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**Space and Censorship in Nadine Gordimer: A Literary Geography**

**Rosa Frances Lyster (LYSROS001)**

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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## Abstract

In South Africa, questions of space and censorship are inseparable. It is impossible to discuss one without discussing the other. The apartheid censors set themselves up as “guardians of the literary,”<sup>1</sup> purporting to create a protected space where a particularly South African literature could flourish. In this thesis, my argument is that to be a “guardian of the literary” meant to be a guardian of space in literature, the way it was represented and the way characters moved through it. In order to explore this argument I have focused on the censors’ response to one writer in particular, Nadine Gordimer. My argument will show that in Gordimer, some spaces seem to be more acceptable than others, as evidenced by the censors’ response to her work. Six of her novels were submitted for scrutiny by the Censorship Board. Three were banned, and three were passed. In *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and its Cultural Consequences*, Peter McDonald asks “If all her novels . . . engaged with the historical circumstances of apartheid South Africa in especially powerful and critical ways, then why were they not all deemed equally threatening to the established order?”<sup>2</sup> My argument is that while it is difficult to provide a definitive answer, it is possible to make sense of the censors’ decisions regarding her work by undertaking an analysis of the novels’ literary geography. Focusing on the prevalence of certain spaces and the absence of others, and the way that characters move through these spaces, it is clear that they represent differing degrees of threat to the established order. In the censors’ reports on Gordimer’s work, crossing a physical boundary was the equivalent of crossing a moral boundary.

Both the apartheid planners and the censors were fixated on boundaries and borders, on the importance of keeping some people in and more people out. My argument is that what the architects of apartheid tried to do in reality, the censors tried to do in fiction. Their attempt to police the borders of the imaginary meant that some spaces were more acceptable than others, that some stories were told while others were ignored. In my final chapter, I argue that the effects of this can still be seen in contemporary novels written about South Africa. The censors had such a powerful hand in “deforming”<sup>3</sup> literature that their fingerprints can still be detected today. A close analysis of certain elements of Patrick Flanery’s *Absolution* (2012) will show that the structure and form of the novel corresponds in interesting ways with the apartheid censors’ ideas of what literature should do and be.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter McDonald, *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and its Cultural Consequences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 52

<sup>2</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 224.

<sup>3</sup> J.M. Coetzee & David Atwell, *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), 300.

Using the work of Franco Moretti, Pierre Bourdieu and Peter McDonald, among many others, this thesis fuses elements of the field of critical literary geography with a close reading of Gordimer's novels and the censors' reports on them. In doing so, I hope to make the case that in South African literature (to paraphrase Franco Moretti), *what* happens is not as important as *where* it happens.

## Chapter One: Introduction

The “drama of space in South Africa”<sup>4</sup> plays out in many theatres. My focus is on one in particular, that of censorship in the apartheid era. In South Africa, questions of space and censorship are inseparable. It is impossible to talk about one without talking about the other. One of the most thorough assessments of apartheid-era censorship has been undertaken by Peter McDonald in *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and its Cultural Consequences*.<sup>5</sup> McDonald’s key thesis is that the apartheid-era censors, under the terms set out by the Publications Control Acts (1963 and 1974) set themselves up as “guardians of the literary”<sup>6</sup> by creating a set of artificially sophisticated definitions of what literature in South Africa was supposed to be and do. This “elaborate exercise in bad faith”<sup>7</sup> allowed the censors to give the impression that they were an autonomous body, committed to carving a space where a particularly South African literature could develop. McDonald makes the point that stated concerns over whether or not a text was “literary” enough to be acceptable acted essentially as a feeble smokescreen for a much more oppressive and rigid form of control. He argues that censorship, of course, was actually about state security and the suppression of political dissent<sup>8</sup>

In my own discussion, I would like to extend McDonald’s conclusions by focusing on the censors’ response to one novelist in particular, Nadine Gordimer, whose works belong to “the eccentric sub-canon of prize-winning books that were banned in South Africa.”<sup>9</sup> I want to show that what the censors sought to control in Gordimer’s work was the way space was represented, that, to paraphrase Franco Moretti in *Atlas of the European Novel*, what happened was not as important as where it happened.<sup>10</sup> To be a “guardian of the literary” meant to be a guardian of space in literature. If, as Foucault argues, “space is fundamental in any exercise of power,”<sup>11</sup> and if, as Lefebvre states, “new social relations demand a new space”<sup>12</sup> then how better to prevent any kind of new social relations from arising than by ensuring that new spaces do not exist, either in reality or in fiction? Looking at the censors’ reports, it is clear that in Gordimer’s work, crossing a physical boundary was the equivalent of crossing a moral one.

<sup>4</sup> Tony Morphet in *Blank: Architecture, Apartheid and After*, Hilton Judin and Ivan Vladislavic, eds. (Cape Town: David Philip, 1998), 5E.

<sup>5</sup> Peter McDonald, *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and its Cultural Consequences*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 52

<sup>7</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 85.

