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Jennifer Russ April 13, 2020

Nadine Gordimer and the Representation of White South-African Liberalism

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Abstract

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Although scholars have written widely about Nadine Gordimer's work, very little has been written actively comparing two of her best-known novels, *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People.* However, in comparing the two novels there is a clear connection between the two white main characters, Rosa Burger and Maureen Smales respectively. Both women represent a major flaw in white liberalism, the hypocrisy of professing liberal ideals while simultaneously maintaining South African racism, although both women are unaware of this hypocrisy throughout much of the novels. As both women begin to understand their own racial complicity, they also begin to hate themselves, allowing Nadine Gordimer to critique white liberalism through their fictional experience.

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Citation Reference List

BG: Burger's Daughter

EG: The Essential Gesture

JP: July's People

Introduction

> "I remain a writer, not a public speaker: nothing I say here will be as true as my fiction."
>
> -- Gordimer, *EG* 264

Nadine Gordimer, one of South Africa's most critically acclaimed and widely-read authors, made this claim in 1982, and for readers familiar with Gordimer's writing, there could not be a statement more accurate about her work. Her fiction did not simply portray life in South Africa in a way no history book could capture, but it also reflected her ideals and beliefs, making her fiction a true insight into what Gordimer felt were the crucial issues facing South African society as well as the society itself. Gordimer's politics and ethics are infused into her novels in a way that allows her to observe, analyze, and often criticize aspects of South African society without her fiction feeling overly didactic or polemical. Her critical engagement with the world around her has been lauded for decades along with her fearlessness in grappling with uncomfortable and unpopular subjects, especially subjects that pertained to her own life, politics, and identity. It is one such subject that provides the basis for this thesis.

The focus of this project is the ways in which Nadine Gordimer constructs a white liberal female identity in *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People*, two of her best-known novels, and how she utilizes that identity to critique white liberalism in South Africa. These two novels are thematically similar in their condemnation of the South African political system and their critical engagement with the white liberal identity, despite their major differences in style and plot. *Burger's Daughter* takes a hyper-historical approach, setting the story explicitly in South Africa during the 1970s and using real events and people, while *July's People* takes a dystopian

approach, setting the plot in a fictionalized future. Both of these novels center around white liberal women who in many ways fail to live up to Gordimer's standard of white responsibility, and through their characters, Gordimer identifies major issues at play when thinking about white liberalism.

Nadine Gordimer was a white South African writer whose career took place during one of South Africa's most turbulent periods: the height of apartheid, its eventual end, and the rise of a new government. Gordimer was born in 1923 to two Jewish immigrants. Her mother was from England, and her father was from Latvia. As well as being an avid reader, she began writing at an extremely young age. Her biographer noted that Gordimer "has said that she began writing at the age of nine after being pleasantly 'surprised' by the patriotic Paul Kruger poem that she wrote as a school exercise" (Roberts 50). Despite her early start, it is still astounding that her first story, "Come Again Tomorrow," was published in 1939 when she was only sixteen years old and her first novel, *The Lying Days*, in 1953 when she was twenty. Even in the early years of her career, Gordimer received a huge amount of critical acclaim. *The Lying Days* in particular was extremely well-received and solidified Gordimer's reputation as a promising young novelist.

By the time she published *Burger's Daughter* in 1979 and *July's People* in 1981, Nadine Gordimer had already established a name for herself on the international literary stage, having won the Booker Prize for her 1974 novel, *The Conservationist*. Both *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People* won the Central News Agency Literary Award, a South African literary prize, in their respective years of publication. In 1991, Gordimer received the Nobel Prize for Literature, the first South African to receive the award. In the press release announcing her as the recipient of the 1991 prize, the Swedish Academy called both *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People* "masterpieces" and stated that "among these powerful novels 'July's People' deserves particular

mention" ("The Nobel Prize in Literature 1991"). She continued to publish her work until the late in her life. Her final novel, *No Time Like the Present*, was published in 2012. Nadine Gordimer died just two years later.

The political context in which Nadine Gordimer began her prolific writing career was one of censorship and oppression. She, along with every other South African writer, had to create literature under a government that "sought to control the ways in which South African politics and history were discussed by banning – that is, making it a criminal offense for people to read and/or possess and/or quote – many works critical of apartheid" (Clark 9). The government was able to achieve this widespread censorship through a number of slightly different but overlapping laws that exploited the international fear of communism in order to suppress any work that expressed critical viewpoints. Gordimer herself wrote in her 1963 essay entitled "Censored, Banned, Gagged" that

> although the Minister of the Interior and the Nationalist Members of Parliament never mention political reasons for censorship, these books, and almost without exception *all* those books by South African writers which have been banned, have been banned for a political reason: non-conformity with the picture of South African life as prescribed and proscribed by apartheid. (Gordimer, *EG* 58)

During the period from the 1950s through the 1980s the South African government was particularly active in banning literary and political texts. A number of Gordimer's works published during this period fell into the overly broad category of being "critical of apartheid" and were subsequently banned. Despite strict censorship laws, Gordimer continued to create brilliant works of writing that tackled controversial topics throughout the final decades of apartheid.

Despite being "predestined to benefit as a white from colonialism," Nadine Gordimer was a vocal supporter of racial equality and actively opposed apartheid (Roberts 18). Gordimer wrote fifteen novels and even more collections of short stories, many of which deal overtly with issues of race and discrimination. She has consistently been described as an anti-apartheid writer. The two novels that are the focus of this thesis are both stunning examples of literary works that critique the racial inequality of apartheid without allowing political considerations to take over the novel.

Burger's Daughter, Gordimer's seventh novel, focuses on the life of Rosa Burger, the daughter of a prominent communist activist named Lionel Burger, a character based on a real activist named Bram Fischer. The novel opens with 14-year-old Rosa waiting outside of a prison in order to see her mother, who had been arrested in connection with the South African Communist Party. However, the main plot of the novel begins after the death of Lionel Burger when Rosa is in her mid-twenties. The story follows her through a number of different professions as she interacts with the remaining, though scattered, group of her father's associates, still a part of a highly political circle without actually involving herself in the politics. These politically charged social settings give Gordimer the opportunity to thread political debates contemporary to the novel's publication into the work itself.

Eventually, Rosa acquires a passport, a feat that would not have been imaginable while her revolutionary parents were alive, and leaves Johannesburg to go to France and see Lionel's first wife, Katya. While in France, Rosa gets a taste of life without the oppressiveness of South Africa, and instead of returning to her country of birth like she had originally intended, she decides to extend her stay in Europe and goes to London. While there she attends a number of political events, and at one she reunites unexpectedly with Baasie, the son of one of her father's

black political associates. Baasie had lived with the Burgers for a brief time when he and Rosa were children, but they lost touch after Rosa went to her grandparents' house during a period when both of her parents were detained by the government.

This reunion is not a happy one, however. Baasie confronts Rosa about how she does not actually know his real name, which is Zwelinzima Vulindlela, and basically tells her that she is just as bad as all the rest of the white South African population because she allows her father to be idolized as "great hero" when "there are dozens of our fathers…getting old and dying in prison" (Gordimer, *BD* 320). Her confrontation with Baasie spurs Rosa to return to South Africa which places her in Johannesburg during the Soweto riots. At the conclusion of the novel, Rosa is "detained without charges. Like thousands of other people taken into custody all over the country, she might be kept for weeks, months, several years, before being let out again" (Gordimer, *BD* 353). The novel does not make clear exactly what Rosa has supposedly done, although at the time someone could be detained if they were even suspected of being involved in 'treasonous' activity. It is in this uncertainty that the novel ends.

July's People, Gordimer's eighth novel and the other work of fiction analyzed in this thesis, is about a woman named Maureen Smales, one of "the most ordinary of Gordimer's characters" according to Stephen Clingman ("The Subject of Revolution" 170). Set in the fictional but presumably immediate future, this novel hypothesizes as to what a black liberation revolution might look like in South Africa. When riots break out in Johannesburg, Maureen, her husband Bam, and their three young children must flee "away from the gunned shopping malls and the blazing, unsold houses of the depressed market, from the burst mains washing round bodies in their Saturday-morning garb of safari suits, and the heat-guided missiles that struck Boeings carrying those trying to take off from Jan Smuts Airport" (Gordimer, *JP* 9). They escape

into the countryside with their long-time servant, July, who has worked in their home for fifteen years. July brings them to his family's settlement and hides them, much to the displeasure of his wife and the rest of his extended family. The Smales family faces the challenge of adapting to rural life among strangers, and Maureen begins to come to terms with the extent to which she and her family have benefitted from apartheid, despite opposing it politically.

As their stay in July's village becomes longer and longer, tensions begin to rise between all of the three main adult characters, but particularly between Maureen and July. Much of this tension is due to the reversal of their previous roles of authority figure and dependent. After some time, the chief of the wider village learns of the Smales' presence and requests to see them. The chief is surprisingly against black liberation and wants Bam to teach him how to use the rifle he brought with him from Johannesburg in order to fend off the black liberation army should they come. A few days later the gun is stolen, and Maureen and Bam eventually determine that Daniel, a young friend of July, has taken it to join the revolution. In the final scene of the novel, a helicopter begins to approach the village, and there is no way to know "whether it holds saviors or murderers" (Gordimer, *JP* 158). Maureen, without explanation, runs away from her family and away from the village into the unknown, "like a solitary animal at the season when animals neither seek a mate nor take care of young, existing only for their lone survival, the enemy of all that would make claims of responsibility" (Gordimer, *JP* 160). She simply runs, and the novel ends.

Most of the research done on Gordimer's fiction has looked at her works individually. Relatively little has been written specifically comparing *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People*, although there are some important writings that I will be using to situate my research, including Stephen Clingman's "The Subject of Revolution: *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People*."

