

*No Place Like Utopia:
Cross-Racial Couples in
Nadine Gordimer's Later Novels*

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“**I**S THERE NOWHERE Else Where We Can Meet?” The title of this Nadine Gordimer story expresses the yearning in apartheid South Africa for a connection across the colour line. From this early story all the way through her latest novel, Gordimer pushes the limits of relationships between blacks and whites in a fractured society. Often Gordimer crystallizes her vision of cross-racial relations in her portrayal of a black man and a white woman who forge an individual connection in the various forms available to them: as young “siblings” in the same household, as mistress and servant, as lovers (a different kind of mistress), even as husband and wife. In her early works, these cross-racial “couples” are fraught with conflict and cynicism from the start, as in the early short story and the novels *Occasion for Loving* and *The Late Bourgeois World*. In the later novels, Gordimer’s couples search for and sometimes briefly find “places we can meet,” but are subject to the shifting forces of history and compelled to move on. Gordimer introduces the idea of “moving on” as a revolutionary necessity in *A Sport of Nature* and carries it into her next novel, *My Son’s Story*, highlighting the tenuousness of all relationships and the illusory quality of middle-class marriage. In these two novels, the only “place where we can meet” is on the move. In her most recent novel, *None to Accompany Me*, Gordimer, with an epigraph from Proust, challenges her characters to keep moving: “We must never be afraid to go too far, for truth lies beyond.”

After the institution of apartheid in 1948, racial distinctions became legal categories, and 1949 saw the enactment of the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act. In 1950, an amendment to

the 1927 Immorality Act added “coloureds” as a category in the laws prohibiting sexual relations between whites and non-whites. These laws were not repealed until 1986, and it seems significant that the first happy relationship between a black man and a white woman occurs in Gordimer’s 1987 novel, *A Sport of Nature*. The two preceding novels portray black-white couples fraught with conflict, but straining towards the communion of Hillela and Whaila in *A Sport of Nature*. The earlier pairs are not actually lovers, though a strong sexual undertone contributes to the intensity of the relationships. They can be thought of as “couples” because of the link between racism and sexual oppression, that is, oppression of both men and women by sexual means. The troubled coupling of Rosa with Baasie/Zwelinzima in *Burger’s Daughter* and Maureen with July in *July’s People* manifests the yearning for a meaningful cross-racial connection. This yearning culminates sexually in *A Sport of Nature*.

The taboo (and criminal offense) of cross-racial sex is rooted in a racially determined sexual mythology:

The most notorious fantasy claims that the black man is sexually evil, low, subhuman; the white woman sexually pure, elevated, superhuman. Together they dramatize the polarities of excrement and disembodied spirituality. (Stimpson 624)¹

Gordimer explores the sexual fears of white women (and white men *for* their women) towards black men in “Is There Nowhere Else Where We Can Meet?” and other early works. Of course the Immorality Act also applied to white men’s sexual relations with non-white women, but the black man-white woman pairing is inherently more subversive, since neither half of the pair has the ultimate political power of the white man. The rape and possession of black women by white men is the primary ancestry of most people of mixed racial heritage in South Africa (Thompson 45), while white women who consorted with black men were often considered insane. The mother of South African novelist Bessie Head is one such case (Head xx). The consequences for black men were even worse: imprisonment, exile, or death, inside and outside the legal system.

Significantly, Gordimer’s character Toby Hood in *A World of Strangers* rejects the idea of taking a black lover for himself

because he does not want to replicate the role of the oppressor (*A World of Strangers* 162, 215; see also Driver 189). In Gordimer's short story "City Lovers," the white man and "coloured" woman who become lovers can only be perceived as master and servant, even by themselves. Though the man is European, the couple remains trapped in the cultural context of South Africa; the affair is dissolved by enforcement of the Immorality Act. A similar resolution supporting the status quo is reached for the black woman and her Afrikaner lover in the companion story, "Country Lovers." By contrast, in black man–white woman pairings, Gordimer reaches beyond the limits of repressed sexual fears and legally imposed racial divisions to subvert the dominant ideology of racism.