<sup>8</sup> Peter McDonald, “The Politics of Obscenity: *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and the Apartheid State,” *English Studies in Africa*, Vol. 47. No.1, (2004).

<sup>9</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 90.

<sup>10</sup> Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel* (London: Verso, 1998), 50.

<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 252.

<sup>12</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 59.

As the geographer A.J. Christopher has observed in *The Atlas of Apartheid*, “apartheid was conceived as a spatial policy, with markedly geographical consequences. Lines were drawn on maps at various scales, and people were evicted and resettled to fit the lines.”<sup>13</sup> The foundation of apartheid was the control of space, “notably its occupation and use on a racial basis.”<sup>14</sup> I will argue that when the censors purported to assess the literary merits of a text, what they were often doing was assessing its literary geography, attempting to police the borders of the imaginary. In other words, concerns with space, with the brutal policing of bodies in space, so dominated South African life that they seeped into every feature of apartheid legislation. In *The Literature Police*, McDonald gestures towards this. However, his focus is not on space specifically, but rather with trying to understand what the censors pretended to mean when they described something as “literary.”

My own attempt to understand the censorship system in South Africa will make use of research done in the field of what Andrew Thacker calls “critical literary geography.”<sup>15</sup> Some fictional geographies are more attended to than others. Franco Moretti, for instance, has devoted his attention to creating the *Atlas of the European Novel*. More recently, in *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, he has used the form of the Victorian village novel to suggest that literary sociology means “deducing from the form of an object the forces that have acted on it.”<sup>16</sup> Although the field is growing, spatial analysis of this kind has mostly concentrated on specific literary spaces, often one of the great metropolitan centres, mostly European. Some of the most recent and exciting work done on *Ulysses*, for instance, concerns “understanding how topographical details generate narrative design.”<sup>17</sup> For my own work, I will apply Moretti’s argument that “geography shapes the imaginative structure”<sup>18</sup> of the novel to an analysis of six Nadine Gordimer novels, all but one of which is set in South Africa. My reason for doing so is that these six novels were scrutinized by the censors. Three were banned, and three were not. My argument is that trying to understand the literary geography of these novels will cast an interesting angle on the decisions taken by the censors regarding her work.

In *The Idea of a Critical Literary Geography*, Andrew Thacker points out that “Discussion of the formal features of literature or historical circumstances is always fraught with difficulty; the links here are no less tentative.”<sup>19</sup> To acknowledge that one has to be cautious is not to diminish the interest or worth of the connections that are made: “it is important not only to discuss space and

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<sup>13</sup> A.J. Christopher, *The Atlas of Apartheid* (London: Routledge, 1994), 6.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher, *Atlas of Apartheid*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Thacker, “The Idea of a Critical Literary Geography,” *New Formations*, Vol. 57. Winter (2005), 1.

<sup>16</sup> Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (London: Verso, 2005), 55.

<sup>17</sup> Eric Bulson, *Novels, Maps, Modernity: The Spatial Imagination: 1850-2000* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 20.

<sup>18</sup> Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel*, 14.

<sup>19</sup> Thacker, *The Idea of a Critical Literary Geography*, 63.

geography thematically, but also to address them as questions with a profound impact on how literary texts are formally assembled. *To investigate a novel as a spatial text must amount to more than simply considering how the text represents an interesting location.*<sup>20</sup> In my investigation of the six Gordimer novels as spatial texts, I hope to be able to show that the geography of these texts has significant implications not only for the narrative structure itself, but for how these texts were received by the censors.

In *Novels, Maps, Modernity*, Eric Bulson argues that “spatial representations in novels *are* ideological, they are influenced by the culture, history, economy, and politics of a particular time and place, they reflect ways of seeing the world and the scores of individuals who live, and have lived, and will live in it.”<sup>21</sup> This suggestion is certainly borne out by an analysis of the literary geography of Gordimer’s novels. My research, then, takes one particular perspective as an attempt to understand *why* three novels were banned and three were not. Is it possible to see any kind of consistent logic, contemptible as it might be, behind the censors’ decisions, other than their purported governing principle as “guardians of the literary”? The answer seems fundamentally to do with space in literature.

In this, I differ slightly from McDonald’s approach in *The Literature Police*. McDonald’s focus does not rest always on the *why*; he is often more concerned with the working mechanisms of the censorship board, and the effect on writers and publishers. Further, his assertion is that it is often impossible to uncover the *why*, for many different reasons, not least of which was the extraordinary whims and caprices of individual censors. As McDonald observes, “the looseness of the system, which relied heavily on the idiosyncrasies of particular censors’ judgments, made the final result anything but obvious.”<sup>22</sup> When discussing the system of censorship in South Africa, much is often made of its stupidity, of the mystifying zeal of the men and women who dedicated their lives to the suppression of literature. It seems impossible that they banned as many books as they did, that “in the period between the first censorship act in 1955 . . . and 1970, eleven thousand books were banned.”<sup>23</sup> It seems impossible that the censors had “ninety-seven definitions of what was undesirable.”<sup>24</sup> As J.M.Coetzee has pointed out, “Censorship is not an occupation that attracts intelligent, subtle minds.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Bulson, *Novels, Maps, Modernity*, 11.