Clingman is considered one of the foremost scholars on Gordimer's body of work and knew her on a personally. In this chapter from his book entitled *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer*: *History from the Inside*, Clingman argues that in *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People* Gordimer attempts to assess "whether there can be a role for whites in the context of Soweto and after, and what the practical implications of such a role might be" ("The Subject of Revolution" 170). He also writes that "both are deeply concerned with the climactic historical moment that Gordimer's fiction increasingly seems to be 'waiting for': the moment of revolution in South Africa" (Clingman, "The Subject of Revolution" 171). Overall, Clingman's book puts forth the idea that Gordimer's novels are deeply historically conscious, and his work on *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People* reflects that interest by focusing on how the two novels approach the impending shift in the racial dynamics of South Africa. He, however, does not take a critical approach to the identity of the protagonists who find themselves facing or about to face the revolution, choosing instead to focus on the connections between the fiction and the contemporaneous historical moment.

Another significant essay that compares *July's People* and *Burger's Daughter* does take up the issue of identity construction. However, it looks at how the novels are each independently invested in the construction of its female lead's identity, in contrast to my comparative analysis of the construction of a shared while female identity across the two novels. In "The Construction of Identity: *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People*," Dominic Head argues that *Burger's Daughter* constructs Rosa's identity through its three-part narrative structure and through her "personal relationships" with others (113). He writes about how "Rosa's identity can be constructed in different ways – by her parents, by the security forces, by Zwelinzima, by herself at different stages of her life" (Head 122). However, Head believes that *July's People* deals with

identity construction in a different way, arguing that the novel serves as a "brief and powerful condemnation of consumer capitalism and the identities it creates and sustains" (123). Ultimately, the article draws the two novels together because they both deal with identity construction but does not try to draw any comparisons between the identities the novels are constructing.

Like Head's discussion of *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People,* much of the scholarship on two of Gordimer's arguably most renowned novels use thematic overlaps to discuss the two works simultaneously but do not actually put them in conversation with each other in a meaningful way. For example, Barbara Temple-Thurston discusses both novels in "Living in the Interregnum: *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People,*" the fourth chapter of her book on Nadine Gordimer's work. However, she discusses the novels almost entirely separately. The bulk of her discussion about their connection takes place at the beginning of the chapter and serves as a justification for writing about them in the same chapter: "Both novels use the topic of revolution to explore whether white South Africans can have a place and a role in bringing about a new and equitable nation. Both novels examine the appropriateness and resilience of the family as an organizing unit in a society caught up in the avalanche of revolutionary change, but each focuses on a very different kind of family" (Temple-Thurston 78). Other than noting these surface-level thematic similarities, Temple-Thurston does not examine the two novels together in any way. Scholars generally agree that it makes sense to discuss *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People* together, but few truly attempt to create a meaningfully comparative analysis of Gordimer's two best known novels.

A more recent work that succeeds in bringing the two novels together is Edward Powell's article, "Equality or unity? Black Consciousness, white solidarity, and the new South Africa in

Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People.*" Powell begins by introducing the South African Black Consciousness movement, the mission of which "was to restore in black people a sense of pride in being black, which would prompt them into actively pursuing their own liberation" (226). The Black Consciousness movement wanted to reject the leadership of white liberals within the anti-apartheid movement and focus on the black population of South Africa liberating itself. Powell argues that "neither novel makes explicit reference to Black Consciousness, but the movement's influence on both is apparent insofar as both novels portray white dissidents coming to terms with being rejected by black people, not just as political allies, but even as friends" (228). Powell notes how in *Burger's Daughter* there is a noticeable tension between black and white anti-apartheid activists and claims that the confrontation between Rosa and Zwelinzima about her father's legacy and her own political involvement is evidence of the influence of Black Consciousness. He then argues that the influence of the Black Consciousness movement can be seen in *July's People* through Maureen and Bam's inability to integrate themselves into July's village and in July's eventual rejection of their authority altogether. Although Powell does discuss the novels in two separate sections, he draws them together with the overarching political theory of Black Consciousness, and by utilizing a theoretical analysis instead of simply a thematic overlap, he does more to actually analyze the novels' connection than most previous scholars.

The lack of meaningful analysis of *July's People* and *Burger's Daughter* is significant given the obvious connections between Maureen Smales and Rosa Burger. This project attempts to fill that void. In the first section, I argue that the two protagonists share an identity of white liberal womanhood that is based in a deep misunderstanding of the disconnect between their morals and their actions. I then demonstrate how Nadine Gordimer critiques white liberalism in

South Africa by making both women confront the truth of their hypocrisy. In the second section, I bring Gordimer's non-fiction work into conversation with her novels, ultimately asking whether the author meets the expectations she lays forth in her essays or, like Maureen and Rosa, fails to live up to her professed ideals.

I. Maureen and Rosa: Portraits of White Complicity

Although she published fiction over many decades, Nadine Gordimer consistently maintained a singular focus throughout her writing career: the society of South Africa. Within this context, she explored the identity of white South African women extensively, including through her characters Maureen Smales and Rosa Burger in *July's People* and *Burger's Daughter* respectively. In *July's People*, Gordimer founded her creation of a white liberal woman in South Africa on Maureen's materialistic advantages, blindness to her own privilege, and the false sense that she is on the right side of history in her opposition to apartheid. Although Rosa Burger rejects the label "liberal" in *Burger's Daughter*, she does represent the major flaw that Gordimer identifies in Maureen: the ease with which white women can fall into political complicity. Through these two characters, Gordimer critiques a dominant feature of many white South African women, which is the hypocrisy of outwardly claiming, and often genuinely believing in her possession of, progressive ideals while simultaneously participating, whether actively or not, in forms of racial oppression.

From the opening page of *July's People,* Maureen's narration makes clear that she is not someone on the forefront of the fight against apartheid. The narration of the book represents Maureen's inner thoughts despite being written in the third person. Gordimer uses free indirect discourse throughout the novel to give an omniscient viewpoint while still allowing the reader into the main character's mentality and perspective. In the second sentence of the novel, Maureen describes how "July bent at the doorway and began that day for them as his kind has always done for their kind" (Gordimer, *JP* 1). While acknowledging racial difference is not in itself problematic, the language Maureen uses in this passage plays into the stereotypical

discourse of racism that is present across the globe in any almost any public discussion of race and racism. The way that she distinguishes her "kind" of people from July's in such terms sparks the question of Maureen's positionality within the political spectrum of South Africa at the time, especially given that at this early point in the novel she has not yet made it clear that she considers herself a liberal.

Throughout the introductory chapters of the novels, in which readers meet and get to know the Smales family, Gordimer emphasizes their comfortable financial status. For example, Maureen remembers when they first purchased the bakkie and how Bam "treated himself to it on his fortieth birthday" even though she has just described how "it makes a cheap car-cum-caravan for white families, generally Afrikaners, and their half-brother coloureds who can't afford both. For more affluent white South Africans, it is a second, sporting vehicle for purposes to which a town car is not suited" (Gordimer, *JP 5*). Since Bam bought it "to use as a shooting-brake," the Smales seem to fall into that last category of affluent white families who have enough disposable income to treat themselves to a second car. Maureen also remembers how when Bam brought the car home the children were incredibly excited because "nothing made them so happy as buying things" (Gordimer, *JP* 6). This vehicle "that was bought for fun" not only represents the material wealth of the Smales family, but the eventual argument over who claims control over it demonstrates the Smales' inability to relinquish their place at the top of the social hierarchy.

Moving to July's family compound and seeing poverty firsthand puts Maureen's flippant attitude towards material things into the spotlight. One of Maureen's first thoughts when she reflects on her family's new living arrangement is that "they had nothing" (Gordimer, *JP* 29). July's mother begrudgingly gives up her home to house a family she has never met, and because of their privileged perspective, that family sees her home and her belongings as nothing. In

reality, Maureen still possesses more than almost anyone else in the village because of the items she brought with her from the city, but she disregards what she has been given because it does not fall into her superficial understanding of the actual value of her belongings. As she begins to explore the small village, Maureen notices items that "she privately recognized as belonging to her" (Gordimer, *JP* 36). She assumes that July has quietly taken them over the years and that she had not noticed in her large suburban house full of trinkets. She even recognizes that "if she had not happened – by what chance in a million, by what slow certain grind between the past and its retribution – to be here now, she would never have missed these things" (Gordimer, *JP* 36). She has such a superficial relationship to most of her belongings due to their replaceability that she never realized that they were no longer in her possession until she saw them in someone else's. Being forced into a scenario where she is acutely aware of how little she has in comparison to her former lifestyle shows Maureen and readers how little thought she had previously given to her possessions, which is an obvious sign of her privilege.

Despite being in a clearly advantaged position due to her race and socioeconomic status, Maureen consistently fails to see her own privilege. All she can think of is how much she has lost, and she never considers that her life and its excessiveness is the one that was abnormal. July's wife makes a comment about the overly comfortable nature of Maureen's life, asking July, "didn't you tell us many times how they live, there. A room to sleep in, another room to eat in, another room to sit in, a room with books…All these things I've never seen, my children have never seen" (Gordimer, *JP* 19). Maureen views her life and perspective as the norm because society has told her that whiteness is the default, and anything else is differing from that norm. Similarly, Maureen reflects how "no fiction could compete with what she was finding she did not know, could not have imagined or discovered through imagination" (Gordimer, *JP* 29). Her

inability to imagine a life outside of her own stems from the fact that she has never needed to confront any other reality than the one in which she was living. That self-absorbed nature is a luxury that only those at the top of the social, political, and economic hierarchies have. Everyone else has had to adapt to her reality, not the other way around. Her ignorance of others also appears when Maureen becomes frustrated with her complete inability to communicate with the black villagers. She angrily asks, "why is it the whites who speak their language are never people like us, they're always the ones who have no doubt that whites are superior?" (Gordimer, *JP* 44). What she fails to recognize here is that most white citizens have no reason to learn "their" language because black citizens are forced to learn and speak English in order to navigate the white-dominated society of apartheid. Her not having to learn another language to communicate with black South Africans is a sign of her racial privilege, but she does not have the understanding to recognize that sign.

