enough that he can no longer make a life as he did before. But the story offers a slight glimpse of self-redemption, a sense that David is not completely broken. And the tiny bit of dignity David retains implies a slight hope that if one such as David – he of the upper echelons of race and education in the old South Africa – can find meaning in life again, then perhaps the disgrace of apartheid can evolve into something better as well. (2)

Coetzee's fight against apartheid is in line with his father's posture which earned him a sack from the South African racist government. The novelist was only eight years old when his father was fired and he continued with his sheep farm. The family later moved to Worcester, a provincial farm. It is perhaps this experience that has continued in the son.

David's visit to Melanie's parents and his refusal to offer an apology for his indiscretion defy rational analysis. The committee's efforts to save his job and still present a good report to the university authorities are graceful efforts indeed, at

least if only it could save a colleague. But David's sense of justice is flawed: 'I won't do it. I appeared before a branch of the law. Before that secular tribunal I pleaded guilty, a secular plea. That plea should suffice. Repentance belongs to another world, to another universe of discourse' (58)

David Lurie creates the impression that he does not know when he is right or wrong. His inability to see no validity in an earlier plea, that has no nexus with the crime being considered and the need to show remorse are good reasons why he should be punished. David prefers to leave his position in disgrace than offer an apology, a situation that reduces him to the level of a dog attendant in Bev's dog clinic. David's adultery with Bev shows he has no morality and sense of decency, above all an impression is created that he learns nothing from his past mistakes. What would happen if Bev's husband discovers that David Lurie is having an affair with his wife and in her clinic? What would be Lucy's reaction and how would Bev, Lucy and the husband relate?

Lucy appears more realistic than her father, David Lurie. Both father and daughter are not poles apart in ethics and morality. As a lesbian, she is not an ideal woman and her acceptance of her violation with calm is in line with her father's flawed judgment: 'What if that is the price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how they look at it; perhaps that is how I should look at it too. They see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors. Why should I be allowed to live here without paying? (158)

Isidore Diala believes that Coetzee gets it all wrong:

> But if Lucy's mode of engagement with history is Coetzee's valid paradigm for whites' negotiation for a precarious foothold in post apartheid South Africa, then his conception of their fall from grace evokes near absolute depravity. (60)

In a sense, Coetzee has a word for whites. He tells them that it is no longer business as usual. They must start all over again as blacks have taken over. Their position is demotion from authority to servitude. They must see white collapse in the language of Lucy: 'It is humiliating. But perhaps that is a good point to start from again. Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity'. (205)

To establish the level of violence in South Africa, the idea that blacks are in control and they are aided by the police, Ettinger: " a surly old man who speaks English with a marked German account" (100) brings the message home to both Lucy and her father. His statement confirms that emigration of whites in South Africa has begun. Ettinger is the only one left in Africa of his family:

> 'Yes, I never go anywhere without my beretta', he observes once they are on the Grahamstom road. He parts the holster at his hip. 'The best is, you save yourself, because the police are not going to save you, not anymore, you can be sure'.
>
> Is Ettinger right? If he had had a gun, would he have saved Lucy? He doubts it. If he had had a gun he would probably be dead now, he and Lucy both (100).

Coetzee is now an Australian citizen. The question is, did he leave South Africa because of possible black reprisal action after the collapse of Apartheid? When apartheid was at its peak, blacks were at the receiving end. With its collapse, the heat is turned on whites. At the height of her lamentation after the rape, Lucy is brooding and in tears. David comes to consol her. This discussion shows that whites are now receiving what blacks had been getting:

'This is not an easy thing to talk about', he says, 'but have you seen a doctor?' She sits up and blows her nose. 'I saw my GP last night'

'And is he taking care of all eventualities?' 'She', she says. 'She, not he. No' – and now there is a crack of anger in her voice- 'How can she? How can a doctor take care of all eventualities? Have some sense'.

He gets up. If she chooses to be irritable, then he can be irritable too. 'I'm sorry I asked', he says. (105)

Lucy's saucy language irritates her father, but that is not all. She hardly addresses him better than that. David occupies a low position in his daughter's esteem. She does not defer to him; she talks to him as a superior to an interior person. David's acquiescence is an acceptance of his degeneration.

In elevating blacks in status in his novels, Coetzee also aspires to probe their nature which can be found in all men. By x – raying the nature of David Lurie, a white, he explains that there can be bestialities in all men. Through Petrus, a black peasant, he continues this exploration. He has both admirable and objectionable natures. David observes these natures, noting it could be found in all races:

> What appeals to him in Petrus is his face, his face and his hands. If there is such a thing as honest toil, then Petrus bears its marks. A man of patience, energy, resilience. A peasant, a paysan, a man of the country. A plotter and a schemer and no doubt a liar too, like peasants everywhere, honest toil and honest cunning. (117).

By implying that Petrus is unreliable, Coetzee is not evaluating it from the angle of race; he is probing peasants in all societies. Although it is a uniquely South African story, it has universal application. It is this universalism in the art of Coetzee that draws universal appeal. Coetzee is skeptical about human nature, in both white and blacks. He does not even believe that the overthrow of white minority rule will usher in the desired justice and good governance. He even doubts the post-apartheid security forces. Andrew O' Hehir agrees with this when he says:

> In his sober, searing and even cynical little book "Disgrace", J.M. Coetzee tells us something we all suspect and fear that political change can do almost nothing to eliminate human misery. What it can do, he suggests, is to reorder it a little and half-accidentally introduce a few new varieties. This view should not surprise any of the great South Africa novelist's readers ---- "Disgrace" is Coetzee's first book to deal explicitly with post-apartheid South Africa, and the picture it paints is a cheerless one that will comfort no one, no matter what race, nationality or viewpoint (1)

Petrus does not assist both Lucy and her father to get at the rapists. He prefers lukewarm withdrawal while the culprits escape justice. And even during the party in his house when David sights one of the rapists, he does nothing. David and Lucy's entrance at the party provokes a stir, even a violation. Lucy's brittle nature has been smashed by the rape. There seems racial under tone in Petrus' protection of the youths. Petrus tells David that the youths cannot go to jail even when arrested. His evasive answers infuriate him: 'I know, I know. He is just a youth, he cannot go to jail, that is the law, you cannot put a youth in jail, you must let him go!' (118)

Petrus later comments imply complicity and assurance that the deed will not be repeated, despite David's protestations:

> 'Lucy is safe here,' he announces suddenly.
> 'It is all right. You can leave her, she is safe'.
> 'But she is not safe, Petrus! Clearly she is not safe. You know what happened here on the twenty- first'.
> 'Yes. I know what happened. But now it is all right?'
> 'Who says it is all right?'
> 'I say'. (138)

Bev also trusts Petrus in a way that David could not understand. David summarizes his daughter's ordeal in this language: 'It was history speaking through them', he offers at last. 'A history of wrong. Think of it that way, if it helps. It may have seemed personal, but it wasn't. It came down from the ancestor' (156)

It is David coming to full realization that it is injustice turning out itself, now creating new victims. Before he leaves his daughter's holdings, he is thoroughly fed up with their quarrel over Lucy's inertia, her refusal to press charges, Petrus' unreliability and the idea that his presence is no longer desirable. Andrew O' Helir sums up David state of mind at the end of the novel thus: "If David actually reclaims some dignity by the end of "Disgrace", it is only because he gives up everything, gives up more than a dog ever could-his daughter, his ideas about justice and language, his dream of the opera on Byron and even the dying animals he has learned to love without reservation, with thought of himself" (4)

Lucy's sexual liberalism can be explained in the unreliability of all men. It is perhaps what turns her into a lesbian. White or

black, she believes that the concept of sex for men is to kill a woman and not to get real sexual satisfaction from her. She sees sex as dislike or hatred, a desire to turn a woman into an object, to use her and then dump her. In her replies to her father, she does not hide this hatred and suspicion. But what makes her case pathetic is that she feels there is no escape and that the phallic will has taken over. To see sex or rape as murder, Lucy is suggesting that no legal action can expiate the act. It is no use punishing the rapist. Her refusal to press charges suggests that to co-operate and leave him with his conscience is a more rewarding act. Is Lucy seeking a religious course to report her violation?

> 'Hatred — when it comes to men and sex, David, nothing surprises me any more. Maybe, for men, hating the woman makes sex more exciting. You are a man, you ought to know. When you have sex with someone strange when you trap her, hold her down, get her under you, put all your weight on her isn't it a bit like killing? Pushing the knife in, exiting afterwards – leaving the body behind covered in blood-doesn't it feel like murder, like getting away with murder?' (158)

When David wants to know if her reaction would have been different if she had been raped by a white man, Lucy argues that she would still feel the same way, white or black. Then she shocks her father: 'I think of you as one of the three Chimpanzees, the one with his paws over his eyes' (161).

The condescension of Lucy reaches its peak when she agrees to marry Petrus with her pregnancy and to be his third wife. She does not want to sleep with him but to shelter under his wing. Petrus tells David that: 'A woman must be marry' (202). It shows his illiteracy and a subtle threat that Lucy either accepts

or faces the consequences. Lucy's explanations worries David and reap at his racist sentiments, practically speaking: 'There is only Petrus left. Petrus may not be a big man but he is big enough for someone small like me. And at least I know Petrus. I have no illusions about him. I know what I would be letting myself in for'. (204).

Lucy agrees to give up the land, the title deeds but not the house: 'I will become a tenant on his land' (204), she says. It is difficult to see the line of thought of Lucy except that of a woman who has reduced her existence to the level of a dog. Black supremacy in South Africa, to my mind does not include the depersonalization of whites. There is something unsettling as we come to the end of Disgrace. One feels he has thoroughly enjoyed the story but is not sufficiently carried along, in what Elizabeth Lowry evaluates as:

> In spite of its naturalistic setting, the schematic organization of Disgrace works against a 'realistic' reading-in Coetzee's phrase, it operates in terms of its own paradigms and myths" of these, the most powerful are ones that Coetzee has used before to describe the colonial situation: the unnatural parent – child and male-female bonds, in which the normal ties of affection are fraying or already severed (6)

Both Petrus and Pollux, one of the rapists, are symbolic figures in the novel. Petrus has a gold commercial soul that is almost unfigurable except we analyse his needs. He barely demonstrates excitement and when he does, it is in a Machiavellian way. Although he works for Lucy and even wants to marry her, there is no evidence that he truly loves her. His only objective is the total possession of Lucy and her property in a progressive and unrelenting fashion. He uses

Pollux to dehumanize her and having won his way, he tightens his grips as a tiger would the neck of a goat. Petrus is an example of a primitive paternalism while Pollux is his instrument, the anvil he uses to crush the head of his victims. Lowry says that:

> 'The truth is that there are two patriarchs in Disgrace: that Petrus represents a force for oppression without pity as great, potentially, as David Luries. Lurie has made use of Soraya and Melanie, but there is a lethal symmetry in the fact that his own daughter is used in turn and becomes a chattel of the Petrus clan-a by owner, without a voice --- what Disgrace finally shows us is the promised victory of one expansionist force over another, with women as pawns, the objects of punitive violence' (11)

Evaluating the overall reading of Disgrace reveals varied reactions- for Michael Heyns, it is "liberal funk". Dan Roodt has forewarned white South Africans to be prepared to atone for the ills of the past, represented by apartheid. Michael Marais's review is interesting:

> Without offering a political progamme, Disgrace therefore does imply what is needed if one is to address the endless struggle for affirmation that determines colonial and post-colonial history. It proposes a renegotiation of interpersonal relations which would install respect for the otherness of other beings and thereby obviate the possibility of violence. (38)

Criticism of literature has always stressed that it is not enough to simulate the ills in a society. It is good to chronicle what is objectionable, but art, a good art, should point the way

forward. If this yardstick is used, it is a minus for this great work, Disgrace. Coetzee in other words, should put forward an alternative political programme and not just condemn what is on ground.

David's prudish analysis of Lucy's intransigence in the aftermath of her rape may foreground Coetzee's consistent ambivalence. If David cannot save himself at his academic trial and even Lucy from the gang that comes to rape his daughter, how can he protect her from future attack? By holding on to this, Coetzee is saying that the change in baton does not necessary guarantee a safe South Africa.

Michael Morais believes it is not possible to have an ethical action in both apartheid and post apartheid South Africa. The collapse of political morality in South Africa is also the collapse of ethical reality. Jane Taylor argues that

> Disgrace considers the failure of a Western liberal tradition premised upon an 18th – century model of philosophical sympathy that is at the same time at the heart of commodity culture, a culture which contradictorily holds as sacred the absolute rights of the individual and the absolute value of private property. (25)

Considered from all angles, there is a consensus even among the critics of Coetzee that he is a good writer. Elizabeth Lowry's submission will be accepted by many of his readers, particularly of Disgrace: 'Disgrace is the best novel Coetzee has written. It is a chilling, spare book, the book of a mature writer who has refined his textual obsessions to produce an exact, effective prose and condensed his thematic concern with authority into a deceptively simple story of family life' (3).

CHAPTER FIVE

PAINFUL TRANSITION, CONTEMPORARY HISTORICAL INTERSECTION AND DIALOQUE WITH THE FUTURE IN TWO OF NADINE GORDIMER'S NOVELS

Born on 20th November, 1923, Nadine Gordimer is South Africa's leading female writer, political activist and Nobel Prize Laureate in literature. Her anti-apartheid movement in South Africa and her moral and racial criticism reached a landmark with the award of the Nobel Prize in 1991. The daughter of Isidore and Nan Gordimer, both Jewish immigrants, her father was a watch maker from Lithuania near Latria border and her mother was from London. She was raised in Springs, Guateng Johannesburg, South Africa but her political and racial commitments were shaped by her father's experience as a Jewish refugee in Czarist Russia, and her mother's creche for poor black children.

Wikipedia reports that she was educated at a convent school but because her mother feared that Gordimer had a weak heart she was home-bound and was often isolated. She started writing at a very early age, publishing her first stories in 1937 at the age of fifteen entitled, "The Quest for Seen Gold", which appeared in the Children's Sunday Sun in 1937. Another story "Come Again Tomorrow", a children's story, was published in Forum at about the same period. At sixteen, her first adult fiction was published. Gordimer did a year's study at Witwatersrand University where she mixed readily with people of all races.

In 1948, she moved to Johannesburg without completing her degree. There she took courses' and continued her writing. In 1949, she published her collection of short stories under the

title Face to Face. Her first novel, The Lying Days was published in 1953. After a failed marriage, she married Reinhold Cassirer, a highly respected arts dealer, which marriage lasted until 2001 when he died. Gordimer has two children: Oriane, a girl born in 1950 during her first marriage and Hugo, a son born in 1955 in her second marriage.

Two historical events would usher Gordimer into the South African struggle: the arrest of her friend Bettie du Toit in 1960 and the Sharpeville massacre. During the Mandela trial of 1962, she made herself a part of the struggle and when Mandela was released from prison in 1990, she was one of the first people he wanted to see. From the 1960s to the 1970s, she took time to lecture in several American Universities while still living in Johannesburg and continuing with the anti-apartheid struggle. During this period, South African Government banned several of her books. July's People was one of her works banned at this period.

She joined the African National Congress while it was still proscribed and hid ANC leaders in her home to enable them escape government arrest. She traveled extensively all over the world, campaigning against apartheid and its recriminating policies. Gordimer fought spiritedly against censorship and state control of information. She objected to her work being aired by the South African Broadcasting Corporation because it was maintained by the apartheid government. Nadine Gordimer has been very active in the fight against HIV/AIDS in South Africa. She was critical of the then South African president, Thabo Mbeki, for his handling of the AIDS matters in that country.

On the foreign scene, she carried her campaign against discrimination in the United States. With six other Nobel Prize

winners, they wrote warning the US not to destabilize Cuba in 2005 when Fidel Castro took ill. Anorher seeming contradiction in her life was that Gordimer did not see Zionism as equivalent to apartheid when she urged her friend, Susan Sontag, not to accept an award from the Israeli government.

Some critics believe some of Gordimer's positions are sometimes ambiguous. For instance, it is difficult to reconcile the moral stances in her books with her atheistic disposition, although she is not known to be very active in atheist organizations. Then, in 1998, she refused to accept "short listing" for the Orange prize because the award admitted entries of only female writers.

HER WORKS

Gordimer's preoccupation in her works deals with the issues of love and politics and the racial problem as they relate to South Africa. She does not believe political power is out to address the people's problem unless it is anchored on truth. Her characters are often ordinary people who traverse the difficult terrain of life by encountering arduous choices and appearing ambiguous. For her, the individual has a hand in shaping his destiny. She sees beliefs and organizations as obstacles that could be dismantled if need be. Her other works include A World of Strangers (1958), Occasion for Loving (1963), A Guest of Honour (1971), which won the James Tail Black Memorial Prize, The Conservationist (1974), The Late Bourgeois World (1966), The Burger's Daughter (1979), My Son's Story (1990) and A Sport of Nature (1987).

Nadine Gordimer believes fiction is the best vehicle to transmit social truth, because all other forms impose certain censorship or strings that make whole-truth impossible. She argues in an interview in Transition, "Nothing I say in essays and articles will

be as true as my fiction, - - - encompass all the things that go unsaid among other people and in yourself - - - There is always, subconsciously, some kind of self-censorship in non fiction". (qtd in Wastberg 7)

JULY'S PEOPLE

The story of July's People is a prophetic one about a bloody South African revolution which as it turned out did not happen. Instead, a black majority rule was instituted under Nelson Mandela in 1994. It is about July, a black South African house boy of fifteen years standing who hides his master Bamford Smales and his wife, Maureen Smales, and their three children from impending catastrophe. Bamford, an architect and his wife Maureen, a house wife and former dancer, are symbolized in role reversal, a delicate mix where Gordimer shows that whites could be nice and can reap rewards for good deeds. Gordimer evaluates this position in relationship with art, her own art:

> Only through a writer's explorations could I have begun to discover the human dynamism of the place I was born to and the time it was to be enacted. Only in the prescient dimension of the imagination could I bring together what had been deliberately broken and fragmented; fit together the shapes of living experience, my own and that of others, without which a whole consciousness is not attainable. I had to be part of the transformation of my place in order for it to be known me. (Wastberg 8)

For her, the writer has to be guided by his conscience; it is this chord between him and his conscience that pulls his art. Thus, her fight against racism and discrimination against blacks is given fuller life in her fiction. And as a conscience of the

society, she warns of the danger inherent in injustice. It is this pull that is the underlying premise in the art of July's People.

For Jennifer Gordon, the primary aim of Gordimer in the novel is to create or suggest a common language for South Africa, and that is the main objective of addressing the problem of language as a limiting factor in that country:

> Through revealing presentations of the language of Bam and Maureen, Bam and July, Maureen and July, and other characters, meticulous portrayal of subtle changes in language during the course of these relationships and realistic discussions of the power and limitations of language, Gordimer shows that the creation of a "common language" will be necessary before any true understanding can develop between individuals in South Africa. (Gordon 1).

Opinions about what Gordimer has set out to do in the novel, July's People, vary. But what is indisputable is the author's good control of her art. The use of symbols is a regular feature in Gordimer's art. Issues of colour, the bakkie, sex and the war do not just mean what we ordinarily know of the words. They mean much more, sometimes used to attack ideas the author is set out to condemn. For instance the "yellow bakkie' (5)

> "Was bought for pleasure, as some women are said to be made for pleasure. His wife pulled the face of tasting something that set her teeth on edge, when he brought it home. But he defended the dyed-blood jauntiness; yellow was cheerful, it repelled heat" (6).

Just as she opposed an 'only woman' literary prize award, she objects to females being only useful as object of pleasure.

Stephen Clinngman believes Gordimer plays to the gallery in her works, without a clear cut vision of the nature of the revolution which her art prescribes. But war which can defy manipulation and control is nobody's friend. Clingman's submission suggests deep misgiving:

> In terms of the method in which its picture of revolution is presented, the novel is still candidly impressionistic. For there may be a way in which the novel is less interested in the future per se than in its unfolding in the present. (Thus the novel) may be the most deceptive, and deceptively simple, of all of Gordimer's novels, and perhaps less genuinely prophetic than, say The Conservationist. What the novel is apparently doing is projecting a vision into the future; but what it may be doing most decisively is in fact the reverse. For what appears to be a projection from the present into the future in the novel is from another point of view seeing the present through the eyes of the future. (Clinngman 1).