<sup>22</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 112.

<sup>23</sup> Judie Newman (ed.), *Burger’s Daughter: A Casebook* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2003), 14.

<sup>24</sup> Newman, *Burger’s Daughter*, 14.

<sup>25</sup> J.M. Coetzee, “Emerging from Censorship” *Salmagundi*, No. 100, Fall (1993), 45.



That their decisions were frequently baffling is undeniable. In *What Happened to Burger's Daughter*, an analysis of the circumstances of the novel's banning and unbanning, Gordimer pointed out that the Publications Control Board was an "extra-judicial body ... whose members need have no legal training ... who in their deliberations are not required to have regard to the rules of justice designed to achieve a fair trial, whose proceedings are not conducted in public and who are not required to afford any reasons for their decision."<sup>26</sup>

While to assume a kind of highly efficient organised mastermind behind the system, and to say that the decisions the censors made had a consistent organization and purpose, is to give perhaps too much credit, the real point is that there doesn't *have* to be a mastermind. It is self-evident that the apartheid government was obsessed with the movement of bodies in space. Here, for instance, is C.R. Swart introducing the Reservation of Separate Amenities Bill in 1953:

If a European has to sit next to a non-European at school, if on the railway station they are to use the same waiting rooms, if they are continually to travel together on the trains and sleep in the same hotels, it is evident that eventually we would have racial admixture, with the result on the one hand one would no longer find a purely European population and on the other hand a non-European population.<sup>27</sup>

Two things are very striking here. One, there is the obsession with "racial admixture"; and two, there is the concern with the movement of bodies in space (the railway station, the trains, the hotels). This provides an efficient summary of apartheid thinking, and there is no compelling reason why the censorship bureaucracy should have been exempt from this. Whether or not it was a conscious policy of the censors, it is clear through their reports, at least in the case of the novelist I have chosen to discuss, that they had a fixation with space, with controlling it and defining it. In *Apartheid and Beyond: South African Writers and the Politics of Place*, Rita Barnard notes that there is not a single political feature of the apartheid state that "did not, in practice, rely on the power of space to separate individuals from each other, to direct and control their movements, and to reinforce social distinctions."<sup>28</sup> Barnard herself does not identify the censorship bureaucracy specifically throughout her study, but the point holds. What is a censorship body if not a significant political feature? Whether or not it was a conscious policy, the censorship bureaucracy seemed effortlessly to align itself with the wider project of the apartheid architects: to create borders, to keep some people in and more people out.

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<sup>26</sup> Nadine Gordimer et al., *What Happened to 'Burger's Daughter'?* (Emmentia: Taurus, 1980), 5.

<sup>27</sup> C.R. Swart, cited in *Atlas of Apartheid*, 4.

<sup>28</sup> Rita Barnard, *Apartheid and Beyond: South African Writers and the Politics of Place* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6.

In *Undesirable Publications: J.M. Coetzee on Censorship and Apartheid*, Mark Sanders poses the following: “did apartheid thinking produce any concepts unique to itself? Was there an ‘apartheid thinking’ in areas other than apartheid in the narrow sense?”<sup>29</sup> While the practice of censorship was certainly not “unique” to apartheid, there is no better expression of apartheid thinking. Apartheid itself can be seen as a kind of censorship, an attempt to erase certain things, such as the presence of black people within the cities, with the eventual goal of convincing white society that they were never there to begin with. Christopher Merrett has discussed the ways in which censorship represented the purest kind of apartheid thinking. In the introduction to *A Culture of Censorship*, he notes that “This book defines censorship very broadly and covers government interference with a wide range of political and social rights...: to publish, to speak publicly, to organize collectively, to move freely around the country, and to gain access to official information.”<sup>30</sup> While a definition as broad as this is not useful for my own purposes, what is interesting is that Merrett sees the prohibition on moving freely around the country as a kind of censorship. Censorship, then, can be seen as the abuse which best “fits” the ideology of apartheid. This is important for my own work in order to show the ways in which a concern with space, so crucial to every aspect of apartheid thinking, embedded itself in the operations of the censors.

It is important to outline what will be defined as censorship for my own analysis. Like McDonald and Margreet de Lange, I have used a very narrow definition: “the state-mandated control of publications as arranged for in the Publications and Entertainment Act (1963) and in the Publications Act (1974).”<sup>31</sup> I use a narrow definition because, in South Africa, censorship is a fraught term. The recent response to the Spear controversy, as well as the Secrecy Bill, attests to this. McDonald notes that

people use it [the term ‘censorship’] loosely to refer to any attempt to control or silence or regulate what people say in the public domain ... Out of respect for the people who suffered under real censorship regimes, we need to be a bit more precise about how we use the word ... Censorship really must involve a state authority ... curbing public speech or writing with the threat of punishment.<sup>32</sup>

Christopher notes that “South Africa has been the scene of a number of momentous social engineering projects from colonialism and segregationism to apartheid, and, currently, to democratic

<sup>29</sup> Mark Sanders, “Undesirable Publications: J.M. Coetzee on Censorship and Apartheid,” *Law and Literature*, Vol. 18, No. 1, Spring (2006), 104.