Perhaps the most poignant moment of Maureen's blindness to the extent of her privilege comes during a fight that she and July have over the keys to the bakkie. July brings up some of the tasks that Maureen has given him over the years, and Maureen immediately gets defensive, asking, "if you felt I shouldn't have asked you to clean out the bookshelves that time, why didn't you say so? What were you afraid of? You could always tell me. You had only to say so. I've never made you do anything you didn't think it was your job to do" (Gordimer, *JP* 70). Her rambling attempt to defend herself shows just how ignorant she is. She utterly fails to understand that her position as a white employer and his position as a black house-servant makes it basically impossible for him to voice complaints, even though she claims that he has always been able to. Maureen is blind to the ways that her whiteness affects their relationship in ways that she cannot control or undo. She does make a brief point about how she should have known how July was

feeling: “If that hurt your feelings…I know I don’t know, I didn’t know, and I should have known” (Gordimer, *JP* 72). However, her temporary moment of understanding does not balance out the continued ignorance of her own privileged position throughout the novel.

Maureen does not simply suffer from an inability to recognize her privilege, but she takes it a step further by convincing herself that she is someone who is fighting against racism and apartheid. Early in the novel, readers learn of Maureen and Bam’s political leanings and former involvement:

> First the Smales had given the time left as ten years, then another five years, then as perhaps projected, shifted away into their children’s time. They yearned for there to be no time left at all, while there still was. They sickened at the appalling thought that they might find they had lived out their whole lives as they were, born white pariah dogs in a black continent. They joined political parties and ‘contact’ groups in willingness to slough privilege it was supposed to be their white dog nature to guard with Mirages and tanks; they were not believed. They had thought of leaving, then, while they were young enough to cast off the blacks’ rejection as well as white privilege, to make a life in another country. They had stayed; and told each other and everyone else that this and nowhere else was home, while knowing, as time left went by, the reason had become they couldn’t get their money out. (Gordimer, *JP* 8)

It is important to note the resentful tone in this passage. Bam and Maureen are not sickened by the injustice happening to black South Africans under apartheid; they are sickened at the idea that they could go down in history as the white people who did nothing. Their opposition to apartheid, though well-meaning, is grounded in self-centeredness and not a fundamental belief in racial equality. Maureen also briefly touches on her and Bam’s rejection by black activists.

Again, her tone is resentful, suggesting that Maureen does not actually believe in black liberation enough to understand that the black resistance movement is not obligated to accept her or allow white liberals to determine how black South Africans will liberate themselves. Although Bam and Maureen claim to be anti-apartheid liberals, their political views appear to be relatively superficial and do not reflect a concrete personal commitment to political change in South Africa.

Maureen Smales naively believes that because she once supported the anti-apartheid movement politically she is doing her part for the cause, even though her actions before the political upheaval did nothing to push back against the social and political norms of apartheid. In fact, in many ways Maureen participated in the racist dynamics of apartheid while simultaneously denouncing them. The major example of this moral hypocrisy throughout the novel is Maureen's role as a white mistress to July, their "decently-paid and contented male servant" (Gordimer, *JP* 9). July's role as a servant in the Smales household is addressed on the very first page of the novel. The first time his name appears it is immediately followed by "their servant, their host," which is oxymoronic and demonstrates early on the tension caused by the reversal of domestic roles (Gordimer, *JP* 1). Out of all the facets of her relationship with July, Maureen is least comfortable with the way that July addresses Bam. She remembers how "they had tried to train him to drop the 'master' for the ubiquitously respectful 'sir'," which is problematic on a number of different levels (Gordimer, *JP* 52). First, the language of training July out of a bad habit is extraordinarily patronizing and even dehumanizing, bringing up images of dog-owners disciplining their pets. Second, Maureen and Bam are attempting to avoid falling into the social category of the white masters, a category rightly shamed by the political left, and

yet they continue to uphold a clear hierarchy within their household by wanting July to use "sir" instead. They disavow the label of master but maintain the behavior.

The confrontation over the bakkie keys exposes to the reader the dissonance between Maureen's understanding of herself and her actual behavior. July, openly challenging Maureen for the first time after fifteen years of service, refers to himself as her "boy," which utterly shocks Maureen's liberal sensibilities. She comments how "the absurd 'boy' fell upon her in strokes neither appropriate nor to be dodged. Where had he picked up the weapon? The shift boss had used it; the word was never used in *her* house; she priggishly shamed and exposed others who spoke it in her presence. She had challenged it in the mouths of white shopkeepers and even policemen" (Gordimer, *JP* 70). The use of italics to emphasize her shows that Maureen considers the dynamic of her house to be unique and, she is offended by the implication that it is not. Maureen incorrectly believes her refusal to use the term "boy" and her vocal opposition when others did removes her from the narrative of a white mistress with black servants in her household. Unfortunately for her self-proclaimed liberalism, not using the word "boy" does mean that it is not an accurate representation of July's position. Although Maureen believes she is doing her part to push back against racism and apartheid, her resistance exists through words alone. Her actions maintain the racial hierarchy she claims to detest.

In the novel, there are also smaller moments when Maureen thinks back on her relationship with July in which readers can observe the disconnect between Maureen's perspective on her own behavior and the behavior itself. Most of them are moments that Maureen feels prove her generosity and liberal beliefs, but each one begs the question of whether she was treating July equally or paternalistically. For example, Maureen reflects on how July has been "living in their yard since they had married, clothed by them in two sets of uniforms, khaki

pants for rough housework, white drill for waiting at table, given Wednesdays and alternate Sundays free, allowed to have his friends visit him and his town woman sleep with him in his room" (Gordimer, *JP* 9). She naively believes he is happy and "contented" as a result, acting like those things are evidence of her being a generous and benevolent employer when she has barely met the standards of what July should be entitled to as both an employee and an adult human being (Gordimer, *JP* 9). Although Maureen claims to believe in racial equality, it is highly doubtful that she would have treated a white servant in the same patronizing way. Similarly, Maureen remembers how when July's children were born she "provided presents for him to send home on her behalf, at the news of each birth" (Gordimer, *JP* 16). Her behavior might seem kind and possibly even progressive, but July never actually gets to meet his children until the next time he has the opportunity to go home, which is only once every two years. Maureen does just enough to make herself feel like she is not a typical white mistress, but her actions reflect a tremendously patronizing attitude towards July that ultimately negates any principle of equality that she believes her behavior represents.

Rosa Burger, the main character of *Burger's Daughter*, provides an interesting comparison to Maureen Smales because Rosa is much more aware of her own privilege and critical of white liberals like Maureen who express anti-racist and anti-apartheid views but do not follow through on those convictions. Rosa's opinion of what constitutes a liberal, which is useful to understand her positioning throughout the novel, is clarified during a scene where a number of activists are arguing over issues of apartheid. In contemplating the nature of the general white

population, she notes that "if he feels guilty, he is a liberal; in that house where I grew up there was no guilt because it was believed that it was as a ruling class and not a colour that whites assumed responsibility. It wasn't something bleached into the flesh" (Gordimer, *BD* 161). Lionel and Cathy Burger, Rosa's parents, were both members of the Communist Party, and they believed and raised Rosa to believe that the struggle for equality is truly about class and not race and that the best way to solve South Africa's racial inequality is to fight against capitalist society. Therefore, Rosa does not consider herself a liberal. However, by the end of *Burger's Daughter*, Rosa discovers that in many ways she has fallen into the white liberal mindset that she has been raised to reject.

Rosa grew up in a highly politically active household, and as a result, her childhood was deeply shaped by her parents' politics. Since both of her parents were communist activists, although they both held other jobs, the two spent much of Rosa's childhood detained for various reasons. Rosa remembers vividly "the single time when both parents were arrested together," and she and her younger brother were sent to relatives in the countryside (Gordimer, *BD* 54). She also remembers how that situation, which most would consider traumatic, was not jarring because she "had been armed very young by her parents against the shock of such contingencies by the assumption that imprisonment was part of the responsibilities of grown-up life, like visiting patients… or going to work each day in town" (Gordimer, *BD* 54). Her understanding of what it means to be an adult is founded on the political commitment of her parents. That is the legacy that Rosa must grapple with throughout her life.

Although both of Rosa's parents were active members of the Communist Party, the novel focuses most on Lionel's involvement. This emphasis is likely because Lionel Burger is based on the historical figure Bram Fischer, an anti-apartheid lawyer who famously went to prison for

furthering Communism and allegedly conspiring to overthrow the government. While Rosa often mentions both of her parents when she addresses the question of her political involvement near the beginning of the novel, it is her relationship with her father and his legacy that is consistently examined throughout. This disproportionate focus on Lionel's political history over Cathy's narrows the lens of Rosa's struggle to understand her legacy, from her familial or parental legacy to her paternal legacy.