The regret of whites during the revolution, according to Gordimer, will be immense. The lack of communication in the Smales' home and a seeming bleak future steer them in the face:

> They sickened at the appalling thought that they might find they had lived out their lives as they were, born white pariah dogs in a black continent. They joined political parties and 'contact' groups - - - They had thought of living, then, while they were young enough to cast off the blacks' rejection as well as white privilege, to make a life in another country. (8)

In apparent fusion of Gordimer and her art, her atheistic attitude will obtrude from time to time: "It was a miracle; it was all a miracle: and one ought to have known, from the suffering of saints, that miracles are horror" (11).

If Bam is finding it difficult to communicate with his wife Maureen, this is not a problem for July, who Gordimer has firmly planted in his rural black folk language: "How they know I'm not driving? Everybody is known I'm fifteen years in town. I'm knowing plenty things". (13) Gordimer through Bam believes "The black man's English was too poor to speak his mind". (97) Maureen is more successful in her communication with July, Martha and other village women. Where Bam gets irritated, Maureen is patient to understand, having known that: "They could assume comprehension between them only if she kept away from even the most common place of abstractions; his was the English learned in kitchens, factories and mines. It was based on orders and responses, not the exchange of ideas or feelings" (96).

Gordimer might be hinting in her art that blacks are unprepared for the role reversal. July's inability to drop the word master, despite the protestations of Bam and Maureen suggests it: He used to have the habit of knocking at a door, asking, the master he say I can come in? And they had tried to train him to drop the "master" for the ubiquitously respectful "Sir". (52) The Smales try to make him drop the Simon degree term:

> 'The master Bam's not your master. Why do you pretend? Nobody's ever thought of you as anything but a grown man'. (71)

July's subservience knows no bounds. He sees himself as "their boy":

> 'You tell everybody you trust your good boy. You are good madam, you got good boy' (70).

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Gordon submits that: "This is where language fails. Despite their many powers, words cannot perform the miracle of conversion that Bam and Maureen are looking for without a much greater change from outside" (106).

Because whites revel in opulence and blacks wallow in abject poverty, the gun powder to trigger the revolution has been ignited: 'They had to get out, they had to go. People are burning those houses. Those big houses! You can't imagine those houses. The whites are being killed in their houses. I've seen it-the whole thing just blow up, walls, roof – (19).

The degeneration of the Smales reaches a feverish pitch with one of their children wiping his anus with a stone after defecating. Bam himself, hardly getting any relief from the sleeping arrangement does the same by asking how long the "toilet rolls will last?" (35). The holistic degeneration of the Smales begins for Sheil Roberts, as they enter July's house:

> That the hut itself begins to have transformatory powers over its occupants is emphasized when, after the Smales family has enjoyed a rare dinner of roasted pig, and after Maureen and Bam make love, he wakes to see menstrual blood on his penis. He experiences a monetary horrifying hallucination that he has the pig's blood on him. This detail of bloody penis, an image of castration, suggests in part the return of the repressed to Bam's consciousness, the site of the return being, predictability, the unhomely hut in which he has recently "entered" his wife. (Roberts 81)

The war or revolution is symbolically unfair to whites, particularly, Maureen. Gordimer records her progressive diseased body: "she smelled bad between the legs" (9) and

went to the level of using old rags during menstruation and when she sweats, she has a "cold-cat smell" (151). Now when she begins to seduce her own servant, every honour appears to have gone. This is not just a devaluation of white superiority; it symbolizes a decimation of white power and myth. Sheila Roberts thinks:

> Maureen's final fording of the river in pursuit of the helicopter has been interpreted mythlogically as some sort of crossing of the Rubicon, or as a trope of rebirth. But I would posit that the moment of her posing sexually for July is also Rubiconal. Even if circumstances should change, she can never again revert to her old stable self as July's employer. (82).

On the other hand, one may be in a dilemma between Gordimer's political morality and the use of erotic love to drive home her point. Does Maureen think that since political power has failed erotic power should take over? Per Wastberg believes that:

> Gordimer's territory has always been the border between private emotions and external forces. There are no neutral zones where people can rest unobserved. In a land of lies, everyone lives a double life. Only love, the erotic dimension, stands for a sort of liberty, the glimpse of a more truthful existence. Outside the lover's chamber, there is a society, greedy, immoral where empathy and responsibility for other whatever skin colour, are rare. Thus, every meeting becomes instrumental or abused. In many of her stories, Gordimer reminds us that the future South Africa is not only a question of votes for all but one that requires immense effort to create a civil sprit, allowing people to look each other in the eye. (7)

To tell her story, Gordimer makes the reader read beyond the lines. In and out of court, account, those often shunned by authors who are strongly restricted by puritan spirit come alive in her works. She lets her message posses whatever she wants to say, to let the scene tell its own story. The scene where Maureen goes to take her bath in the rain tells it better. Now a village woman, Maureen lives like any other village woman, white or black:

> She went out. Night was close to her face. Rain sifted from the dark. She knew only where the door way was, to get back. She took off her shirt and got out of panties and jeans in one go, supporting herself against the streaming acid wall. Holding her clothing out of the mud, she let the rain pelt her lightly, face, breasts and back, then stream over her. She turned as if she were under a shower faucet. (48)

During the time of apartheid, disease and hunger ravaged the black community. Some of these diseases were peculiar to black children, hardly ever seen in whites. Gordimer recreates this scene in contradistinction to the children of the Smales who have now come to bear the disease: 'The children had begun to cough in their sleep for the last one hour or so- the same cough that one always hears from black children'.(50)In a sense, Gordimer's play with the fire image is symbolic. It is a symbol of crisis, but also a source of life. Fire reinvents primordial existence. During the period of apartheid, it was the cause of death, issuing deadly blows from the barrels of guns that maimed and killed. But after a two - day rain, the Smales long for it:

> The hearth-fire that filled the hut with smoke was the centre of being; children, fowls, dogs, kittens came as near to it as the hierarchy of their existence allowed.

> The war with that food brought blood chafing into life-came from it, where the clickers of wood, transparent with heart, made the porridge bubble vigour. Bam and Maureen had longed for cigarettes, for a drink of wine or spirits, their children had craved for sweet things; but in the days of the rain, the small fire they never let die satisfied all wants. (58)

The co-habitation, as it is between July's people and the Smales, is somewhat emblematic. As it continues to engender role reversal, July learning how to drive and Bam learning how to chop wood. Both stick to the new vocation with zeal and dedication and not letting the other to assist in the new chosen field: "You shouldn't bother. I've told you. I can chop my own wood. You mustn't do it" (59)

Bam insists. July insists on driving without a license because of the new political structure now in place:

> "Who's going to catch me? The white policeman is run away when the black soldiers come that time. Sometime they take him. I don't know - - - No one there can ask me, where is my license. Even my pass, no one can ask me anymore. It is finished". (59)

July's manner of speaking is in defiance of the existing law and order. Is black majority rule all about lawlessness as the present situation in South Africa shows – rape, armed robbery and killings? Gordimer's hint is prophetic as indeed most aspects of the novel are except the bloody revolution that never takes place.

Gordimer's theory of equality of the races is dependent on equal emotional satisfaction and deprivation in the same

degree. She spurns any other consideration based on colour or hair:

> There was fear and danger in considering this emotional absolute as open in any way; the brain-weighers, the claimants of divine authority to distinguish powers of moral discernment from the degree of frizz in hair and conceptual ability from the relative thickness of lips-they were vigilant to pounce upon anything that could be twisted to give them credence intimate relationships arrived at? Who decided? (92)

In the same way, identifying grace and beauty when they are observed, Gordimer openly acknowledges black beauty, not based on colour or artifice but based on clearly natural endowment:

> Maureen laughed back at her, at her small pretty tight-drawn face whose blackness was closed quality acting upon it from within rather than a matter of pigment. Why should the white woman be ashamed to be seen in her weakness, blemishes, as she saw the other woman's. (92)

Beauty when seen ought to be complimented instead of deriding it based on one prejudice or the other. The high point of the revolution is that whites are now the endangered specie. Instead of being the predator, they have now turned and become the prey. Gordimer with these hints on the uncertainties of life, its inequalities and unpredictability: 'Why? D' you think someone might see me? But the local people know we're here, of course they know. Why? There's much more risk when Bam goes out and shoots. When you drive around in that yellow thing - - are you afraid –'(97)

At a stage it has become a risk to keep whites in one's home. Like the author did herself for the African National Congress (ANC) members during the apartheid days, July is in danger of keeping the Smales in his house. He has to take permission from the local chief, to avoid black reprisals:

> He know who it is we – He send someone ask who I'm keep in my house. Someone say you must come there to the Chief's place. I must show him. Always when people is coming somewhere, they must go to the Chief, ask him? –
> Ask him what? –
> Ask him nice, they can stay in his village. (100)

Gordimer uses the opportunity to show the true allegiance of traditional African structure over the alien structure which the Western political structure represents. That July is eager to obey the Chief and break the laws of the government by driving without license shows that there is more allegiance to the former:

> -Yes I'm say that. My place is here. But all people here, all villages, it's the Chief's. If he's sending someone ask me this or this, I must do. Isn't it? If he's saying I must come, I must come. That is our law. (100)

Bam's loss of authority and degeneration reaches its peak when he goes to the bush to defecate. The smell he leaves behind which showers and bath have always kept away becomes now noticeable. Suddenly a body which Maureen has caressed with her tongue becomes loathsome, repugnant and disgusting. For the natives, heath-fire becomes the perfume to drive away body odour. By centralizing it, they make fire a part of life and a soothing balm. In authorial intrusion, Gordimer makes a case: "only those still thinking as if they were living with bathrooms

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en suite would have decided, civilized, the custom was unhygienic and too hot" (103).

With a little pride still left, the Smales question the Chief's right over their stay in an African Kingdom, his own kingdom. Obviously they have forgotten they are living in an age that is fast fading, that has no bearing with the present:

> What business of the Chief to tell them where? He had not asked them to come here. A wide arc of the hand: plenty place to go. And this was not their custom, but the civilized one; when a white farmer sold up, or died, the next owner would simply say to the black labourer living and working on the land, born there: go. (104)

Gordimer makes bold to challenge the age - long white supremacy. How will the white feel if they are visited with such injustice, she seems to ask? The visit of the Smales to the Chief's house turns out to be an enlightening one. The Chief wants to be educated on everything possible under the sun: visit with the pope, interrogation with the secret police, the black–white relationship, with July remaining the bridge between the Chief and the Smales:

> What's he say? –
> He's say he can't believe that; white people are not shooting, the government is not killing those men? Always the white men got the guns, those tanks, aeroplanes. Long time. Even from fourteen – eighteen King George war. Even from Smutes and Vorster time. The white men can't run away. No. Why they run away? – (117).

July also admits that the Chief has respect and influence but in the context of the modern world, even in black majority rule, he

is powerless. He is a toothless bulldog whose influence is fast giving way to modern governmental structure. In a sense, under both systems of apartheid and multi-racial society, the Chief's future is doomed because he has no money and cannot stand on the way of the black majority rule:

> He is our Chief, but he doesn't fight when the white people tell him he must do what they want-they want. Now can he fight when the black soldiers come, they say do this or this. How can he fight? He is poor man. He is Chief but poor man, he has got money if they come over here, those what you call it, the people from Soweto they bring them, they eat his mealier, they hungry, kill a cow – what he's going to do? Can't do nothing. Talking, talking – (122 - 123)

July is like Petrus in Disgrace by J.M. Coetzee; a black wily fox who is so worldly wise that he is an expert in upstaging unsuspecting whites. Bam could read deeper the nature of July but because he has made so deep impression on Maureen: "She wouldn't have Bam say anything to him, offend his pride, he was so highly intelligent in other ways" (99).

July defends Victor as Petrus defends the boy, Pollux that joins other boys to rape Lucy. Between Petrus and July there is little difference. Both are servants who later assume the role of masters; both are ambitious; both are go - betweens between blacks and whites; and both wish to continue to protect black interest. In terms of education they are a little more than illiterates and they have limited language power but they are very crafty.

The baseline then is a situation where two white writers have deep knowledge of characters they are describing and who

shoot them out as products of racism and fruits of many years of repression, Joah Silbur's review is apt in this regard:

> Gordimer's novel is an intense look at a network of power relations: black to white, servant to master, male to female, child to parent - and the enormous changes through in all allegiances once power shifts utterly. For all the extremities of the situation it chronicles and the suspense – drama of its plot, it is a very subtle book – spare, careful, and instructive. (Silbur 1)

Opinion varies as to the success of the author in July's People. The novel is often compared with Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe. What is however clear is Gordimer's role as a champion of the oppressed.

NONE TO ACCOMPANY ME

Gordimer's eleventh novel - None To Accompany Me is her most complex novel in which she displays exceptional skills. The story is about Vera Stark, a white civil rights lawyer, her married life, infidelities, and the violence in South Africa after the collapse of Apartheid and the corruption, political rivalries and acute housing problems that engulfed that nation. The novel is also about Vera Stark's increasing evolution from a naïve house wife to a highly assertive liberal lawyer who chooses to pitch her tent with the plight of blacks at the end of the major changes in South Africa.

Sensual and somewhat inconsiderate in the matters of love and marriage, Vera's role as mother and lover is progressively geared towards self protection. It is Gordimer's real throw to the lot of the feminist. Vera is content to throw out her handsome husband, Bennet, to the streets homeless despite the sacrifices

he makes on her account. The house she inherited from her first marriage after a divorce is sold off when Bennet goes on a visit to see their son, Ivan, a London banker. Vera's answer to the action when her daughter enquires why is: "Because I cannot live with someone who cannot live without me" (310). Her daughter, Annie, a gay South African doctor, is aghast by her mother's insensitivity.

In a parallel characterization, Gordimer creates Didymus and his wife Sibongile (Sally) who has just returned from abroad after the inauguration of the new black majority government with their beautiful daughter, Mpho. Didymus is sidelined but Sibongile is rehabilitated through a high profile job as deputy director of the movement's regional redeployment programme for returnees. Later she is elected as a member of the central executive in the post-apartheid movement. Tashiko Sakamoto believes that

> Nadine Gordimer's None to Accompany Me (1994) presents a definite shift of perspective in the way her work represents Black female characters. Here there is more concern than ever with the empowerment of Black Women in politics. The novel explores both Black and White women's empowerment within South Africa's national transformation during the period of dramatic change in political power from white dominance to the first democratically elected government. (1)

As a writer, Gordimer is a hero of sorts, for trailing the dangerous terrain by opposing apartheid. She finds it difficult to understand the hypocrisy of white conservatives who preach race purity. In an interview with Dwight Garner, she backs her books thus:

> Well, you know, in the fundamentalist milieu of the Afrikaners, there was a sense that they were a chosen people, that they were bringing civilization to the blacks. And look at the whole race purity theory. Is that not one of a chosen people? Why would it be diminishing the race to have a mixture of blood? Why would it be that the dilution of the blood would be such a terrible thing? (5)

None to Accompany Me reveals a pagination of self in the story. It could lead to consistent evaluation of self which will lead to the question: Is justice all about self survival? Vera questions her daughter when she asks her why selling the house should ever be contemplated: "When someone gives you so much power over himself, he makes you a tyrant" (310), she replies. But Vera has never really been a fair person, cheating on her husband in her matrimonial home when he is busy fighting at war and getting the same house in settlement after divorce. She later submits to Otto in shameful sexual glorification. But fate has equally been fair to Bennet. A war love rat ought to pay for his crimes at peace time.

Gordimer had said: "I shall never write an autobiography", to a journalist and she repeated it to her interviewer, Dwight Garner (7). But she has been consistently compared with James Frey as a writer who fabricated parts of her lives in order to sell her books. Even her biographer, Ronald Suresh Roberts, parted ways with Gordimer because he claimed that Gordimer's essay: "A South African Childhood", was not entirely autobiographical. Gordimer accused her biographer of making certain revelations which she saw as a "breach of confidence" and she renounced the book which he later published without her authorization.

Gordimer's elevation of black womanhood in None To Accompany Me is significant. Her making Sibongile Magoma prominent at the expense of her husband, Didymus, has been hailed as a departure from her stance in her earlier novels. She appears coming to term with the idea that the total liberation of South Africa cannot be an all male affair. Black woman's struggle is a fire in the cause. Sibongile believes that home politics is central to her self liberation and that of other African women.

While Coetzee has been criticized for lack of enough political commitment, Gordimer is seen as running a crusade, chronicling black suffering for which she has never suffered. Garan Holcombe rises in her defense thus:

> Gordimer has been criticized for writing from a position of privilege, of suffering from what she has described as "the languid evasions of moral guilt": this is unfair. You are not denied a voice and a perspective simply because you have not suffered for your skin colour. Furthermore, this form of criticism negates Gordimer's position as a staunch defender of a free South Africa, and of her right to be a liberal witness to her country's tragedies. Some it would seem are frustrated that the writing career of Nadine Gordimer has outlived Apartheid. In the mid 1990s several critics questioned whether there was a place for her after the fall of the regime. These were the sort of people who saw her as a 'protest' writer, whose work was done the moment Nelson Mandela was elected. This is an absurd attempt to reduce Gordimer as a writer. (3)

Recent publications by Gordimer have proved her critics wrong. She has demonstrated to the astonishment of her critics

that she is a writer for all seasons, whose career spans ages, political eras and across generations. With The House Gun (1998), The Pickup (2001) and Get a Life (2005), all written after the death of her partner show that she is not yet done. Get a Life is the story of Bannerman who returned to her parent's home after becoming radioactive. It is an attempt by Gordimer to x-ray the evils of the South African ecosystem in the face of rising exploitation of the environment. The Pickup is the story of a privileged daughter of an investment banker and an Arab - African mechanic, while The House Gun tackles the emotional catharsis of a white couple whose son commits murder and runs to a black lawyer for defense. The story of Vera Stark is however unique as Gordimer herself observes:

> Vera Stark's image looms large in the foundation building and she is almost indispensable. When Oupa is studying for his law examination, she is the resource person, the clearing house in his journey to the Promised Land.
>
> She was the figure of the school – mistress missing in his lonely-self education, she was the abstract image of authority that, resented all your life or not, you had to turn to in your powerlessness. (15)

On the contrary, Bennett Stark has been anything but a success in his own chosen field. He carves wood and models clay but even then recognition seems long in coming. He falls back on his English degree which he had earned when he has not decided on a career. Like David Lurie, his success in this area is scanty. Gordimer's opinion of him is poor despite his good looks: 'From the point of view of advancement in the academic community it's a bad sign to have some advantage that is simply a gift of nature, not earned and not attainable for others by any amount of hard work, lobbying or today'. (19)

Vera Stark is not in the mould of her creator who abhors injustice because it offends her sense of justice. Gordimer uses Vera to state a case of justice for its own case which later explains the life she lives, her immorality and insensitivity. For instance:

> She went to work at the Foundation, not out of white guilt people talked about, but out of a need to take up, to balance on her own two feet the time and place to which, by birth, she understood she had no choice but to belong. This need must have been growing unheeded – seed that by a bird and germinating, sprouting, beside a cultivated tree – climbing the branches of passionate domesticity. (21)

Thus, Vera Stark is a well thought out character, carefully created to nib at the population and throw off the guilt of the past. It is for this reason that Garan Holcombe asserts:

> Gordimer explores against the growth of black consciousness. She examines the complexity of white privilege, inviting us to see the weakness of the liberal response to Apartheid. She also investigates its attempts at self – justification and finds that even in benevolence, there can be an ugly egotism. (3)

Gordimer's campaign against Apartheid has been steady and fierce. But this fight sometimes assumes the nature of a crusade. Her critics feel she is too much into the sociological to the detriment of her art. Gordimer's novel that is particularly referred to is My Son's Story. Yet, a careful look at most of her novels reveals this tendency. Clive Barnett supports this point:

> Gordimer's novel is judged to be too weighed down by its author's urge to write explicitly about politics in South Africa. It's a good read and good

> journalism. It informs and explains. But it's too banal and too explicit to be good art'. Gordimer's political urges are seen to impinge upon the quality of the novel's writing. A dualism is set up in this sort of evaluation, between the novels which escape the murky traps of a society saturated with political significance, and novels which apparently succeed in rendering political reality but are, by this very token, condemned to a lesser aesthetic judgment. (291)

Part of Gordimer's greatness is to create a character in a distinguished way so that when he or she begins to fall, the audience can identify with him/her. Affectation and empathy forever intermingle in her art, always playing themselves out in the life of the characters. For instance, Mpho, the daughter of Didymus and Sibongile has to be appealing so that when she gets pregnant and goes for abortion, we read more resentment into Vera's grandson's flirtations with her. Gordimer describes that: "The Magoma daughter was a sixteen-year-old beauty of the kind created by the cross-pollination of history" (49). This is a suspenseful creation and a demonstration of a skill which makes the art of Shakespeare great:

> This school girl combined the style of Vogue with the assertion of Africa. She was a mutation achieving happy appropriation of the aesthetics of opposition species. She exposed the exaggeratedly long legs that seem to have been created by natural endowment to the specification of Western standards of luxury, along with the elongated chassis of custom-built cars. (49)

The twenty first century art has been marked by 'polished' liberalism towards sex by the world leading writers – Coetzee,

Gordimer, Morrison etc writing in English. In their art, while sex is given prominence because it occupies a significant place in the life of mankind, care has been taken to condemn sexual acts that have been suggestive of immorality. Bennet snatches Vera from her husband but she betrays him even while still living with him. Vera's betrayal is Gordimer's way of saying that such women should not be trusted. She calls her a bitch a number of times to voice her disapproval: 'Bitch, greeted her face in the mirror and next day she went back to one twenty – one. There she felt it was her lover would accept that a woman like her could enjoy making love with another man? With her husband?' (68)

Injustice breeds injustice. That is what Apartheid has done. Bennet is stabbed in the back as he has stabbed the first husband of Vera. Although he does not know and never suspects, her final act towards the end of the novel, turning him to the streets, is a well deserved revenge. This time he knows. Vera's last love making with Otto Abarlanel shows the place of his betrayal and the morality level of the lovers:

> There was no appropriate place for that curious passion to be enacted, and so it happened in the kitchen, she took him in through the aperture of clothes pulled out of the way, standing up where they had risen from the kitchen table, they were clutched like a pillar shaking in an earth tremor, and never before or after in her life was she, in her turn, transformed, and fused with a man in such blazing sensation. That was the day and place of betrayal of Ben, Bennet, the chosen man (70)

In his letter to his mother, Ivan tells Vera: "We somehow learned from you about emotion, you can't fake love" (90) when he switches like her from his wife to "a Hungarian

redhead" (90).He says, "If it's gone, its gone" (90). Ivan does not understand that it is nature at work. His mother is a little better than a whore and she gives birth to a gay South African doctor and himself, a London banker divorcee.

