Tribhuvan University

Representation of Post-Apartheid South Africa in Nadine Gordimer's*The House Gun*

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Central Department of English in the Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English

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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. PratapRawat has completed his thesis entitled " Representation of Post-Apartheid South Africa in Nadine Gordimer's*The House Gun"*under my supervision. He carried his research from December 2015 to March 2016. I hereby recommend his thesis to be submitted for viva.

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Letter of Approval

This is to certify that the thesis entitled " Representation of post-Apartheid South Africa in Gordimer's *The House Gun"*submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by PratapRawat, has been approved by the research committee.

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Abstracts

The present research examines the awful context of widespread violence in Gordimer's s*The House Gun* and comes to the conclusion of the urgency of the cultural constructivism in the post-apartheid country of South Africa. It explores through the illustration of a new type of modern family going through the way of individualism, where they face severe crime from the hand of a homosexual prominent character Duncan. This post-apartheid country has lots of social challenges in store for the black and the white victims together. Black characters are seen through the cunning eye and are reluctantly accepted even though the white fate has been controlled by the former. As there is the need of recovery, this research aims at reconstructing the binaries between the black and the white with the renewal of cultures.

Contents

I. Representation of Contemporaneity in *The House Gun*

This research work focuses on Nadine Gordimer's*The House Gun* (1998), a story of post apartheid narrative in South Africa. A liberal white middle class family is the center of the story. It especially unfolds an awful context of wide spread violence and the urgency of cultural constructivism due to the imitation of western life style. After the apartheid, there are many changes in the lives of the white and the blacks, such as Duncan and Carl Jesperson. People are affected by violence and they try to recover from it. In the contemporary South Africa, the violence ridden people desperately intend to recover from it. So, there is the need of recovery from the violence that is needed to bring the reconciliation and harmony with the help of cultural construction. This study objective of the study it to show the need of cultural construction between blacks and whites. Exploring the novel we find whites' life or fate is controlled or determined by the blacks when Hamiltons' appoint Motsami to defend criminal charges against Duncan. This research aims at reconstructing the binaries between the black and the white and it shows the importance of renewal of cultures between the white and the black.

According to Gordimer herself, she does "not write about apartheid," but about "people who happen to live under that system" (qtd in Brighton J. Uledi-Kamanga xvi). This statement seems to apply to her novel *The House Gun*. Following the 1994 abolition of racial segregation in South Africa, Nobel laureate in literature Gordimer (1923-2014) published *The House Gun* (1998). Her previous works, such as The Conservationist (1974), *Burger's Daughter* (1979) or *July's People* (1981), were aimed at denouncing the atrocities of the apartheid regime. *The House Gun* in contrast, and similarly to her following post-apartheid novels, is aimed at addressing the legacy of the old

regime.Gordimer was born in a small gold mining town of Springs, South Africa. Both of her parents were immigrants. Her mother was born in England, her father in Latvia, then part of the Russian Empire. Although both parents were Jewish by birth, she was raised in a largely secular environment and educated in a Catholic girls school.

In 1998, white South African author and political activist Gordimer published her 12th novel, *The House Gun*. This novel is Gordimer's second post-apartheid novel after *None to Accompany Me*, which was published in 1994. She has written many novels which comment on South African politics. *The House Gun* follows the story of a couple, Calaudia and Harold Lingard, dealing with their son Duncun's murder of one of his house mates. The novel treats the rising crime rate in South Africa and the guns that virtually all households have, as well as the legacy of South African Apartheid and the couples concerns about their son's lawyer who is black. In *The House Gun*,Gordimer shows the reader what the new South Africa is supposed to look like, be it on a small scale. The reason why Gordimer has written a book with such a theme, is to demonstrate how in the new South Africa, the tables are turned. The conversations and actions that take place in *The House Gun* mostly revolve around the murder of a white man committed by a white man. Whereas it is a murder that is committed within the white community, Duncan asks for Hamilton Motsamai, a black solicitor, to defend his case. Harald and Claudia react in shock, but they appear to be the only ones. They come to realise that in the new, modern South Africa, a white man can be assisted by a black solicitor. As Gordimer is a white South African who has lived through both the apartheid days, the transitional period and now lives in a democratic South Africa, she is able to tell the story of the Lindgards "from the inside" (Rochman). Gordimer herself has

experienced the shift of power, in which the black South Africans went from having no rights at all to being allowed to live a free life in which they could finally participate in society, study and fulfil jobs that used to be only for the white, well-educated South Africans.

In *The House Gun*Gordimer explores the complexities of the violence ridden post-apartheid society through a murder trial. Two white privileged liberal parents face the fact that their architect-son has killed his friend. While they turn to a talented black lawyer for help with their son's legal problems their emotional problems run much deeper and both are gone in a genuine crisis of faith.

Similarly, different critics have analyzed the novel from the multiple perspectives. *The House Gun* however, indicates not so much the lack of a subject as a new way of looking at an old subject as a new circumstance – the old subject facing new circumstances – the old subject being the psychological and material effect of white racism on whites, the circumstances being those of post apartheid of South Africa. Lewis highlights this issue in his "Under the Sign of the Gun: Welcome to the Postmodern Melancholy of Gordimer'spost apartheid world". "The micro politics of *The House Gun* suggests that we can read South Africa's transition to full democracy as a paradigmatic change from a modern to postmodern condition"(64). Here for Lewis, gun becomes the center debate where violence is the implication in the transition phase between modernism and post modernism.

In the essay, "The Lawyer's, The Writers Imagination: Professionalism and the story teller's Art in Nadine Gordimer's*The House Gun*" Illene Durst explores the portrayal of attorney Hamilton Motsamaiin*The House Gun*. "A literary Lawyer who

successfully makes community with his client: he maintains an exemplary professionalism and achieves his parents to the extent possible form the emotional trauma and damage done by civilian encounters with the violence of the criminal justice system" (299).

David Medalie in his article "The context of the Awful Event: Gordimer's*The House Gun*" explores question of individual and social responsibility in the context of wide spread violence. The central incident is murder that seems to have no obvious political etiology. "Nonetheless, Gordimer uses this enigmatic crime and its repercussions to probe obliquely the complex relationship between the individual and the social context in the post apartheid South Africa" (633). This article relates that investigation to the often expressed claim that Gordimer's works are predominantly concerned with the relationship between the 'personal' and the 'political'.

Practice of Western life style has an awful impact on the non-Western society which requires the renewal of cultures.The awful context in post apartheid period is never justified. Duncan, a white character practices western lifestyles having awful impact upon the transition phase of post apartheid African society. Duncan's practice of western lifestyles leads him into the tragic situation which is solved only through the coming together of two different cultures. Hamilton Motsamai, the black lawyer has the dominant role to save the life of whites who never admitted the blacks in their life. Finally, whites doubtfully admit black to solve their problems; where Duncan had to be freed from the potential criminal charges for murdering his friend. It is unclear why the writer makes whites hesitatingly admit blacks for their ability and why didn't they try to find other lawyer. What is the Gordimer's intention to bring two different cultures together and

dependent on each other? Why is black lawyer chosen for racial reconciliation? These are some of the questions this research intends to solve in the light of cultural presentation.