Feminist critics are often disappointed with Gordimer's use of sexuality in her writing, since she avoids specifically linking racism with sexism, and downplays gender oppression to the point of parody (for example, the "Women for Peace" meeting in *Burger's Daughter* is a lacerating comic depiction of white bourgeois feminism's attempt to reach poor black women [202-03]). Dorothy Driver argues in "Nadine Gordimer: The Politicisation of Women" that Gordimer *does* link racism with sexism, perhaps unconsciously, in several of her works, but ultimately she "withdraws sympathy from white women" because of her "lack of ease at being a woman who is also a white South African" (195; 191).

Gordimer's use of sexuality is not easily separable from issues of gender representation, especially in the case of Hillela. Brenda Cooper is particularly unforgiving:

It is interesting that it is still possible in the 1980s for a woman writer to create such a "heroine," or, perhaps, it is only still possible in a situation like South Africa, where the priority issue that Gordimer is handling is that of race, and her primary concern is to illustrate the ways in which her new breed of white South African can love, serve and physically worship *black* men. (82)

I agree with Cooper and other critics that Gordimer accepts the status quo of patriarchal political structures, and that gender equality is not part of her otherwise radical vision. Hillela is, in fact, a fantasy creation, and her sexual objectification by men in the novel does not degrade her as it would most women. Admit-

tedly, such a fantasy creation may serve to entrench further dangerous attitudes towards female sexuality that subjugate and oppress women. However, I feel that it is reductive, if not prescriptive, to say that "Gordimer is *not* free to present biological and mysteriously sensual solutions to the vast range of social and political problems and difficult emotions faced by whites in South Africa today" (Cooper 76). This statement ignores the positive possibilities of Hillela's sexuality, mythic though it may be. Gordimer's depictions of women are sometimes troubling, but the complexity of her characterization eludes charges of anti-feminism. In fact, in *My Son's Story*, the female characters move out of traditional gender roles into radical political action, and Gordimer moves closer to a revolutionary vision that encompasses feminism.

Gordimer's depiction of sexuality as a means of empowerment evolves significantly in her later novels. Traditional as wives and mothers, Gordimer's women are untraditional in their sexual morality, choosing lovers freely and frequently, in and out of marriage. In Gordimer's evolving vision, black men are free to choose white women as lovers, and these pairings represent hope in the struggle for racial equality. Though the inequality between men and women which Gordimer tacitly accepts stands in sharp contrast to her critique of racial inequality, her black man-white woman "couples" represent an inversion of the dominant social code of white male domination over blacks and women.

In "Prospero's Complex," Judie Newman provides a cogent analysis of racism as a product of sexual repression. Newman observes that in *Burger's Daughter* "Rosa's sexuality is the basis of an exploration of the racist psyche" (69). In Rosa's story, Newman finds images that suggest the "twin racist strategies" of "blackness as a way to sensual liberation" and "the attempt to blame 'dirty' actions on the black" (74). Following Fanon, Newman presents Rosa's story as an illustration that "the 'civilized' white may retain an irrational longing for areas of repressed sexuality which he then projects onto the Negro, [but] this image of the sexual-sensual-genital black can be corrected" (72).

As the child of a family committed to the eradication of apartheid, Rosa's identity search is integrally bound up with issues of

race. Rosa's most direct confrontations with her own racism are with Zwelinzima. He is locked in Rosa's consciousness throughout the novel as her childhood playmate "Baasie," or little boss, the black boy who lived with her family while his father worked underground in the struggle against apartheid. Zwelinzima cannot forgive Rosa or her family for sending him back to the poverty of black townships when he got too old to attend the schools in their white suburb. As a child Rosa had no part in this decision; what becomes clear is that what Zwelinzima cannot forgive is Rosa's whiteness. Her middle-class privilege, her father's celebrated martyrdom to the same cause that killed his own unknown father and countless other blacks, the abandonment that separated the two as children—for Zwelinzima, all these are secondary to the simple fact of racial difference.