Annie brings her Lesbian partner into her father's house as a man would bring his wife to see his parents. She even reveals their marriage intentions. In the same house, secured through adultery, husband and wife make love in one room while their daughter, Annie makes love to another woman in the next room. The debauchery has no limit: 'They were making love the way a man and woman do, in this house where, on the other side of a wall, two women lay enlaced. The awareness became a kind of excitement, a defiance for her, an assertion for him'. (227) Gordimer's description is not without a cause. Human weakness can be found in both black and white. It is an invitation to race theorists, especially those interested in the 'purity' of blood to come and provide answers. She does not make excuses for the aggression of the modern woman, who hides under sexual perversity to inflict embarrassment on the society. Gordimer carefully shows that Vera's depravity is a self creation, an inclination to always throw caution to the wind. At a dinner, Vera bares it all:

> Poor thing; she comes clip-clopping into the ladies' room on high-heeled hooves and behind the door there is the noisy stream of her urine falling, she's even taught herself to piss boldly as a man. Or perhaps that's wronging her-she comes out and smiles, my God I was bursting, hey, sorry. (107)

Vera is not just promiscuous; she is given to too much wine. It is difficult to establish Vera's morality even when it concerns her children. At a time when Annie needs the big stick to rouse

her into consciousness, from the depravity of lesbianism, she shamelessly sits on the fence, when the child needs the truth and parental disapproval:

> Tell me. We disgust you-Lou and I –
> Of course you don't –
> No 'of course' about it. Tell me. –
> No disgust –
> 'So long as I'm happy', mnh? – What all the parents deprived of grand children swallow bravely and say.
> It's just the penis. No – I don't disapprove. I don't consider what you do is wrong. I have to say it. I regret for you-no penis (160)

Nothing is important to Vera in a man-woman relationship except sexual satisfaction. And when Annie asks:

> "What about Ivan? With the penis, and the grandchildren, it still didn't work out –"
> (160),
> Vera has nothing to say except
> "Al, it doesn't solve everything, I'll admit"
> (160)

Gordimer through this discourse is inviting every race to see for itself. The quality of the mind does not depend on colour. Like J.M. Coetzee's Disgrace, Lucy the daughter of David Lurie is equally morally depraved. Gordimer and Coetzee are preaching the same thing. Evil is not a colour thing, it is a cancer in man, in both black and white.

Gordimer's sense of justice knows no bound. Just as the heat is turned on blacks at the time of Apartheid, which is condemnable, it is also unjust to practices violence during the post Apartheid era. The bloodbath in Odenville, the rape, burning and maiming are not issues to cheer about. Vera is only echoing Gordimer's deep seated disapproval:

> When I heard that Apla man on the radio saying there is outrage only because this time whites were killed, I agreed with him. He shocked people because they see him as racist, but what he said is more than fact, Zeph, it's true, it's right inside, deep in whites who own newspapers and the TV and radio stations. But we can't say it because we're not racist, we can't say it because we have to demonstrate we don't stereotype, we don't use racial categories in the worth of human life. Killings are killings. Death is death. Blood and wine mix. All we can produce is this cover-up. (152)

For those who believe in judgment, in fairness, there should be no shedding of blood. Nothing justifies murder, not even for revenge and certainly not a cause to atone for all the ills of Apartheid in the past.

The relationship between Zeph and Vera is deep and complex and needs some comment. Zeph Rapulana is an ambitious, politically sagacious and financially sound black lawyer in the employ of the foundation. Although he is soft spoken, he has come to be part of that engine room that moves the foundation. Vera is powerfully drawn to him although sex has no place in their relationship. Yet: "Vera had never before felt - it was more than drawn to – involved in the being of a man to whom she knew no sexual pull" (123)
"At the same time, she was beginning to have an inkling that her sense of connection with this man was that she had something to learn from him, as all unbelievers secretly hope to appropriate a value without adopting a faith"(154)

It is to Zeph's house that Vera turns when she sells off her only house. It is difficult to dismiss sexual interest in the act although

Vera claims it is without such entanglements:

"It was as if, in the common place nature of their continuing contact through the foundation, they belonged together as a single sex, a reconciliation of all each had experienced, he as a man, she as a woman". (123)

The experiment between Zeph and Vera is a continuation of Gordimer's credo, of a universal bond between all mankind; a world where feelings should play a dominant role and where sexual satisfaction could be reached from all races.

A dominant theme in None to Accompany Me is the emancipation of black and white women. This is particularly noticeable in Sibongile, Mpho, Vera and even Oupa's wife in the village. Sibongile's rise to power blunts the political edges of her husband, Didymus. Gordimer tries to compare the efforts of Oupa's wife who labours to fulfill her role as a house wife whose husband is away, and Sibongile who strives hard to maintain her visibility in the new political arrangement. Oupa's wife complements her husband's energies, without whose effort he would have found it difficult to concentrate. She is thus a part of the struggle in the new dispensation in a strong way.

Gordimer, it seems, has thus reacted to an earlier criticism that her works sidelined black women and made them invisible. She has been fair to white women in this regard, although they are seen as appendages to black men in the struggle for emancipation. Even Mpho tries to break away from the clutches of her parents. Gordimer sees her as a "cross-pollination" of history. She speaks "a perky London English" and she is: "a style of beauty that comes out of the clash between domination and resistance" (None 49). Mpho is a symbol of the upcoming generation, trapped between contemporary historical intersection and dialogues with the future. Toshiko Sakamoto

argues that in the emancipation of women in None to Accompany Me:

> Gordimer parallels the reversal of ascendancy and the consequential withdrawal of sexual attraction from the husband to his wife who has become a revolutionary without his knowledge. Sibongile's feminity and her sexual appeal to Didymus are also overshadowed by her political advancement: "This body beside him invaded the whole bed, lolled against him. His own body felt no sign of desire for it". Although Sonny and Didymus are free from the common male opposition to or reluctance in women's political activism, there are real delicate problems and new dilemmas for them within the new conception of women and their empowerment. The novel thus explores pressures and anxieties created when women are empowered and addresses the question of how men may reconcile with the re-organization of gender relations occasioned with the politicization of women. (3)

Gordimer is as much astonished as the world in the level of violence going on in South Africa despite a smooth transition to black majority rule. She could not find answers to it and she stays behind Lou, the partner of Annie to express it:

> I don't suppose the fact that we were blacks and whites would make much difference if the object is to create terror. Stop negotiations. But think of the international hullabaloo if the UN representative were to have been killed. Now that would have been something to wake up the outside world to this government's failure to deal with violence. (150)

The heart of Gordimer is in universal justice, one that is not dependent on either whites or blacks. If Botha could be criticized for fostering violence and discrimination, will President Zuma be applauded for the flowering of violence, rape, arson and robberies in South Africa?

In None to Accompany Me, Gordimer sees culture crisis as one of the aftermaths of the white-black interaction in South Africa. A character like Mpho is a victim of this relationship. Completely alienated from her cultural roots, Mpho finds out that she cannot escape her roots despite her cultural hybridization. Sexual liberalism and youthfulness are the greatest compelling drive. She plunges into Oupa after other spateful affairs and in falling in love assumes that sincerity is the key word. Oupa is married with kids and still has his eyes wide open. When Vera asks him: "So you love her. You think you were in love with her -" (175), Oupa's answer astonishes even Vera:

> "When I say I don't know - - - such a kid, the time when I might have a girl-friend like that, I was inside, those young years. But also she's seen, she knows, so many things I never have – London and Europe and so on - - - sometimes she even laughs at me, the things I don't know about. In one way she's too young, and in another way she's ahead of me. So I don't suppose we could ever get it right" (176)

By consenting to abortion, the parents of Mpho are showing that they are no longer in tune with their roots. Life in exile and Western culture has ensured that they could terminate life to save their face. Only Mpho's grand mother in Alexandra is still with her roots. She does not consent to abortion:

> "Our people don't do this thing. Our children are a blessing. We are not white people. Didymus is my

son. Mpho is my child. This child will be my child. I will look after the child here, in my house. I have told Mpho". (187)

Mpho submits herself to the abortion plan in a way that suggests that the old order is gone. It is like Africa, the old Africa giving way to the Africa of the future. But the act will always hunt Mpho and tear her psyche. Even Vera Stark will not like her grandson Adam to be in love with such a girl. Thus, the kind of future Mpho will be dialoguing with will be one with moral crisis, one that is not completely acceptable to whites and blacks.

The marriage in the future South Africa in Gordimer's opinion is not going to be what it used to be with their parents.

In conclusion, the opinion of Nadine Gordimer is that marriage in the future South Africa will not be the same again with the present. As the old order has changed, so will South Africans expect moral and ethical crisis.

CHAPTER SIX

CRISIS OF REDEMPTION, MARTYRDOM AND IRON WILL IN TWO OF MAYA ANGELOU'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Maya Angelou stands tall among African American women autobiographers whose works emerged immediately after the Civil Rights movements. Born Marguerite Ann Johnson in St. Louis Missouri on April 4, 1928, Maya has been described by Joan M. Braxton as: "America's most visible black female autobiographer" (Symbolic 4). Racism and fate will prepare Angelou for this role, while her determination and strength of character will make the events come to pass. She first came to limelight with her first of the six volume autobiography named I known Why the Caged Bird Sings, which was published in 1969. The book which gives a graphic account of the first seventeen years of her life was nominated for a National Book Award. The book was also on the New York Times paperback Nonfiction Bestseller list with the longest-running record (two years).

Standing over six feet tall and weighing over 289 pounds, Angelou means many things to many people. She has held varying jobs like fry cook, dancer, actress, journalist, television producer, film director and educator. In the 1950s, she joined Harlem Writers Guild and was very active in the Civil Rights movements. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. appointed her the Coordinator of the Northern Christian Leadership Conference. Angelou is also known as a playwright and poet. In 1993, during the inauguration of Bill Clinton's Presidency, she recited her poem "On the Pulse of Morning", thus becoming the first poet to make such recitations since Robert Frost during President John F. Kennedy's inauguration in 1961.

Angelou is mostly remembered as a defender of the rights of blacks and women, a role she has carried out for herself in her books. What distinguishes Maya Angelou's works is the honesty she brings to bear on them. For instance, she is reputed as the first black woman to publicly discuss her personal life in a mortifying manner. Her rape at the age of eight by her mother's boyfriend, Mr. Freeman, her life of prostitution and as a Madame of brothel all pointed to the fact that she has had a rough life. She became a single mother at the age of seventeen and as she grew older lent herself to the smoking of marijuana to aid her performance during public shows. She worked as the first black female street conductor in San Francisco and went into series of relationships and marriages, all to survive.

Her parents were Bailey Johnson (father), a doorman and dietitian with the Navy, and her mother was Vivian (Baxter) Johnson, a real estate agent and a trained surgical nurse. Her parents were divorced while Maya was only three years old and she was sent along with her elder brother, Bailey Johnson, who was four years old unaccompanied to live with their paternal grand mother, Annie Henderson in Stomps, Arkansas. Annie Henderson was a woman with means who prospered as a result of the great Depression and World War 11.

A DNA test conducted in 2008 showed that Maya Angelou descended from the Mende people of West Africa and her maternal great-grand mother, Mary Lee, was made pregnant by her former owner, a white man named John Savin. To hide his tracks, he forced Lee to sign a false statement accusing another man of the act. Despite the fact that a grand jury indicted Savin for making Lee commit perjury, he was neither found guilty of rape nor punished. Instead, Lee was sent to Clinton County, Missouri with the little girl born out of the relationship. This girl, Marguerite Baxter, became Maya Angelou's grand mother.

Thus, racism, victimization and oppression attended Angelou's history and were the factors that shaped her vision of life. Angelou has been awarded several degrees for her work and in 1971, her collection of poetry Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water Fore 1 Diie was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. She has taught at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, as recipient of the first lifetime Reynolds Professorship of American studies. Her schedule is full with lecture circuit, where Wikipedia has reported over 80 appearances a year and charges as much as US $ 43,000 per engagement. Sometimes, tickets were sold out well in advance before the lecture.

HER WORK

Angelou's work has challenged the normal structure of autobiographic writing and according to Wikipedia; "critiquing, changing and expanding the genre" (2). While public reception of her books has been immense, they have also been challenged in the United States. The central issues in her works are racism, family ties, identity crisis and self evaluation. Her biographer, Mary Jane Lupton records that there are inconsistencies in Angelou's six autobiographies, lectures, interviews, speeches and articles. Although she praises her for speaking eloquently, she however states that Angelou while writing does so: "With no time chart in front of her" (Maya Angelou: A critical 2).

Critics have a long time reconciling Angelou's decision to support the presidential campaign of Hilary Clinton against Barrack Obama when the two were slugging it out for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination, especially as her good friend Operah Winfred had publicly shown support for Obama. But when Obama won the South Carolina primary votes by 80%, Angelou threw her support for Obama. Critics believe that Angelou's stand at that early stage of the

presidential campaign was inconsistent with her avowed interest in black cause. Yet it is difficult to overlook the visibility which Clinton's presidential inauguration gave to her in 1993 when she recited her poem, "On the Pulse of the Morning."

Similarly, Angelou's repentant attitude which was given prominence in her works is undermined by her open support with other celebrities in Harlem of gay rights for same-sex-marriage. Despite these ambiguous stances, in 2002, Molefi Kate Asante listed Maya Angelou among the list of 100 greatest African Americans, a testimony to her steady rise in profile.

Maya Angelou's works are considered autobiographical fiction, although Angelou herself has insisted that they are autobiographies. The argument of some critics is that while historical facts indisputably exist, including the people and events recorded, but since she supplies semblances of scenes, dialogues and speeches, in a manner to achieve unity and sequence, her works are classified as autobiographical fiction because the human brain can hardly capture events in such minutest details as she has described in her books. But outstanding praise has to be given Angelou for coming out as robustly as she has done, taking into account that despite human frailties and passage of time, she is still able to give the very best account of her life and events.

A streak of uncertainties run through the biographies-the fear of tomorrow and the future settlement of bills, her fate as a single mother, the security of her marriage and the fear of going into a new one. Self definition is a recurring decimal and we see in every page the lack of control of that future despite Angelou's will power and resilience until she matured.

Across the fence, Angelou sees white dominance and male image looming large as she beckons to other black women to stand up for their rights and assert their place. She is an apostle that says that women should come together as a group so that their influence can be felt. Mrs. Bertha Flowers, a teacher and a friend of the Angelou family, was reported by her biographer, Mary Jane Lupton, to have introduced Maya Angelou to classical literature and the following authors-Charles Dickens, William Shakespeare, Edgar Allan Poe, Douglas Johnson, James Weldon Johnson, Frances Harper Anne Spencer and Jessie Fauset (Lupton 15).

Angelou's Prose works include:
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1969), Gather Together in My Name (1976), Singing and Swinging, and Getting Merry Like Christmas (1976), The Heart of a Woman (1981), All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes (1986), and A Song Flung Up to Heaven (2002). She has also a collection of poems, Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water Fore I Diiie (1971) which was nominated for the Pulitzer prize for poetry; a poem she wrote and narrated for the M.K Asante Jr film, The Black Candle. She has also been successful as a playwright and actress, screenplay writer for television and film. She is also known as a film and play director and an expert in public speaking. She played a supporting role in 1977, in the famous Roots TV mini-series. Her screen play Georgia, Georgia (1972) is believed to be the first original script by a black woman to be produced.

Other awards by Angelou include a Tony Award nomination for her role in the 1973 play, Look Away and three Grammy's for her spoken word albums. The musician, Ben Harper, has also honoured Angelou for his song, "I'll Rise" adapted from her poem, "And still I Rise". She has been honoured with over thirty honorary degrees (Moore 96).

I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings is Maya Angelou's first of the six volume autobiography series published in 1969 and the one that engraved her name in gold. Angelou took the title of the book from the third stanza of the poem of a follow African American poet, Paul Laurence Durbar, titled "Sympathy":

> I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
> When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,
> When he beats his bars and would be free,
> It is not a carol of joy or glee,
> But a prayer that he sends from his hearts deep core,
> But a plea, that uproar to Heaven he flings-
> I know why the caged bird sings
> (Collected Poetry 102)

The book chronicles the first seventeen years of Maya Angelou's life and the crises of her life at that early period which helped to shape her life and writing. Her rape at the age of eight, the divorce of her parents which led her and her brother Bailey Johnson being sent to Stomps, Arkansas, by train unaccompanied, to live with their grandmother, and the birth of her son, Guy, which made her a single mother at the age of seventeen, were some of her experiences. These challenging events instead of setting her back transformed her into a remarkable woman and a toast of her age.

Angelou's literary career took a new turn when her friend and writer, James Baldwin, brought her to a dinner party at the home of a cartoonist, Jules Heifer and his wife Judy in 1968. Judy Heifer connected Angelou to Robert Loomis at Random House after hearing the story of her life. Baldwin's statement that: "to write an autobiography as literature is just about impossible" (A Career 1) spurred her on and challenged her

intellect. Angelou took the challenge and in 1969, the book was published. It was nominated for a National Book Award in 1970 and had a singular record of topping the New York Times paper back seller for nonfiction for two years

THEME

The theme of the Caged Bird is racism, child molestation and rape, sexuality and the place of an African American in racist America. Angelou's description of sex scene, her sometimes profane language and irreverent portrayal of religious institutions have made the book a target of purists. Consequently, it has been challenged and banned in schools and libraries in the United States, damned in some countries but still read and enjoyed across the world. Although the autobiographies of Angelou have distinct stories, strung together craftily and presented in sequence, the Caged Bird is still regarded as her best.

HER RAPE

One significant sad event in her life was her rape at the age of eight by her mother's boyfriend, Mr. Freeman. Despite Freeman's threats to both Maya and her brother, Bailey, the act was revealed. Freeman was found guilty but was jailed for one day. But he was found kicked to death four days later maybe by Angelou's uncles. Angelou says of the event: "I thought, my voice killed him, I killed that man, because I told his name. And then I thought I would never speak again, because my voice would kill anyone" (Maya Angelou 133). Her biographer, Mary Jane Lupton, recorded that she remained nearly mute for five years after that.
(Lupton, Maya 5)

The account of the rape of Angelou is symbolic. It is the rape of all back American women, who, conditioned by the racist

society, were made to pay the ultimate prize as victims of racism. Some were victims of their white owners while others fell prey to fellow blacks, like Mr. Freeman who deflowered young girls they were supposed to protect and guide. Symbolically, Angelou represented these black women who sometimes could not reveal the identity of their assailants. Maya Angelou's courage is the voice of the very few black women who rose above the tyranny of a few sexually irresponsible men in racist America. The image of the bird trying to escape from its cage is equally the symbol of a black woman struggling to escape a trapped situation. Angelou as the prototype of all African American women is a regular and connecting image throughout the book.