Rosa has assisted her father in his political activities throughout her life, but she views her involvement in terms of supporting her family, not in terms of a personal political commitment. After her father dies, Rosa talks with her lover at the time, Conrad, about what kind of life she might now live without the obligation of staying near her imprisoned father. She inwardly addresses how Conrad sees her future:

> For you, I could not be visualized leaving, living any other life than the one necessity – political necessity? – had made for me so far. You with your navel-fluff-picking hunt for 'individual destiny': didn't you understand, everything that child, that girl did was out of what is between daughter and mother, daughter and brother, daughter and father. When I was passive, in that cottage, if you had known – I was struggling with a monstrous resentment against the claim – not of the Communist Party! – of blood, shared genes, the semen from which I had issued and the body in which I had grown. (Gordimer, *BD* 62)

What Conrad does not understand is that Rosa did what she did because her father asked her to and because, like many children, she was deeply loyal to her family. It was not because she herself has a strong belief in the tenets of the Communist Party. For example, when Rosa was in her early twenties, she pretended to be engaged to one of her father's young associates, so she would be allowed to visit him in prison and exchange classified information. She ended up

developing feelings for this man, who had to flee the country as soon as he was released. If Rosa had done that because she was committed to helping the Communist Party, she would not resent her father. However, Rosa does resent him, later thinking how she "accused *him* – Lionel Burger, knowing as he did, without question, I would do what had to be done" (Gordimer, *BD* 66). The resentment Rosa harbors towards her father shows that she did what she did for him and not for the Party.

Rosa later confirms her lack of true commitment to the Communist Party during an interaction with Clare Terblanche, the daughter of two of Lionel Burger's associates and a childhood friend of Rosa's. After Lionel's death, Clare approaches Rosa seemingly to inquire about an apartment opening in Rosa's building, but Rosa realizes very quickly that Clare is actually there to ask her for a favor. Clare, who is still involved with the Communist Party through her own parents, wants Rosa to get a key to the copy room in her office building, so she can use it at night to print and copy undisclosed but clearly secret materials. Rosa notes how "with just such a smile, unanswerable, demanding, her father had invaded people's lives, getting them to do things" (Gordimer, *BD* 120). She remembers how Lionel would leverage his personal relationships to further the cause, just as Clare is now attempting to do. However, Rosa refuses to cooperate with Clare and chooses not to get involved. Although her refusal may seem like a small act of defiance, it is the first time in the novel that Rosa is faced with the active decision to continue her involvement in her father's political circle, and she chooses to not involve herself, which reinforces her lack of personal commitment to communist activism.

Her interaction with Clare also allows Rosa to outwardly raise the question of her paternal legacy and what her responsibility is to follow in her father's footsteps. During her conversation with Clare, Rosa comments, "what conformists: the children of our parents," and

the negative connotations of conformity reveal Rosa's disdain for that role (Gordimer, *BD* 127). When Clare gets offended, Rosa goes on to explain how "other people break away. They live completely different lives. Parents and children don't understand each other – there's nothing to say, between them. Some sort of natural insurance against repetition…Not us. We live as they lived" (Gordimer, *BD* 127). Here Rosa is actually voicing the question that she has been grappling with for the entire novel up until this point. Why should she be beholden to the work and passions of her father when it is perfectly acceptable for other children to break free of their parents' influence? When she asks Clare if she ever had a choice in being involved in political resistance, Clare responds with "in this country, under this system, looking at the way blacks live – what has the choice to do with parents? What else could you choose?" (Gordimer, *BD* 127). Clare does not see what Rosa does, which is that she *could* choose to be done. She *could* choose to step back and live her life the way that she wants. With Lionel dead, that is now a real and very tempting option for Rosa, and in many ways, that option creates one of the central tensions in the book: whether to continue in a life of political activism or to step back and live a private life.

It is helpful here to bring Maureen Smales back into conversation because it seems as if Rosa Burger is facing a choice that Maureen made in her own life: to abandon politics in favor of a more personal path. Both Maureen and Bam Smales were, or at least claim that they were, active in the anti-apartheid movement when they were first married, but by the time of the events of *July's* People, they are middle-aged adults who are no longer active in political spheres and care mostly about their financial situation and their children. Of course, Maureen did not have the Burger's family history of intense and often illegal resistance to the South African government, but she does offer a glimpse into what Rosa's life could potentially look like in

twenty years, if Rosa ultimately does decide to forgo the activist legacy that her parents left to her.

Rosa gets to experience what life would be like without political responsibilities when she finally obtains a passport and travels abroad, something that she was never able to do while her revolutionary parents were still alive. She visits her father's first wife, Katya Bagnelli, in France. Katya had been a member of the Communist Party with Lionel before he met Rosa's mother, and she left him, the Party, and South Africa to pursue a life in Europe. Although it seems like an odd choice, given that the two women have never met, Rosa's intention becomes clear through her interactions with Katya. No one ever directly asks Rosa why she chose to visit her father's ex-wife, but Rosa inwardly acknowledges that "if you *were* to ask me – I didn't come on some pilgrimage, worshipping or iconoclastic, to learn about my father. There must have been some reason, though, why I hit with closed eyes upon this house, this French village; reason beyond my reasoning that surveillance wouldn't think to look for me there. I wanted to know how to defect from him" (Gordimer, *BD* 264). The use of the political term "defect" to describe intimate familial relationships further solidifies the interwoven nature of family and politics within Rosa's mind and shows that leaving behind the Communist Party and leaving behind her father are one and the same. Rosa is actively looking for a way out of political activity, out of South Africa, and out of Lionel Burger's long shadow, and the only person she knows of who has succeeded in doing that is Katya.

Even as Rosa is attempting to escape her previous life, she still deals with the guilt of abandoning the cause and the people she left behind. She begins an affair with a married man and makes plans to move to Paris to be with him. In trying to explain to him how she left South Africa, she says, "but I made a deal. With them," and she recounts how "he defended her. She

repeated: -- With them, Bernard" (Gordimer, *BD* 276). Gordimer's use of the word "defended" here is noticeable, given that the only person Bernard could be defending Rosa from is herself. Clearly, she is grappling with her decision to broker a deal with the South African government to get herself out, but it is not clear at this point whether she feels guilty about the decision itself or the methods she had to use to make it happen. The repetition of "them" in Rosa's dialogue suggests that she does feel guilty about her methods, but her continuing to make long-term plans to stay in France in spite of her apparent guilt implies that while she may feel guilty about the way she obtained the passport she does not feel guilty about choosing to leave.

Up until this point in the novel, Gordimer has painted a fairly sympathetic picture of Rosa as a white South African woman, but reuniting with Baasie, her childhood friend, reveals that Rosa has fallen into the hypocritical complacency that Gordimer so clearly critiques through Maureen in *July's People*. Rosa, between leaving Katya and moving to Paris to be with her lover, goes to London for a few weeks, and while she is there, she attends a party with a number of British anti-apartheid activists. She runs into Baasie, and while their initial encounter is somewhat awkward, it is not hostile. Later that night, however, Baasie telephones her, and everything is different. One of the first things he says to Rosa is "I'm not 'Baasie', I'm Zwelinzima Vulindlela" (Gordimer, *BD* 318). Even though they are both now adults, Rosa still calls him by the pet-name her family gave him as a child, and he confronts her about it, addressing her ignorance of his real name or what it means. This first accusation sets the stage for Rosa's image to massively shift.

Zwelinzima then goes on to criticize her for her behavior at the party, during which people praised her father as a hero. He angrily makes a comment about how everyone makes such a big deal about Lionel Burger, which is, in his opinion, undeserved:

> Everyone in the world must be told what a great hero he was and how much he suffered for the blacks. Everyone must cry over him and show his life on television and write in the papers. Listen, there are dozens of our fathers sick and dying like dogs, kicked out of the locations when they can't work any more. Getting old and dying in prison. Killed in prison. It's nothing. I know plenty of blacks like Burger. It's nothing, it's us, we must be used to it, it's not going to show on English television. (Gordimer, *BD* 320)

Zwelinzima is blatantly claiming that Lionel Burger does not deserve the level of praise he receives and denouncing the coercive nature of Burger's memorialization. Rosa has never heard someone criticize her father in this way before, and her reaction is telling. She tries to claim that Lionel "would have been the first to say – what you're saying," but as Zwelinzima points out, she has never stopped anyone from fawning over her father and in the right context even seems to bask in the attention it gives her (Gordimer, *BD* 320). In this case her actions, or lack thereof, speak louder than words. She gets extremely defensive, and by trying to defend her father's position in anti-apartheid lore, she becomes one of those people with whom her childhood friend finds issue, placing Lionel Burger on a pedestal that Zwelinzima argues he does not deserve.

As their argument continues, Rosa displays a new side of herself, a side that in many ways reflects typical white South African mentalities, and Zwelinzima does not let that go unaddressed. Rosa, in what appears to be a last-ditch attempt to prove herself innocent of white racial complicity, tells Zwelinzima how she was the one who got his father, a revolutionary like Lionel, documents that allowed him to enter South Africa for the trip during which he was arrested and ultimately died in prison. Her childhood friend immediately questions why she chose to mention it:

> What is that? So what is that for me? Blacks must suffer now. We can't be caught although we are caught, we can't be killed although we die in jail, we are used to it, it's nothing to do with you. Whites are locking up blacks every day. You want to make the big confession? – why do you think you should be different from all the other whites who've been shitting on us ever since they came? He was able to go back home and get caught because you took the pass there. You want me to know in case I blame you for nothing. You think because you're telling me it makes it all right – for you. It wasn't your fault – you want me to tell you, then it's all right. For you. Because I'm the only one who can say so. But he's dead, and what about all the others – who cares whose 'fault' – they die because it's the whites killing them, black blood is the stuff to get rid of white shit. (Gordimer, *BD* 322)

Zwelinzima accurately points out that the only reason Rosa is bringing up her involvement in the arrest of his father is to make herself feel better. She wants to prove that she did not do nothing and that she is therefore innocent of white inaction, and she wants reassurance that what happened to Zwelinzima's father is not her fault and is therefore free of personal guilt and responsibility. However, Zwelinzima does not give Rosa that satisfaction. Instead, he shatters the narrative around which her entire life has been built: that political activity relieves her of the guilt of her white skin and that she is one of the 'good whites' fighting against apartheid. None of that matters to Zwelinzima. To him, what Rosa has or has not done does not change the fact that she is white. It does not negate the reality of her racial privilege or the black suffering upon which that privilege is founded. Her confrontation with Zwelinzima, especially the part where she tries to impress him with her involvement, shows that she expects gratitude and praise for her behavior, even though she has lived her life resentful of the role her parents

forced her to play in their political resistance. That expectation of gratitude is exactly what Zwelinzima says is wrong about how people idolize Lionel Burger, and Rosa proves that she holds that same expectation for others' perception of her as well.