There are several theories surrounding domestic violence, including the idea that domestic violence is a learned behavior from childhood and that repressed batters fall into a cycle of violence. For example, the social ecological model recognizes that factors contributing to domestic violence exist at the individual, relationship, community, and societal level. Some factors, such as substance abuse, contribute to the frequency, severity of the abuse while others, such as the systemic acceptance against violence which has a casual relationship to domestic violence.

Violence is a physical force and in many cases it is destructing. It results from a number of reasons: social, economic, religious, ethnic, etc. Sometimes different types of political motives are directly or indirectly interwoven with these causes. Encarta Reference 200 defines violence as “physical attack” especially from other persons which involves violent or physical assault. Thus violence is such a damaging physical attack on person property and this mainly originates from human anger.

Likewise, literature is also not free from violence. The presence of a house gun that is simply there to protect the housemates, demonstrates the persistence of violence in the new South Africa. The title of Gordimer’s novel already suggests that violence is part of life, as even in the domestic area, a gun is needed or at least available to the inhabitants. When Duncan is questioned about the gun in court, he explains that it belonged to everyone living in the house, “it was the gun kept in the house so that if someone was attacked, intruders broke in, whoever it was could defend himself” (218).

Violence and crime, as mentioned before, are part of everyday life and murder seems to be no exception. The fact that Duncan and his housemates own a gun and that throughout the book, nobody seems to think this is unusual implies that the story could not have taken place in a European country. Throughout the book, indirect connections are made between violent acts, murder and city life in South Africa. According to Stephen Clingman, the story suggests that Johannesburg but also South Africa as a country are in one way or another built on murder. Murder has always been there and will always exist, as it is part of society. Moreover, Clingman claims that the murder in the novel stands for South Africa's past, "an inscrutable past whose essence will not finally be interpreted, understood, or redeemed" (156). In the end, the murder committed by Duncan cannot be interpreted, understood or redeemed; Duncan is sentenced to seven years in prison, but why he was able to commit such a crime remains hard to understand for the majority of the people that are involved.

Michel Foucault (1926) was a philosopher, a psychologist and a historian. The power problem is central to his thinking regarding the relations between society, individuals, groups and institutions. The relation of power, meaning that power is always a case of power relations between people. The decent redness of power and meaning that is not concentrated on a single individual or class. The multi-directionality of power that it does not flow only from the more or the less powerful, out rather "comes from below", even if it is nevertheless, "no egalitarian". The strategic nature of power, meaning that it has a dynamic of its own, is intentional. In conclusion, Foucault analyses the relations between individuals and society without assuming that the individual is powerless compared to institutions, groups or states. He does not minimize the restrictions imposed

to individuals, but thinks that power is not concentrated but diffuses throughout the whole society. This allows us to see it at work in each human interaction and thus to see how resistance always shows up.

Moreover, in another part, along with Frierndrich Nietzsche can be read as a great theorist and critic of modernity how do social entities for example, institution practices norm, value, systems, cultures, and share forms of life change? Conversely, how are they maintained and held fixed? How do values and practices for example-way of dividing of the world as property, or ideas of freedom that inspire people to fight-spread of fade, invade or get swept away? And so how can human beings, acting individually or in groups, act most powerfully to transform the social worlds around us.

The disciple of sociology has generated great contribution to scholarship and research about American race relations. Most of the theorizing on American race relations in American in expressed in binary in terms of black and white. Historically, the story of American race relations typically problematizes the “othered” status that is the non white status in America’s hierarchy. In other words, in case of race, it becomes difficult to see the forest for the trees. Thus in sociology, we find less scholarship about the role “whiteness as the norms” plays in sustaining social privilege beyond that which is accorded marginalized others. In order to examine the historical black and white binary paradigm of race in America, it is important to understand it’s structuration. America is inherently a “white” country; in character, in structure and in culture. Needless to say, black Americans create lives of their own. At as a people, they face boundries and construction set by white majority. America’s version of apartheid, while lacking over legal sanction, comes closet to the system even now (4).

The tentative chapter division and the allocation of the timeline of the research are as follows. The first chapter is the introduction of the research and it is also the introduction of the author and the theory and has the discussion of the tool new historical cultural construction theory along with the overview on violence. The second chapter is the application of the theory in the text *The House Gun* with the critical appraisal of the text. The last chapter concludes the research. All in all, the research is the declaration on how there is the necessity of cultural construction aside of violence in the post apartheid violence ridden society.

II. Representation of Post- Apartheid Experience in*The House Gun*

In recent South African history there have been two major shifts in power:first with the imposition of an apartheid in 1949; secondly, the end of the apartheid in 1989. Next to this, many people still think of South Africa as a patriarchy because in the past there was a big difference between the power of men and women. White men had more power than white women, but black men were much more powerful than black women. Black men even postponed to negotiate about women's power because they first wanted to take over the power of the whites.

According to Robert Ross, "on 26 May 1948, white South Africa went to the polls" (122). He explains that the result was surprising, because the National Party under D.F. Malan won the election (122). Ross also explains that this party introduced the system of segregation known as apartheid, which means that as long as this party was in power, people had to live according to the rules of apartheid (123). The party introduced the system as something quite innocent which only wanted to preserve "the various nations of South Africa in all their purity" (124). "Through the Population Registration Act of 1950, the Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 and the Immorality Act of 1950," the state ascertained that specific groups were separated, Ross explains (124). Ross then gives details about the four principles of apartheid:

> State power was in the hands of whites. Secondly, the space of the country, both urban and rural, was to be divided on the basis of 'race'. Thirdly, the supply of black labour, particularly for mines and farms, but also for domestic work and factories, was placed under state control.

> Finally, state power was applied to maintain order, and to regulate all aspects of life, particularly the lives of blacks. (126)

For nearly forty-six years people were to live by these principles whether they were in favour of them, or against them. Blacks had to submit themselves with the law of the whites, where the law was mostly against the liberty of the black people.

According to Ross, there were already indications about the end of apartheid in the late 1970's (174). From around the late 1970's onwards, there was unrest and disagreement about the ruling party. This unrest and the riots were the start of the downfall of white supremacy. On the level of the government, the National Party did not really have a choice and had to accept that the African National Congress (ANC) "wanted the elected representatives to have as much power as possible," according to Ross (204). This means that as soon as the National Party surrendered to the ANC, they were no longer in power. This did not all happen in one day, but it all went quite decently. However, on the level of the people, the power shift was much less decent and much more violent, because the blacks wanted to show their power. The whites had to adapt and the blacks did not show mercy, because the whites also did not show mercy when they were in power. This does not mean that the whites treated black people very badly, but they always made sure that they kept their power. For the people in South Africa it was difficult to estimate the consequences of the imminent power shift. The black people probably longed for the shift to happen, but it also caused anger and uncertainty. However, for the white people it was even more uncertain what would happen with them when they lost their power. There were white people who were not really in favour of apartheid, but who did not act against it either. The power shift was therefore also

frightful, because the whites could only wait to see the consequences. This must have caused anxiety, but also panic because some whites might want to escape South Africa for their safety. On the other hand, it must have felt positively exciting for the blacks who anticipated their imminent freedom and power. Because they wanted to be sure that the shift would actually happen, many blacks went into the streets to fight for their freedom, so there was also some anxiety on their side. This disturbed the public order and probably gave rise to more anxiety and uncertainty for the future of the white people in South Africa.