For Rosa and Zwelinzima, there is no place where they can meet; even the confrontation that severs their relationship occurs "no place" in a disembodied phone conversation. After nearly twenty years, Zwelinzima destroys the "little boss" of Rosa's memory: "Whatever you whites touch, it's a take-over." "I don't have to live in your head" (321; 323). All the pain of whites' exclusion from the Black Consciousness movement is crystallized in Rosa's stinging retorts, the desire to hurt Zwelinzima as she has been hurt:

What is it you want?—the insult thrilled her as she delivered herself of it—You want something. If it's money, I'm telling you there isn't any. Go and ask one of your white English liberals who'll pay but won't fight. Nobody phones in the middle of the night to make a fuss about what they were called as a little child. (322)

Later, she asks herself "How could I have come out with the things I did? Where were they hiding?" (329). When she sees that her radical family heritage does not exempt her from lashing out with subtly racist insults, Rosa abandons her comfortable European exile. At the end of the novel, she is locked in a South African prison, re-committed to the struggle against internal and external racism.

Rosa's adult sexuality is expressed in an affair with a white Frenchman, far from the site of the painful racial and familial fracturing of her past. Gordimer writes Rosa's affair with Bernard

Chaballier in ethereal, dreamlike language, in sharp contrast to the visceral realism of her interactions with Zwelinzima. Their childhood intimacy is described in palpable physical detail: the two children share a bed where Rosa feels “a special, spreading warmth when Baasie had wet the bed in our sleep,” a warmth that “took us back into the enveloping fluids of a host body” (139-40). She enacts a brotherly-incestuous relationship as an adult with Conrad in which they treat “each other’s dirt as our own, as little Baasie and I had long ago performed the child’s black mass, tasting on a finger the gall of our own shit and the saline of our own pee” (70). Baasie is associated with dirt and with sex in his link to Conrad, bringing physically charged, incestuous feelings into Rosa’s interactions with the adult Zwelinzima. Her first response to his late night phone call is as a lover, expecting Bernard on the line. Rosa is physically revolted by her own cruelty towards Zwelinzima, and Gordimer’s writing reaches an apex of finely observed, chillingly rendered detail:

Neither spoke and neither put down the receiver for a few moments. Then she let go her fingers that had stiffened to their own clutch and the thing was back in place. The burning lights witnessed her.

She stood in the middle of the room.

Knocking a fist at the doorway as she passed, she ran to the bathroom and fell to her knees at the lavatory bowl, vomiting. The wine, the bits of sausage—she laid her head, gasping between spasms, on the porcelain rim, slime dripping from her mouth with the tears of effort running from her nose. (323)

The telephone call marks a turning point in Rosa’s life, and the scene a pivot in Gordimer’s fiction.

In her essay “Living in the Interregnum,” Gordimer relates a piece of personal history:

A black man I may surely call my friend because we have survived a time when he did not find it possible to accept a white’s friendship, and a time when I didn’t think I could accept that he should decide when that time was past, said to me this year, “Whites have to learn to struggle.” (270)

This is Rosa’s task: to move beyond the “twin racist attitudes”—blacks as dirt, blacks as sexual demons—into the subordinate position whites must take in the overthrow of apartheid. Rosa

loses Zwelinzima within the confines of *Burger's Daughter*, but Gordimer continues her exploration of cross-racial relationships in the novels that follow. The "interregnum" of her essay finds fictional form in *July's People* as she paints a picture of what might come after the revolution.

The relationship between Maureen and July in *July's People* is almost a direct continuation of Rosa and Zwelinzima's. Maureen and July's unequal status is even more entrenched by the mistress-servant relationship. Displaced into a post-revolution future, Maureen complains that July does not treat her like a "friend," but she herself cannot help falling into the scolding remonstrances of her former role as mistress. After Maureen and her family are brought to July's native village, they become entirely dependent on him in an inverted power relationship. Yet there is no language to fit these new relations; July speaks to Maureen in "the English learned in kitchens, factories, and mines . . . based on orders and responses, not the exchange of ideas and feelings" (96). She had always prided herself on her treatment of July, but she discovers its inherent contradictions:

How was she to have known, until she came here, that the special consideration she had shown for his dignity as a man, while he was by definition a servant, would become his humiliation itself, the one thing there was to say between them that had any meaning.