Constant reminders that Maya Angelou is black fill the book. At her graduation ceremony at eight grade, a white racist instead of increasing her joy made it his duty to dampen it. He told his audience that blacks still had limited job opportunities. Similarly, a white dentist visited her with racism by refusing to treat her rotten tooth despite an earlier financial assistance during the Depression by her grandmother to the same racist. A racist by nature does not believe in symbiotic relationship. He is raised from cradle to be a parasite on the helpless blacks around him. When Angelou stressed on this and about the fact that blacks have always cooked the food of racists, it should be understood in this light.

In an autobiography, the truth of life represented can fully be attested to by individuals who lived around the periods being described, but more can be validated by the autobiographer. Critics have not been too comfortable about the whole truthfulness of Maya Angelou's book. In an interview with George Plimpton, she stated, "sometimes I make a diameter from a composite of three or four people, because the essence

is only one person is not sufficiently strong to be written about" (Rogers 1). Ronald R. Rogers sees her style as democratic craft, a kind of consensus building to achieve a truthful account.

Using pillars to support truth is like using spices to improve on one's cooking. It is this use of pillars to stabilize a literary structure that Angelou calls "the sometimes slippery notion of truth in non-fiction" and memoir. (Rogers 1) A similar charge was made against the writings of Nadine Gordimer. The charge against the works of Gordimer not withstanding, issues raised by Angelou were recurrent in the autobiography of many black American women, especially those written after the Civil Rights movement. Braxton sees the issues as the celebration of black motherhood, a criticism of racism, the importance of family, the quest for independence, personal dignity and self-definition. (Braxton 64). Angelou thus falls under a mold, as a representative of a period.

What marks out Angelou is her style and the depth of her exposure of even the ugly sides of her personality and life. Where others have chosen to be romantic, Angelou has been strident and critical. In instances where others fear the aftermaths of societal ridicule and scorn, Angelou has risen in exposure. Hilton Als calls her style and person, one of the "pioneers of self-exposure" (Songbird 1). Angelou herself was also worried what the society would make out of her image as a one-time prostitute but her husband, Paul Du Feu, had come out to her aid: "be honest about it and tell the truth as a writer" (Lupton 14). Angelou's case is one where a doctor puts aside faeces at childbirth and takes up the baby. Angelou's life is magnificent, filled with rot and decay but uplifting. It is the edifying aspect that should be lifted.

Angelou's image in the Caged Bird is one of cultural dualism; the two life society imposes on a black woman in racist America. The first is the realization that she is black and unwanted in her immediate society and thus must eat from the crumbs that fall from the whites table. The second is her negotiated pathway and insistence that she has a say in her life. Lillian Arensberg sees this cultural dualism as Angelou being: "perpetually in the process of becoming, of dying and being reborn, in all its ramifications" (Arensberg 115). But Angelou traces the origin and causes of it as the fact that: "The black female is assaulted in her tender years by all those common forces of nature at the same time that she is caught in the tripartite crossfire of male prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power". (Caged Bird 265) Truly, Angelou died when she was raped but she rose again when she found her voice in her writing. It was through her rebirth that she was able to explain all that happened to her. At the heart of her rebirth was Mrs. Flowers. It was perhaps for this reason that James Baldwin stated that her book "liberates the reader into life" and he called it, "a Biblical study of life in the midst of death" (Moore 56).

Family bond is very strong in Caged Bird. Her biographer Jane Mary Lupton identifies "Kinship concerns" (A critical 11) as one of the most important themes in Angelo's works and the unpitying factor is "the mother-child pattern" (Singing 131). This can be seen, according to her, in Angelou's relationship with her son, Guy, Angelou and her mother and Angelou and her grandmother. While the symbol of fatherhood is skeletal, sex and marriage though recurrent are not the frames that hold the story. They are tangential motifs that occur from time to time as soothing balms on sprained ankles.

THE HEART OF A WOMAN

This is Angelou's fourth volume of autobiography which critics appear in agreement that it still ranks below the first, I known Why the Caged Bird Sings (1969). But it is undoubtedly a well composed work. It sets off with Angelou leaving her California home with her son, Guy Johnson for New York. There she entered the Harlem Writers Guild and interacted with budding and established writers like Malcolm X and James Baldwin. Although she continued to sing, especially at the Apollo theatre in Harlem, it was there that she began to enter very deeply the black Americans' struggle to fight for their place in white dominated America.

John and Grace Killens play a part in this solid development and the opportunity provided by Martin Luther king Jr, who appointed her Coordinator, Northern Christian Leadership Conference. All these put Angelou in a good position to assert her right. She thus threw her weight to the Civil Rights movement. Later, she fell in love with a South African Freedom fighter, Vusumzi Make after leaving Thomas, the New York Bail bonds man she was to marry. Vusumzi took her and her son, Guy first to London, then to Cairo. But the marriage was not destined to last. Vusumzi was secretive and unfaithful, but more than that, Angelou was assertive and uncompromising. She became the first female editor of an English-Language magazine and later left for Ghana with her son, when the marriage collapsed finally, as others would do after that.

The Heart of a Woman opened with Angelou's return from a year-long European tour as premier dancer with Porgy Bess. When she wanted to rent an accommodation, racism would not allow her. Angelou got the accommodation through a sympathetic white couple, Atara and Joe Morheim. When the white landlord found out that he had been beaten in the game,

after telling Angelou the house had been taken over that very morning, the landlord fumed:

> "You bustards, I know what you're doing. I ought to
> sue you". Joe replied in equal measure "You fascist, you'd better not mention suing anybody. This lady here should sue you. If she wants to, I'll testify in court for her. Now, get the hell out of the way so we can move in". (The Heart 5)

We could feel Angelou's slide from an innocent woman to a spoilt one and then repentance when one of her friends, Wilkie, asked if she would like to host Billie Holiday. Holiday was a singer hooked on to drugs. She was in the habit of using crude and vulgar language. Angelou's reply to the request showed her own past life too:

> I didn't become nervous until he left. Then the reality of Lady Day coming to my house slammed into me and started my body to quaking. It was pretty well known that she used heavy drugs, and I hardly smoked grass anymore .How could I tell her she couldn't shoot up or sniff up in my house? It was also rumored that she had lesbian affairs. If she propositioned me, how could I reject her without making her think I was legendary in show business, and I didn't want to arouse it. I vacuumed, emptied ashtrays and dusted, knowing that a clean house would in no way influence Billie Holiday. (Heart 7)

In school, Guy, Angelou's son was tactfully expelled from school because he was vulgar. He could have been pardoned if he had been given a chance to apologise and also if he were white. Angelou's profanity and Guy's exposure to uncouth

language prepared him for it. Then Guy's book on the beginning of life made him to be worldly wise and ahead of his peers. He could talk about the penis, the vagina and the womb. There were costs for being so open and equally for being black:

> Two days later, Guy brought home a message which infuriated me. My son was reasonably bright, but he had never been more than a competent student. The letter he brought home, however, stated that due to his wonderful grades, he had been advanced and would be attending another school at the end of the term. (Heart 21)

This was the view held by Angelou's mother, who was as defiant as her daughter. She and her husband, Bailey Johnson, had divorced when Angelou was only three years old and her brother, Bailey Jr. was four. After marrying a few times, she told her daughter what fear could do to any human being:

> Animals can sense fear. They feel it. Well, you know that human beings are animals, too. Never, never let a person know you're frightened. And a group of them--- absolutely never. Fear brings out the worst thing in everybody. Now, in that lobby you were as scared as a rabbit. I know it and all those white folks knew it. If I hadn't been there, they might have turned into a mob. But something about me told them, if they mess with either of us, they'd better start looking for some new asses, 'cause I'd blow away what their mamas gave them. (Heart 26).

Angelou's mother made a declaration that might have served as Angelou's guide for several years: "The Desert Hotel better be ready for integration, 'cause if it's not, I'm ready for the Desert Hotel". (Heart 26)

Racism in sex in the 1940s and sixties went down to even the children. Without letting adults know, they sang to press home that whites were sexually inferior:

White folks aint got the hole
And they aint got the pole
And they aint got the soul
To do it right--- real right --- All night. (Heart 32)

When Angelou went to New York, it was John killens who brought to her the full meaning of racism and racial environment:

> Girl, don't do it. Georgia is Down South. California is up South. If you're black in this country, you're on a plantation. You have to deal with masters. There might be some argument over whether they are vicious masters, but be assured that they all think they are masters.... ...And if you think that, then you'd better believe they think you are the slave. Maybe a smart slave, a pretty slave, a good slave, but a slave just the same. (Heart 33)

One remarkable feature of Angelou's autobiographies is her honesty. This honesty which can be extended to sexual frankness sometimes reveals her to be at a receiving or disadvantaged end. As a single mother and in search of a partner, she revealed how difficult it could be for such a woman. Like she coaxed her white boyfriend into sex which made her pregnant, she thought she could lure Godfrey Cambridge into sex. She revealed all her efforts and final disappointment:

> We ate a four-course meal (I always used my cooking to enhance my sex appeal) and laughed a lot. After Guy went to bed, Godfrey and I sat in the

> living room listening to records and drinking cognac laced coffee. To my disappointment, the jokes continued. Godfrey talked about crazy passengers, egotistic actors and tyrannical directors, and each story led to a punch line which begged for laughter. The stories became more forced and time moved more haltingly. Despite my availability, my cooking and my willingness, together we ignited no passionate fires. When I let him out of the house, he gave me a brother's kiss and I scratched him off my list as possibility. (Heart 53)

By Angelou's own admission, feminism, while it could liberate women, could also keep them off their natural roles and make them strain for what naturally would have come to them. It is natural for a man to go after a woman. When a woman initiates a sexual interest, a man strives to fall into line. But assertiveness can blunt the male libido because he fears the unknown, the aftermath and the security of the union. What could have restrained Godfrey, his own moral instinct or failure to notice Angelou's advances? It was perhaps Godfrey's fear of losing Angelou's genuine friendship if they failed to get the love affair right. It is perhaps safer to remain on the fence than to climb over it and be burnt. Or could it be his own commitment to a wife or girl friend?

WHITES ON THE SIDE OF BLACKS

Throughout the book, Angelou has recounted the roles of whites who had blacks interest at heart. Angelou's critical balance saves the book from falling into subjective monologue. At the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Angelou met some of such whites like Jack Murray and Stanley Levison. They told her what she needed to know about their full co-operation:

> Miss Angelou, I assure you, you don't have to convert the converted. Historically, the exploited, the enslaved, the minority, has had to strive harder and be more qualified just in order to be considered in the running. Stanley and I understand that. That's why we are full-time volunteers at SCCL. Because we understand. (Heart 61)

Similarly, when the Civil Rights Leader, Martin Luther King Jr, was carrying out his campaign against racism in the United States, some white students in colleges came to identify with the movement. The students were from Long Island. Some whites, positively moved by the situation of blacks, also joined in the struggle. Some of them, white movie stars like Harry Belafonte and Sidney Pointers joined the struggle. One of them, Shelley Winters, explained why she was glad to contribute her money and time to SCLC:

> It is not that I love Reverend King or all black people or even Harry Belafonte. I have a daughter. She's white and she's young now, but when she grows up and finds that most of the people in the world are black or brown or yellow, and have been oppressed for centuries by people who look like her, she's going to ask me what I did about it. I want to be able to say, "The best I could". (Heart 91)

Angelou found Winters' answer more practical. Thus, fear of the future had begun to creep into whites. It was perhaps this fear that laid the solid foundation for the collapse or significant reduction in racial sentiments.

DIVISION OVER APPROACH

Just as writers were divided over the discrimination of blacks, so were blacks confused about the position of their leaders. Some supported the non violent approach of Luther, while

others preferred the uncompromising attitude of Malcolm X. At the 125 street where blacks usually congregated, they freely aired their views:

> "You see them Negroes in North Carolina.
> They mean business"
> "Charlie better straighten up, we're tired of this shit."
> "Man, that Martin Luther King, he's not a man made of blood."
> "He is a fool. Love your enemies? Jesus Christ did that and you saw what happened to him".
> "Yeah, they lynched him".
> "Black people ought to listen to Malcolm X. He's got it right .Crackers are blue-eyed devils."
> "I don't go for that hate talk. Negroes aint got time to be hating anybody. We got to get together." (Heart 92).

Maya Angelou's lot was with Malcolm X approach. She thought Reverened king's method was flawed. A tyrant never loosens his grips just because you are yielding. If you offer the other cheek after being slapped on the right, the tyrant would strike the left, Angelou stated:

> Redemptive suffering had always been the part of Martin's argument which I found difficult to accept. I had seen distress fester souls and bent people's bodies out of shape, but I had yet to see anyone redeemed from pain, by pain. (Heart 94)

This was Angelou's philosophy which she pursues till date. She had maintained this stand in Order Out of Chaos by Dolly McPherson:

> All my work, my life, everything I do is about survival, not just bare, armful, plodding survival, but survival with grace and faith. While one may encounter many defeats, one must not be defeated. (Order 10-11).

But Angelou was wrong about Reverend King's philosophy because he was also pragmatic and a realist. He had told the members of the SCLC that:

> "Please accept my thanks. And remember, we are not alone. There are a lot of good people in this nation. White people who love right and are willing to stand up and be counted". (Heat 94)
> Also, "But we cannot relax, because for every fair-minded white American, there is a Bull Connor waiting with his shotgun and attach dogs". (Heart 94)

King's stand removes him from the umbrella of blacks who while fighting against racism have in turn made themselves racists. In either case, the world does not fare better. A continuation of racism in another form is reverse racism and for others, just racism. Whichever name it is given, it is all about oppression and discrimination, a belief that one's race is superior to that of another.

It can be said that despite Angelou's diligent and consistent fight against racism, she was ab initio not cut out for wifely roles. The manner she cornered Thomas, the bail bondsman, to make a proposition tells volume of what to expect of her in marriage. In the birth of Guy, her son, it was she who initiated a sexual relationship that made her pregnant. When Vusumzi entered her life, she tactfully threw her relationship with Thomas out of the window. As Thomas nursed his wounds, she latched herself closely to Vus, at least for the moment until he began to desire to change her. Angelou had been fending for herself since she was a teenager. It was wrong for Vusumzi to overlook that and insist that Maya Angelou would not work and be an obedient wife. Abbey had warned Angelou: "The worst injury of slavery was that the white man took away the black man's chance to be in charge of himself, his wife and his

family. Vus is teaching you that you're not a man, no matter how strong you are. He's going to make you into an African woman. Just watch it. (Heart 143)

First, it was wrong to bring in the centrality of the Whiteman's image in the discussion because he had no place and did not influence Vus's decision or Angelou's assertiveness. Both of them were black and could work out the direction of their relationship the way they wanted. Angelou herself did not agree with Abbey because she knew the problem was not over racism but the rise of matriarchy and the stir it was causing because it was gradually gaining momentum. Angelou had a history to rely on, especially with her interaction with other women in London. Angelou thus stated in unequivocal terms that while marriage was desirable it would not be both the means and the end for her. Marriage for her was a contract that would survive on her terms:

> 'But she didn't know the African women in the African stories. I wanted to be a wife and to create a beautiful home to make my man happy, but there was more to life than being a diligent maid with a permanent pussy'. (Heart 143)

For Grace Killens, Angelou could be hasty about things, particularly marriage. The security of a relationship ought to engage the attention of a woman before her rushing into marriage. Grace Killens reminded Angelou:

> "You met him last week at our house. Didn't you? And this week you're going to marry him. The wild west woman". (Heart 127)

For Angelou, once her mind was made up, she would proceed with a project, no matter the risk and the task ahead.

ANGELOU AT THE HEART OF ANY PROTEST

From her involvement with the Civil Rights Movements to the protest marches and freedom for blacks everywhere, Angelou saw herself as a part of that struggle. For Angelou; black protest in America had a common theme but many methods to achieve that end. For Malcolm X, it was no compromise: "The Honourable Elija Muhammad teaches us that integration is a trick. A trick to let the black man to sleep. We must separate ourselves from the white man, this immoral Whiteman and his white religion. It is hypocrisy practiced by Christian hypocrites" (Heart 168). Malcolm X also stated: "As long as the black man looked to the white man's God for his freedom, the black man would remain enslaved" (Heart 168).

For Maya Angelou, the fundamental problem that hindered black-white co-operation and integration was that a particular schism existed between the two ab initio. While blacks were communal, whites were impersonal. Her biographer, Mary Jane Lupton identified this trait in the autobiographies of Angelou as "Kinship concerns", (A Critical 11). This dominant aspect of her work can be traced from her parents' abandonment at the age of three to her relationship with her son, husbands and lovers. If we must accept Lupton's submission, then we have to accept Angelou's argument that blacks were bred or created differently from whites. But is it really true? Sociologists have talked of nature and nurture as important factors in determining the behaviour of an individual. Karl Marx believes that the social existence of a man determines his consciousness. But Angelou believes that nature is the determining factor. She argues that:

> Black people could never be like whites. We were different. More respectful, more merciful, more spiritual. Whites' irresponsibility sent their own aged parents to institutions to be cared for by strangers

> and to die alone. We generously kept old aunts and uncles, grandparents and great-grand parents at home, feeble but needed, senile but accepted as natural parts of natural families. (Heart 172)

If we accept that nature prepared blacks for this role, we can agree also with the argument that all people are the same and their reactions to issues are dependent on social situations. This is more in line with the known American philosophy and the propelling spirit when she forcefully declared independence from Britain. Angelou's statement above clearly runs counter to the statement that all people are the same.

Angelou took time to describe the sympathy of blacks, especially during the Depression of the thirties when blacks assisted migrants who turned helpless at their doors. She also believed that blacks' forgiveness of whites who treated them badly and despised them were more in tune with the tenets of Christianity. Blacks had cooked the food of a nation of racists, except a few instances when blacks poisoned white families.

SYMBOLISM IN THE VUSUMZI AND ANGELOU'S RELATIONSHIP

As a freedom fighter, Vusumzi Make was the bridge between the South African racism and the United States as a citadel of black oppression. His inability to make a good home with Angelou is symbolic. It was that they were strange partners although fighting against the same cause. Disagreement between husband and wife seen as normal not withstanding, even Vusumzi did identity that the two societies were sociologically different. At the time Angelou engaged him for cheating on her, Make made the point clear:

> "Don't you ever threaten me again. I am an African. I do not scare easily and I do not run at

all. Do not question me again. You are my wife. That is all you need to know" (Heart 197).

At this stage, Make was not seeing Angelou as an African. If ever she could be called an African, it was an alienated one. Although Angelou and Make could not see themselves as the same people, their haughty attitude towards each other had clearly marked them out as individuals of the same back ground. When the agents of the apartheid government began to send insulting calls to Angelou, the connection between the two people could be seen. When David and Angelou sang the spirituals of the Negro to diplomats and politicians, a permanent relationship could be established to the "bitter, beautiful past" (Heart 220).

Angelou's attitude to life was an affront to the masculine ego. At the height of the threat to their livelihood in Cairo, Angelou quietly applied and got a job as an Associate Editor of the Arab Observer. Make felt a dart at his ego: "You took a job without consulting me? Are you a man?"(Heart 226). To make sure the job was not taken, Make told Angelou: "You must call David and explain that you acted as an American woman, but that I returned home and reminded you that now you are an African wife "(Heart 227). While Make's case could be seen as an unnecessarily display of male chauvinism, Angelou's unwitting assertiveness was a danger to the institution of marriage: Both symbolize rebellion and or starting point for separation. Angelou ended up with her son, Guy in Ghana and Make at diplomatic missions and South African battle field as The Heart of the Woman ends.