The consequences of the shift in power were enormous, because it was difficult to decide what was best for South Africa, and not all parties agreed on this point. That is why "date was set for the first fully representative elections in South Africa's history: from 26 to 29 April 1994 South Africa would go to the polls to elect a new constituent and legislative assembly, and hereby a new President" (206). This meant the transition from apartheid to democracy. When Nelson Mandela was in power, he "appreciated the need to reconcile whites with a black-run government" (215). Mandela's government was multiracial and he accepted all races, but nowadays there seems to be no room for whites in the South African government. According to Ross, "memories could not be cleared, and psyches had been scarred by apartheid. It will take a long time before the inequalities of the past are removed, if that ever happens" (222-3). That the power shift has finally taken place is more important for most South Africans.

Because the shift in power relations was going to be a major event of great importance, it seems that Gordimer and Coetzee decided to write upon the topic. After years of racial segregation and static power division, apartheid finally comes to an end.

This is a massive change for all the people in South Africa and that is why it is such an interesting topic. The shift has been something that some people fought for, but also something other people wanted to avoid. All these people must have worried about the consequences of the power shift, because it was uncertain what would happen next. The shift was inevitable, but also dangerous and could cause an unpredictable situation with chaos and lawlessness. After years of being repressed, the black people wanted nothing more than freedom, but perhaps they also wanted revenge. It is fascinating to see what the consequences of the shift are and how it influences people. Clingman explains why the power shift received so much attention in literature. According to Clingman:

> By the 1980's South African fiction began to be preoccupied with thoughts of revolution in South Africa; Gordimer's eight novel, *July's People* (1981) was set at a future moment of revolution itself. There were perhaps good reasons for this overall concern. By this time South Africa's neighbouring countries, Mozambique, Angola and Zimbabwe had won their independence. Inside the country the Soweto Revolt had been quelled, but it had initiated a longer-term period of political upswing. By the 1980s an independent black trade-union movement was gathering in numbers and strength. There was also renewed organization against apartheid, both at the local level and on a broader national basis: within a year of the essay ["Living in the Interregnum"] ... the United Democratic Front had been established, the first such mass movement, legal and active above ground, since the banning of the African National Congress and the Pan - Africanist Congress in 1960. (qtd in Uledi-Kamanga 121)

Because of the developments outside of South Africa, there also arose unrest in South Africa, because this gave hope to the many people who wanted a change. Both Gordimer and Coetzee wanted this change to happen and by writing about it, they made the shift more conceivable and more realistic.

Because apartheid dictated a racial segregation where whites were in power, the end of apartheid also meant a shift in power relations. Because this power shift was a major event in history and because it was expected by many people, it influenced literature greatly. Apartheid is a very well known and contested term. Although many people seem to disapprove of the system nowadays, there were people in history that were in favour of it. Because of many history books, but also because of the novels of Gordimer, apartheid will never be forgotten.

It is first important to note that in *None to Accompany Me* (1994) Gordimer reflected upon whether past burden would be discarded or would remain to threaten the new post-apartheid society, but moreover *The House Gun* reveals that the seeds of violence have accompanied them (638) and, as will be shown, violence has remained habitual in South Africa and has become the new norm (12). Although the murder of Carl Jespersen seems to be isolated from a South African perspective, "the South African context is nevertheless evoked both by the narrator and during Duncan's trial, so that it cannot be ignored". Contextualisation occurs in the following passages:

> Duncan cannot be brought to account for encouragement of robberies, hijackings and rape so regrettably common in this time of transition from long eras of repression during which state brutality

> taught violence to our people generations before the options of freedom in solving life's problems were opened to them.(65)

The climate of violence bears some serious responsibility for the act the accused committed, yes; because of this climate, the gun was there. The gun was lying around in the living-room, like a house cat; on a table, like an ashtray. But the accused bears no responsibility whatever for the prevalence of violence; (271) And in:

> Few of the doctor's patients connected her with one of the cases of violence they might have read about. There were so many; in a region of the country where the political ambition of a leader had led to killings that had become vendettas, fomented by him, a daily tally of deaths was routine as a weather report; elsewhere, taxi drivers shot one another in rivalry over who would choose to ride with them, quarrels in discotheques were settled by the final curse-word of guns. State violence under the old, past regime had habituated its victims to it. People had forgotten there was any other way. (50)

In these excerpts , Gordimer identifies the source of South Africa's "common" violence by placing responsibility on the state which "taught violence to its people generations" and has "habituated its victims to it". In addition, the author clearly emphasises the repercussions of a "violent and crime-ridden society" through Duncan's decision to kill, as she ascribes the murder to "the climate of violence" present in South Africa and thereby absolves Duncan of responsibility. She also evidently presents the ubiquity and prevalence of violence in post-apartheid South Africa, as found in admissions such as: "there were so many cases" and a "daily tally of deaths was

routine as a weather report", and she adds that violence has become so ingrained that "people have forgotten there was any other way". Finally, as suggested by the title, guns in South Africa have become household items, and it is precisely this domestic trait of violence which facilitated the perpetration of the crime by Duncan . If the gun hadn't been there the man on the sofa would not be under the ground of the city.

Furthermore, as the gun has become a necessary transitional item which every white household needs in order to feel secure, barricades are also inevitable and are brought to light in: "as Harold arrives at the security gates of the townhouse complex, he presses the electronic gadget which lets them into their home …" (34) The 21st century gated communities are accounted for the fact that whites have "become strangers in an uncharted land, living in constant fear of random acts of violence by intruders from de facto segregated South Africa townships" and they therefore "barricade themselves in gated communities and arm themselves with a gun in every room" (11). Yet, it ought to be mentioned that the gate is not a contemporary achievement, for it is in itself a legacy of the apartheid regime.

Indeed, the modern gated estate is the 19th century laager (11). The laager was "an encampment protected by a circle of wagons or armoured vehicles" (Merriam-Webster, 2015, online), and it was the Afrikaner settler's strategy against the ever-present black threat. However, guns and ramparts "provide no refuge" (34), for South Africa has today become one of the most violent nations in the world where violence and fear are a way of life.

Finally, in order to show the recurrent use of violence to protect oneself in South Africa, a parallel between the cases of athlete Oscar Pistorius and Gordimer's criminal

will be drawn, based on the findings of cultural anthropologist Scheper-Hughes. First, both individuals received an education and an affluent upbringing in a gated white suburban community in South Africa, which isolated them from the larger society, which is black and poor. Moreover, both sets of parents who claim to be "moderately progressive though disengaged from the social and political realities of democratic South Africa" are forced to appear in an unfamiliar public world and to confront a son who has become a stranger to them. Oscar Pistorius and Duncan were tried by black judges and their sanity was questioned, for they underwent a psychiatric examination that showed no evidence of mental incompetence. Similarly to Duncan's court proceedings, the prosecution in Pistorius' case claimed that the crime was accounted for "jealous rage", and the "handy" nature of the gun was condemned. When the final decision was announced, they shared the same outcome: guilty of murder without premeditation and a five-year sentence.