Fifteen years

your boy

you satisfy. (98)

July hurls these words in her face; though she scrupulously never called him "boy," the relationship must now be acknowledged for what it was.

Early on Maureen recognizes the importance of context in the formation of values: "'We' . . . understand the sacred power and rights of sexual love as formulated in master bedrooms, and motels with false names in the register. Here, the sacred power and rights of sexual love are as formulated in a wife's hut, and a backyard room in a city" (65). Removed from the master bedroom, Maureen and her husband Bam lose all sexual desire; the one time they do make love is inspired by the intoxication of eating meat. As Maureen grows increasingly dependent on July, Bam is usurped, symbolically emasculated by the sight of her

menstrual blood on his penis, and by the loss of his vehicle and his gun. Maureen tries to use her knowledge of July's "town woman" as leverage in their arguments, but her imposed morality only drives them further apart. Only when he speaks to her in a barrage of his own language does she realize the falsity of her mistress position:

She understood although she knew no word. Understood everything: what he had had to be, how she had covered up to herself for him, in order for him to be her idea of him. But for himself—to be intelligent, honest, dignified for *her* was nothing; his measure of a man was taken elsewhere, and by others. She was not his mother, his wife, his sister, his friend, his people. (152)

The ironically sexualized description of Maureen and July's final confrontation points up the impossibility of a meaningful connection: "The incredible tenderness of the evening surrounded them as if mistaking them for lovers" (153). Maureen parodies a sexual pose on the vehicle, but the "death's harpy image she made of herself meant nothing to him, who had never been to a motor show complete with provocative girls" (153). Their relationship has become grotesque. Sexuality is displaced still further in an apocalyptic ending. Maureen runs towards an unmarked helicopter, "jigging in its monstrous orgasm" (158), for escape or deliverance from the stasis of July's village. Maureen and July have no place to meet because they *are* "no place"; the reverse utopia of the interregnum does not allow for cross-racial communication beyond the most rudimentary sort.

The stalemate between blacks and whites depicted in *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People* is lifted by the freewheeling sexuality of Hillela Capran in *A Sport of Nature*. The densely controlled narrative of *July's People* gives way to a playful, shifting narrative style, slipping between genres as Hillela slips in and out of her lovers' beds. Gordimer presents Hillela's revolutionary virtue as her ability to be always "on the move." From her childhood trips with her travelling salesman father, to an adolescence marked by displacement among well-meaning but priggish relatives, Hillela learns to make her home where she finds it, always looking forward, never back. Much to her politically active aunt Pauline's surprise, Hillela is the one able to "feel the tug of history" (199) and rally to political events in a productive way.

In a more or less accidental exile from South Africa, her political awakening begins when she meets and marries a black South African, Whaila Kgomani. She tries to fix a "place where we can meet" for her "rainbow family" in a hole in the sand Whaila digs:

... on the beach they were complete, Hillela and her man and their baby; in the hot shade, contained within their bowl of sand whose circle had no ingress for anyone or anything else and no egress by which oneself could be cast out. And each Sunday fitted over the last in an unbroken and indistinguishable circle. (192)

Their union, and their child, express the yearning for communion between blacks and whites. Naively Hillela predicts their baby will be "our colour." Whaila sighs at her powers of invention, her desire to create "a creature made of love, without a label" (179). The baby turns out pure black, and Hillela feels "the reversal of parental feeling as it is supposed to be," relieved and satisfied "not to have reproduced herself" (195). But as Pauline observes, "Feeling free to sleep with a black man doesn't set him free" (187).

Sasha, Hillela's cousin and childhood lover, sees beyond his mother's cynicism:

... the dynamic of real change is always utopian. . . . Utopia is unattainable; without aiming for it—taking a chance!—you can never hope even to fall far short of it. . . . Without utopia—the idea of utopia—there's a failure of imagination—and that's a failure to know how to go on living. It will take another kind of being to stay on, here. A new white person. Not us. The chance is a wild chance—like falling in love. (187)

The interregnum has opened up. "We must continue to be tormented by the ideal," Gordimer said in "Living in the Interregnum" (284), and in creating Hillela, she envisions a "new white person" capable of pushing past the barriers of apartheid.