<sup>30</sup> Christopher Merrett, *A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa* (David Philip Publishers & University of Natal Press: Pietermaritzburg, 1994), 2.

<sup>31</sup> Margreet de Lange, *The Muzzled Muse: Literature and Censorship in South Africa* (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing, 1997), 5

<sup>32</sup> Peter McDonald, “Peter McDonald on Censorship in South Africa,” accessed 18 November, 2012.  
<http://writersinspire.podcasts.ox.ac.uk/content/peter-mcdonald-censorship-south-africa>

transformation. All of these had profound spatial implications and left significant legacies in the geography of the country.”<sup>33</sup> If we see censorship as a key feature of a “momentous social engineering project,” then my argument is that these “profound spatial implications” extend themselves to imaginary space. Concerns of space governed every waking minute of life under apartheid, and are still disproportionately significant today. We still live in apartheid cities; the everyday takes its shape from decisions made by the architects of the system. As Christopher notes, “the physical and social heritage of over forty-five years of enforced separation are overwhelming.”<sup>34</sup> Apartheid architects censored South Africa, and most especially the cities, and the Publications Control Board worked to ensure that this was reflected in fiction.

In the following chapters, I will develop this argument by applying it to a spatial analysis of the six Gordimer novels. In my final chapter, I will attempt to make a connection between the decisions taken by the censors, and contemporary writing about South Africa. I will try to demonstrate how the “heritage” of enforced separation of both physical and literary space can be seen in one novel in particular, published this year: Patrick Flanery’s *Absolution*.<sup>35</sup> In *The Rules of Art*, Pierre Bourdieu argues that taste is a form of violence perpetrated by the strong on the weak where the strong have the power to make the rules of art and literature.<sup>36</sup> The history of censorship in South Africa acts as one of the most vivid material example of this. The Publications Control Acts laid down specific proscriptions about what literature should be; the rules of art and literature that they had the power to make are a matter of historical record.

It is useful here to outline McDonald’s summary of what the censors said they meant when they were talking about “the literary”:

1. Literature...constitutes a privileged aesthetic space set apart from more mundane forms of discourse, including pornography, mass-market fiction, journalism, and political writings.
2. Though it belongs...to a folk, it is not narrowly local or patriotic. A particular literature achieves greatness only when it takes its place within a series of larger spheres, constructed variously as ‘European’, ‘Western’ or ultimately, the ‘universal’.
3. Literature does not appeal to a mass readership. It can be appreciated only by a limited and sophisticated public...only by literary readers.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Christopher, *Atlas of Apartheid*, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>35</sup> Patrick Flanery, *Absolution* (London: Atlantic Books, 2012).

<sup>36</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

<sup>37</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 163.

As the following two chapters will illustrate, these rules of literature reveal a specific concern with South African literary geography. My final chapter will attempt to show that the impact of these rules can still be detected today.

The apartheid government's dogged pursuit of international credibility ensured that they would shape a set of rules for literature that cleaved to some imagined European standard. This almost goes without saying. What does demand further interrogation, however, is the ways that this "heady amalgam...in which nineteenth century aestheticism fused with New Critical formalism, where nationalism collided...with a universalistic idea of Western humanism and where everything was overlaid with a more familiar set of prejudices against mass culture"<sup>38</sup> allowed the censors to make certain demands of how space was represented in literature.

Christopher argues that "the administrators were acutely place conscious, with a heightened emphasis on the distinctiveness of particular places and communities. ... an entirely new map of the country unfolded as the policy developed."<sup>39</sup> In *Atlas of the European Novel*, Moretti concerns himself with "*ortgebunden* – the place bound nature of literary forms: each of them with its peculiar geometry, its boundaries, its spatial taboos and favourite routes."<sup>40</sup> The connection between these two points is clear: because of the nature of apartheid, South African literary forms were even more definitively "place bound," and so the apartheid censors *must* have been somehow cognisant (in the sense that questions of space and power dominated every feature of apartheid thinking) of the threat posed by different kinds of literary spaces.

In order, then, to attempt to understand the complex play of interactions between authors, censors, and questions of space in apartheid South Africa, I focus on an author who represents a kind of ideal test case for a number of reasons. Nadine Gordimer has had a long career. Dominic Head notes that "Gordimer's oeuvre...spans the entire period of apartheid in South Africa (her first collection of stories was published in 1949, the year after the first Nationalist government was elected to power."<sup>41</sup> Her most recent, *No Time Like The Present*, was published last year. She has produced novels at fairly regular intervals, so that we see that they came up against the censorship board in its many different iterations. Her work was affected by both the 1963 and the 1974 Publications Control Acts. In the period spanning 1963 to 1979, she published 6 novels. Three were banned, and three were not. Censors' reports for all of these novels exist, save one: *A Guest of*

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<sup>38</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 163.