The eighties witnessed the emergence of a new movement in Anglo-American literary scholarship which, in methodological sophistication, theoretical all-inclusiveness, and classroom appeal, bid fair to rival anything from Germany and France. The moment was ripe for such a homegrown movement to appear. For several years, many scholars in English and American universities ranging from Frederick Crews, George Watson, and E. D. Hirsch, Jr., on one end of the scale to Fredric Jameson, Terry Eagleton, and Frank Lentricchia on the other had been raising a clamor for a return to historical scholarship in the academic study of literature. The historical nature of literary works, it was said, had been badly neglected over the past half century of Anglo-American criticism. The time had come to move beyond the narrowly "formalistic" or "text-centered" approach to

literature. A new historical approach was needed and, in the course of events, a new movement arose to meet the demand.

The "New Historicism," as by general agreement the movement has come to be called, is unified by its disdain for literary formalism. Specifically, leaders of the movement describe themselves as unhappy with the exclusion of social and political circumstances (commonly known as the "context") from the interpretation of literary works; they are impatient with the settled view that a poem is a self-contained object, a verbal icon, a logical core surrounded by a texture of irrelevance. In this they are setting their jaws against the New Criticism, although rather late in the day. The French *nouvelle critique* and German philosophical hermeneutics have intervened, at least in the history of fashions within the university; and the new movement has arisen at least as much in response to these later developments as to a critical establishment which has made a formalistic view of literary works its official doctrine. Thus the New Historicism in literary study has emerged in this decade not so much in the spirit of a counter-insurgency as after the manner of a corporate reorganization. It has been a response not to literature but to literary studies. It has been called forth not by the subject matter under study not by actual poems, novels, playsbut by the institutional situation in which young scholars now find themselves.

The situation in English as the century entered its final two decades was one that placed a greater premium on method than ideas. In addition, there was a rising sense that literary study had reached something of an impasse. On one side were the students of the New Critics, still doing readings of long-accepted texts; on the other, the deconstructionists, showing how texts undo themselves. Both seemed remote from the

true interests of the new professoriate, which had cut its teeth on the political slogans of the sixties. As Jean E. Howard frankly says in a defense of the new movement, by the early eighties professors had grown weary of teaching literary texts as "ethereal entities" floating above the strife of history. For a spell, perhaps, feminism seemed close to solving the dilemma; it appeared to hold out the hope of transforming literary criticism into an agent for social change. But gradually many within the discipline began to awaken to the fact that feminism had no distinctive *method* of its own; the feminist critic knew what she wanted to say about a text, but she had to adopt other interpretive "strategies," as the saying went, to make her themes appear. This began more and more to be the case. Younger critics were having to resort to a tandem operation, using deconstruction or some other variant of poststructuralist method to clear the ground on which an assortment of radical political notions were carted in to raise a new interpretation. But such a procedure left critics anxious lest their interpretations fail to go beyond the already familiar readings of the text. It was in this situation that the New Historicism emerged. It appeared to offer a distinctive approach, a rigorous method, along "with the opportunity to salvage one's political commitments. Indeed, at times the New Historicism seemed almost designed to methodize the political interpretation of literature.

The movement has gained rapid acceptance in English departments. It already has its classical texts (e.g., Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, Louis Adrian Montrose's uncollected essays on Shakespeare, especially the one entitled "Shaping Fantasies"); it has its own journal (*Representations*, published by the University of California Press). Its special methods of interpretation are practiced by a large number of

critics in England and America Jonathan Dollimore, Jane Tompkins, Don E. Wayne, Walter Benn Michaels, Catherine Gallagher, Arthur F. Marotti, Jean E. Howard, Stephen Orgel, Annabel Patterson, and Peter Stallybrass, to name only a few). It has set off an enthusiasm of historical research. Younger critics have begun to comb through parliamentary reports, religious tracts, labor statistics, and dusty stacks of ephemera published by contemporaries of the great English and American writers. Slightly older critics have begun, as it were, to retool themselves to "rehistoricize" their scholarship for the new market conditions. Last year the English Institute devoted a large share of its program to the new approach. Graduate students have begun to catch on, and they had better. The year before, Wesleyan University's English department became the first in the country to advertise a job opening for a New Historicist.

There have been other "new historicisms" before this. Fredric Jameson's style of neo-Marxist historicism as practiced in *The Political Unconscious* (Cornell University Press, 1981) has been described as "new," but Jameson locates the grounds of his argument not in historical research but in recent theory; he is "historicist" only in respecting the past as past while seeking to make it serve the present. Similarly, Wesley Morris's *Toward a New Historicism* (Princeton University Press, 1972) is unrelated to the movement which has usurped that name. A student of Roy Harvey Pearce, Morris sought an approach that would somehow balance the recognition that a literary work belongs to its own time with the confidence that literary works can nevertheless transcend their time. Perhaps needless to say, Morris' effort was not followed up by younger critics. The winds of doctrine in university English departments in the last quarter of this century have not been favorable to anyone who suggested the possibility of transcendence.

But the movement that now goes by the name of New Historicism differs from both of these. Perhaps the central statement of its themes is the introduction to Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. Even the title suggests the main focus of the movement. Within the ranks of the New Historicism, literature is considered one of the social forces that contribute to the making of individuals; it acts as a form of social control. Although most New Historicists are scrupulous to distinguish themselves from Marxist critics, the fact remains that the central task of the New Historicism is the same as that of Marxist criticism: first to call into question the traditional view of literature as an autonomous realm of discourse with its own problems, forms, principles, activities, and then to dissolve the literary text into the social and political context from which it issued. In fact, the New Historicism tries explicitly to solve the theoretical difficulty in Marxist criticism of relating the cultural superstructure to the material base. Its claim to newness might be put in terms of its claim to having solved that problem.

What are the principles or what Greenblatt calls the "enabling presumptions" behind the New Historicist method? The movement establishes itself upon four main contentions. Literature is historical, which means (in this exhibition) that a literary work is not primarily the record of one mind's attempt to solve certain formal problems and the need to find something to say; it is a social and cultural construct shaped by more than one consciousness. The proper way to understand it, therefore, is through the culture and society that produced it. Literature, then, is not a distinct category of human activity. It must be assimilated to history, which means a particular vision of history. Like works of literature, man himself is a social construct, the sloppy composition of social and political forces there is no such thing as a human nature that transcends history. Renaissance man

belongs inescapably and irretrievably to the Renaissance. There is no continuity between him and us; history is a series of "ruptures" between ages and men. As a consequence, the historian/ critic is trapped in his own "historicity." No one can rise above his own social formations, his own ideological upbringing, in order to understand the past on its terms. A modern reader can never experience a text as its contemporaries experienced it. Given this fact, the best a modern historicist approach to literature can hope to accomplish, according to Catherine Belsey, is "to use the text as a basis for the reconstruction of an ideology."