But of course, Gordimer's vision of this "new white person" is not simple. The "perfect circle of sand" around Hillela's marriage breaks when Whaila is brutally assassinated. She carries on the struggle, moving beyond her romantic worship of Whaila to recognition:

The real rainbow family stinks. The dried liquid of dysentery streaks the legs of babies and old men and the women smell of their monthly

blood. They smell of lack of water. They smell of lack of food. They smell of bodies blown up by the expanding gases of their corpses' innards, lying in the bush in the sun. (251)

Hillela's trajectory leads her through various roles in the political struggle against apartheid, into marriage to another black African leader, Reuel. She grows out of the idealism of her first marriage into the pragmatism of warfare. The full bellies of Reuel's people keep him in power, but along the way he does not shrink from compromise: "the mopping-up operations . . . included the looting of bars and brothels by some of his long-deprived troops" (287).

Hillela makes similar compromises. Reuel values her as a "mistress of adaptation" (310). She exercises what was once a revolutionary necessity, the ability to move on, in new circumstances of power as one of three wives to Reuel. Like Whaila, Reuel admires her powers of invention:

Hillela has not been taken in by this African family; she has disposed it around her. Hers is the non-matrilineal centre that no-one resents because no-one has known it could exist. She has invented it. This is not the rainbow family. (310)

Here, Gordimer moves beyond the romantic idea of racial communion through a sexual relationship to suggest a more complex vision. Hillela invents an existence beyond the rainbow family, but Gordimer stops short of defining Hillela's invention in clear terms. Vague, journalistic snippets provide the only descriptions of Hillela's life in the fictional African republic. Sasha's narrative can be seen as providing the theory behind Hillela's practice of becoming a "new white person;" she is, the title suggests, a "sport of nature . . . a departure from the parent stock" of whites in Africa (epigraph). Hillela remains committed to the eradication of apartheid in South Africa, but her participation in the struggle is limited. Near the end, the novel shifts briefly though importantly to Sasha as he carries on the struggle more directly, but ultimately his story is eclipsed by Hillela's.

Like *July's People*, *A Sport of Nature* ends in a future moment beyond apartheid. Hillela does not return to South Africa until after the revolution is won, in a final, sweeping romantic scene. When Hillela and the world see "the flag of Whaila's country" fly

for the first time, the narrative abandons the pragmatism of Reuel. Gordimer returns to a utopian vision, and as the flag unfurls, Hillela is symbolically reunited with Whaila:

It also may be true that a life is always moving—without being aware of this or what the moment may be and by a compass not available to others—towards a moment.

Cannons ejaculate from the Castle.

It is noon.

Hillela is watching a flag slowly climb, still in its pupa folds, a crumpled wing emerging—now!—it writhes one last time and flares wide in the wind, is smoothed taut by the fist of the wind, the flag of Whaila's country. (341)

Hillela's love for Whaila is fused with the yearning for a free South Africa, and the sexual image suggests that she has found, symbolically, "a place where we can meet" beyond death. The tension between the mixed race couples of Gordimer's earlier novels is resolved here, in the future moment of a new South Africa.

Hillela and Whaila's great love can be seen as a culmination. By now, Gordimer has thoroughly explored sexuality as a means to political awakening, and resolved the yearning for meaningful cross-racial connection. What comes after a culmination? Before attempting an answer to that question in a discussion of Gordimer's last two novels, it is fruitful to look back to the original impetus of this paper, to see how far we have come. The portrait of Hillela and Whaila is worlds away from the man and woman in "Is There Nowhere Else Where We Can Meet?" In this early short story, Gordimer portrays a white psyche so warped in its perception of blacks that no connection is possible across racial boundaries.

In Stephen Clingman's analysis of this important early story, he describes its setting as a no man's land, both literally and psychically (Clingman 211-12). The man and woman meet on an empty veld, a borderland between white suburb and black location, as the woman passes purposefully through. The man is at first a dot on the landscape, then a "native" standing stock still as she passes, "without a flicker of interest as a cow sees you go" (18). He comes terrifyingly alive in quick pursuit, and "it was Fear itself that had her by the arms, the legs, the throat; not fear

of the man, of any single menace he might present, but Fear, absolute, abstract" (18). Their encounter takes her into the depths of her psyche; her original nonchalance transforms into the white's fear of the primitive embodied by the black race. The primitive means violence, and because he is a man, the woman fears that the violence will be sexual. But all he wants are her material goods, her money. After a struggle she relinquishes them and runs away.