CHAPTER SEVEN

RECOLLECTING THE PAST, LOCATING THE FUTURE THROUGH THE PRESENT IN THE NOVELS OF PETER ABRAHAMS

The importance of Peter Abrahams in South African literary history cannot be overemphasized. Yet he is a writer who has been denied his deserved place in history. According to David Ker:

> Peter Abrahams' works have not received the attention they deserve---Abrahams theme is the black man's attempt to regain his manhood and self-respect, which alone can help him to achieve freedom in a world dominated by the white man. Abrahams believes that until this is done it will not be possible for the black man to mix with the white man on a personal level and with easy relaxation. (Literature 106)

He was born to an Ethiopian father, Peter Henry Abrahams Degas and a colored mother of a Cape Malay, Lina Abrahams on the morning of March 19, 1919 in Vrededorp, Johannesburg. Because Coloured people were descendants of the union of black and white settlers, they had certain privileges, which included sending representatives to the provincial parliament. Unable to form a strong political union with blacks and not fully accepted by whites, the fate of the Coloured people hung precariously in South Africa. Their privilege in parliament was whittled down in 1910 when the Act of Union amalgamated came into effect. Abraham describes their delicate political status thus: 'Culturally, the Colored have no past, no tradition that goes to a time beyond the coming of the White man. They lack, as a group, the cohesive stability of

the other groups. They are the most prejudiced and colour conscious of all the non-white groups'. (57)

Abrahams began his literary career as a poet with his collection of poems, A Black Man Speaks of Freedom (1940) but his journey was a tortuous one. The poverty around him and those that brought him up were enormous. He joined gangs and stole to augment family income for his training. He went to live with relations at Elsburg in the home of Uncle Sam and Aunty Liza where he knew real privation. He later went to a teacher training college where he worked and schooled at the same time. He abandoned this in conscience, having decided he was not going to make teaching a career.

Ambition to become a writer and to throw off suffocating racial sentiments drove him into exile in 1939 at the tender age of nineteen. Abrahams sums up his reasons for leaving South Africa in this language: 'I had come away charged with bitterness against the whites of that land in particular and all whites in general. Life there had allowed me no self-respect, no dignity. And I had left suffering from a colossal inferiority complex, and carrying a huge chip on my shoulders'. (Tell 146)

In 1941, Abrahams married a white woman, Daphne barely two years of his sojourn in Britain. Although Britain was more liberal than South Africa, Abrahams' inability to break with the past led him to move over to France with his wife. A son was born to them but the issue of colour bar remained a recurring decimal. Looking at his transition, Abrahams still believes that life had not been completely rejuvenating. He argues in Return to Goli that:

> It was there, among the French peasants, that I had come to realize the absurdity of colour judgments of any kind. I had found there the same prejudices and

> superstitions, the same backwardness, the almost tribal ways of living of Africa. This was the white counterpart of what made the whites of African call the dark folk there 'uncivilized'. In that village (Paley), race and colour had fallen into their proper places for me. (31)

Yet, critics are not in complete agreement that he himself had transcended racial sentiments. For instance, Kolawole Ogungbesan believes:

> Before long, Abrahams succeeds in overcoming the bitterness, but it is doubtful if he ever outgrew the inferiority complex. It is difficult to explain otherwise his preoccupation with the theme of the black man's attempt to regain his manhood and self-respect as a precondition of achieving true independence. Abrahams believes that until this is done, it will not be possible for the Blackman to mix with the white man on a personal level. His novels examine the different ways of reaching this goal. (2)

Abrahams' examination of life and different ideologies soon commenced when he entered college at St Peter's. He read other books and came into contact with Marxism. While in Britain, he took his interest to a higher level by joining the communist party. Abrahams' interest was sustained by two main reasons: It was the only organ that offered him a job and he was excited by the communist writings. While accepting communist ideals, Abrahams refused to have his freedom controlled by the party. For instance, he refused to subunit his two books, Dark Testament and Song of the City for the party's clearance before publication. In its reaction, the Communist Party passed uncomplimentary reviews in the Daily Worker, the official organ of the party. Abrahams broke with the party, but later admitted it had made a deep impression on him:

> As a result of it I had realized that people, individual people, would always be more important than causes for me. My business as a writer was with people, with human thoughts, conflicts, longings and strivings, not with causes. Painfully, I was slowly groping to a view of life that transcended my own personal problems as a member of one oppressed group of humanity. I felt that if I could see the whole scheme of things with the long eye of history I might be able to fit the problems of my own group into the general human scheme and, in doing so, become a writer. (17)

As Abrahams' profile increased, he wrote other books like Tell Freedom (1940), A Wreath for Udomo (1956), A Night of their Own (1965) and This Island Now (1966).

Abrahams' was sent to Jamaica by the colonial office to write a popular history of the Island. He thus came out with Jamaica: An Island Mosaic (1957). He believed Jamaica was a more racially neutral society. He returned to Jamaica in 1959 and has made it a permanent home, where he wrote for the West Indian Economist and Holiday Magazine. During Jamaican independence on August 5, 1962, Abrahams' published an essay titled, "The Real Jamaica", where he expressed his joy over the country's progress. In 1985, he published, The View from Coyaba (1985).

In the main, Peter Abrahams is a solid African writer who started early and matured in his art. Although his primary consideration is the total elimination of colour differences, he himself has admitted that it is a social responsibility for blacks as well as for whites. The first consideration of this chapter is to see his evolution through this period of maturity by examining

two of his books, Mine Boy (1946) and Tell Freedom (1963), his autobiography. Desire to focus on this choice may make deep consideration of his other political works difficult.

MINE BOY

Mine Boy is the first novel of Peter Abrahams to give him international recognition. A critic like Kolawole Ogungbesan believes it is even the first South African novel in English to attract international attention. After his not so bright outing in Song of the City, the novelist took a greater interest in creating Mine Boy. Although Mine Boy is almost a duplication of Song of the City, it is unarguably a better creation. Abrahams' steps are firmer in the novel, although he has not completely shed himself of the image of a maturing artist.

As a member of the Communist Party in Britain when the novel was written, the later part of the novel, particularly the discussions between Xuma and Paddy O' Shea, bear eloquent testimony of Abrahams' Marxist inclinations. The battle between Xuma, Paddy and the mine workers on one hand and the management on the other after the accident that led to the death of the mine workers shows Abraham's communist dispositions. Although Xuma's flight shows a weak approach to the black problem, his return is refreshing that at the end of the tunnel there is something to cheer about.

Mine Boy is a simple novel, but with a compact and complex plot. Although the story is linear, and of essence about black plight and slum in South Africa at the peak of racial segregation, we still get to have a feel of the white life as well. Abrahams in an attempt to do this relied heavily on the landscape and the simple life of the largely illiterate black South Africans. By relying on the environment so much so to display the disparity in the opulence of white lifestyle as against back

poverty, Abrahams pays on characterization. For this, many of the characters appear as caricatures and fleeting to memory. Daddy and Ma Plank are such creations. Ogungbesan assesses the novel thus:

> Both the strength and weakness of Mine Boy derive from this simple inter play of colours: white and black. It is what gives resonance to the lives of the people, and the problems which confront them. The photographic method which Abrahams uses to record everything in its minutest details in an attempt to capture the essence of living in a segregated city produces a simple black-and-white picture. (The Writing 39)

Abrahams' power to create emanates from a deep store which he had experienced as a growing child in South Africa. His description of the landscape came to him naturally as one who was used to playing in it. At the beginning of the novel, Abrahams shows us what to expect: a simple story about a simple man. Until Xuma matures and becomes assertive towards the end of the novel, this simple image about simple characters continues to remain with us:

> I wonder where I am, he thought. He had lost all sense of direction. Still, one street was as good as another -- And then he saw the woman at the gate. He would have passed without seeing her, for she was a part of the shadowy gate, but she had coughed and moved. He went closer.
>
> 'Sister, do you know a place where a man can rest and maybe have a drink?' His voice was deep and husky.
>
> 'It is late,' the woman replied.
>
> 'It is very late,' the man said.
>
> 'Make a light for me to see you,' the woman said.

'I have no matches.
'What have you?'
'Nothing'.
'And you want to rest and drink when it is so late?'
'No'
'Huh. You're a queer one. What are you called? Are you new here?'
'Xuma. I come from the north'
'Well, Xuma from the north, stay here and I will be back with a light. Maybe you can have a rest and drink and maybe you cannot. But stay here'. (Mine Boy 1-2).

In the novel, Xuma comes fully alive. Although Leah is sufficiently well created, we continue to see a vain but powerful woman. Leah's image looms large and could be seen in the manner she talks to the other characters. Her ability to bribe her way and get out of trouble equally shows an adept character vast in illicit trade. The killing of Dladla, the brother of Leah's lover, casts a deep moral shadow on Leah's philanthropy. Dladla is accused of betraying Leah by informing the police about her movements. For this, Leah is made to pay heavily when caught and sent to jail. Leah's love for power and adoration can be seen in this passage where she tells Xuma about her lover:

'My man. He's in jail. He's been there for one year, and he must stay there for another two years. He killed a man. A big man with a big mouth who tried to kiss me. He is strong, my man, and he fights for his woman, and he kills for his woman. Not like Dladla who is all mouth and knife and nothing. He's a man, my man. You are a man yourself, Xuma, you are strong. But my man can break you like a stick! I don't lie, you can ask people ---.' (5)

Thus for women like Leah, only physical strength, brute force and power mean something to them. When she offers assistance, she follows it up with a threat. At every occasion we read insecurity and fear of betrayal from her speech. She is Abrahams' creation to show the insecurity in the life of most South African men and woman. When Leah takes Xuma in, she warns him after giving him food and showing him a place to sleep:

> 'And listen to me Xuma from the north, don't think because I do this I am soft or easy and you can cheat me, because if you do, I will cut you up so that your own mother will not want you ---'. Xuma laughed. You are strange woman. I don't understand you. The only thing I can understand is your kindness'. 'You're all right', she said softly 'But the city is a strange place. Good night'. She went out and shut the door. (Mine 6)

Throughout the story, Xuma never takes Leah's threat for granted. Although he has consistently denied killing Dladla, we find it difficult to exonerate her because of her earlier threats.

Abraham is disgusted with black way of life, their aimlessness and lack of focus just as Toni Morrison does in her novels. Although he sees the Apartheid regime as responsible for the situation, he all the same wants blacks and whites to read about it, especially about Saturday:

> 'It is always like this on Saturdays, people have money in their pockets and it makes them move in the streets and they spend the money. Saturday is so here', Joseph said. It was so in all the streets. One street was as crowded as another. Groups of men and women milled up and down. It was Saturday. A national half holiday for the black citizens of Johannesburg. And Malay Camp shared with Vrededorp the honour of being the main social centres. (Mine 13)

Like Bigger in Native Son, Xuma although has no formal education, he has a deep sense of justice and knows his right. He believes the faceless South African security system should at least punish offenders and not innocent men. It is this belief that makes him to refuse to run away from a policeman who brutalizes blacks without cause. As Joseph runs for safety, Xuma waits and confronts his assailant. Xuma pleads his innocence but the policeman will not listen. Abrahams recounts Xuma's bravery carefully:

> A policeman was only ten yards away and he was coming straight for Xuma. Xuma waited. He had done nothing. He just stood there watching. The policeman came nearer. He raised his stick and brought it done with force. It missed Xuma's head and struck his shoulder. Pain shot through his body. 'I have done nothing', he said and grabbed the policeman's arm before he could hit again. 'Let go bastard!' the policeman shouted and kicked out.
>
> Xuma felt pain shooting up his leg. 'Dog!' he whispered and struck the policeman in the face. A look of strange surprise crept into the policeman's eyes. Xuma trembled with anger. He bounced his great fist and struck again. Hard. The policeman groaned and collapsed in a heap and lay still. (Mine Boy 16)

Xuma only runs after he has dazed the policeman and knows the law will now be after him. Abrahams' opinion is that black South Africans should confront their adversaries if they hope to achieve peace and justice in the future South Africa. He does not rule out violence to achieve this because the security agents are inflicting unjustifiable pain.

The only jobs open to blacks in South Africa are mine jobs, serving whites and prostitution for the women. To be able to contain the racial sentiments, they drink themselves to a state of stupor. Leah's business is to sell this liquor to her compatriots. The local brew is not acceptable to the Whiteman. Thus, Leah's place is constantly policed and raided. In the same country, white men and women drink freely uninterrupted. They also sell beer and other drinks without molestation. The two sets of justice worry Xuma and he broods helplessly:

> He had just left the mines. He tried to think about his work but his mind kept going back to Leah. He had been in court when she was tried. Leah had stood in the little box where they put all the prisoners. She had smiled at him and her eyes had been calm and friendly. And then the white man had told her she must go to jail for nine months and they had put her picture in the white man's newspaper. And outside the court there had been a young one who told everybody that white people sold beer and other drinks and didn't go to jail. And he said the only way to stop skokiaan Queens is to make beer for black people (Mine 168).

What makes the situation agonizing is that white people are immigrants in South Africa and only two million of them oppress over twenty million blacks. The white man's laws prevent Leah from getting any meaningful education and job. The same stringent legal system that prevents her from reaching her full height sends her to jail for fending for herself.

The operational system of Apartheid is to use blacks against blacks. The law is made by whites and enforced by them. In the mines, because too few white people accept to work there, they have to depend on blacks. Paddy tells Xuma how to control his people, how to reduce the white's burden and how to achieve ultimate success:

'If you work for me I want no nonsense', Paddy said. 'It is hard underground, but if you are a good worker it will be all right. You will look after the other boys. You will make them work. That is your job. But to be a good leader you must be a good worker. If your work is no good you will be bad boss boy. Sometimes men will be lazy then you must use your fist and you must kick them. It is so here, that is why I want a strong man. But to be strong is not enough, you must lead. And men will only follow a fearless one. You must be that one. There will be fifty men under you. Some will try to see if you are soft. You will have to crush them with your fist or you are no good. Some will be jealous because you are new and are put over them and you do not know the work. You must deal with them and you must learn the work quickly. If you are good, I will be your friend. If you are not, I will be your enemy. That is all my indaba with you. Is it wise?'

'It is wise', Xuma replied.

'All right'.

Paddy shot out his hard. Xuma shook it.

The grip was the grip of two strong men.

'Have you money?'

'No baas'.

'Don't call me baas. Here'

Paddy pulled a wad of notes out of his pocket and gave Xuma one. (Mine 47).

The current violence in South Africa did not begin today. It started from the society which Abrahams describes in Mine Boy. It is a society created by Apartheid and nurtured by apartheid. Leah is Xuma's first teacher of the ways of the city. She also welcomes him to the city. In fact, Leah sees Xuma as

her son and tries to protect him. She believes that his naivety stems from his country side background and his childlike disposition. Xuma knowing his own limitations and his financial insecurity acquiesces. In most cases, Xuma does not understand her but he concedes to her because of all she has done for him. Xuma allows Leah to play the big sister but it is even doubtful if he can pose a challenge. He begins with Leah, gets his holdings through her, secures his first love, Eliza through her and ends up in Leah's house despondent when she goes to jail. Her lectures are intermittent but forceful:

> 'Listen to me Xuma. I will try again to make you understand. In the city it is like this: all the time you are fighting. Fighting! When you are asleep and when you are awake. And you look only after yourself. If you do not you are finished. If you are soft every one will spit in your face. They will rob you and cheat you and betray you. So, to live here, you must be hard. Hard as a stone. And money is your friend. With money you can buy a policeman. With money you can buy somebody to go to jail for you. That is how it is Xuma. It may be good, it may be bad, but there it is. And to live one must see it. Where you come from it isn't so. But here it is so'. (Mine 50)

Leah's credo convinces and takes her through thick and thin. But when the long arm of South African law catches up with her, she goes to jail for nine months. But it is not only Leah that is jailed. It is all black South African women who daily are bludgeoned into prison for fending for themselves.

At another level, Abrahams brings forward women like Eliza who frustrate other blacks because they want to be like white people. They cause themselves pain as well as others like Xuma

because of their inferiority complex. The reader is made to sympathize with her because of her education but her inability to see that her aspiration is unattainable in the then South Africa makes her image unpleasant. In her testament to Xuma, she explains her predicament which he fails to understand:

> I am no good and I cannot help myself. It will be right if you hate me. You should beat me. But inside me there is something wrong. And it is because I want the things of the white people. I want to be like the white people and go where they go and do the things they do and I am black. I cannot help it. Inside I am not black and I do not want to be a black person. I want to be like they are, you understand, Xuma. It is no good but I cannot help it. It is just so. And it is that that makes me hurt you --- please understand'.
>
> 'How can I understand?'
>
> Eliza sighed and went out again. (Mine 60)

Thus, Eliza knows what she is doing and the fact that she is inflicting pain on Xuma. At a time Xuma should have thrown off her painful love, he hangs on foolishly.

Paddy's girl friend, Di is more realistic but racist all the same about Xuma's pains. Short of saying he is a fool, Di explains Xuma's popularity at the mines and why he cannot have Eliza for himself for keeps:

> 'What do you think of him' he asked finally.
>
> 'What is there to think? He's just a mine boy'.
>
> 'He is a grand fellow'.
>
> 'Yes grand, but not a human being yet. Just a mine boy. His girl's human and he can't understand her. He can't understand her wanting

the things I want and have. And another thing you're wrong about he does not dislike you, you're just not of the same world. Red.'
'That's nonsense, Di.'
'Think it out for yourself'
'That fellow's as human as I am'
'No, Red, he accepts what you wouldn't. That's part of the reason why he's so popular among all the other whites. He's all right. You can't say the same about Chris's boy.' (Mine 67)

Di is clearly right about Xuma. After her private discussion with him, she sees nothing in Xuma except a robot. Only time will prove her wrong. Xuma's true image later comes out and even Paddy is surprised. The delicate mix between Di's evaluation and Xuma's eventual evolution into a revolutionary mark out Abrahams as a brilliant writer. Nadine Gordimer sees him as: "the most talented black novelist" and Mine Boy as "the first proletarian novel" (English Language -114).

For P.O. Iheakaram, Peter Abrahams is only reacting to the nationalist impulse in South Africa in Mine Boy. While seeing the novel as a protest literature, he sees Leah's imprisonment as injustice that raises other questions like why a black woman will go to jail and a white woman will not:

This is one of the many questions nationalists ask in South Africa and seek to find answers to. As Xuma matures politically, he is able to critically examine Paddy O'shea's philosophy of "a man first and then a black or white man" (P 172). Xuma affirms, "I am a black man. My people are black. I love them" (P.172). With this national consciousness, Xuma debunks Paddy's principle of "a man first" as impracticable in a racist environment where a black

> man carries a pass, is stopped by a policeman in the street, does not go where he likes and is ordered out of "White people only" places. If Paddy's words were true, there would be no racial discrimination. But since "the white man will not let it be", Paddy's formulation of "Men without colour" was only a dream. It only aroused bitter and unhappy feeling in Xuma and with it, aggressive nationalism. "He hated all white people and he hated the Red One", Paddy (P176).

The black miner's strike under Xuma's leadership is an expression, in action, of his new nationalist vision. From then, Xuma becomes truly nationalistic. Leah's jail term, his own troubled mind following Eliza's walk away from his life, the insecurity in South Africa itself and uncertainty about his job, all these bring out the full rebellion in him and he enthuses: "It is good that a black man should tell the white people how we feel. And also, a black man must tell the black people how they feel and what they want. These things I must do, then I will feel like a man" (Mine 183).

Abrahams uses the mine to symbolise a classless society. His final mission in the novel is to create a scenario where the Blackman and Whiteman can visualize what a society without racial consciousness can do to the psyche of the black man. It is respect for the black man and open-mindedness for the white man. In Johannesburg, Xuma is afraid of the Whiteman and his laws. Inside the mines he is at peace and fears nobody. For the white man to fear him there shows that the mine inspires insecurity and fear. Inside, he is outnumbered and without his guns, outside the white man is also outnumbered but protected with guns. Abrahams thus is saying that the black man must do something about the apartheid laws and guns that give the

white man an edge to oppress him. He can only reach his goal if he can control the destiny of his own country and the weapons thereof. Xuma's feelings externalise it:

> The only place where he was completely free was underground in the mines. There he was a master and knew his way. There he did not even fear his white man, for his Whiteman depended on him. He was the boss boy. He gave the orders to the other mine boys. They would do for him what they would not do for his white man or any other white man. He knew that, he had found it out. And underground his white man respected him and asked him for his opinion before they did anything. It was so and he was at home and at ease underground. (Mine 63)

Abrahams' position here is dearly Marxist and he clearly means that equality is achievable. Then he enjoyed Marxist support. When he broke away, he became more political.