Such an approach stands traditional historical scholarship on its head. The first principle of traditional scholarship its generally agreed-upon point of departure was that the recovery of the original meaning of a literary text is the whole aim of critical interpretation. But the New Historicism premises that recovery of meaning is impossible, to attempt it naive. What practitioners of the new method are concerned with, by contrast, is the recovery of the original ideology which gave birth to the text, and which the text in turn helped to disseminate throughout a culture. This dimension of critical interpretation has been neglected by traditional scholars not merely because the required concept, the "enabling presumption" of ideology, was unavailable to them until recently; in the New Historicist view, it had never been widely attempted because literary texts themselves suppress the means by which they construct ideology. A traditional formalistic approach, treating the text as self-contained, can never locate these ideological operations, also known as "representations." Only a historicist approach, treating the text as one element in the ideology of an age, can hope to lay them bare.

Although the movement represents itself, then, as being more faithful to the true, hitherto-neglected nature of literature, in reality its key assumptions are derived from the institutional milieu in which it arose. Its concepts and categories are simply those which, over the last few years, have conditioned a large part of the literary thought within the university. Thus, the New Historicism is critical of the ‘‘enabling presumptions" of its more distant, but not of its more immediate, predecessors. For instance, the movement follows poststructuralism in its assurance that literary works mean any number of things to any number of readers (the doctrine of the plurality of meaning), freeing New Historicists to find the warrant for their interpretations not in the author’s intentions for his work but in the ideology of his age. Similarly, the New Historicist effort to assimilate the literary text to history is guaranteed by the poststructuralist doctrine of textuality, which states that the text is not aloof from the surrounding context, that there is contiguity, an ebb and flow, between text and whatever might once have been seen as "outside" it. Yet these ideas are obtained secondhand. They are not established by original inquiry or argument. They are simply the precipitate of an academic climate in which a plurality of meanings is recognized as offering the greatest good for the greatest number of literary scholars, and in which the re-assimilation of text to context is the goal of practically everybody.

The other sources of the movement will be equally familiar to observers of the academic scene. The doctrine of historicity is a Heideggerian motif that came to the movement via the writings of German hermeneutical philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer. The New Historicist conception of ideology is not that of Marx, but rather that of the French structuralist Marxist Louis Althusser though, in plain fact, the New Historicists

seem more directly influenced by expositors of Marxist doctrine like Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton than by Althusser. Finally, in its general orientation toward scholarship and historical research the New Historicism dances attendance on the figure of the late Michel Foucault. Again, though, the influence of Foucault is a generalized and secondhand one: it permeates the New Historicist conception of history as a succession of *episteme* or structures of thought that shape everyone and everything within a culture. But this is no more than to say that Foucault has provided New Historicists with their own *episteme*. Their work cannot really be said to extend or elaborate upon Foucault's. Nor is it critical of Foucault's concept of the *episteme*. It merely embraces the concept as a given.

What do these assumptions lead New Historicists to argue? The initial effort is to relocate the literary text among the other, traditionally nonliterary "discursive practices" of an age. The representation of character in the nineteenth-century novel, for instance, is said to be bound up with contemporary debates over parliamentary representation; or, Iago's plot against Othello is described as typical of Elizabethan attempts to deny the otherness of subject peoples. But the larger purpose of New Historicist inquiry is the reconstruction of the actual (as opposed to the "represented") relations in which people lived during a particular time. For example, in one of the most widely read essays by a New Historicist, Louis Adrian Montrose interprets *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as an ideological attempt to comprehend the power of Queen Elizabethto make sense of it and place it safely within boundswhile simultaneously upholding the authority of males within Elizabethan culture. By citing a variety of contemporary writing (in order to reinstate the "discursive practices" of the age), Montrose demonstrates the Elizabethans'

ambivalence toward their queen: abiding respect mixed with a dark desire to master her sexually. In this context, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is reread as a fable of the restoration of male governance. Mothers are significantly excluded from the *dramatis personae* of the play, just as the danger of matriarchy (with which the Elizabethans flirted in their fascination with the myth of the Amazons) was quietly suppressed by the celebration of Elizabeth's virginity. The very real possibility that power might actually be passed from mother to daughter was concealed from women of the age by such cultural productions as Shakespeare's play, in which Elizabeth was a willing collaborator as much by her decision to remain unwed and barren as by her "cultural presence" within the play.

It is in this sense that works of literature such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are "representations" of the culture from which they emerge. They are the emanations, the active agents, of the culture's circumambient ideology. Literary works are both what a culture produces as well as what reproduces the ideology. The term "representations" is misleading insofar as it suggests a mimetic theory of literature. Nothing could be further from New Historicist truths. In fact, the New Historicism presumes that artistic fiction does not imitate human action; it mediates it. That is, fiction is defined as the lens through which a certain portrait of the human experience is brought into focus. And as mediation rather than as imitation of social practices, it can be thus be said to *shape* rather than to *reflect* an ages understanding of human experience and potentiality.

In New Historicist interpretation, as a consequence, history is not viewed as the cause or the source of a work. Instead, the relationship between history and the work is seen as a dialectic: the literary text is interpreted as both product and producer, end and source, of history. One undeniable side benefit of such a view is that history is no longer

conceived, as in some vulgar historical scholarship, as a thing wholly prior, a process which completes itself at the appearance of the work. At the same time, though, it must not be thought that the New Historicism dispenses with the cognitive category of priority. For the New Historicist it is ideology, not history, which is prior. The literary text is said to be a constituent part of a culture's ideology by virtue of passing it on; but the ideology nevertheless exists' intact' intelligible, in a form separate from (and therefore prior to) the work. If it didn't, the critic could not discern a relationship between work and ideology; and if the ideology were not prior to the work, it wouldn't be a historical relationship.

But the apriorism of ideology in New Historicist thought raises large questions. The principal one is this: How does the critic know that the ideology located in the work of literature under discussion genuinely belongs to the past? How can he be sure that the ideology is not simply his own political sympathy which has been injected into the work and then ‘‘located" there by means of an ingenious selection of the evidence? These questions occur spontaneously to anyone who reads widely in New Historicist writing, so much of which expresses a politically *au courant* sympathy for exploited peoples, powerless women, workers, slaves, and peasants. A critic like Stephen Greenblatt is too intelligent not to acknowledge that his own sympathy for such peoples is *a priori*. In the essay that launched the New Historicist journal Representations, Greenblatt interprets a Durer sketch in *The Painter's Manual* (1525) for a monument commemorating a victory over rebellious peasantsa somewhat ludicrous design topped off by a peasant stabbed in the backas ironic and subversive.Greenblatt goes on to admit, though, that ‘‘the bitter irony we initially perceived [in Durer's sketch] was constituted less by concrete evidence of Durer's subversiveness than by our own sympathy for the peasants, sympathy

conditioned by our century's ideology, by recent historical scholarship, and no doubt above all, by our safe distance from the fear and loathing of 1525." He does not stop there, however. This admission, he continues, "though necessary, seems inadequate, for our solidarity with early sixteenth-century German peasants is of interest *only insofar as it seems to have been called forth by Durer's monument* and not simply read into it" (emphasis added). Yet how can the critic be certain that the work studied has not simply provided him with an occasion for a renewed outbreak of familiar feeling, like a pop song from our adolescence that reminds us of a girl we once ached for? Greenblatt passes silently over such a question. The real question for him "is how Durer could have created a brilliant, detailed, and coherent design that could lend itself to a strong interpretation so much at odds with his own probable intentions"? But this isn't a scholarly question so much as it is a dilemma for a certain kind of scholar. For such a scholar (i.e., one for whom the intentions of the artist are not normative), almost any work, no matter how brilliant, detailed, and coherent, can be made to lend itself to almost any interpretation at all. For Greenblatt, the aim of scholarship is to square the artist's intentions with the scholar's own sympathy. He simply *assumes* that Durer's design is "at odds" with the sympathy any sensitive modern would feel. The sympathy is treated as a fact of equal importance (and comparable ontological status) with the design. No effort is made to ascertain whether the design really is at odds with anything; it is simply treated as a *donnée* of interpretation that it must be. The critic knows because of the way he feels.