<sup>39</sup> Christopher, *Atlas of Apartheid*, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel*, 5.

<sup>41</sup> Dominic Head, *Nadine Gordimer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2.

*Honour* (not banned). The themes that she favours are fairly consistent, which allows one to make finer distinctions regarding literary space. Her work is on resolutely similar lines, close-ups of contemporary life in South Africa, mostly urban South Africa, what Stephen Clingman calls an “acute and sustained observations of the society she inhabits.”<sup>42</sup> The censors, too, noticed the consistency of her themes, calling her “the competent Nadine Gordimer with her obsession with the urban African political scene.”<sup>43</sup> She was at the height of renown and productivity at the same time that the apartheid government was at the height of its powers. Finally and perhaps most importantly, she was relatively “free.” In other words, she was never detained, never forced into exile, never prevented by physical force from producing novels. My choice of a white writer is significant. White and black experience of apartheid oppression was different. A white writer would, on balance, not have to contend with the forces that a black writer would. For many black writers, censorship was not a discrete entity, but rather one part of a system that existed to oppress them.

As de Lange observes, “the different approaches writers used to cope with the system depended on their cultural and political position in the society,”<sup>44</sup> which was, of course, determined largely by race. In *Waiting For Revolution* (1979), Conor Cruise O’Brien argued that Gordimer, “like many of the great Russian novelists of the nineteenth century, lives in two worlds at once. She lives, as the Russians did, in a police state, and she also lives, as they did, in the wider culture of the West, receiving the reflections of the kinds of freedom that the West has enjoyed over two centuries or more.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, Gordimer was free in a way that many black writers were not. The work of a white writer is thus more likely to allow for a more focused study of the imprint of censorship itself, rather than the hundreds of other instruments of oppression utilised by the apartheid state.

These factors make it possible to look closely at the complex interplay between space and censorship, and Gordimer is perhaps the only writer to meet all the above criteria. It is particularly significant that her themes are so consistent. Tony Morphet argues that “Gordimer’s fiction has been, from the beginning, that of an urban, intellectual, artistic and political milieu. The resolution she was in search of would, she believed, be found in the metropolitan urban centres...”<sup>46</sup> As Clingman notes in *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside*, “the central feature applying to the world in which Gordimer lives is plain enough: that in South Africa there is a system of rigorous

<sup>42</sup>Stephen Clingman, *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 18.

<sup>43</sup> Anna Louw, “In the Heart of the Country: A Calvinist Allegory?” *PN Review*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (1987), 50.

<sup>44</sup> de Lange, *Muzzled Muse*, 3.

<sup>45</sup> Conor Cruise O’Brien, “Waiting for Revolution” in *Burger’s Daughter: A Casebook*, ed. Judie Newman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 41.

<sup>46</sup> Tony Morphet, “Stranger fictions: Trajectories in the Liberal Novel”, *World Literature Today*, South African Literature in Transition (Winter, 1996), 55

social division maintained and regulated by the apartheid state.”<sup>47</sup> Given this, McDonald asks: “If all her novels ... engaged with the historical circumstances of apartheid South Africa in especially powerful and critical ways, then why were they not all deemed equally threatening to the established order?”<sup>48</sup> It is very difficult to answer this question convincingly. McDonald’s argument is that the censors based their decision on whether or not her books lived up to a literary standard of their own devising. As stated previously, I would like to extend this and suggest that Gordimer’s work was judged to be “literary” in ways that were remarkably consistent with the legal strictures on South African space and its delineation.

In his essay on the structure of Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education* in *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu argues that “If *Sentimental Education* ... may be read as a history, it is because the structure which organizes the fiction, and which grounds the illusion of reality it produces, is hidden, as in reality, beneath the interactions of people, which are structured by it.”<sup>49</sup> To reveal the structure of *Sentimental Education* “enables us to understand the novel’s logic as both story and history.”<sup>50</sup> What does this mean for Gordimer? If the apartheid system is “the structure which organizes the fiction,” then what role does censorship have to play in this? In her introduction to *Burger’s Daughter: A Casebook*, Judie Newman notes that Clingman “reads Gordimer’s work largely in terms of the conditioning force of social and ideological codes as if the writer were formed by South Africa itself, deprived of any individual agency.”<sup>51</sup> I hope to avoid this in my own work. My argument is not that Gordimer has been “formed by South Africa itself,” or by censorship itself, but rather that there is a strong connection to be made. The forces of censorship have exerted themselves on her work, as she has acknowledged. For this thesis, I hope to demonstrate that there is a consistent pattern to be observed if one looks at the literary geography of her novels and the decisions of the censors in conjunction with one another.

It is important to note that apartheid legislation changed as the bureaucratic machine grew to ungainly proportions, laws were piled upon laws; a writer like Gordimer was never putting her foot in the same river twice, and neither were the censors. Merrett points out that the censorship system in particular, “like most political and cultural institutions... adapted to possibilities and needs, and must not be thought of as static.”<sup>52</sup> As already mentioned, Gordimer’s work came under the scrutiny

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<sup>47</sup> Clingman, *Nadine Gordimer*, 15.