To achieve a critical balance, Abrahams works out a clear arrangement. He identifies good people like Paddy and Chris among the white folk. For the mine worker who contacted tuberculosis, Paddy and Xuma help him get full benefits-thirteen whole pounds five shillings! Xuma is helping a fellow black while Paddy is reacting to his sense of justice and humanity. Abrahams tells his readers that the final answer to the South African problem can be found in the black man himself. Paddy tells Xuma that no one can save the Blackman but himself. He tells him that the black man must fight his way to freedom or forever remain a slave. Recent events in South African have proved Abrahams right;

> 'You must find it, Xuma. Out of your feeling and out of your pain it must come. Others have found it. You can too. But first you must think and not be

> afraid of your thoughts. And if you have questions and you look around you will find those who will answer them. But first you must know what you are going to fight and why and what you want. (Mine 171)

As Eliza evaporates into thing air and out of Xuma's life, so will racism. Eliza is emblematic of all that is illusory just as Paddy is symbolic of all that is good. But what of Maisy? Abrahams says she is the real woman for the South African cause, the lasting spirit that will propel the revolution. Her final statement of support says it all:

> 'I will wait for you Xuma. If it is a long time or a short time I will wait for you. I will wait for you until you come back to me. Then we will make a home where there will be much laughter and much happiness. Do not fear that I will see others. You are the only man I want and I will wait for you every day and every night'.
> 'I will come back, for you are a good person to be with it'. (Mine 184)

Towards the end of the story, Abrahams uses the mine's manager and engineer to show the insensitivity of some white people and the premium they place on human life. When the mines should have been closed for a while in respect of some dead workers, among them a white man, the two men show no sympathy. Instead of showing love and patriotism, they blame their fallen colleagues for an avoidable accident which was clearly not their fault. The death of Chris and Johannes should have shocked the mine's manager and the engineers but it does not. The discussion and insensitivity can be seen in their reaction when the bodies were brought up:

'Well?' the manager asked. 'It was a minor collapse', one of the engineers said. 'It's all right now. The beams were soaked through and rotten at the place. They gave. Nothing serious. If those fellows had kept their heads and stayed where they were instead of panicking and trying to keep the place open with their bodies, everything would have been all right. It is all right for working, any how, just a spot of clearing and putting up new beams. The manager looked at the second manager who nodded.
'They lost their lives through panic', he said. Paddy grabbed the man and fell him with one blow. 'They looked after their men', He said. 'We warned you about that thing a long time ago'.
'All right! All right!', the manager cried.
'The mine's all right. Get ready to go down, night shift!'
'No' Xuma cried, 'No!'
'Get ready' the manager shouted.
'Let them fix up the place first', Xuma cried.
'We warned them about it. They said it was all right. Now two men are dead! Good men. Let them fix it up first then we will go down!' (Mine 180-1)

The manager's intransigence breads rebellion in Xuma and Paddy. Abrahams through them warns about future occurrence and the effect it will have. Subsequent events in South Africa have proved him right. For him, wickedness is not a colour matter. It is a mental disposition, which transcends race or creed.

TELL FREEDOM

Tell freedom is Peter Abrahams' autobiography which tells the story of his life from his birth in South Africa until he sailed to

London in search of greener pastures for a more comfortable racial setting. Life in South Africa had been suffocating and his deprivation gruesome; his journey outside the country therefore marked a turning point in his life and career. He was born on 19th March, 1919, to an Ethiopian father, Peter Henry Abrahams Devas and a South African mother, Lina Abrahams. Lina's first marriage was with a Scot which produced two blond children. Thus, in his immediate family, Peter Abrahams saw colour differences based on pigmentation and this had effect on his world view.

Abrahams' first consciousness is carefully recorded in the opening pages:

> I pushed my nose and lips against the pane and tried to lick a raindrop sliding down on the other side. As it slid past my eyes, I saw the many colours in the raindrop---It must be warm in there. Warm and dry. And perhaps the sun would be shinning in there. The green must be the trees and the grass; and the brightness, the sun--- I was inside the raindrop, away from the misery and sunshine, inside my raindrop world
> 'Lee'.
> The sound jerked me out of my raindrop world. I was at the window, looking out, feeling damp.
> 'Lee'.
> I sensed that was the sound by which I was identified. (Tell 9)

Once conscious, Abrahams enters the world of pain and the world of want. First it began with the death of his father and his journey to Elsburg to live with foster parents, Aunty Liza and Uncle Sam. The grim picture is vividly captured in the opening pages:

> I remember someone lifted me up and I looked into the coffin where my father lay. Because he did not smile at me, and because my mother cried, I cried too. Then they took him away. And I never saw him again. With his going, the order and stability that has been in my life, dissolved. There was no bread-winner so we had to leave the place that had been our home. (Tell 13)

At Elsburg, life is anything but kind. Even the house they live in shows the level of deprivation:

> The houses were made by those who lived in them. And because they had no security of tenure few took pride in what they put up. The walls were of unbaked mud bricks held together by straw. The roofs were sheets of corrugated-iron nailed or screwed together over rafters. And the holes and opening spaces were stopped up with sacking and pieces of canvas. Neither cold nor wet was ever effectively kept out. (Tell 16)

At Elsburg, he never went to school and his breakfast consisted of a plate full of mielie pap and a mug of black coffee. He went about the veld with other boys to collect cow dung which was used to heat the house and heat the iron. He was thus an errand boy to collect materials to aid his foster parents' work who were farming and washing for white people.

What makes Tell Freedom a very important book is its message, a gripping story of the horrible condition blacks in South Africa live. But credit must be given to the writer too, for Abrahams is a great craftsman. In simple language, he renders a complicated society in a picturesque manner. Nadine Gordiner had remarked while rebuking her fellow South Africa

writers for their endless preoccupation with autobiographies, in her Ann Redcliff Memorial Lecture at Harvard in 1961: "This sort of writing, however interesting, may make a competent journalist, but does not make a creative writer. And if a man has it in him to create, he should not squander the stuff of his experience" (The novel 522).

She however praised Abrahams' novel, Mine Boy while noting in that essay that the short stories and essays which other writers of South Africa produced did not merit any critical attention. Kola Ogungbesan does not agree with Nadine Gordimer:

> Yet it is noteworthy that it was both the autobiographical Return to Goli and, more particularly Tell Freedom that won Abrahams international acclaim. The wide attention given to these two books and the relative neglect of Abrahams novels shows that readers were more interested in satisfying their 'curiosity' about conditions in South Africa than in literary merits. (The Writing 85).

But it must be mentioned that Abrahams' Mine Boy was well received. In fact, it was this novel that drew the attention of international literary community to the great talent of Abrahams.

The suffering of blacks in South Africa comes to life as Abrahams describes the scene where they run in search of cow dung instead of going to school:

> "We streaked off in all directions searching for the precious dung. Dung makes the fire that cooks the food. Dung is the fire that fights off the cold. Dung boils the washing that brings the money that pays for our bread" (Tell 21).

One might have held the foster parents of Abrahams responsible for his woes and lack of education. But Aunt Liza and Uncle Sam work themselves also to the point of exhaustion. From sunrise to sunset, they are at labour, straining themselves to earn a living, often for mere pittance. The house they live is only for a while because the land belongs to a white family. For instance, when Abraham returns after searching for the cow dung, Aunt Liza is still at work:

> I reached home near sunset. Aunt Liza was still at her washing tub. She strained her back painfully. I dumped the sacks near the fire. Though the day was not hot, sweat dripped from her face. Her eyes were bloodshot. The top of her dress clung damply to her body and was wet under her arms. I noticed the thickness of her arms, and her big hands that were pitted with being in water the whole day, white as a sheet and swollen to twice their size. A tired smile softened her face.
> 'Tired?'
> I nodded.
> 'First time's always the worst', she said. (Tell 22)

After a whole day's labour, Aunt Liza could only give Abrahams a cup of coffee. Food is reserved until Uncle Sam returns. Tired and extremely hungry, Abrahams drifts to sleep. When he makes up, both Aunt Liza and the hunger are still in their places:

> I watched her work, and became aware of my gnawing hunger.
> 'Aunt Liza ---'
> ' Heh?'
> 'When does Uncle Sam come home?'
> 'Very hungry?'
> 'Yes'
> 'Soon now'. (Tell 23)

Despite the fact that Abrahams nearly died at the well and went all day in search of cow dung and moeroga leaves that grew among the grass, the meal prepared was still not enough for the young boy. He was given the liberty to scrap the pot which he found crunchy and most tasteful of the meal. Abrahams' poverty gradually moved to his canvas shoes which were going almost off until he went barefoot.

Uncle Sam and Aunt Liza have no desire to put Abrahams through the hardship. They themselves are helpless. Both husband and wife have been reduced to factors in the process of production for white people. They are no longer human beings but representations of the crisis of black people. Abrahams could see it in Uncle Sam, his degeneration, his near depletion to the point of extinction as he sits after a hard day's job:

> I glanced furtively at Uncle Sam. The last sound he had made was to say grace. He sat, the mug of coffee in his hands, his face expressionless, his eyes fixed on one spot of the fading fire. I closed my eyes. I still had no picture of Uncle Sam. He was still not a person. He was just a name, a being, and silence. I felt afraid of him because I did not understand anything about him. (Tell 25).

Uncle Sam does not sit relaxing, his spirit has been taken away by the job he does.

Abrahams begins his job of fighting racism early. Once at Elsbury, he gives one of the white boys who called his father a black baboon a good beating. Abrahams uses the scene to describe the disparity between his own generation and that of Uncle Sam. The white man, father of the boys comes to Uncle Sam's house to either exact revenge or to make him leave his

land. Uncle Sam in an attempt to protect his job and tenancy flogs Abrahams as a result saying: "You must never lift your hand to a white person. No matter what happens, you must never lift your hand to a white person" (Tell 34).

After the ordeal, the picture is vividly recreated:

> Uncle Sam stopped. I lay whimpering on the floor. Aunt Liza sat like one in a trance.
> 'Is he still stubborn, Sam?'
> 'Tell the baas and baases you are sorry'.
> 'I'm sorry', I said.
> 'Bet his father is one of those who believe in equality'.
> 'His father is dead'. Aunt Liza said.
> 'Good night, Sam.'
> 'Good night, Baas. Sorry about this'.
> 'All right, Sam.' (Tell 34)

Abrahams is made to pay for the fight when the white boy should have been left to nurse his pains. Abrahams' ordeal will end when his brother, Harry and Margaret come for him. But the pains in future are still immense.

As Coloured, Harry, Margaret and Abrahams face the hard life in South Africa but racism for them is not as harsh as those of blacks. They could answer back at white police men:

> 'Evening, baas', Harry said
> 'Where're you going so late?'
> 'Home', Harry said. 'We've been to fetch my brother from the country'.
> 'Prove it'.
> 'I'm Coloured; I don't carry a pass'
> For a long time he shone the torch on Harry's face.
> 'Trying to be smart heh?'
> 'No, baas. Just stating a fact'.
> He swung the torch down to my face. I blinked and closed my eyes.

'He looks like a kaffir'.
'Don't you call my brother a kaffir!' Maggie snapped.
He swung the beam up to her face, then turned it out.
'All right'. (Tell 40).

Just like in Black Boy, blacks steal in South Africa not just as revenge for not getting an equitable wage but to make use of essential commodities that white people discard in their homes and still refuse to give out to blacks. Richard Wright steals to escape starvation, but most often as revenge for unjust treatment. When Abrahams returns from Elsburg, he has worn his canvas shoes to the sole and Aunty Betty has to steal to clad him.

At Vrededorp, blacks assist fellow blacks to escape from white justice. When it is a black policeman, they challenge and visit him with violence. The black policeman defends himself:

'It is my work,' the man said. 'A man must work to live'.
'So you a black man must go on even after the white man has given up'.
'A black man!'
'But it is my work', the man protested.
'Our work is to protect our children'.
'Stone the dog! He has sold his manhood to the whites'.
The man turned and ran. A rain of stones followed him. They flung stones long after he had gone. (Tell 52)

As Wright's family moves, because of poverty, so does the family of Abrahams. The similarity between Wright's crisis and that of Abrahams shows the black people are always hunted. The level of discrimination in America and South Africa is now

beyond proportion. Sometimes Abrahams' family sells wood to white people. Sometimes whites are nice and at other times they are rude and treat them badly. Aunt Mattie provides the wood which they sell. Most often the white people suspect them, perhaps out of the experience with some black people:

> 'I think the wood's only an excuse,' the man said. 'He looks guilty as hell. If he found the place empty---'
> 'Stop it!' The woman laughed. 'He's only a child'.
> 'There are no children among them. They thieve before they can walk or talk properly'.
> 'Don't be silly'.
> 'Look at his face. He can't even look at you'
> 'He's a child, frightened like any child would be with strangers'.
> 'Guilty conscience, if you ask me'.
> 'Nonsense --- How much is the wood, boy?'
> 'Two for tickey, missus'. (Tell 82)

Sometimes it is the whites who are cheating on them. Woods supplied are not paid for and they use intimidation to scare them away:

> 'What are you waiting for, boy?'
> 'My money, baas'
> 'What money?'
> 'For the wood, baas six bundles'
> 'She paid you'.
> 'I saw her pay you, you dirty little black liar. Get out before I loose my temper! Lying about white people. Get out!'
> I ran. (Tell 83).

A new dimension to black South African gangsterism was the forcing of peers to beg for money for imposed "bosses". A younger member of a gang could forcefully be made to beg for money or he would be severely beaten. Here the law of the

jungle prevailed. Once Abrahams found himself in this position and the siege would have continued but for his brother Harry who rescued him by beating up the dictatorial "boss":

> My 'boss' took me to a crowded corner.
> He took off his cap and pushed it into my hands. He fondled the wire whip. Then he punched me in the ribs.
> 'I'll cut your skin to ribbons if you don't beg. Beg!'
> He crossed the road, and watched from the darkest corner he could find. I stood trembling. A white man passed, stopped and turned back. He looked up at me then flung a six penny piece into the cap. A couple passed. The man flipped a penny. It fell at my feet, rolled into the gutter. I ran after it. The woman laughed. For a while after that nothing happened. People went past as though they did not see me. I shook the cap.
> 'Penny, please, baas. Penny, missus'.
> An elderly lady put a shilling into the cap and murmured: 'Poor thing'. (Tell 111-2)

Here Abrahams' is clearly indicating that there are some good people among white people; and in another sense indicting the South African black youths. He was seeing them as their own oppressors. As enemies of their own people, their action was even resented by the South African police. The three time indignity only came to an end when Harry and Danny intervened. The assailant settled the matter with a ten shilling note. But the matter should not just be dismissed like that. It should be seen as a part of violence that eventually engulfed South African society till date. The foundation was thus laid a long time ago by the South African Apartheid regime.

Abrahams' journey to school was accentuated by a fore - sighted Jewish girl who was Mr. Wylie's friend. The discussion between Abrahams and the girl was like that between Bigger and Mrs. Dalton. While both kids were ignorant of what education held for the future, only one, Abrahams availed himself of the opportunity. In a sense, while one was programmed providentially to survive and prosper; the other marked himself out for doom. Abrahams went home and thought. Bigger Thomas never did. He was content to drive whites about. As a black boy, he clearly had no future. Abrahams' discussion with the Jewish girl is important:

'Why don't you go to school?'
'I don't know, miss'.
'Don't you want to?'
'I don't know miss'
'Can you read or write?'
'No miss'.
'Stop saying miss now'
'Yes, miss'.
She laughed.
'Sit down. Eat your sandwiches if you like'.
I sat on the edge of the chair near the door.
'So you can't read?'
'No, miss'.
'Wouldn't you like to?'
'I don't know, miss'
'Want to find out?'
'Yes, miss'. (Tell 115)

She read to him stories from Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare. Othello appealed to him most. She later gave him the book. The clear difference between Bigger and Abrahams was that

while the Jewish girl made no offer as to a scholarship, Mrs. Daltons clearly offered that. Abrahams grabbed his but Bigger rejected his won opportunity. The verdict then is that the problem does not lie as Shakespeare said, in our stars but in our selves.

Abrahams' enrolment in school was dramatic. The teacher promised him he would read and write by the end of that year. But Abrahams' co-operation was the incentive that made it possible. The last dialogue after his enrolment shows the authorities' haste and Abrahams' zeal:

> 'Afraid of hard work?'
> 'No, Sir.'
> 'All right! I'll make you work. I promise you 'll read and write by the end of this year. The rules will be hard. If there is any trouble and slackness I want the teacher to send you to me and I shall use the cane, hard. All right?'
> 'Yes, sir;
> 'See, Sarah! The boy and I are in a hurry. Help us. We haven't much time--- Take him away'
> 'Yes, Sir! (Tell 117)

In that school, discrimination trailed the poorer pupils like Abrahams. While they ate, uncomplimentary remarks were made. The unfortunate aspect of it was that it was made by coloured. 'Let us not play with him. He's got woolly hair like a kaffir.' (121) Not ready to be intimidated, Abraham replied, 'Go to hell. Yours may be straight but your skin is black' (121). The problem then was not only white creation but by blacks of whatever shade on their fellow blacks. Abraham attended school regularly for three years and learnt to read and write. Lamb's Tale from Shakespeare, Everyman edition of John Keats and Palgrave's Golden Treasury, which he stole were his greatest reading companions.

Racism did not end with Abrahams and his family. His sister Maggie and her fiancé nearly called off their marriage because of similar differences in shades of colour. According to Abrahams:

> Maggie and Chris Fortune had fixed the date for their marriage and were saving up for their furniture. The day was very near and they had found a house in City and Suburban, where only the most select Coloured lived. But Maggie very nearly called off the marriage because Chris Fortune's very fair mother had hesitated about meeting Maggie's very dark mother. However, the mothers met, and the marriage took place. (Tell 128)

As he progressed in school, his old self and friends began to fade away. New life and new consciousness began to fill his world. As he walked the streets, he felt lonely. He began to compare the home of blacks with that of whites. The magic of electricity opened up for him a new consciousness. Suddenly, Vrededorp and its horizons began to be inadequate. Although he still saw the gang, the fun associated with stealing had got out of him. He sought for the least excuse not to join the gang in begging. The only vestige of intimacy he had left was with his friend Dinny. But even that did not last. Recounting the mood of the period, Abrahams' says:

> Sometimes I grew tired, but the park benches I passed said. EUROPEANS ONLY. Sometimes I had the price of a cup of tea as I walked past cheerful-looking little cafes. No visible sign was up. But I knew these too, were: RESERVED FOR EUROPEANS ONLY. Really, these streets and trees, almost, the clean air I breathed here, were: RESERVED FOR EUROPEANS ONLY. I was the

> intruder. And like the intruder, I walked carefully lest I be discovered. I longed for what the white folk had. I envied them their superior, European lot. The familiar mood that awaits the sensitive young who are poor and dispossessed is a mood of sharp and painful inferiority, of violent angry tensions, of desperate and overwhelming longings. On these nightly walks, that mood took possession of me. My three books fed it. (Tell 130)

Thus, Abrahams' slavery was accentuated by whites and his liberation from the shackles of bondage was ironically provided by Western education. Whites thus created the spear that they would be attacked. Both in the United States and South Africa, the same lever operated among blacks and would pull them out until two of them reached the presidency of the United States and South Africa. Injustice is a virus that could be identified in any society. It is for this reason that an unjust system can not carry everyone along. Sometimes fair- minded whites rebelled and took sides with blacks. The melodrama would confuse both the donor and the beneficiary. For instance, Abrahams could not understand his plight when he was caught between a patronizing white woman he met at the market whom he was helping for a tip and the white policeman who came to enforce the law. Abrahams could not understand how an unjust system could be offering him protection and love:

> She shopped at the corner where they served tea. I could not follow her to the neat little tables. But she made the waitress send her black boy to me with a cup. The stares of passing whites embarrassed me. But I felt safe in the protection afforded by the red-head. Against a white person who did not react and behave in the way I understood so well. It made it so much more

> difficult to know where one was with whites. It complicated the business of building up defenses. (Tell 135)

Despite white generosity, majority of them believed blacks would never make it to the top. Until he began to work at the hotel, Abrahams was not fully given reasons why passes were issued. Tim his colleague at the hotel who called him Peter, Beet or Beter explained it:

> 'It is a thing of fear, Beet. If you have many enemies and you are not sure you have conquered them, then, always, you want to know where they are, what they do, where they go. If it is possible, you want to know what they think. For that, passes are good'. (Tell 142)

Thus, in the conception of whites blacks are enemies. The life of the black man was full of arduous tasks. One could work himself lame. At the hotel, Abrahams nearly died of exhaustion. His sister Maggie saved him. Abrahams recounts it:

> Each day was like the one before. The work of each day was like that of the day before. We did the same things each day, the same things each night. When I got home to Maggie's place, she and her husband were asleep. When I left, each morning, they were sleepy. I became permanently tired, permanently sleepy. My eyes grew bloodshot, like Jim's. I moved with the heavy slowness of a leaden man, like Jim. I ate less and less. I just was not hungry. Only tired. Always tired. So the first week passed. Each day like the other. Days without name. I forgot the feel of the sun. I developed a dry cough that hurt my chest. I did not think about anything. I was too tired. There was only the work, and, at the end of the month, the pound. (Tell 145)

Abrahams' travails were like the travails of many black youths in South Africa. His inability to see the sun was symbolic. It was his imprisonment and those of his age in that Apartheid enclave. Abrahams' sickness was the sickness of many black youths and their future. Maggie's intervention was also symbolic. It meant that the future liberation of South African blacks would rest squarely on the shoulder of blacks. Maggie woke up one morning and told his brother, Abrahams that he would not go back to that hotel to work, despite the pound. This was an instance where reason prevailed.