The error of the New Historicism lies not in its political allegiances, however, but in the logic of its method. That method might be described as a way of salvaging initially favored hypotheses (or "strong interpretations") in the face of a lack of concrete evidence.

Two main objections to such a procedure come to mind. First, we may simply disagree with the conviction that has inspired the argument in the first place. We may not happen to agree that it is a *prima facie* likelihood that all of the men within any given culture have sought to oppress the women or that those who express contempt for peasants are expressing the ambivalence of a wish-fulfillment fantasy. And if we disagree, no amount of evidence about the "discursive practices" of the age will persuade us otherwise. The very *choice* of what to quote in corroboration of this view (and what to withhold) will be made on the basis of the conviction that it is truea conviction that is held long in advance of a search for evidence. But secondly, even if for the sake of argument we grant this assumption, we are not bound to any conclusion reached by its means. We can yield the point that Elizabethan culture u as patriarchal, or that those who serve ruling minorities desire secretly to see them toppled, and still go on to deny that *AMidsummer Night's Dream* or Durer's sketch contain these meanings. If it is not self-contradictory for us to do thisif we can simultaneously grant an assumption and reject its interpretive significanceit follows that any interpretation grounded upon an unproven assumption about a work's historical context is trifling, if not untenable. Only if a reader of a New Historicist argument is prepared to accept its *a priori* assumptions can its conclusions be accepted as true to history. The essential categories of New Historicist thought make the necessary facts appear.

"The whole point" of the New Historicist enterprise, Jean E. Howard says, "is to grasp the terms of the discourse which made it possible for contemporaries to see the 'facts' of their own time in a particular wayindeed, made it possible to see certain phenomena *as* facts at all."At first glance, this objective appears to be little different from

that of traditional historical interpretation: the discourse of the past is grasped in its own terms. But what has been subtly introduced is a comparison. The New Historicist sees facts that the people of the time did not, and this special insight is what enables him to grasp the "discursive practices" that "produced" the facts that the people *did* see. But there remains a question: How can the New Historicist be certain that this second set of "facts"those so painfully clear to a modern readerare not merely produced by the discursive practices of his own time? Surely the terms in which he explains the past"representations," "subversiveness," "cultural presence," etc.belong to no age so much as his own. They are to be numbered among the discursive practices of the recent academic past. How then does the New Historicist know that the facts which show up so clearly in his interpretive framework can also be found in the distant past? There is no provision for them in his own theory of historical knowledge. If he can never escape his own historicity, how can the New Historicist know for certain that those "facts" exist at all?

Despite its theoretical sheen, the New Historicism is strikingly unphilosophical about these and other problems of knowledge raised by its methods of interpretation. Movement writers never explain how it is that, though we are unable to recover the original meaning of a literary text, we are nevertheless able to reconstruct its original ideology. Nor do they account for why, though we cannot experience a text from an earlier age as its original readers would have experienced it, this problem disappears when we are faced by a text from the more recent pastsay, a critical essay by a New Historicist. Indeed, it is clear that the New Historicism’s categories of history are the standard academic ones. Although the movement is publicly contemptuous of the

"periodization" of academic history, the uses to which New Historicists put the Foucauldian notion of the *episteme* amount to very little more than the same practice under a new, improved label. A historical age is conceived of as a structure of thought held together by the same discursive practices. But the extent and duration of an *episteme* is never fixed, and how one can be distinguished from another is never explained, except by the use of such labels as "Renaissance" or "Victorian England." Problems like these are not confronted, because academic categories in which New Historicist thinking occurs act something like ear-stoppers against unwelcome sounds.

None of these doubts is likely to dampen the enthusiasm within English departments for the new movement. The vindication is simply too persuasive. "If we don’t do it this way we can’t justify interpreting literary works any longer," movement regulars seem to be saying, "or what’s worse, we’ll have to go back to our old ways." Hence the distinctive terminology: "discursive practices," "representations," "mediations," "contradictions," "ruptures," "subversion." What the New Historicism offers to students of literature is the joy of new explanations, new paradigms. It does not designate an unexplored area of scholarly investigation. It does not raise new problems, new questions. If its attempts to "historicize" literary study were merely an inducement to look into new kinds of documents, to ask about the relation of literature to social history in a new way, the movement would perform a service for scholarship. But it does not. The New Historicism cannot be considered a new subspecialty within the discipline of English in the same sense as the older subspecialties of textual criticism or Renaissance studies. It is instead an academic specialty in the same sense that feminism isa school of interpretation predisposed to find the same themes in every work it reads and to explain

them always in the same terms. The specialization, in other words, is not a disciplinary but a bureaucratic one. It seeks to establish a new jurisdiction in a reorganized university. At such a juncture, the question of method becomes a matter of group loyalty. New Historicists like to picture themselves as challenging "the institution of criticism"breaking loose from what Jane Tompkins describes as "the extremely narrow confines of literary study as it is now practiced within the academy." In reality, however, the movement is another step toward the reconfinement of literary study. As jobs are created for New Historicists and space in the critical journals is set aside for their essaysas academic decisions are increasingly made on the basis not of scholarly competence but of methodological affiliation the pressure on younger scholars and graduate students to enlist in the movement becomes enormous: that way employment, advancement, and prestige lie. It seems to worry no one that this might take away from individual scholars the determination of what sort of research to pursue and put it in the hands of hiring committees and editorial boards. Yet such a state of affairs can only end by narrowing the possibilities for fruitful scholarship and abridging the academic freedom of those who would go their own way.

The philosopher Michael Oakeshott has pointed out that a student of the past cannot learn the history of something without first discovering what kind of thing it is. In this respect, the New Historicism is not a genuine historical inquiry; it does not inquire into the true nature of literary works, because it is confident it already knows what they are. They are agents of ideology. Contrary to appearances, the movement is not an effort to discover what it means for a literary work to be historical; it is really little more than an attempt to get literary works to conform to a particular vision of history. For the

university as a whole the movement represents a further stage in literary scholarship's progressive abandonment of literature.

Finally, it is almost without any doubt that Duncan and Pistorius would have "ended up on the gallows" if the death penalty had not been abolished in 1994. In this transitional period of South African reconciliation, it can be asserted that these cases were "judged with reason and justice tempered by mercy and compassion" for both judges acknowledged the "loss that could never be undone" but remembered that it was necessary that:

> the State keep in mind the philosophy of punishment as rehabilitation of an individual, not as condemnation of the putative representative of society's present ills whose punishment therefore must be harsh and heavy enough to deal with collective guilt. (272)

In this excerpt, and similarly to the words used by Pistorius' judge, Gordimer evokes the language of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as she tries to "achieve balance based on proportionality" (12). The author advocates a sentence which is "commensurate with the wrong-doing of the individual ", "not dependent upon the convicted person's social or sexual morals" and "which is just both to the victim and the accused" (272).