<sup>48</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 224.

<sup>49</sup> Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, 14.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>51</sup> Newman, *Burger’s Daughter*, 7.

<sup>52</sup> Merrett, *Culture of Censorship*, 1.

of the censors in many different forms of the Act. However, I hope to demonstrate that a consistent thread runs through the censors' response to all of Gordimer's work.

McDonald notes that the censors often "invoked a narrative of cultural progress in which the literary is gradually purged of the political and finally achieves its teleological destiny in a purely aesthetic sphere."<sup>53</sup>In other words, the more "literary" a novel was, the further its themes would be from contemporary South African life. It would make sense, then, that there would arise some interesting links between the idea of "universality," and literary "desirability." McDonald argues that:

their aestheticist assumption that great literature rose above contemporary politics made it possible for [the censors] to publish manifestly interventionist novels such as *Occasion For Loving*, *Guest of Honour*, and *The Conservationist*, as well as Coetzee's fictions *In The Heart of the Country*, *Waiting For The Barbarians*, and *The Life and Times of Michael K*. This assumption would, of course, work the other way around. *The Late Bourgeois World*, Jack Cope's *The Dawn Comes Twice*, Brink's *Looking On Darkness*, as well as CJ Driver's two novels ... were all banned, in part, because they failed the universality test.<sup>54</sup>

McDonald's point is that the censors' decisions can be understood if one looks at the conditions and terms they set for what made a work "literary." My point in the following chapters is that the decisions of the censors can be understood, in Gordimer's case, in terms of an analysis of their literary geography. But the juncture at which mine and McDonald's arguments come together is the point at which it is clear that when we are talking about the literary, we are talking about space. Our argument, then, is the same. "Failing the universality test" often meant failing the space test. Failing the universality test frequently meant failing to set your novels out of historical time or space. In the final chapter, I briefly look at the censors' response to the work of J.M. Coetzee in order to demonstrate how intimately the questions of universality and censorship are connected, and the implications that this has for South African literary geography.

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<sup>53</sup>McDonald, *Literature Police*, 164.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

## Chapter Two: Occasion for Loving, The Late Bourgeois World, and World of Strangers

Turning to the six Gordimer novels which were reviewed by the censors (McDonald notes that *Burger's Daughter* “was the last of Gordimer’s novels to enter the censorship system”<sup>55</sup>), it is useful now to restate McDonald’s question: “if all her novels . . . engaged with the historical circumstances of apartheid South Africa in especially powerful and critical ways, then why were they not all deemed equally threatening to the established order?”<sup>56</sup> To repeat, six novels were published in the period 1958 to 1979. Three were banned: *A World of Strangers* (1958),<sup>57</sup> *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966),<sup>58</sup> and *Burger's Daughter* (1979).<sup>59</sup> Three were not: *Occasion for Loving* (1963),<sup>60</sup> *A Guest of Honour* (1970),<sup>61</sup> and *The Conservationist* (1974).<sup>62</sup>

The three that were banned have obvious things in common. They all have a contemporary setting. All three are set in the city. All three have characters, either black or white, who move about the city with relative ease, from white areas to the black townships and back again. The laws that govern movement in the apartheid city seem to affect them less. It is crucial for my argument that the setting for these novels is urban. As many scholars have argued, the apartheid city represented the zenith of apartheid thinking, the embodiment of all its ideas.<sup>63</sup> Christopher notes that “the apartheid city was deliberately created by the South African government over a period of forty years,”<sup>64</sup> and as such represented the most sustained expression of apartheid thought.

In *Atlas of the European Novel*, Moretti argues that “novels protect their readers from randomness by reducing [the city].”<sup>65</sup> In South Africa, it could be argued, the censors and the architects of apartheid tried to “protect” the white public from the reality of the urbanised black population by, again, reducing the city, keeping it out of sight. As McDonald observes, “One of the goals of apartheid policy was, of course, to prevent a non-racial idea of a ‘South African’ writer, or indeed, citizen, from ever emerging”<sup>66</sup> The censors’ reports from Gordimer’s banned novels reveal how this goal articulated itself. What the censors objected to most in Gordimer’s work is when the

<sup>55</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 239.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>57</sup> Nadine Gordimer, *A World of Strangers* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1962).

<sup>58</sup> Nadine Gordimer, *The Late Bourgeois World* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1982).

<sup>59</sup> Nadine Gordimer, *Burger's Daughter* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1980).

<sup>60</sup> Nadine Gordimer, *Occasion for Loving* (London: Gollancz, 1963).

<sup>61</sup> Nadine Gordimer, *A Guest of Honour* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002).

<sup>62</sup> Nadine Gordimer, *The Conservationist* (London: Penguin, 1978).

<sup>63</sup> Deborah Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise* (Oxford: New York: Clarendon Press, 1991); Hilton Judin and Ivan Vladislavic, ed. *Blank: Architecture, Apartheid and After* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1998).