Safely back in the white world of gardens and postboxes, the woman reprimands herself for fighting the man. Her decision not to report the incident to the police signifies her recognition of racial inequality. She knows that the punishment he would receive far outweighs any loss of material goods, or even the moment of pure "Fear" she experienced. The woman's dawning understanding of her assailant's economic condition, determined by his race, shows that there is hope for meaningful relationships between blacks and whites. The yearning expressed in the title—Is there no place else, no place other than the no man's land of the psyche, the borderland of the veld?—haunts Gordimer's fiction.

In the novels discussed so far, the yearning manifests itself in confrontations between black men and white women. As Fanon and others have demonstrated, the bogeyman of racism lies within (Newman 68-92). In *Burger's Daughter*, Rosa and Zwelinzima turn childhood memories without colour consciousness into weapons in a racial battle. The wordless miscommunication of the man and woman in the short story is re-enacted in Maureen and July's failure to find a common language in *July's People*. Maureen experiences the same "Fear" as the woman in the story, and discovers its source within herself:

She had never been afraid of a man. Now comes fear . . . and it comes from this one, from *him*. It spread from him; she was feeling no personal threat in him, not physical, anyway, but in herself. (98)

In *A Sport of Nature*, Hillela confronts her own skewed racial attitudes in a frank discussion with Whaila:

Underneath, you must be white like me . . . because that's what I was told, when I was being taught not to be prejudiced: underneath, they are all just like us. Nobody said we are just like *you*. (178)

She is not afraid of the "muddled feelings . . . you get down there" and acknowledges that "they haven't all worn off" (178); unlike Rosa and Maureen, Hillela is able to move on into a future beyond fixed racial categories.

The lifting of the bans on interracial sex and marriage, along with other steps towards the dismantling of apartheid, coincide with Gordimer's freer depiction of racial relations in *A Sport of Nature*. *My Son's Story* was written as practical measures were being taken to end white dominance of the government in South Africa, and the novel reflects this period of transition. The period of interregnum continues, as the white regime holds on and the black nation experiences a new set of growing pains.

A Sport of Nature ends in a future, not quite a utopia, but a future hazily, romantically rendered. In *My Son's Story*, Gordimer returns to the present, with a practical description of the revolution in progress. After the culmination marked by Hillela and Whaila's sexual and political communion, Gordimer moves her narrative into the no man's land of "coloured" society. She crosses the borderland of her early story, as her characters journey across the veld from "coloured" township to black location. The no man's land is no longer a site of alienation, but of power. For the first time in her novels, Gordimer enters the consciousness of a "coloured" character through her first person narrator, Will.

The white's yearning for connection with blacks is filtered through Will's cynicism; even the third-person narrative does not venture far into the feelings of Hannah, the white woman who has an affair with Sonny, Will's father. The sexual relationship is the springboard for Will's angry look at Sonny's life, but unlike Hillela and Whaila's union in *A Sport of Nature*, this relationship does not contain the essence of the revolutionary moment. This shift on Gordimer's part signifies that she herself has "moved on" from the yearning for racial communion through sex, to a desexualized, non-racial revolutionary vision.

The cross-racial relationship occupies centre stage for much of the novel, and initially it fits into the paradigm of a concurrent sexual and political awakening as portrayed in Gordimer's earlier works. Sonny falls in love with Hannah because of their

shared political struggles and ideology, but his love rings hollow in view of the pain he causes his family. Will tortures himself with a recognition of his own fantasies of white women:

Of course [my father's woman] is blonde. The wet dreams I have, a schoolboy who's never slept with a woman, are blonde. It's an infection brought to us by the laws that have decided what we are, and what they are—the blonde ones. (14)

The narrative structure Gordimer employs reveals a trick at the end; we discover that even the third person sections were written by Will, imagined by Will, which could account for the lack of real urgency in the descriptions of Sonny and Hannah's relationship. Still, Gordimer's shift away from fusing a sexual relationship with the larger political good is significant; instead, she locates the ultimate revolutionary gesture in a character who has "moved on" from sexuality as a defining force of identity.