Both Maureen Smales and Rosa Burger come to realize that they do not actually uphold the high ideals that they previously claimed to represent, and this realization creates for each woman a crisis of identity. Rosa, recounting the phone call, thinks "I cannot explain to anyone why the telephone call in the middle of the night made everything that was possible, impossible" (Gordimer, *BD* 328). That phone call represents a shift in consciousness for her, a turning point in her life. Afterword, she is disgusted with herself and mentally addresses her father, recounting "how I disfigured myself. How filthy and ugly, in the bathroom mirror. Debauched. To make defense of you the occasion for trotting out the holier-than-thou accusation – the final craven defense of the kind of people for whom there is going to be no future. If we'd still been children, I might have been throwing stones at him in a tantrum" (Gordimer, *BD* 329). This passage demonstrates her feeling of guilt, which further represents Rosa's unknowing descent into the role of a liberal. She had previously rejected the term liberal, claiming that if someone "feels guilt, he is a liberal" (Gordimer, *BD* 161). However, she now feels that exact guilt because she understands her failure to uphold the ideals around which she has shaped her identity. Her sense of self is totally shattered when she realizes that she has become exactly what she has spent her whole life denouncing, and that comprehension is clearly a moment of deep shame.

Maureen has a similar moment of self-awareness, although it is not as obvious whether she shares Rosa's shame when she comes to self-realization. At the very end of *July's People*, when Bam and Maureen realize that Bam's gun has been stolen, Maureen goes to July to confront him about its disappearance. She wants him to track it down and get it back, especially

when it becomes apparent that Daniel, July's protégé of sorts, is the person who took it. Maureen and July's disagreement escalates, and July begins "to talk at her in his own language" (Gordimer, *JP* 152). Maureen recounts how "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 as a man was taken elsewhere and by others. She was not his mother, his wife, his sister, his friend, his people" (Gordimer, *JP* 152). In this moment, she finally grasps that she has not been the benevolent, progressive white that she has believed herself to be for so long. In fact, she has forced him to be something that he is not in order to preserve the perfect image of what she believes their relationship to be. Despite having no comprehension of July's language, she nevertheless understands his anger towards her. Maureen confirms this new understanding when she returns to Bam after her argument with July. After mentally noting that they owe everything they have in their hut to July, she asks Bam, "was it like this for him?" (Gordimer, *JP* 154). She then comments, "nothing in that house was his" (Gordimer, *JP* 155). Maureen now begins to understand the reality of how July lived in their home, and therefore she now understands how she has failed in her claims to be anything other than "a rich white woman" (Gordimer, *JP* 22).

Both Rosa Burger and Maureen Smales change the language with which they describe themselves, suggesting that each woman's confrontation causes a sizable shift in how she views herself. Rosa is clearly disgusted with herself after her phone call with Zwelinzima and is uncharacteristically insulting to herself afterwards. Neither Rosa nor Maureen use any noticeably negative language to describe themselves before their self-realizations, and the change in tone is noteworthy. Similar to Rosa, Maureen begins to describe herself negatively towards the end of

her fight with July. Maureen recounts how "she lurched over and posed herself, a grotesque" (Gordimer, *JP* 153). She also describes herself as "death's harpy image" (Gordimer, *JP* 153). Although the moment of self-insult is brief, she uses strongly negative terms in her account of the disagreement, which is outside of her normal mode of self-description. Maureen's shift in tone shows that the disagreement has caused her to see herself differently.

Although the end of *July's People* is notoriously ambivalent, Maureen's irrational running can be interpreted as an inability to cope with who she has discovered herself to be. The helicopter arrival scene takes place immediately after her argument with July and debrief with Bam, so it is likely that her odd behavior is influenced by those moments. She has no way of knowing whether or not the helicopter "holds saviours or murderers," and yet she runs toward it anyway (Gordimer, *JP* 158). Getting away from the life that she has been living, the life that showed her the extent of her complicity, is more important than whatever danger may be waiting with the helicopter. Furthermore, she runs towards the helicopter "like a solitary animal at the season when animals neither seek a mate nor take care of young, existing only for their lone survival, the enemy of all that would make claims of responsibility" (Gordimer, *JP* 160). That responsibility could be her children or her husband, but it could also be responsibility for her own behavior and the role she unknowingly played in the continuation of racial inequality, which Maureen is either unable or unwilling to accept.

An important similarity to note between Rosa Burger's and Maureen Smales' moments of self-realization is that they happen because of confrontations with black men whom they have been consciously or unconsciously treating problematically. In *Burger's Daughter*, Rosa spends the majority of her life thinking of Zwelinzima as Baasie, the child her parents took in. She refers to him with an almost disrespectful familiarity, calling him her "black brother" (Gordimer, *BD*

115). Remembering him as a brother figure undermines the reality of her racial privilege in comparison to his and romanticizes the dynamic between him and the Burger family, which was caring but was not familial and could never have been otherwise because of their racial difference. Rosa also makes problematic assumptions about what Baasie has been doing since they were separated as children. When visiting a black township, she thinks how "Baasie looked like one of these children because they were black, like him. He came from streets like these and he has disappeared into them. He is a man, somewhere like this" (Gordimer, *BD* 150). First, equating his experience to that of any black child on the basis of race is problematic in and of itself, but secondly, Rosa's narrow imagining of the possibilities of Baasie's life closes off anything other than the official narrative of black life in South Africa. This assumption may be a result of a deeply pessimistic understanding of the limited opportunities accorded to black men in that country. However, given Rosa's wide exposure to a variety of successful black South Africans throughout her childhood and adolescence, it seems unlikely that she simply believes there are no other options for Baasie. It seems more likely that she is allowing herself to unconsciously fall into a more common narrative of black life. Finally, Rosa describes Baasie as "my little kaffertjie," which is an insulting phrase South Africans used to refer to young black boys (Gordimer, *BD* 195). It is not only racially charged, but it is also extremely patronizing and denies Baasie the respect of being thought of as the adult he is. Rosa Burger comes into their reunion having thought of Zwelinzima as "Baasie" for a long time, and that dynamic feeds into the intensity of their confrontation and the guilt of her self-realizations.

Similarly, the moment Maureen Smales realizes her failings comes as a result of a confrontation with a black man whom she has not respected. Although she previously believed their relationship was based on mutual understanding, Maureen's relationship with July is

actually based in her patronizing treatment and view of him, as evidenced by her trying to train him out of using the term ‘master’ and her view of the basic decencies she extends him as favors or generosities instead of the adult rights that he deserves. She likes to think that she her treatment of July is proof that she is a good white, someone who defies the racist stereotype of her peers, but in actuality, her treatment of him proves that she does not defy that role. Like Rosa Burger, Maureen Smales comes to understand her own fault via a confrontation of a black man that she has patronized and infantilized.

By creating major moments of self-discovery around Rosa and Maureen’s failures to recognize their own problematic behavior, Gordimer situates the hypocrisy of the progressive South African who outwardly claims, and often genuinely believes, that she is doing good while simultaneously perpetuating racist attitudes as an important characteristic of white South Africans. These moments are major climaxes in the two novels’ plots, and the fact that the climax of both novels comes from a white woman’s understanding for the first time her unwitting complicity within the South African racial system shows the centrality and significance of that newfound understanding. In *July’s People* and *Burger’s Daughter*, Gordimer’s development of an identity of white womanhood centered around unconscious moral hypocrisy presents a critique of politically progressive whites in South Africa. While both characters are extremely well rounded and have a number of good qualities, they both ultimately show themselves as less than adequate in terms of truly acting in accordance with their professions of anti-racism and anti-apartheidism, and Gordimer does not paint that failure in a sympathetic light. The shift in both their behavior and self-descriptions shows how life-altering it is for these two white women to come to terms with the falsehoods they have been living with

for years and suggests that their belief in their innocence constituted a major piece of their identity.

One question that arises from these two characters is why their identity is so wrapped up in their perception of themselves as progressive women fighting against apartheid and why their reactions to failing in that role are so intense. By drawing on conclusions made in Sarita Srivastava's work examining white feminists and anti-racism, Maureen and Rosa's heavy investment in their own innocence can be seen as a result of the importance social movements place on a shared code of ethics. Although Srivastava writes specifically about white feminists in "'You're calling me a racist?' The Moral and Emotional Regulation of Antiracism and Feminism," many of her conclusions about the response of white feminists to discussions of race translate well to other social movements, such as the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. She argues that "using implicit guidelines for conduct as well as alternative moral standards, language, and practices, social movements such as feminism work at constructing imagined egalitarian communities and ethical selves" (Srivastava 34). The anti-apartheid movement falls into this category of social movements in which Srivastava situates feminism. Furthermore, she writes that "social movements require a vision not only of a community of individuals but also of shared ideas, morals, and ethics" (Srivastava 34). In her essay, she is thinking about feminism and its shared ideas of gender equality, but her arguments also apply to the anti-apartheid movement and its shared ideas of racial equality.

Srivastava discusses how social movements such as feminism foster the development of individuals' moral identities. She draws on Sherryl Kleinman's understanding of the term "moral identity" as an identity through which people understand themselves as good people. They find moral significance in acting in ways they believe are consistent with that identity. The moral

identity that Maureen and Rosa share is 'anti-apartheidist.' Srivastava further quotes Kleinman to discuss what happens when people fail to live up to their moral identities:

> In the alternative health organization Kleinman studied, the members' sense of self-worth was dependent on their belief that they were "doing something different" (5), that they were truly alternative. However, Kleinman says, their deep investment in this alternative moral identity "kept them from seeing how their behaviours contradicted their ideals" when they perpetuated inequalities inside their organization (1996, 11). Kleinman argues that "we become so invested in our beliefs as radicals or 'good people' that we cannot see the reactionary or hurtful consequences of our behaviours" (11). (Srivastava 41)

Kleinman discovered that moral identities could give members such self-worth that they became blinded to their own actions.