<sup>64</sup> Christopher, *Atlas of Apartheid*, 138.

<sup>65</sup> Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel*, 105.

<sup>66</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 160.



literary geography of South Africa, especially of the city, refuses to be “reduced,” and when the two halves, white South Africa and black South Africa, come together without overwhelming difficulty.

Looking at the censors’ reports, something that becomes apparent is the similarity in the language used by apartheid architects and apartheid censors. Both were fixated on borders and boundaries, and the importance of maintaining them. In the reports, when something is unacceptable, it crosses a boundary.<sup>67</sup> For instance, in their discussion of *The Late Bourgeois World*, the censors argued that: “The depiction of interracial desire alone, taken together with Elizabeth’s final reflections, in which she ‘expects that Luke will want to have sexual intercourse with her’ . . . meant that the boundary of permissibility had definitely been crossed”,<sup>68</sup> and that “the intimate intercourse crosses the border of sociability and politics.”<sup>69</sup>

As mentioned, scholars of censorship tend to emphasize the arbitrary nature of the censors’ decisions. Discussing their rulings with regard to Gordimer, McDonald states that “These decisions were, on the face of it, just a further testament to their perversity of their literary guardianship.”<sup>70</sup> Indeed, there doesn’t seem to be a consistent pattern to the rulings. However, on closer examination, a kind of internal logic can be revealed. In Gordimer, how and why and where characters move, is of crucial importance. If one was attempting to make sense of the decisions made by the censors, a look at this element of her novels may go some way toward explaining them. My focus here is trying to demonstrate how some of Gordimer’s spaces are more threatening than others, and that in every case, sense can be made of the censors’ decisions by looking at the novels from this perspective.

I will begin with a comparison of the first three novels scrutinized by the censors: *Occasion for Loving* (1963), *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966), and *World of Strangers* (1958). *Late Bourgeois* and *World of Strangers* were banned. *Occasion* was not. This decision is unexpected. For one thing, *Occasion* is the only novel of the three that violates one of the founding principles of apartheid, the one that prohibits sex across the colour bar. *Occasion* is the only one with frequent descriptions of sex between a black man and a white woman: “They began to kiss and please each other with some

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<sup>67</sup> For the censors’ reports, I have used the style adopted by Peter McDonald in *The Literature Police*. “Files from the period 1963-8 are identified as coming from the range coded BCS, which the Western Cape Provincial Archives in Cape Town added, followed by the year of submission and the report number, which the censors used. For files from the period 1975-90, I use the system established by the next generation of censors and followed by the archivists. ‘P’ for publication, followed by the year, then the month of submission and the report number.” (McDonald, *Literature Police*, xv).

<sup>68</sup> BCS20416.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 219.

rivalry, like a pair of peacocks showing off their feathers.”<sup>71</sup> Ann Davis, a young white English woman who comes to South Africa with her (white South African) husband and lodges in a house belonging to Tom and Jessie Stilwell, is having an affair with Gideon Shibalo, a black South African artist and teacher. She informs her husband, Boaz, of it in matter of fact tones: “You know, this business of going about with Gideon Shibalo. I’ve been having a sort of . . . love affair.”<sup>72</sup> Jessie Stilwell, the novel’s protagonist, views their relationship at a critical distance: “Wrapped in their warmth, she thought: they’ve been making love out there.”<sup>73</sup> The love affair between the two, the effect it has on others, and the way it changes, is the driving force of the narrative. In contrast, the other two novels depict no such intimacy. In *The Late Bourgeois World*, Liz Van Den Sandt contemplates the possibility of an affair with Luke Fokase, a black activist: “and in return he comes with the smell of the smoke of braziers in his clothes. Oh yes, and it’s quite possible he’ll make love to me, next time or some time.”<sup>74</sup> Censors remarked on this, of course, arguing that “the nonchalant acceptance of political and social hobnobbing between white and non-white”<sup>75</sup> was what made the novel unacceptable. McDonald notes that ‘what made it finally ‘undesirable’ . . . was not so much the fact that it depicted subversive activities or interracial desire, but that it presented them through the eyes of a white woman – Dekker, the author of the report, stressed her race and gender throughout – who considered such things as ‘wholly normal.’<sup>76</sup>

Yet all the characters in *Occasion* “accept” the “business of Ann and Gideon Shibalo.”<sup>77</sup> Everyone considers it, if not “normal,” then feasible, plausible: “She [Jessie] had been mixed up so many times with friends whose marriages or love affairs went awry because of another woman; the situation between Boaz and Ann was the same as the others, except that Gideon Shibalo was black, of course.”<sup>78</sup> The description of interracial desire in *Bourgeois*, on the other hand, exists purely in the hypothetical. Liz and Luke do not make love; the possibility is something that she merely considers. Further, any depictions of interracial desire are specifically absent from *World of Strangers*. As the censors remarked, the novel’s protagonist, Toby Hood, “has sexual relations with

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<sup>71</sup> Gordimer, *Occasion for Loving*, 107.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>74</sup> Gordimer, *Late Bourgeois World*, 90.