Revolutionary fervor produces lust, but the terms of Sonny and Hannah's intimacy are limited from the beginning. Private passions are secondary to the revolutionary necessity. The relationship is further complicated because it is adulterous. Sonny recognizes that with

Hannah there was the sexuality of commitment; for commitment implies danger, and the blind primal instinct is to ensure the species survives in circumstances of danger, even when the individual animal dies or the plant has had its season. In this freak displacement, the biological drive of his life, which belonged with his wife and the children he'd begotten, was diverted to his lover. He and Hannah begot no child; the revolutionary movement was to be their survivor. (241-42)

The irony of Sonny's sexual/political awakening is that the quiet, traditional wife he betrays becomes the most revolutionary of all.

Because Gordimer no longer identifies sexual communion with radical politics, Sonny's affair leads to deep regret for the lost relationship with his wife. He misses the process of Aila's emerging political consciousness, only discovering it after she has taken irrevocable action and is forced to flee the country. Also, he suspects that his relationship with Hannah is responsible for his removal from the central activities of the movement. He ponders the priorities he was able to set since the repeal of the Immorality Act:

... if the law had still forbidden him Hannah ... he would never have risked himself ... taking the risk for that white woman would have put at risk his only freedom, the only freedom of his kind, the freedom to go to prison again and again, if need be, for the struggle. Only for the struggle. Nothing else was worthwhile, recognized, nothing. That filthy law would have saved him. (263-64)

The narrative shifts focus from Hannah to Aila, desexualizing the revolutionary moment. As Sonny discovers his wife's secret revolutionary activities, he also realizes that she fakes her sexual pleasure.

Gordimer never portrays a cross-racial relationship that can sustain the pressures of apartheid, which may be indicative of her vision of relationships, a reflection of the apartheid situation, or both. The yearning for a cross-racial connection culminated with Hillela and Whaila, whose relationship was destroyed in the political struggle, along with the dream of a rainbow family. In *My Son's Story*, the cross-racial relationship is a passing phase. The top priority, for Gordimer and for her characters, is the revolution in progress.

Significantly, Gordimer does not tell Aila's story. The narrative stays firmly rooted in the male perspective. Will's angry narrative seems outdated, conventional, bordering on misogynist. He treats women with contempt, calling his lovers "little girls," and the strength of the women in his life confounds him. Hannah's clearly defined feminism is an integral part of her political position. Will's flighty sister Baby surprises everyone by joining the resistance, and traditional Aila's actions are the most shocking of all. As in *A Sport of Nature*, where Sasha's direct revolutionary action occurs on the periphery of the main narrative, these revolutionary women are cast to the edge of *My Son's Story*.

I detect an unconscious feminist gesture on Gordimer's part in this novel; the women here are far stronger, much more independent, and infinitely more capable of action than the men. I wonder if these new women characters represent a shift in Gordimer's consciousness that she does not quite follow through. Her narrative stays safely home with the men, who are stuck, bitter, impotent, while the women "move on" into productive political action outside the bounds of the novel. Aila's revolutionary conversion is the most radical gesture in all of Gordimer's

fiction, yet her story is still to be told. Aila's political conversion inches towards the utopian vision of a rainbow family. As a person of mixed racial heritage, Aila is neither white, black nor Indian, but a fusion of all racial categories. As a woman, Aila adds a gendered twist to the no *man's* land of her "coloured" society. Racially and sexually disadvantaged, Aila has no power in apartheid South Africa. Outside the apartheid structure, however, women like Aila may hold the ultimate power of the revolution.