What Kleinman found in studying alternative health organizations, which is what Srivastava finds in feminist organizations, is exactly what happens to Maureen and Rosa in *July's People* and *Burger's Daughter*. Both women find self-worth in their perceptions of themselves as progressive and "good," as evidenced by their major shift in self-descriptive language after their respective confrontations, and their belief in their identities as part of the anti-apartheid movement has blinded them to the ways in which their behavior has not aligned with their professed principles. Identifying with the anti-apartheid movement has allowed Maureen and Rosa to develop moral identities around fighting for racial equality, but it has also allowed them to ignore their failures to live up to the shared ethics of that social movement.

Srivastava also discusses why white feminists in her study more often than not respond to accusations of racial insensitivity in a highly emotional way. Many of the women she

interviewed responded defensively or tearfully, and she believes those responses are because of the contexts in which they have developed their moral identity:

> The political context of alternative moral identities also explains why being seen as nonracist or antiracist is more likely to be a highly emotional concern for feminists and other activists or community workers and more likely to be crucial to their moral identity or sense of self. This political and ethical climate means that there is a great deal at stake—not only one's sense of goodness and sense of self but also one's political identity, one's career as activist or worker in a feminist organization. (Srivastava 41)

Obviously, Rosa Burger and Maureen Smales do not work for an anti-apartheid organization, which correlates to the social movement they consider themselves a part of instead of feminism. However, because apartheid-related politics dominated South African society during the time when the two novels were set, many other facets of Rosa and Maureen's lives are deeply engrained in the "political and ethical climate" of South Africa. They still have a huge amount at stake. Maureen has developed a deep understanding of who she is and, maybe more importantly, who she is not, and that understanding is rooted in being a "good" white. She has found a lot of self-worth not just in identifying with the anti-apartheid movement but in positioning herself in opposition to roles like the white mistress. Although she does not live up to the benevolent employer role she perceives herself to be, she has openly staked her identity on it by calling out others in public for using the language of the white master. Rosa has been raised her entire life to find value in working against apartheid, and her entire social circle consists of others who are also committed to that work. What is at stake for Rosa is more than just her sense of self or of being a good person; it is her friends, her familial legacy, and the reason for the sacrifices she has made throughout her life. The correlation between political contexts and

emotional responses of members of social movements, such as feminism or the anti-apartheid movement, helps to explain why Maureen Smales and Rosa Burger care so much about their moral identity of being anti-apartheid in *July's People* and *Burger's Daughter*.

Finally, Sarita Srivastava theorizes a four-stage sequence of moral progression through which white feminists, or members of other social movements, understand discussions of race, and this sequence serves as an accurate representation of the progression of Rosa and Maureen's understanding of their racial complicity, although neither appears to make it to the final stage. Srivastava defines the four different stages as "first, being color-blind, being unaware of color and race; second, becoming aware that racism is a problem and being committed to your own nonracism; third, becoming aware of your own racism and feeling terrible about it; and finally, being able to accept and live with the fact that you might be racist rather than fearing it" (Srivastava 51). Although both *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People* both begin at points when Maureen and Rosa are already in the second stage, it is easy to assume that at some point before their adulthood they were not aware of race. Because of the pervasiveness of racial issues in South Africa, their color-blind stage might have only been while they were very young, but presumably it existed. For most of the two novels, Maureen and Rosa are in the second stage of the sequence, knowing that racism is bad and believing that they are not racist themselves. Nadine Gordimer centers the identity of white womanhood around this second stage of obliviousness and critiques that identity by forcing her main characters into the third stage, realization and crisis.

The confrontations that Maureen has with July and Rosa has with Zwelinzima reveal to the women their own complicity in racism, and as a result, they go through a crisis of identity leading to self-loathing, exactly the situation Srivastava describes as the third stage of her

sequence. Maureen clearly that she does not progress into the fourth stage, acceptance. Although critics have debated the meaning of the ending of *July's People*, self-acceptance does not seem to be a reasonable explanation for Maureen running into the unknown. She is explicitly running from responsibility, which solidifies the conclusion that Maureen is stuck in Srivastava's third stage.

Conversely, the ending of *Burger's Daughter* does not make it clear whether or not Rosa has fully made it to the final stage of self-acceptance, although it seems clear that she has reconciled with her legacy as an activist. After her fight with Zwelinzima, she returns to South Africa to work "in the physiotherapy department of a black hospital" (Gordimer, *BG* 334). Her homecoming in itself suggests that Rosa has come to terms with her father's legacy because her previous inability to do so was the reason behind her leaving in the first place. Rosa eventually gets arrested, again suggesting that she has gone back to her activist ways, but the novel never reveals the reason for her detainment. That aspect of her story is purposefully left out of the narrative, although it is suggested that she may have used her last weeks in Europe work against the South African government. Because "what Rosa did in her last two weeks in London is unclear," Gordimer writes that it is impossible to know definitively "how she occupied her time, between the meeting with old associates at the rally or party and her return" (Gordimer, *BG* 356). This uncharacteristic mystery surrounding her behavior supports the claim that Rosa has returned to activism in the final pages of the novel, especially since the uncertainty of her actions is mentioned in a section discussing her prospects at a future trial.

Although the novel implies that Rosa has rekindled her involvement in the anti-apartheid movement, it is unclear whether or not she has actually made it to Srivastava's fourth stage. Because Srivastava is dealing with emotions, the only evidence of whether Rosa has progressed

through the entire process would be the thoughts and feelings of Rosa herself, not her actions. Even if we take Rosa's implied activism as the truth, her intentions regarding that activism are unknown. Those things definitely could be signs that she has come to an acceptance of her failings and wants to work to combat them, but they could also be signs of her continued guilt over her racial complicity, which would mean that she is still in the stage of self-hatred. Her actions alone do not necessarily mean that she has progressed into the final stage.

The tone of Rosa's narration in the final section of the novel, however, does suggest that she has found some form of acceptance. Mentally addressing Lionel, she comments that "you and my mother and the faithful never limited yourselves to being like anyone else" (Gordimer, *BG* 332). Rosa has stopped using a resentful or critical tone to discuss her father's legacy like she does throughout much of the novel. In this moment, she addresses him with admiration and a sense of determination. She has now realized that "no one can defect" (Gordimer, *BG* 332). Rosa speaks with a soberer and more resolved tone. In her final words to her father, she notes that "it's strange to live in a country where there are still heroes. Like anyone else, I do what I can" (Gordimer, *BG* 332). Although Rosa never states that she has moved past her guilt, her newfound resolve that she is doing what she can to be of service makes her progression into Srivastava's final stage extremely likely. Using Srivastava's moral progression, readers can better understand the evolution of Maureen and Rosa's understanding of their own racism, from ignorance to realization and guilt to, in Rosa's case, acceptance.

Despite being two very different women facing very different circumstances, Rosa Burger and Maureen Smales share one major character flaw: the moral hypocrisy of white liberalism. Nadine Gordimer positions this flaw at the center of both novels, and through the breakdown of these women's moral identities as "good" white women, she critiques the racial

obliviousness of white South African women. Maureen and Rosa demonstrate the ease with which white South Africans can be completely unaware of the discrepancies between their professed principles and their actions, and their moments of self-realization illustrate the shame whites should feel at those discrepancies. *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People* therefore serve as exposés of the white woman who unwittingly participates in the racist dynamics of apartheid and who must come face to face with the reality of her own racism.

II. The White Writer's Responsibility: Does Gordimer measure up?

Despite being best known as a novelist, Nadine Gordimer produced a substantial amount of non-fictional writing throughout her career, and like her fiction, much of that writing is dedicated to the role of the white population in the fight against apartheid. *The Essential Gesture*, a collection of her non-fiction essays, contains some of her most impassioned writing about what she believed was the responsibility of white South Africans and the responsibility of the white South African writer more specifically. As a white writer in apartheid-era South Africa, these moral questions related directly to Gordimer's own life, and given her critique of the obliviousness and hypocrisy of white liberalism through the similar identity issues of Maureen Smales and Rosa Burger, the question arises whether or not Gordimer herself is guilty of that same flaw. By analyzing the connections between her fiction and non-fiction, we can examine to what extent Gordimer attempts to reflect her personal convictions through *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People*.

In the introduction to *The Essential Gesture*, Stephen Clingman calls Gordimer "a most extraordinary observer of her society" ("Introduction" 2). Her insight into South African society and her ability to successfully articulate what it means to live in and write in that society is incredible, particularly due to her status as a "minority-within-the-white-minority," which is how she refers to the segment of the white population that did not support the system of apartheid (Gordimer, *EG* 303). Clingman wonders "what reservoirs of intellectual and emotional strength are required to confront the facts of one's own privilege while seeking ways to undo it" ("Introduction" 6). Reading Nadine Gordimer's essays, it is impossible not to ask that same question. Through this collection of non-fiction, the reader can clearly observe Gordimer's

critical approach to the world around her and to her own place within it. As one reviewer of the collection noted, it is easy to see Gordimer's "desire to explore what it means to be white and to sympathize with blacks, but at the same time neither to romanticize their situation nor exaggerate [her] usefulness" (Roberts 464). This careful balance is reflected throughout her writing, and her remarkable exploration of difficult subjects such as her own place within society has gained her international renown for serving as a window into apartheid-era South Africa.