> I've found out that you think it's a discovery, it's something that's come to you that has never been known before. But it's always been there, it's been discovered again and again, forever. Again and again, what Odysseus did, and what Homer, whoever he was, knew. Violence is a repetition we don't seem able to break; (294)

Gordimer clearly asserts that violence is atavistic. “It’s always been there, it’s been discovered again and again, forever. Again and again,” and it “is a repetition we don’t seem able to break”. In other words, violence is like “a creature with an instinct to survive and a low cunning of its own” (639). Moreover, neither Pistorius nor Duncan is actually physically threatened by a black outsider. The ominousness comes from within themselves and their acquisition of means of violence drives them to act completely against their own nature (162). In fact, notwithstanding the textual evidence of Duncan’s “sense of moral responsibility, Christian and Humanist education” (235), the prevalence of violence that has become the norm in South Africa leads him to commit the unconceivable: “the taking of another life” (261). Furthermore, it can be argued that the killing of another person is an attempt atdestroying the prominent natural evil “that plagues our existence” (292), for the enemy is us : “nous sumptuouscreatures mêlées d’amour et du mal” (183).To begin with, when the Lindgards are informed of their son being defended by a black advocate, the self-styled liberal couple is shocked, for both spouses are “pervaded with unconscious racism” (65). This mistrust towardsMotsamai is notably documented in:

> They had heard it at once, in the shock of the name; the choice of a black man. Claudia is not one of those doctors who touch black skin indiscriminately along with white, in their work, but retain liberal prejudices against the intellectual capacities of blacks. Yet she is questioning, and he is; in the muck in which they are stewing now, where murder is done, old prejudices still writhe to the surface. (33)

What Claudia and Harald are “questioning” is Motsamai’s exact competence, as

found in the following utterance: “is he really a competent lawyer? We could get someone else. Anyone.”(9) It is therefore evident that anybody other than a black advocate would better suit the Lindgards’ views. Yet, they somehow reject the racist label by resorting to so-called facts, as encountered in: “due to racial prejudice in the old regimes, black lawyers have had far less experience than white lawyers, and experience is what counts.” (38) Finally, in spite of their adamant objection towards a black defence for their son, the parents come to see in the person of Motsamai some sort of salvation, as found in: “could be an advantage. If there’s one of the black judges on the bench.” (33) The Lindgardshowever ashamed of it (33)perpetuate the attitude of black submission being beneficial to white people. Indeed, having a black advocate for their son’s plea was socially useful as it could have lessened Duncan’s sentence; and as was already mentioned earlier, the judge’s sentence was in fact particularly lenient.

Finally, in order to account for the couple’s discrimination, it can be asserted that racism towards the black character of Motsamai from part of the white community shows the melancholy of the lost white supremacy over black people, for the Lindgards’ distrust results from the “racial anguish at the loss of power” (54). In fact, in *The House Gun*, blacks are no longer dependent upon white people; on the contrary, the latter depend upon the former and this reversed dependence is noticeably found in the following passages: “Motsamai, the stranger from the Other Side of the divided past. They are in his pink-palmed black hands ”(86) and in: one of those kept-apart strangers from the Other Side has come across and they

are dependent on him. The black man will act, speak for them. They have become those who cannot speak, act, for themselves.

Furthermore, not only does this new dependence upon Motsamai irritate the liberal couple, but so does his exceptional newfound access to power. In fact, the description of the black lawyer wearing an “elegant” and “particularly well cut” suit sitting in a “majestic maroon-leather upholstered chair” (59) in a “well-appointed office” suggests “ostentation and vanity” (53). And this vanity is perceived by theLindgards as arrogance. Claudia regardsMotsamai as “full of himself and somehow arrogant” (43), and Duncan describes him as “ a bit of a pompous old bastard, but who’s alright” (62). Gordimer accentuates Motsamai’s new place in a world of power and wealth to which he was previously not entitled by stressing his acting role in society. Time and time again, Motsamai is described as a “dramaturge” (98) who reduces justice to performance (54). In short, it therefore seems that Gordimer’s appraisal of Motsamaiwho embodies “the emergent black elite in South Africa”is pessimistic, for “the lure of the power and wealth that hypnotized his Boer predecessors remains an irresistible temptation to their African successor and tends to perpetuate the spectre of the apartheid state” (54). Yet, contrasting with the pessimistic appraisal of Motsamai, a more positive characterisation is found, for it can be argued that the black lawyer embodies a Nelson Mandela-like figure.

Among the traits shared by Motsamai and Nelson Mandela, the first and most obvious one is their skin colour: a dark complexion. Moreover, in spite of their uneducated familial background, they managed to earn graduate degrees in Law and they practised in established law firms (Nelson, 2014, online), and their

political activity led them to be arrested and imprisoned (37). Finally, similarly to Mandela who was perceived by whites and blacks to be the only one able to absolve the sin of apartheid, Motsamai is acknowledged as the messiah by the Lindgards: the only one able to defend their son and the "most capable individual available" (30).

Motsamai'ssalvatory function is also found in the following excerpt: "Motsamai is providential… a star was needed and he appeared in our constellation… He's what the popular press would term much sought-after." (38) As shown, Motsamai is given a "towering shadow of a deity" (41). However,a major divergence between Motsamai and Nelson Mandela ought to be pointed out. On the South African societal level, Mandela embodied the democratic spirit and the triumph over apartheid, while Motsamai's behaviour, as previously demonstrated, is threatening and endangers the stability of South African post-apartheid democracy.

Not only does Gordimer then show the reminiscence of white racism in post-apartheid South Africa, but she also somehow legitimates the post-apartheid whites' resistance to the emergent black elite in South Africa, epitomised by Motsamai, for the lawyer's newfound access to power and arrogant behaviour threaten the stability of democratic principles.

Finally, Gordimer's choice of characterising most of the individuals in *The House Gun* as being homosexual and bisexual is not trivial. In doing so, as will be evidenced, the author challenges the established South African patriarchalism and colonialism, whose social systems associated homosexuality with deviance (112). Yet, it ought to be mentioned that although Gordimer's purpose is to illustrate the necessity for

change in South Africa, her representation of bisexuality in *The House Gun* is driven with contradictions: now denounced and now celebrated.