Discrimination did not end in public places and local organizations. Even in international organizations like the Boy Scout Movement, in South Africa this: "was run on segregational lines. The white scouts had one organization, the blacks another and the coloured yet another. As in all other spheres, there was no intermingling between black and white. The black scouts were called Pathfinders. And this little office was their headquarters" (151).

As Abrahams grew in knowledge, he gradually linked his fate with that of other blacks in America:

> "America and Harlem were at the other end of the world. And in coloured terminology Negroes were black people whom both whites and coloured called natives in their polite moments ----- I realized, quite suddenly, that I was rapidly, moving out of this coloured world of mine, out of the reach of even my dear mother and sister. I saw them with the objective eyes of a stranger" (Tell 152).

As Abrahams tried to tell them about American Negro literature, and what it meant to him, they were not really interested and the chasm widened between him and them.

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As Abrahams progressed in his studies, he began to look up to going to either London or America. He was determined to pursue his exploration of the world and to find out where his luck was tied. Abrahams' yearning was like that of other writers either in America or South Africa who hoped to see the two sides of the oppressor and his antics. As he discussed with his friends his mind began to focus on one of the options:

> So as the others expressed their dreams of getting to America, I tried to take stock of the two forces that pulled me, first this way, then that. And it seemed that America had more to offer me as a black man. If the American Negro was not free, he was, at least, free to give voice to his unfreedom. And there was promise for me in the very fact that so many of them had risen to high eminence. Yet England, holding out no offer, not even the comfort of being among my own kind, could counter that call because men now dead had once crossed its heaths and walked its lanes, quietly, unhurriedly, and had sung, with such beauty that their songs had pierced the heart of a black boy, a world away, and in another time. I decided, I would go to England one day. Perhaps I would go to America afterwards. But I would go to England first. (Tell 154)

Abrahams then began to play on the image of light and darkness. These images symbolize both the prospect of each and the challenges facing the other. One was life, the other was death. One was loved and praised, while the other was denigrated and rejected. It was a wide option, but one that left him no opportunity to choose because he was born unto one and there seemed to be no escape. It was this dreary situation that made him to look beyond his world in South Africa. As his account pierces the soul, the options punctuate the reader's world, in a language that is sweet but constraining:

> Dark folk move in darkness: white folk move in light. Well, Malay Camp wouldn't be a slum if it were as light as the city. Slum is darkness. Dark folk live in darkness. Beyond Malay Camp, a little to the left again, was white Fordsburg. White: lights. Black: darkness. A strip of darkness ran through black Fordsburg and became a big black blob. Vrededorp. And to the left of it, that world of light was May Fair. And the patch of light to the right of it was upper, white, Vrededorp. To the right of me, beyond the heart of the city, lights moved away in waves. Those were the white suburbs: there was Hospital Hill; beyond it, out of sight, were Park Town and the other suburbs of light. Light is white: dark is black. And from the beautiful city a soft, eternal hum drifted up to me. And all else was silent. (Tell 157).

When Abrahams fell in love with Anne, the dreaded discrimination stared him in the face. He came to know the difference between them and other white people even in the market. When they went out one Saturday night, Anne in her carefree mood pointed out the kind of dress she would like to wear: 'Peter! That one there! Oh --- isn't it lovely. That's the one I want when we are rich!' Her eyes were bright, her lips parted. (Tell 161). Two young white women made them to understand what they thought of Anne's exclamation. Abrahams account would mortify even the saints:

> The two young women turned their heads. They studied Anne and her shabby dress. They looked at the beautiful dress she admired. They burst out laughing. Till that moment, Anne had been unaware of them. She looked quickly at them. The joy went out of her eyes. Her dark skin looked

parched and pale suddenly. She shivered and hurried down the street, head downcast. I followed her. The laughter of the young women followed us. I caught up with her near Park station. Her arm trembled to my touch. There was restraint between us. I led her into the station and the 'non-European' tea room. She went to a corner table. I got two cups of tea and followed her. We sat drinking our tea in silence, not looking at each other. (Tell 161)

The snobbery of the two young white women reminded the lovers of their unworthiness. It was painful enough that their wishes were unattainable, but it was a deep gash when an enemy reminded them of it. As if the assault was not enough, three white policemen descended on them at the tea room as they were convalescing and demanded for their passes. Thus, the experience of black people in South Africa was one of progressive assault. They were attacked morally, spiritually and physically.

For ambitious blacks like Abrahams, progress seemed difficult because either relatives or other blacks were not giving enough encouragement. When Abrahams told Maggie that he had been admitted to a college, her response could dampen the spirit of any soul:

'Now tell me what it's all about'.
'I'm going to college!'
'What for? Going to be a teacher?'
That was the only thing to go to college for.
'No'.
'Then why? And where' ll you find the money for books and things?'
'Here---'. I gave her the letter.
She looked up after a while, a bit dazed. (Tell 164)

Maggie's reaction showed that she was not ambitious and even a little envy could be deduced from her statements. She did not congratulate him first. That would have been her first natural reaction:

> 'But this is far away, in Petersburg. Where is that?'
> 'Up in the north'
> 'And you really want to go?'
> 'Yes'
> 'But why don't you go to the normal college at Vrededorp?' (Tell 164).

Maggie was not done yet. If it were possible she would have dissuaded him from the mission. Then she made the last spirited attempt:
'All these books and all this learning of yours sometimes worries me. What 'll you do with it? And will you be happy?' (Tell 164).

It is difficult to understand why Maggie could not see that education held the key to the future of blacks. She should have been able to see that her lack of skill had a lot to do with her low education.

Abrahams' mother sensed that Maggie would be jealous when she asked him:

> 'Has Mag been upset?'
> 'She cried'
> 'It's her soft heart. Don't let it worry you. I'll talk to her'
> 'And you, Ma?'
> 'I'm happy for you, my child. Very happy'.
> 'Then you really don't mind my going?'
> 'A mother always minds. But don't you think about that. You go and I'll pray to God to look after you'. (Tell 165).

Anne's reaction was a natural one for a girl going to part with her heartthrob:

> 'It will be lonely, Peter'.
> 'I will come back'.
> 'It will be as lonely as it was before we met'
> 'I will come back, Anne. I love you'.
> 'No, it will be worse because I will remember you'.
> 'We can write'
> 'I can't. I'm not educated like you' (Tell 165-6)

It was like providence knowing the role Abrahams would play in South African literature was busy eliminating the obstacles on his way, which appeared like genuine expressions of emotion. When he parted with Anne, they never saw again and Maggie was way out of his reach to determiner his future.

At college, Father Adams greatly inspired his literary interest. He also urged him to read the Bible to see the great language it was written. It was there that he discovered God deeply. He summed up his state of mind at the college thus:

> Alone that night, I went into the empty chapel. I went on my knees --- Dear God, Dear Jesus, help me. Please help me --- Then I went to the old marula tree and looked down into the valley that had been named the Grace of God. Vrededorp, the market, the dark places and those past hurts were forgotten. There was peace here, and I was happy. I was among people who were as brothers one unto another, and there were books and the land was beautiful. Almost, I was in another land. A land free of hurt, insult, colour and poverty. (Tell 172)

Father Adams' role would hand over to him another round of contrariness; a contrast between the whites in Johannesburg and Vrededorp and the ones in his school.

At a particular stage in his life, Abrahams decided he would make a better progress, not by hating or despising the ways of the white man but by learning what made him thick. His advancement in life based on his acquisition of a higher western education was a testimony of that. It was a jig- saw puzzle that left him panting. It was a quadratic equation that did not work. Abrahams laid the blame on the ambiguous roles of the two groups of white people in two different camps but of the same extraction. He could not reconcile the mission of Christianity and that of the imperialists. Abrahams puts his difficulty thus:

> Here, in this peaceful valley, the equation worked out. The fathers who taught us lived up to their teaching. They were good men and they poured their lives into good work. Belief was translated into reality. We were the witnesses. But we would leave this peaceful valley and go out into the big world. And there, among the whites, it did not work out. It did not work out when whites came to our church. They sat in the front row. What made it so very difficult for us was the fact that the equation did work out with the Fathers and indeed with the Sisters from across the little bridge. But we had proof that the rest of the white Christians of our land were not like the Fathers and the Sisters. If there were any fault that we could lay at the door of the good Fathers and Sister, it was that they taught us too well. They had made Christianity a living reality for us, a way of life, a creed to live by, to measure our relations with others by. And the tragedy lay in the

measuring. The equation did not work out. And in the harshness of our young idealism we demanded that it worked out as logically as a piece of mathematics. And it did not. Where was the error: in man or God? (Tell 183)

In his effort to work out the puzzle, he found Marxism. But he was worried that the two enemies in Marxism, Trotskyites and Stalinists, were deeply locked up in abusive vilification. He believed that Marxism had the answer to this problem eating his soul. He has written

> And I had test the new creed called Marxism against the reality of my experience and the darkness of my land. And only by the Marxian theories of economics and imperialism had the racialism of the land made sense. Marxism had supplied an intelligent and reasonable explanation for the things that happened. Had it also the key to the solving of these problems? (Tell 187)

But like Richard Wright, he would discover that Marxism and imperialism were birds of the same feather, two faces of the same coin. He found this out in 1938 when a white man Oliver Walker wrote about him in the Daily Express calling him the 'Coloured Boy Poet'. When he went in search of a clerk and messengers job it brought to him what they made out of his new poet image:

'I know your face. You're the coloured poet'.
'Yes, Sir'.
'Well, we don't want you'. (Tell 188)

His mother and relatives feared for him because of his new Marxist language. They foresaw nothing but trouble at the end of the tunnel as they suspected it would bring him into conflict

with the South African authorities. Abrahams will know the true meaning of Marxism in an African soil. Dr Gool took him in with an open heart and hospitality. Abrahams' mistook his liberal spirit for a sign to free speech. So when he came under the fighting range of Dr. Gool and Edward Roux, he was caught in the cross-fire. He lost Dr Gool's hospitality and friendship, and went into hardship again.

Abraham took time to describe the war in the Marxist camp and what it did to Edward Roux. The new future they had taunted was only lip-service:

> Roux had sacrificed a brilliant academic career to work for African freedom. The wrath of authority had broken on him. He had become a communist, had been involved in nearly all the labour and political struggles of the blacks. He had taught blacks to read and write, had organized night schools, and worked out a basic English for black workers. Then there had been a change in the communist line. Roux had not agreed with the new line. He had been broken. His fine record had been swept aside in the campaign to discredit him among the blacks. But in this the communist party had failed. They had, however, succeeded in driving him into the social and economic wilderness. I had wanted to talk to Roux that night at the elder Gool's, but I had been driven to silence by the quiet sincerity and marks of suffering on the man. Instead, I had marveled unhappily at the ruthlessness with which the comrades seemed determined to herald in the New Future. I wanted to believe in that New Future that promised the equality and security of all men. If only they had room for pity, compassion, and mercy ---- if only they allowed for the human heart ---- (Tell 199-200)

As part of the racial policy, the passport office denied Abrahams the right to own one. No reason was given and no attempt was made to review it. Despite the fact that he complied with a request to bring a consent letter from his mother, he was still denied the passport:

'You said I needed a letter of consent'
'I can't give you a passport'
'But you said --- I have the money. I can get it and show it to you'
'You can't have a passport!'
'But why?'
He lost his temper.
'I have said you can't have a passport!' (Tell 204)

Without food and money, Abrahams lived on credit, ate free at Fatty's Testament and paid when he was able. At this stage, he knew he had to leave the country or die of hunger. He trekked up north to the Cape Province, Free State and then down to Natal. His sufferings conjured up the hardship of Michael K in Coetzee's novel. But Abraham was undeterred. An opportunity that a ship needed a white crew provided itself. When he applied for a police license, the head of the place told him why he would be let go through his official:

> 'We are going to let you go, Abrahams. The Chief thinks it will be better to have one less of you on our hands. Here, take this back to the officer and he 'll give you your clearance. Good fishing, Abrahams'. (Tell 222).

As Abrahams left South Africa, he made a prophesy about role reversal, about reverse racism and that the heat would be turned on whites at the end of the day. That whites would later be at the receiving end. With a black man as the president of the United States of America, has that prophecy come to pass?

Also, not only do we have a black majority rule in South Africa, whites are now at the receiving end. Abrahams' last testament is very pertinent:

> And in my contacts with them, the Europeans had made it clear that they were the overlords, that the earth and all its wealth belonged to them: They had spoken the language of physical strength, the language of force. And I had submitted to their superior strength. But submission can be a subtle thing. A man can submit today in order to resist tomorrow. My submission had been such. And because I had not been free to show my real feeling, to voice my true thoughts, my submission had breed bitterness and anger. And there were nearly ten million others who had submitted with equal anger and bitterness. One day, the whites would have to reckon with these people. One day their sons and daughters would have to face the wrath of these embittered people. The two million whites cannot for ever be overlords of the ten million non-whites. One day they may have to submit to the same judgment of force they have invoked in their dealing with us ---- for me, personally, life in South Africa had come to an end. (Tell 223-4)

What judgment do you suppose whites would be having? Truth may have triumphed; the blacks too must know that they owe the world an obligation to institute a free and just society.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE PARADOX OF HISTORICAL INTERLOCK AND THE FATE OF BLACKS IN AFRICAN AMERICAN AND SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETIES

The gravitas in the works of Richard Wright, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, Peter Abrahams, J.M Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer about the discrimination, violence and inhuman treatment in African American and South African societies have distinguished them as some of the greatest writers in the modern times. The six writers are concerned with the racial problems in their individual societies but Coetzee has been pre-eminent by taking a careful withdrawal into other issues that plague mankind. Thoughtful and methodical, Coetzee's style is noticeably slow and careful and his deliberation shows a writer who is in control of his art. For instance, Coetzee, if he can afford it, restrains from the emotive word, "black", although his theme is not in doubt. This elicits the reader's participation and possible inference to other forms of discriminating that are not purely racial. In both Disgrace and Life and Times of Michael K, Coetzee avoids the emotive word, "black".

Wright, Abrahams, Angelou and Morrison explore the image crisis in blacks while Coetzee and Gordimer find fault with the egocentricism in whites. While blacks go in search of their roots, whites go on ego trip. "I won't do it", (58) David Lurie insists in Disgrace when he is asked to apologise for taking advantage of his position, by sleeping with his student, Melanie Isaacs. A member of the Disciplinary committee Dr. Rassool sees beyond Luries insincerity and then comments:

> Yes. I want to register an objection to these responses of Professor Lurie's which I regard as fundamentally evasive. Professor Lurie's says he

> accepts the charges. Yet when we try to pin him down on what it is that he actually accepts, all we get is subtle mockery. To me that suggests that he accepts the charges only in name. (50)

David Lurie is not only evasive but arrogant and haughty. Humility would have saved his job and the degrading job he later succumbs to: looking after dogs and being a nuisance to his daughter, Lucy. Lurie refuses to apologise and so leaves the disciplinary committee no option than to recommend the supreme penalty: his being forced to resign. Even at the height of his humiliation and virtual dismissal from Lucy's small holdings, David Lurie still clings to white superiority. When a member of the committee, Desmond Swarts says, "David, are you sure you don't want a postponement to give yourself time to reflect and perhaps consult?" (50), he retorts, "Why? What do I need to reflect on?" (51). Thus David Lurie's problem is that of ego.

Vera Stark in None To Accompany Me comes closer to David Lurie in this character flaw. Vera refuses to admit she needs her husband, Bennet. She sells their only family house because "I cannot live with someone who cannot live without me". "Ivan, I can't like in the past" (223), she says. She sells the house and takes up tenancy with Zeph Rapuna. She pursues a blind ideal at the expense of her family. Despite her children's protestations, like David Lurie, she refuses to recant or soft-pedal.

Thus, Wright, Angelou, Abrahams and Morrison are closer in thematic exploration while Gordimer and Coetzee see racism from the same prism. Environmental factors, racial sentiments and goal settlement are the main factors pulling the writers together. Each of the writers represents his/her age and

weaknesses adequately and in the end the reader is left to make the necessary value judgment. For instance, it would be unthinkable for a black grandson to call his father and mother, not to talk of grand parents, by name. But Adam calls his father and grand parents by name without causing any offence. Ivan does the same, while Annie could openly bring a fellow lesbian to her parent's house and she is accepted. By this portrayal, Coetzee wants his readers to see the differences in culture and why characters behave the way they do. It is perhaps this disparity in cultural outlook that makes African American scholars to resist the use of Western literary theory to judge African American Literature. One of the most important African American Scholars, Henry Louis Gates, says this of it:

> My desire has been to allow the black tradition to speak for itself about its nature and various functions, rather than to read it, or analyze it, in terms of literary theories borrowed whole from other traditions, appropriated from without .(8)

Gates, like many early black writers, has had cause to disprove that African American literature is 'separatist' and was geared towards the balkanization of American Literature. He said, "It is fair to describe the subtext of the history of black letters as this urge to refute the claim that because blacks had no written tradition they were bearers of an inferior culture" (15). For Joanne Gabbin, an English professor at James Madison University, African American Literature can be found inside and outside of the American literature: "Somehow African American literature has been relegated to a different level, outside American literature, yet it is an integral part" 918). The argument is sustained because African Americans were in most part of American history discriminated against. In other words, they were not accepted while still remaining within American society.

A similar problem faced South African literary society. The Human Sciences Research Council had planned the publication of literary survey on literatures of several languages of South Africa. The project was under the general editorship of Charles Malan and to be funded by the Human Sciences Research Council. The length of the survey was to be 80,000 words to Africans literature, 70,000 to South African English Literature and 40,000 each to Zulu, Xhosa and Sotho literature and Venda literature 5,000 words. The project however ran into troubled waters and resulted in three modest surveys written in English: - History of African Literature (1993) by J.C. Kannemeyer, South African English literature in African Languages: A Concise Historical Perspective by D.B. Ntuli and C.F. Swanepoel and Grounds of Contest: A Survey of South African English literature (1990). For Michael Chapwian, a single authorship is difficult to achieve because:

> A single-authored literary history, South African literature covers work from the expression of stone-age Bushmen to that of writers such as Gordimer, Brink, Breytenbach, and Coetzee. In considering, the questions of what constitutes a usable part, what value may be assigned to traditional, elite, and popular forms, generally how after apartheid one might understand the linguistic and cultural complexity of the Southern African region, the study inherited a literary culture that had been constructed upon assumptions of linguistic- racial exclusivities.

However, Americans consistently talk of "multiculturalism" to represent the diverse ethnic nature of the United States, but the term does not entail deep co-operation. The same can be said of South African society. The questions which critics pose according to Chapwian are: which literature is the literature of a society in a multicultural milieu? Who should tell this story and

what literary background should be reflected? Critics will undoubtedly shout themselves hoarse over the issue of dominance, political authority, nativity and who was in the right to speak against injustice. Multiculturalism makes the citizens of that society to walk a tight rope and to find expression to a voice of which there is no consensus. Sacvan Bercovitch sees the mission of Cambridge History of American Literature (1994) as an attempt to marry "consensual" histories with "dissensus" history. He says that "what we have is a Babel of contending approaches" (631-52).