In her latest novel, *None To Accompany Me*, Gordimer returns to her utopian vision of cross-racial connection as located in a relationship between a white woman and a black man, and it seems that at last she has found that elusive "place where we can meet" within the structure of her narrative. The main character, Vera Stark, feels an immediate connection to Zeph Rapulana, whom she meets in her capacity as a lawyer negotiating tribal land resettlements. When she hears of his involvement in a violent attack by Afrikaner landholders, she fears acutely for his death. She finds him wounded but alive, and their connection deepens; he comforts her worry with a gesture reminiscent of a sexual relationship from Vera's past. Yet she recognizes a difference, in herself and in her relationship with this black man:

... what had disturbed her as a mimesis of the past was the beginning of some new capability in her, something in the chemistry of human contact that she was only now ready for. This country black man about whose life apart from [their shared work] she knew nothing ... already had this capability. That was why he was able to claim her with what was neither a sexual caress nor an impersonal handshake such as they customarily exchanged. . . . There was between them a level of knowledge of one another, tranquil, not very deep, but quite apart from those relationships complicated and profound, tangled in their beings, from which each came to it, a level that was neither sexually intuitive nor that of friendship. (122)

Gordimer's insistence on the non-sexual nature of their relationship is significant; it is as if Gordimer has "moved on" from the intense sexuality of Hillela and Whaila in *A Sport of Nature*, and the thwarted communion between Sonny and Hannah in *My Son's Story*, to something that is, at last, true:

... sex had no part in their perception of each other except that it recognized that each came from a base of sexual and familial rela-

tions to a meeting that had nothing to do with any of these. Vera had never before felt—it was more than drawn to—involved in the being of a man to whom she felt no sexual pull. And it was not that she did not find him physically attractive. . . . It was as if, in the commonplace nature of their continuing contact . . . they belonged together as a single sex, a reconciliation of all each had experienced, he as a man, she as a woman. (123)

Through this communion, Vera can be seen as the “new white person” of Sasha’s utopian vision in *A Sport of Nature*, fusing with a black man in a nonracial, nongendered singular entity. Once again Gordimer resolves the yearning for cross-racial connection through a white woman and a black man. This time they embody a “single sex,” and by extension they might be considered to form a single race, but Gordimer’s omission of a racial formulation is important: here is a relationship beyond not just sexuality but race as well. The power of this connection ultimately supersedes all Vera’s previous ties. At the end of the novel, Vera moves into a garden house on Zeph’s property, leaving her husband of forty-five years, for this relationship beyond sex.

Gordimer continues the revolutionary gesture of moving on in this novel through her section headings: the first section entitled “Baggage,” the second and longest section, “Transit.” The title of the final section, “Arrivals,” signifies a stopping point Gordimer had heretofore placed in a distant future. The novel is set during the dismantling of apartheid, in the period leading to South Africa’s first free elections. Gordimer no longer has to leap into the future to imagine how this might be, and *None to Accompany Me* serves in part as a chronicle of this transitional period.

The solitary image of the title indicates that this is also the story of an identity search. Vera insists on an independent, unaccompanied life that is at the same time politically engaged, and she finds this balance in her distant yet intense nonsexual relationship with Zeph. The communion Vera and Zeph experience respects differences, and is not particularly intimate. Zeph is a Christian, which Vera the atheist accepts but does not attempt to understand; in addition, he is a businessman working within the system rather than a revolutionary trying to change it. The details of their lives are unimportant to their primary connection; what matters is that they have established real common ground.

To repeat Gordimer's entreaty in "Living in the Interregnum": "We must continue to be tormented by the ideal" (284). In her latest novel, Gordimer seems to resolve this "tormenting ideal" through a *non*-sexual black man-white woman relationship. At the end of the novel, as indicated by the section title, Vera "arrives" at Zeph's garden house, thereby achieving the spirit of the novel's epigraph: "We must never be afraid to go too far, for truth lies beyond." On a practical level, Gordimer's utopian vision of cross-racial connection is fulfilled through Vera's tenancy on Zeph's property, in an important inversion of the white landowner/black tenant set-up. Where Rosa and Zwelinzima, Maureen and July, Hillela and Whaila, Hannah and Sonny fail, Vera and Zeph succeed; on his property, finally restored in a free South Africa, they find a "place to meet" at last.

NOTE

- ¹ Stimpson speaks from an American context here, but her characterizations are apt, as can be seen in Newman's discussion of Allport, Kovel, Mannoni, and Fanon.

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