First, intolerance towards sexual liberation is found with Duncan's father, who, in an attempt to rationally explain the crime committed by his son, attributes it to the "mindless vacillation attached to bisexuals" (70). Headds that "apparently, Duncan did not know what he wanted to be" (121) and it is precisely this instability that led his son to "gratify his heart's deepest desire" to murder (71). In addition, by calling a psychiatrist to testify in court, Motsamai questions Duncan's sanity , and the deviant nature of bisexuality is expressed by the doctor in: Cumulative provocation reaching its climax in the subject's total loss of control.Lindgard is a man with a bisexual nature. That in itself is a source of personality conflict. (229)

As shown in this excerpt, bisexuality is associated with a "total loss of control" and a "personality conflict", which is reminiscent of patriarchal and colonialist views. More examples of this purported deviation from normality are found in the judge's moral conclusion, in which not only homosexuality, but also the open and shared sexual relationships within the communal house are perceived as a "transgression of acceptable standards" (271). With his utterance, the prosecutor attempted to suggest "a continuum of transgression, ranging from murder to homosexuality, and to punish for all of it" (641) and precisely, it is not insignificant that the judge condemns Duncan to serve seven years of imprisonment for it was the period of incarceration for convicted homosexuals during the apartheid regime (BBC NEWS, 1998, online). Furthermore, uneasiness towards newly gained sexual liberation in the

Post-apartheid democratic regime finds a focus in the character of Carl Jespersen, for he is depicted by the popular attributes ascribed to homosexuality and bisexuality: an outsider, whose sexual behaviour goes "beyond the limits", a disrupter of stability because of his excessive sexual appetite and desire, and a deceiver, for quickly tiring his conquests (69). Thus, Carl Jespersen seems to serve as the embodiment of the lack of restraint that is typical of the post-apartheid generation (69-70). Finally, in the following utterance:

> "who really can follow these bisexual variations", the omission of the question mark stresses the novelty of homosexuality as being officially accepted by the civil authority and the position of the adverb, preceding the modal auxiliary, lays emphasis on rareness along with scandalousness (67).

From another perspective, sexual liberation, and more accurately bisexuality, rather than being condemned, appears to be celebrated. Indeed, KhuluDladla's description of Duncan as being an "interesting guy" with whom "you can work out ideas , politics, art, music, God no frontiers"(222) opposes the previous pathological nature of bisexuality. Here, it is seen as a valuable characteristic that enables Duncan to interact freely with anyone on any topics.

Moreover, Gordimer associates homosexuality and bisexuality with liberation from the dull ordinary life by the youth culture, who, for being a new generation, has a more relaxed attitude both to race and sexual behaviour. Evidence can be found in admissions such as: "in that house, as the saying goes: no problem, black and white, brothers in bed together" (160). From the perspective of Duncan's generation, "the real

liberation" (120) is the permeability of racial and sexual boundaries, as it is considered "as superiority beyond the ordinary humdrum." (120) It can therefore be alleged that the author, through her characters, provides "a lens through which Duncan's parents and the readers may reconceptualize differences and relationships" (70), so as to test the reader's capacity to interpret beyond binary categories in gender and depart from hetero-normativity.

Finally, new patterns of family structures are put forward in The *House Gun*. In fact, the shared house exemplifies a more progressive society in terms of its occupants: an unconventional group which is "mostly homosexual, but not entirely so; mostly white, but including one black man; mostly male, but including one woman; mostly South African, but including one foreigner" (66). The house is "a place where people just turn up to eat together at night, a sort of family. Better than a traditional and nuclear family, a lot of friendship and trust between them"(208). The emphasis laid on a "family of choice" rather than a "family of blood" (71-2) is made even more explicit in the Lindgards' acceptance of Natalie's child, in spite of his unknown parentage.

In other words, notwithstanding the reminiscence of patriarchal and colonialist views to be found in *The House Gun* and Gordimer's ambivalent interpretation of bisexuality, it can be argued that the author advocates tolerance towards sexual and racial minorities through the new kind of family unit which, in a microcosmic way, enacts the democratic South African society in which there is no discrimination on the basis of race, gender or sexual orientation.

To conclude, departing from a central incident being a murder which bears no apparent political consequence to former segregated South Africa, the 'national anti-apartheid spokesperson', in her 1994 novel *The House Gun*, succeeds in addressing the legacy of the apartheid regime in democratic South Africa and in exploring individual and collective responsibility in a crime-ridden society. As shown, although the post-apartheid constitution has become more progressive in terms of allowing more racial, sexual and gender freedom to its citizens, they are nevertheless faced with a disobedient society in which "old prejudices still writhe to the surface" (33). Colonialist, patriarchal and binarist views have become intrinsic to the South African people because for more than forty-five years, these ideologies were norms. In *The House Gun*,Gordimer denounces not only the white's unconscious racism, which is nourished by an unwillingness to accept their fall from power and grace simultaneously, but also the vanity of black newcomers into power, which threatens the stability of democracy. The author also advocates the essentialness of the absence of discrimination based on gender, race and sexual preferences and the necessary regulation of firearms, if a viable and stable democracy, in the continuum of the one devised by Nelson Mandela, is to be achieved.

III. Historicity in *The House Gun*

The events in Gordimer's*The House Gun* can be read as a symbol for South Africa's past and present, while it questions people's will and ability to forgive and forget. Duncan's act, killing his own housemate, is not only an example of the violence that has remained part of everyday South African life, it can also be connected to the position of the white community in South Africa's past. Whereas white South Africans did not necessarily kill black South Africans, they did take away their rights and made it almost impossible for them to live normal lives. As Clingman mentions, the murder Duncan has committed can never really be explained, let alone be understood or redeemed, which is comparable to South Africa's past. The punishment Duncan has to endure, not only the seven years he has to spend in prison, but more so the burden he has to carry being a murderer for the rest of his life, can be compared to the burden the white community has to bear in the years after apartheid.

In other words, the memories of patriarchal and colonialist views to be found in *The House Gun* and Gordimer's unbiased views on the homosexuality has been illustrated with the help of new type of family going through the way of individualistic lifestyles. It is the satire on the condition of the post apartheid condition of the family enduring the tolerance towards sexual and racial minorities through the new attempt which enacts the democratic South African society in which there is no discrimination on the basis of race, gender or sexual orientation. As shown, although the post-apartheid constitution has become more progressive in terms of allowing more racial, sexual and gender freedom to its citizens, they are nevertheless faced with a disobedient society in which old prejudices still writhe to the surface.

The House Gun suggests that for black but also for white South Africans, it might take a long time before all that happened in the past is forgiven and forgotten. Like Claudia and Harald, white South Africans will at some point have to work with or rely on black South Africans and come to realise the reversal that has taken place. The guilt they feel for not having participated in the anti-apartheid movement, while they now need the assistance of their black compatriots can be interpreted as a punishment.

To conclude, although Gordimer's*The House Gun* tells a personal story, it can be interpreted as an example of how violence, crime and the issue of racial differences continue to exist in the new South Africa. At first, *The House Gun* seems to render mainly a personal and private story, as it revolves around the Lindgard family, the criminal offence their son has committed and the different relationships with people that are involved. Yet, *The House Gun* also has a political and a public side particularly when regarding South Africa's violent history and its controversial politics. While Gordimer has written a post-apartheid novel, it does not look back on the apartheid days but instead focuses on the shift of power and the question of who is in charge in the new South Africa. What is more, by portraying life on a small scale in modern South Africa, Gordimer demonstrates the freedom the South African society now allows.

Thus, *The House Gun* paints a picture of how on the one hand, the new South Africa has created new opportunities and allows for power to be shared with black South Africans, but on the other, it shows that the country remains haunted by its past, and violence and crime affects all races and all layers of society.

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