The issue of race was undoubtedly the most important question of South African society throughout its complicated history, and for Gordimer, the racial conflict of South Africa consistently occupied both her fiction and non-fiction writing as one of the most prevalent themes. Gordimer believed that "the moral question of race" would be the question "by which the twentieth century will be characterized" (*EG* 289). She dedicated many addresses and lectures to the topic of race in South Africa and particularly to the role of the white author in the country's highly divided society. Gordimer openly and adamantly expressed her anti-apartheid opinions. In her 1982 essay, "Living in the Interregnum," Nadine Gordimer calls apartheid "the ugliest creation of man" (*EG* 262). Later in that same essay she asserts, "there are two absolutes in my life. One is that racism is evil – human damnation in the Old Testament sense, and no compromises, as well as sacrifices, should be too great in the fight against it" (Gordimer, *EG* 262). There could be no doubts about Gordimer's stance on apartheid, and she dedicated a significant portion of her non-fiction writing throughout her career to her convictions on racial equality.

As early as 1959, Gordimer was preoccupied with the role that white people had to play in both contemporary and future South Africa. In that year, she published "Where Do Whites Fit In?", in which she claims that "if we're going to fit in at all in the new Africa, it's going to be

sideways, where-we-can, wherever-they'll-shift-up-for-us" (Gordimer, *EG* 32). She argues that there will need to be a monumental shift in whites' understanding of their place in society if they hope to be accepted by the black majority that will inevitably and rightly run the country and the rest of the continent. According to Gordimer, "the white man who wants to fit in in the new Africa must learn a number of hard things. He'd do well to regard himself as an immigrant to a new country…He'll have to forget the old impulses to leadership, and the temptation to give advice backed by the experience and culture of Western civilization" (*EG* 34). She believes that the white population needs to learn to give up its proprietary claim to South Africa and to adapt to the new society that the black majority will create. Even those who want to be "freed both of the privileges and the guilt of the white sins of our fathers" will have to make the adjustment to life without those privileges, an adjustment that Nadine Gordimer predicted would be extremely difficult more than thirty years before it officially took place (*EG* 32).

Gordimer also dedicated much thought to what it means to be a writer and believed "all that the writer can do, as a writer, is to go on writing *the truth as he sees it*" (*EG* 105). In her 1975 essay entitled "A Writer's Freedom," Nadine Gordimer asked "what is a writer's freedom? To me it is his right to maintain and publish to the world a deep, intense, private view of the situation in which he finds his society" (*EG* 104). The truth as Gordimer saw it in South Africa was a political system founded on racism and maintained through systemic oppression and violence, and her right as a writer was to examine that system and its implications as much as she felt inspired to through her writing. Although she was writing within the context of South Africa and apartheid, her beliefs in the rights of writers to act as observers of their society extended to writers across the globe.

However, in that same essay in which she describes the importance of a writer's ability to critique his society, Gordimer identifies the tension between personal political convictions and the need of the writer to be able "to tell the truth as he sees it, in his own words, without being accused of letting the side down" (Gordimer, *EG* 107). Gordimer believes that pressure to write in a certain way does not just come from those opposed to societal criticism. She observes, in reference to the writer, that

> There will be those who regard him as their mouth-piece; people whose ideals, as a human being, he shares, and whose cause, as a human being, is his own. They may be those whose suffering is his own. His identification with, admiration for, and loyalty to these set up a state of conflict within him. His integrity as a human being demands the sacrifice of everything to the struggle put up on the side of free men. His integrity as a writer goes the moment he begins to write what he is told he ought to write. (*EG* 106)

She identifies a real danger to the writer that does not come from those who disagree with her politics, but from those who do. For her, allowing one's writing to be dictated by a cause or a movement is just as potent a threat as allowing oneself to be silenced by political opposition. Gordimer describes the tension between staying true to one's artistic integrity while simultaneously grappling with a sense of obligation to political activism, and that tension holds a clear connection to her own position as a vocal opposer of apartheid. Because of her political views, Gordimer needed to reconcile her anti-apartheid convictions with her strongly held belief that a writer should be free of external pressures to create certain types of art.

Combining her previous literary interests in race and authorship, Nadine Gordimer also wrote extensively on the intersection of the two: what it meant to be a white writer writing in South Africa under apartheid. Her two essays that delve into this topic most comprehensively are

"Living in the Interregnum," which was published in 1982, and "The Essential Gesture," which was published in 1984. She begins "Living in the Interregnum" with the statement, "I live at 6,000 feet in a society whirling, stamping, swaying with the force of revolutionary change" (Gordimer, *EG* 262). In a single sentence, Gordimer encapsulates the observational and analytical view point that the essay takes on the white South African population and the white writer. Throughout the essay she argues that the white population needs to recognize what their role has previously been in the old South Africa and reexamine what their role can be in a new South Africa. She believes that "whites of former South Africa will have to redefine themselves in a new collective within new structures" (Gordimer, *EG* 264). Their position will inevitably change, and the structures within which they position themselves will also change. The only choice will be to adapt to whatever new system arises. Gordimer notes that the white liberal population in particular might find that task challenging. She quotes Desmond Tutu: "the point is that however much they want to identify with blacks it is an existential fact…that they have not really been victims of this baneful oppression and exploitation" (Gordimer, *EG* 267). In this essay, Gordimer makes it clear that she believes whites will have no choice but to come to terms with their shifting place no matter how "hated and shameful the collective life of apartheid and its structures have been" to them (*EG* 269).

Gordimer expands on the challenge of managing a shifting social role by relating it to white writers specifically. In "Living in the Interregnum," she states,

> The white writer has to make the decision whether to remain responsible to the dying white order – and even as dissident, if he goes no further than that position, he remains *negatively* within the white order – or to declare himself positively as answerable to the order struggling to be born. And to declare himself for the latter is only the beginning; as

> it is for whites in a less specialized position, only more so. He has to try to find a way to reconcile the irreconcilable within himself, establish his relation to the culture of a new kind of posited community, non-racial but conceived with and led by blacks. (Gordimer, *EG* 278)

This statement harkens back to Gordimer's previous writings on the struggle between artistic and political integrity, but it incorporates the added layer of the white identity. Gordimer proposes an increased responsibility to one's political integrity for white South African writers because of their privileged racial status in a highly discriminatory system. She believes that white writers must be vocal advocates for change and work to understand their place in a new black-led society. Even if they do not condone the system of apartheid, Gordimer believes that if white writers do not actively speak against it, they are complicit in it.

"The Essential Gesture," written in 1984, follows up on the themes of "Living in the Interregnum," but it focuses more heavily on the external pressures that the nature of South African society puts on its national writers. Particularly for those writers who have chosen to commit themselves to the anti-apartheid cause, there exists "a double demand, the first from the oppressed to act as spokesperson for them, the second, from the state, to take punishment for that act" (Gordimer, *EG* 287). If a writer chooses to take on the responsibility of using her platform to give voice to the voiceless, she must also be willing to take responsibility for her words. The strict censorship laws in South Africa at the time meant that it was easy for the state to ban any work they wanted, and they could even ban certain people from speaking at events or being quoted. However, Gordimer advocated strongly for writers to take on that challenge and stay true to their political convictions in the face of state censorship. She writes that "the white writer's task as 'cultural worker' is to raise the consciousness of white people, who, unlike himself, have

not woken up" (Gordimer, *EG* 293). This task was particularly important given that "a precarious state of ignorance among large sections of the 'white' population was upheld by means of anti-communist propaganda, media censorship and, not least, the general desire to remain ignorant" (Helgesson 3). Her conceptualization of the task of the white writer draws back in the tension between a writer's moral and artistic integrity. How does someone balance the responsibility of racial consciousness-raising and the need to maintain artistic freedom throughout the creative process? According to Nadine Gordimer, "art is on the side of the oppressed…For if art is freedom of the spirit, how can it exist within the oppressors?" (*EG* 291). Although this claim seems potentially over-stated given the roles of white male writers in literary history, if it is true, then in South Africa the creative impulse should naturally be accompanied by the political impulse to work against the discrimination of apartheid. She elaborates on this idea by claiming that consciousness-raising "is a responsibility which the white writer already has taken on, for himself, if the other responsibility – to his creative integrity – keeps him scrupulous in writing about what he knows to be true whether whites like to hear it or not" (Gordimer, *EG* 294). For Gordimer, as long as the white artist sticks to his artistic imperative to write "the truth as he sees it," he should be able to reconcile his two integrities within himself (*EG* 105).

Since Nadine Gordimer was an author who wrote prolifically about the duties and responsibilities that come with writing, her essays on what it means to be a white writer in South Africa serve as an interesting lens through which to examine her fiction. Given that she was exactly the kind of white writer she discusses in her essays, one that is vehemently opposed to apartheid yet has chosen to stay in South Africa instead of expatriate, a comparison of her fiction and non-fiction can illuminate questions about whether she puts her claims into practice, especially since she wrote the essays in *The Essential Gesture* in the years leading up to and

during the publication of the two novels. As discussed in the previous chapter, Gordimer constructs a white female identity in *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People* through the two main characters, and it is through her critical portrayal of that identity that Gordimer fulfills her own code of white authorship.

Maureen in particular does not exemplify how Nadine Gordimer believed that white South Africans should behave, as laid out in *The Essential Gesture*. Gordimer discusses at length the relinquishment of power that all white people will need to come to terms with in her essays, particularly in "Where Do Whites Fit In?," where she writes that white people would need to "learn a number of hard things" and "forget the old impulses to leadership" (*EG* 34). Maureen is a prime example of someone failing to meet that expectation. When she and her family flee to July's village, she finds herself in a scenario in which she no longer occupies a position of power, and she does not adjust well to that change in position despite her ostensibly liberal politics. Through her continued patronization of July, her inability to relinquish control of the bakkie, and her position as one of the "do-gooders who justify their presence in South Africa by being kind to their servants," Maureen Smales demonstrates that she does not follow the path that Gordimer's nonfiction laid out for white people facing an impending shift in the racial dynamic of South African (Gordimer, *EG* 100).