In considering the works of Coetzee, Angelou, Abrahams Gordimer, Morrison and Wright, admission has to be made that Wright belongs to a different world. The racism he portrays in his works is more confrontational and weird. Coming after the Harlem Renaissance, it is a chronicle that shocks the American society, white and black. Sherley Anne Williams says in "Women in the Fiction of Richard Wright" (1982) that Wright casts black women as castrators and white women as saviours of black men. She accuses him of fathering the "denigration of black woman" and "glorifying -----the symbolic white woman" that was to "flower in the fiction of black writers in the late sixties and seventies" (66).

Both Wright and Gordimer have been accused of switching from fiction to nonfiction and viz versa. For instance, Timothy Dow Adams in "I do Believe Him though I know He Lies" (1985) claims that Wright's: "inability to tell the truth is Wright's metaphor for the self" (83). Adams also charges Wright of changing ideas or event from one text to another. Similarly, Nadine Gordimer has been accused like James Frey as authors fabricating parts of their lives in order to sell their books. For instance, Gordimer's biographer, Ronald Suresh Roberts, has claimed that Gordimer's essay "A South African

Childhood" is not entirely autobiographical as it claims to be. Gordimer parts ways with Roberts for attacking her political views and depicting her husband's illness and death in a way she does not like. Gerald Holcombe has compared Gordimer, Morrison and Alice Walker and concludes:

> Gordimer is a writer of extraordinary power and acuity. Her voice is remarkably controlled and restrained, in contrast with the subject matter of much of her work: the way people go about their daily lives and interactions with one another in the myriad tensions of a brutal police state. Like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, Gordimer is adept at delineating the relationship between the personal and the political. (3)

Susana VEGA-GONZALEZ asserts that:

> "Throughout her career Morrison has produced a literature clearly committed to the reality of her people, demonstrating that magical realism is not equivalent to escapism and that the use of the supernatural does not preclude the author's concern over social, cultural and ethnic issues". (3)

One area where Morrison differs from the other three writers is in plot development. While we can trace Bigger Thomas from his first day of employment to his two brutal murders, escape, capture, court trial and then sentence, we can hardly have this kind of pyramidal creation in the novels of Morrison. In both Coetzee and Gordimer, we can trace plot organic evolution up to a climax, decline and resolution. But this cannot be said of Morrison's art. Linear reading dissolves as soon as we enter the main story and the concept of seeing a story from beginning, middle and end becomes indeterminable. Morrison's plots are fluid and the reader needs maximum concentration to fully appreciate her art. Anyone who wants to see a story in the usual convention will be disappointed in the end.

In many ways, Richard Wright and Peter Abrahams share many things in common. Apart from the fact that both writers were born about the same decade, Wright (1908) and Abrahams (1919), they share the same thematic concern: racism. The disparity in their date of birth notwithstanding, they began their literary career at about the same period. Wright published his first story in a Negro magazine in 1931 while Abrahams published his first collection of poems, A Black Man Speaks of Freedom in 1940. While Black Boy (1945) treats the first seventeen years of Wright's life, Tell Freedom (1953) tells the first nineteen years of Abraham's life. Native Son (1940) and Mine Boy (1946) are the two books that brought both writers international acclaim. They equally published their first works of fiction before their autobiographies.

The two writers married white women after escaping from the suffocating racial sentiments around them: Wright flew from America to France and Abrahams left South Africa for Britain. As if that was not enough, they both joined the communist party because the party encouraged them ideologically, and they left the party for similar reasons: for trying to control the direction of their writings. The party also criticized the books they refused to submit to the official organ of the party. Parting of ways with the party had been painful for both writers, but it was inevitable for men whose voices had been stringent for the cause of freedom.

For both writers, poverty, racism and oppression of blacks were major issues in their novels and they were reasons why they fought. Writing within the same age but in different societies, their voices were united because they wrote about the same period and were controlled by similar factors. For instance, their major works appeared during the Second World War or immediately after it. Thus, they were influenced by both the

crisis of the War and the depression that followed. Thus, intense oppression of black people that characterized the period greatly influenced them.

The violence in South Africa, the joining of gangs in both societies, which the two writers described were issues of deep concern. However, the approach of the two men differed. Wright believed in the immediate and violent overthrow of white hegemony. Abrahams was somewhat softer, violent all the same but in a progressive self conscious way. While Abrahams believed white co-operation was necessary, Wright thought blacks ought to determine their fate without compromise.

In one area where Angelou differed from other writers is that she is being considered in this thesis based only on her autobiographies. It is a marriage between self and art. Historical events chronicled make her works historical pieces wrapped around the life of the author. By weaving her life around important periods, Angelou succeeds in weaving herself into our consciousness and a new approach to the study of autobiographies. By telling the human truth about her life, she is poles apart from other authors under consideration in this essay, who though also told the truth about human situations, presented them in the eyes of others. In this respect, she is close to Wright, Abrahams and Coetzee. For this their works can be called protest literature or political works.

The theme of flying is predominant in Wright's Native Son, Morrison's Song of Solomon and Coetzee's Life and Times of Michael K. Milkman's ancestor, Solomon/Shalimar is one of the blacks who could fly. Milkman could fly himself just as Pilate "Without ever leaving the ground, she could fly" (340). Milkman rides the air. Robert Smith, the agent of the North

Carolina Mutual Life Insurance, enthuses "take off, from Mercy and fly and fly away on my own wings" (3) Guitar tells Milkman that the peacock cannot do better in flight than a chicken because: "Too much tail. All that jewelry weighs it down. Like vanity. Can't nobody fly with all that shit. Wanna fly, you got to give up the shit that weights you down" (179-80).

Bigger Thomas also engages in the flight drama with his friends. The gang discusses the possibility of flying a plane. Gus tells the gang: "Them white boys sure can fly" (14) Bigger explains the cause: "Yes....they get a chance to do everything" (14) .The plight of Michael K is the same in Coetzee's novel. When the doctor asks K the thoughts he wants to think, he replies:

> I used to think about flying. I always wanted to fly. I used to stretch out my arms and think I was flying over the fences and between the houses. I flew low over people's heads, but they couldn't see me. When they switched on the music I became too restless to do it, to fly. (133)

As the theme of flying is a recurrent motif, is it then the bane of all oppressed people, and a kind of palliative?

Gordimer's skill as a writer is immense and language use appears to her naturally even when she is describing complex human situations and emotional turmoils. But her critics are sometimes unnerved when she launches head-on into the issues of the sociological, which they believe always, undermine her art. Gordimer has tried to defend this charge: "Learning to write sent me falling, falling through the surface of the South African way of life" (gtd in Holcombe 2008, 2).

While Coetzee has told his life history in Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life (1997) and Youth Scenes from Provincial

Life (2002), although in fictionalized ways and Richard Wright told his in Black Boy, Gordimer has however said she would never write an autobiography. She gives her reasons in an interview as:

> Two things first of all, although some people's lives are remarkable, from my point of view very often this means the writer has run out of creativity. No new ideas come, so you tell your own story. That's one reason. The other reason is that I'm much too secretive. My private life belongs to me. I want to keep that to myself. (14)

The books written by Wright, Coetzee, Wole Soyinka and other writers seem to disprove Gordimer's assertion in so far as they were written long after they had either published their autobiographies or even won the Nobel Prize. In addition, they have all written other books after their individual autobiographies.

On the issue of criticism, each of the writers either disregards criticism of his or her works or shuns critics altogether. For Coetzee: "I cannot find it in myself to align myself with the censor .....the dark – suited, bald – headed figure, with his pursed lips and his red pen" (Willis, 1). Wright left the communist party in the United State when its leadership began to make uncomplimentary remarks about his book, Native Son. For Gordimer, who is more benevolent:

> Well, how do I think about criticism? There are perhaps one or two people in different parts of the world whose opinion I really value. So I would care very much what they say. But for the rest, it doesn't really matter. I know what I was trying to do. I know where I've succeeded, and I know where I've failed. I think every writer must be his or her own most stringent and absolute unforgiving critic. (Salon 15)

While offering a critical balance, Morrison nevertheless says this of criticism in her essay, "Playing in the Dark":

> Criticism as a form of knowledge is capable of robbing literature not only of its own implicit and explicit ideology but of its ideas as well; it can dismiss the difficult, arduous work writers do to make an art that becomes and remains part of and significant within a human landscape. It is important to see how inextricable Africanism is or ought to be from the deliberations of literary criticism and the wanton, elaborate strategies undertaken to erase its presence from view. (Morrison 1008)

Except perhaps Coetzee, each of the six writers employs black folk language to make penetrating description. Morrison, Gordimer, Abrahams, Coetzee and Wright remain the champions of the proletariats in their works. They remain their mouthpiece, and have no regrets about this portrayal. But Coetzee lets his characters speak polished English even when they are barely educated. Both Michael K and his mother speak good English just as all the characters in Disgrace do except in the case of Petrus who towards the end of the novel begins to speak illiterate English, a style that appears like an afterthought for Coetzee.

It might be expedient to distinguish Gordimer from the rest three for her finding time to compare the situation of blacks in both South Africa and the United states. By giving attention to the theme, she has elevated her art for comparison. When asked why some blacks in the United States seem to be living 100 years behind civilization, she said:

> I find that rather depressing. But of course you must remember that here you've got a black minority. Our situation is very different from the point of view of

> proportional values. Here, we've got a black majority. We have a black native government. There are whites and others-people of different, black, coloured races – in the government, but it is indeed a black majority government, you've got a black majority population. The biggest difference is that blacks in South Africa all have their own languages. I think this is of tremendous importance. There is something about having your own mother tongue. Black Americans cannot turn to the ear, to the intimate shelter of another language. South African blacks have always had that. And they also had, of course, their own ground under their feet-they no longer had the title deed to it...but the earth under the feet and the rivers running and the forests, these were their home, their habitat. (Salon 12)

Gordimer, Wright, Angelou, Abrahams and Morrison are the writers whose works we can truly classify as protest literature. They clearly identify injustice in their societies and go all out to condemn it. It is enough that this virulent incision has been made and they pull all out to attack it with the entire arsenal at their disposal. Coetzee is as much committed but in a milder and even-tempered way. Virginia Whatley Smith says:

> "Wright resisted social construction into a collective black boy to rise as an individual self, and Black Boy is an account of the dialectics between this phylogenic and autogenic construction of the black boy".

Joseph T. Skerrett in "Composing Bigger" (1988) dwells on the theme of "authorial self-referentiality prevalent in Wright's fiction and non fiction" (3). Skerrett rejects the usual reading of Marxism and naturalism in the novel. In other words, Wright's

fiction and non fiction are personal opinions thinly disguised. As the works are protests against racism, it is Wright's personal fight and protest.

Coetzee adumbrates the politics of South Africa in his works, yet in the veil of internationalism. B. Levin acknowledges this much when he says:

> "Mr Coetzee sees the heart of darkness in all societies, and gradually it becomes clear that he is not dealing in politics at all, but inquiring into the nature of the beast that lurks within each of us, and needs no collective stimulus to turn and rend us" (44).

Although Levin is referring to Coetzee's book, Waiting for the Barbarians, this much can be said of most of his novels. A reader is quickly taken in by Coetzee's literary sophistication and moral lesson that the work ceases to be fiction but assumes the role of a guide, a companion for the every day's lesson of life.

For Leon de Kock, the two elements that characterize the works of J.M Coetzee are "doubleness and resentational crisis" (284). He also gives the names of South African authors who "hit the seam" as truly and directly as Coetzee as Nadine Gordimer, Alan Paton, Es'kia Mphahlele, Dennis Brutus, Athol Fugard, Mongane Wally Serote, Breyten Breytenbach and Andre' Brink. He argues that they have emerged world writers of South African extraction. But he lists Thomas Pringle, Olive Schreiner, Roy Compbell, Pauline Smith, Guy Butler, Alan Paton, Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee as White South African English "Canon" (Lock, 285). He says other critics see them as intensely preoccupied with cultural doubleness of either home (Britain) or outpost (South Africa). He uses Gordimer's argument that "national" literature impossible" (18-19) and

Coetzee point of a "great South African novel" unlikely (74-79) to drive home his argument.

Kock's categorization is valid, but it is yet to be seen how it can help the quality of fiction to be produced in the region. Categorization has always impinged on the right of writers to create, and the charge against South African writings has always been on its outlook, its preoccupation with the same theme, its apparent lack of freedom to invert anything outside the theme of apartheid. Is it any wonder that critics towards the end of apartheid began to speculate if any art would ever be coming from the enclave? The different observations of the white and black writing in South Africa, to me do not entail discord of theme, but approaches from different flanks of the same subject matter. Forcing South African literature into a one united vision is as impossible as taking African American literature to toe one American dream and destiny.

Critics usually compare Gordimer with Coetzee. While Coetzee's grace and power of language are acknowledged, Gordimer is reputed for literary profundity. In his criticism of Gordimer's works, Ronald Ayling acknowledges that critics shower her with enormous praise, contrary to Ayling's own personal experience:

> For all the respect accorded Nadine Gordimer's fiction, it is my experience that many readers find her writing to be cold and estranging in style and tone. That response is certainly true for a number of North American graduates with whom I have discussed her work. They fail to see the sublimal tension that is apparent, it seems to me. In her writings, where a strong emotional undercurrent runs beneath the apparently controlled, even non-committal surface making as in Swift's finest satires) its own implicit moral commentary. (96)

Gordimer's reaction to criticism that there are four critics she values their comments has cut Ayling's triumph, although there is no doubt that the critic's mandate helps to further elucidate a literary work; her response provides a mirror for a two-way evaluation which the reader needs.

One area where Coetzee has been severely criticized has been on his concentration with race and colonialism. For this, David Attwell says he is "a regional writer within South Africa" (25).But the charge runs against the trumped up impression that he is not committed enough to the ills of South Africa under Apartheid. Coetzee is certainly committed to the anti-Apartheid crusade. Peggy Lindsey also aggress with this when she posits:

> Several of Coetzee's novels are noted for their eloquent protest against political and social conditions in South Africa, particularly the suffering caused by imperialism, apartheid, and post apartheid violence, as well as for their technical virtuosity. His fiction is often melancholy in tone, treating themes of human isolation and survival. (4)

As will be expected, African American literature will change in line with the course of political events in that country. With the victory of Barack Obama as the first black American to be elected the president of the United States of America, literature from that region will also change as Emeka Nwabueze rightly points out:

> "As the face of the society changes, so changes the face of literature also. Literature is an aspect of society and reflects the characteristics of the age when it was written". (36)

Maya Angelou believes that literature can change both the thought and action of an individual or a people. In her conversation with Claudia Tate, she says:

> "Learning the craft, understanding what language can do, gaining control of language, enables one to make people weep, make them laugh, even make them go to war". (Claudia 4)

Thus, literature can be said to have helped in changing the course of the political events in both South Africa and the United States. The symbiotic relationship between literature and the environment is significant as art draws its validity from the society it chronicles and mirrors. Art predicates its life on a given society and man sees himself and age in a dictum that explains him.

Gordimer's July's People and None to Accompany Me and Coetzee's, Disgrace are books that treat the post apartheid era of South Africa. But Life and Times of Michael K by Coetzee, Song of Solomon and Jazz by Morrison and Wright's Black Boy and Native Son are all books still treating the recent problems and oppression of black people in both the United States and South Africa. In a sense, Gordimer, Abrahams and Coetzee are more forward looking and thinking ahead of their age. Their optimism can be said to be more proactive, although Wright boots the crisis awake and alerts both blacks and whites of the consequences of racial problems.

There are many writers who talked about the racial problems in both societies as Claudia rightly observes:

> "While many black writers, male and female, fit into the general tradition in African-American literature of celebrating black survival by overcoming racial obstacles, other writers give their attention to those

who fall in battle, insisting that their fight, though unsuccessful, is valiant and therefore merits artistic attention" .(XX IV).

If we have to admit that literature has done so much to advance the course of events in both South Africa and the United States for the better, in the case of blacks, what can we say of the role of writers in the scheme of things? It might be safe to say that the works of writers speak for them and eloquently represent them. In a way, a man is indistinguishable from his works. But what makes a writer the guardian of his people's culture and the voice of his age? Toni Morrison offers an explanation in Playing in the Dark,

> Writers are among the most sensitive, the most intellectually anarchic, most representative, most probing of artists, the ability of writers to imagine what is not the self, to familiarize the strange and mystify the familiar, is the test of their power. The languages they use and the social and historical context in which these languages signify are indirect and direct revelations of that power and its limitations. So it is to them, the creators of American literature, that I look for clarification about the invention and effect of Africanism in the United States. (1010)

For Coetzee as he examines the writer and the state antagonism says:

> "The ostensible powerlessness of the writer gives him a paradoxical potential for heroism in the face of persecution. And the writer triumphs in the end because his version of truth will out last his antagonist's". (Coetzee 1990, 64).

Throughout human history, man has always searched for his identity, his voice and ever reaching to be himself. But there is also the other side of him: to fuse with other people of his kind without discrimination, let or hindrance. This is what literature has been talking about for centuries. Thus, Bigger Thomas, that heroic brute who revels in brutal murders to assert his position, has to regrettably bring this message to mankind,

> "It was when he read the newspapers or magazines, or went to the movies, or walked along the streets with crowds, that he felt what he wanted: to merge himself with others and be a part of this world, to lose himself in it so he could find himself, to be allowed a chance to live like others, even though he was black" (226).

From the story of Michael K to that of David Lurie, Wright himself in Black Boy, Vera Stark, Joe and Violet Trace and Milkman, Abrahams and Angelou, the issue or theme is the same.

CONCLUSION

This enormous discourse evaluates the pathetic story of black Africans in both South Africa and the United States, the inhuman condition they have had to go through, and the period of slavery to their freedom and now to the presidency of the United States of America and the black president and black majority rule in South Africa. It is a compelling story and a happy one indeed. It is a lesson to whites and blacks that patience pays in the end, but more remarkably that in all cases efforts should be made to right the wrong. Justice is with God and in the end will triumph. The world is on its way to true equity and justice.

In an attempt to conclude this discourse, an observation need be made of an interesting feature between the biography of the six writers considered in this thesis about racism, oppression, sex, love and freedom. A streak of rebellious and nonconformist attitude pervades their life and writing. While this is not uncommon with writers; it can however help to strengthen a deeper interest in their work. For instance, with the exception of Wright, Morrison and Abrahams, the other three writers married at least more than once. They thus wrote under very strenuous condition, a challenging situation where they were creating order out of chaos. If the institution of marriage offered them little solace at the time of writing, their triumph is indeed significant.

Political events in the United States and South Africa have been swift and epochal with a black majority rule in South Africa and a black American president in the white House.
The toga of racism is gradually becoming loose and may be cast off altogether in no distant time, a situation that can enable all races to see themselves as frail and equal. In a sense, it will be wrong to compare the life of the writers considered in this essay and the characters they have created. It is enough to lift their prophecies and the delectable characters they have created. As Toni Morrison argues, after reading To Have and Have Not (1937) by Ernest Hemingway:

> It would be irresponsible and unjustified to invest Hemingway with the thoughts of his characters. It is Harry who thinks a black woman is like a nurse shark, not Hemingway. An author is not personally accountable for the acts of his fictive creatures, although he is responsible for them. And there is no evidence I know of to persuade me that Hemingway shared Harry's views. In point of fact there is strong evidence to suggest the opposite. (Disturbing Nurses 48)

If we have to stretch it further, there is no reason to see the characters created by these authors as a reflection of their individual lives or as their inability to serve as role models in their private lives through the society they criticize. Art aspires to capture and recreate the society it is destined as the artist watches with consternation at the reactions to the works of his hands.

There are a lot of lessons to be learnt in the United States and South Africa literature. Nowhere else in the world were the issues of race and oppression fought so desperately like in the two societies. Both societies are good models in the evaluation and the fight against racial equality. Fiercely racial in its past histories, the two societies are also beacons of hope in very terrible situations, that given the necessary heat and pressure, any iron can bend.

The task before African American and South African writers is to channel their energies towards honour to reduce the level of violence, tension, rape and crime in the two regions. Creation of a just and plural society is desirable if mankind has to enter the new millennium with hope and love. The apocalyptic situations in the two regions are not issues to cheer about. If the scenario created in the past was that racism created victims based on who held political power, what can be made of the new power shift? We cannot create new principles of Armageddon and then hope to enter a new and better era.

The current events in the world signal that the future of racism is doomed. As the experience of the tower of Babel has shown, co-operation is an innate impulse in man. As we look forward to a bright future, what else do we expect in race relations? The future will tell.

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