Furthermore, Maureen and Bam represent a middle-aged white complacency that Nadine Gordimer specifically writes against in "Speak Out: The Necessity for Protest," an address given to university students in 1971. She reflects on how "white South Africans of my generation have abdicated their responsibility to speak out" and urges students to "never 'settle down' and forget the sort of responsibility they were once prepared to take up, the responsibility for being culpable and aware in their society" (Gordimer, *EG* 89, 97). In *July's People*, Maureen and Bam have

settled down and forgotten their former political convictions, doing exactly what Gordimer advised students against. Throughout the novel, Maureen fails over and over again to live up to *The Essential Gesture*'s depictions of how a white South African should behave.

Rosa Burger fares slightly better given her prolonged involvement with the Communist Party, but her behavior after Lionel dies shows that, like Maureen, she does not follow the ideal behavior that Gordimer describes in *The Essential Gesture*. At first, it does seem that Rosa lives up to those high expectations. Gordimer writes that "in a democracy – even if it is a so-called democracy like our white-elitist one – the greatest veneration one can show the rule of law is to keep a watch on it, and to reserve the right to judge unjust laws and the subversion of the function of the law by the power of the state" (*EG* 92). By working with her father and his associates within the Party, Rosa helps to push back against the unjust laws of South Africa. Even her illegal activities reflect the sentiments of *The Essential Gesture*, as Gordimer writes that "there's not much law-abiding virtue in sticking to a constitution like the South African one, in which only the rights of a white minority are guaranteed" (*EG* 122). Gordimer stops just short of actively promoting illegal activities, but it is clear that in her opinion working outside of the South African constitution in order to reject laws that have been deemed unjust is warranted.

However, Rosa's inaction after her father's death and her apparent lack of real commitment to the Party reveal that she is susceptible to failing Gordimer's high standards for white behavior. Like Maureen, she abandons her "responsibility to speak out" when she flees to Europe and decides to stay in exile indefinitely (Gordimer, *EG* 89). Through her argument with Baasie, in which she reveals her self-important attitude towards her political involvement and defends the idolization of her father, Rosa demonstrates that she has failed to "forget the old impulses to leadership," which Gordimer believes all white South Africans must do, and has

"become used to being bossy" (Gordimer, *EG* 34/35). Despite her former involvement, which was due to familial and not political loyalty, for much of *Burger's Daughter* Rosa Burger does not represent a white South African taking the path that Nadine Gordimer put forth in her non-fiction writing because she allows herself to retreat from the responsibilities of working against apartheid. Eventually she returns to that work, but her temporary abandonment of it shows that she is susceptible to the temptation of escape.

Gordimer purposefully created characters that do not behave in ways that she believes are desirable for white citizens of South Africa, and it is through her critique of these characters that she reflects the other major concern of *The Essential Gesture*, which is the responsibility of the writer and her relationship with politics. Nadine Gordimer writes that the tension between artistic and political integrity in South Africa is unprecedented, saying "there can have been few if any examples in human history of the degree, variety and intensity of conflicts that exist between the South African artist and the external power of society" (*EG* 135). However, she also believes in the necessity of balancing inner conflict, saying that "the morality of life and the morality of art have broken out of their categories in social flux. If you cannot reconcile them, they cannot be kept from one another's throats, within you" (Gordimer, *EG* 277). By crafting Maureen Smales and Rosa Burger into compelling and well-rounded characters, Nadine Gordimer reflects her artistic integrity, but by using those characters to examine flaws in the white liberal mentality and the failings of white liberalism in South Africa in general, she uses her creative platform to explore issues of political importance. Gordimer therefore meets her own expectation that white writers commit themselves and their writing to the advancement of justice and the fight against apartheid.

In terms of "raising the consciousness of white people," which she wrote was also the responsibility of white writers, it is less clear if Gordimer achieved that goal through her novels because censorship in South Africa complicated the situation. In late June of 1979, the government embargoed distribution of *Burger's Daughter* and on July 11th banned it (Roberts 411). Because of the novel's inclusion of a "specifically prohibited pamphlet published by a banned organization – the Soweto Students' Representative Council," *Burger's Daughter* became an immediate target for censorship (Roberts 411). According to Stephen Clingman, "many reasons were given for the original banning, but all of them seemed to centre upon the chief one, which was, in the Committee's own words, that 'the authoress uses Rosa's story as a pad from which to launch a blistering and full scale attack on the Republic of South Africa'" ("The Subject of Revolution" 189). Eventually that ban was lifted through an appeals process, which was arguably due to Gordimer's status as an internationally known and white author. *July's People* was also banned after its publication in 1981. If raising the consciousness of the white population is one of the duties of white South African writers, how can someone fulfill that duty if her writing is banned?

Nadine Gordimer wrote novels that were controversial at the time of their publication, and unfortunately that meant many people in South Africa could not gain access to them. In the case of *July's People* and *Burger's Daughter*, white liberal women might have recognized themselves in Maureen Smales and Rosa Burger and gained insight into their own lives or behavior through Maureen's and Rosa's moments of self-realization, but that could only happen if they had access to the novels. The predicament of government censorship in South Africa meant that literary works powerful enough to raise the consciousness of the white population often could not fulfill that role.

Reflection on *July's People* and *Burger's Daughter* in conjunction with *The Essential Gesture* raises the question of whether Nadine Gordimer falls into the same trap as the protagonists of her novels. Is she professing ideals that she does not embody? In her non-fiction, she writes eloquently about white citizens needing to fight back against apartheid and white writers needing to stay true to their vision while simultaneously raising the consciousness of the rest of the white population. Like Maureen and Rosa, Gordimer has a set of principles that she outwardly claims to live by, but does she too fail to live up to her principles? I do not believe so. Even though the censorship of some of her novels meant that she may not have fully achieved her goal of white consciousness-raising, Gordimer cannot be accused of not actively striving towards that goal through her fiction. Furthermore, by critiquing white South African liberalism via the characters of Maureen Smales and Rosa Burger in *July's People* and *Burger's Daughter*, Gordimer demonstrates that she fulfills the responsibility of white South Africans against apartheid that she lays out in *The Essential Gesture* and therefore does not have the same flaw of her protagonists, saying one thing and doing another.

III. Conclusion

Why is it important to examine how Gordimer portrayed white liberal women? Why does it matter if Gordimer lived up to her own expectations? I believe that in her construction and resulting criticism of Maureen and Rosa as white liberal women Gordimer shows the necessity for those in positions of privilege to constantly examine their own complicity. Maureen Smales and Rosa Burger both represent a version of white complicity and hypocrisy that Gordimer saw in South African liberals, and she used her literary platform to highlight and analyze those issues.

Maureen and Rosa's discovery of their unconscious role in South African racism reminds readers that even those who believe in their progressiveness and innocence can find themselves failing to uphold their own principles. The centrality of the main characters' shared flaw makes the danger of unconscious complicity one of the main takeaways from both *July's People* and *Burger's Daughter*. Although both novels were written in the specific context of apartheid, the lesson stretches beyond the issue of race and the borders of South Africa. Members of privileged communities across the globe can and should learn from the mistakes of Rosa and Maureen.

In keeping with the ideas that she puts forth in these two novels, that even those claiming certain ideals should not be above scrutiny, it is fair enough to extend that scrutiny to Gordimer herself. As a white woman, she shared many of the same privileges as her protagonists and was therefore potentially susceptible to their shared flaw. Part of understanding her legacy as one of South Africa's most important writers is examining how she put her principles into practice, especially since she has continually been cited as one of the world's foremost anti-apartheid writers. Looking at her construction and critique of white complicity and hypocrisy reveals how Gordimer practiced what she preached and did not exhibit the same hypocrisy that she critiques through the characters of Maureen and Rosa. While the consistency between political beliefs and

creative output may not be relevant to every author, Gordimer's legacy is more than just writing poignant novels. It is writing powerful political novels that advocate for change and actively grapple with contemporary issues. To take her novels seriously and to understand their depth, it is crucial to analyze Gordimer's nonfictional writing and comprehend her personal politics.

By creating these characters in the way that she did, Gordimer also created one potential way for how authors with racial privilege can write about problems of race. One of the biggest questions surrounding her career has been whether or not her racial privilege impacts the validity of her writing. Does being white preclude her from writing and speaking about racial relations in South Africa? Clearly Gordimer did not think so, since she wrote extensively on how white writers should use their platform to speak out against injustice. However, I would argue that she demonstrates a method of involvement that allowed her to believe those things. As a white woman, she did not write novels about experiences of race that she could not understand. She never put words into the oppressed black majority's mouths. While there are black characters in her novels, those novels do not presume to present what it felt like to be a black citizen in South Africa. Instead, Gordimer used her work to delve into issues of race that related more directly to her own positions and did so in a way that still opposed apartheid. By making *July's People* and *Burger's Daughter* about white women, Gordimer did not use her platform to speak for others, and by using those novels as exposés of the flaws of white liberalism, she shows how white authors can discuss racial relations in ways that do not reinforce the oppression of minorities.

Understanding how she constructs an identity of white womanhood around the moral hypocrisy of liberalism demonstrates how Gordimer lives up to both her own words and her global legacy. Her portrayals of Rosa and Maureen make up an important aspect of why she is considered to be one of the world's most eloquent anti-apartheid writers because those portrayals

help to illuminate problems she identifies within South African society. Through her construction of Maureen and Rosa's identities in *July's People* and *Burger's Daughter*, Gordimer shows that she is in fact "a most extraordinary observer of her society," and her observations continue to hold valuable lessons today (Clingman, "Introduction" 2).

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