<sup>75</sup> BCS 272/66.

<sup>76</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 230.

<sup>77</sup> Gordimer, *Occasion for Loving*, 112.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

[Anna Louw] and with another white woman but could not bring himself to feel any interest in any of the African women he met.”<sup>79</sup>

On this basis, then, the banning decision makes little sense. In his discussion of J.M. Coetzee’s work on the apartheid ideologue Geoffrey Cronje, Sanders notes that “Apartheid thinking, as Coetzee generalizes it from the works of Cronje, sought to render certain bodies undesirable. Specifically, it sought to make black bodies undesirable to whites, and white bodies undesirable to blacks.”<sup>80</sup> A novel *about* the desirability of black bodies to whites, and vice versa, seems an obvious candidate for banning. And yet it was not.

One reason for this could be the literary geography of these novels, and specifically with the way in which the city is depicted. The way characters move across the city is very different in each novel, and this seems to have striking implications. All of Gordimer’s novels are concerned with the way spaces change people. As John Cooke observes in *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: Private Lives, Public Landscapes*, her novels’ protagonists are “fundamentally tied to the landscapes they inhabit, landscapes which embody the cultural situations of these characters.”<sup>81</sup> The extent to which environment determines the nature of the relationships, and the extent to which the geography of Johannesburg, specifically, determines the course of events, is hugely revealing in the threat it represented to apartheid thinking and the status quo. As many scholars have argued, the apartheid city represented the zenith of apartheid thinking, the manifestation of its ideas. Apartheid is fundamentally concerned with the city. Christopher states that “apartheid operated on a local, urban level.”<sup>82</sup> Barnard notes that David M. Smith’s seminal collection *The Apartheid City and Beyond: Urbanisation and Social Change* “takes it as axiomatic that apartheid, as legislated racial separation, was inextricably bound up with urbanisation.”<sup>83</sup> The Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act, “one of the major measures designed to preserve white South Africa”<sup>84</sup> were the formative acts of urban apartheid, and essentially the foundation of apartheid legislation.

It is important, then, that the three novels currently under discussion are set in Johannesburg. But it is a very different Johannesburg every time, and what happens in the literary city here, specifically which part of it, reveals a great deal about the threat these novels posed to the established order. If the apartheid city represents the concentrated expression of apartheid thought,

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<sup>79</sup>BCS 20416.

<sup>80</sup> Sanders, “Undesirable Publications”, 102.

<sup>81</sup> John Cooke, *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: Private Lives, Public Landscapes* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 29.

<sup>82</sup> Christopher, *Atlas of Apartheid*, 101.

<sup>83</sup> David Marshall Smith, *The Apartheid City and Beyond: Urbanisation and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>84</sup>Christopher, *Atlas of Apartheid*, 102.

then it is important that Ann and Gideon's love affair in *Occasion* does not really take place within the city itself, but rather in the blank expanse of the countryside, as will be discussed further. As the brief comparison of interracial desire across the three novels must reveal, *what* happens is simply not as important as *where* it happens.

These two banned novels end with the novels' protagonists making some kind of commitment. In *Bourgeois*, Liz commits by offering the use of her bank account to fund underground activities. In *Strangers*, Toby commits to returning back to South Africa: "Sam, I'll be back for the baby's christening. If it's born while I'm away, you let me know, and I'll come back in time."<sup>85</sup> As will be discussed in the next section, Rosa Burger arrives at the same destination in the third banned novel, *Burger's Daughter*. Barnard observes that Gordimer's characters "find themselves at the edge of their theories about themselves and the world."<sup>86</sup> The characters in the banned novels, the ones who make a commitment, find themselves in a position where they realize that their theories no longer hold up, and that some kind of resolution is called for. It is significant that this resolution involves movement: the movement of money from one bank account to another, the movement from Europe to South Africa.

Discussing Austen's literary geography in *Atlas of the European Novel*, Moretti argues that a shift takes place and that "distance...is no longer a function of fate, but of sentiment."<sup>87</sup> Something is revealed about a character's feelings, their commitment to a person, for instance, by their willingness (or unwillingness) to traverse a distance. Similarly, in Gordimer's banned novels, the willingness to traverse a distance (say, from the white suburbs to the townships, or from Europe back to South Africa) is indicative of a very specific moral sentiment.

By the end of *World of Strangers*, for instance, something has shifted for Toby, and he expresses this as a resolution to affiliate himself, to commit: "I felt myself suddenly within the world of dispossession, where the prison record is a mark of honour, exile is home, and family a committee of protest, that world I had watched from afar, a foreign country since childhood."<sup>88</sup>

It is significant, of course, that his epiphany is couched in spatial terms. He has travelled from one world to another; he has made the "foreign country" of commitment his home. In *Bourgeois*, Liz Van Den Sandt makes a commitment of a more overt kind. After the activist Luke Fokase visits her at her home, she decides to use her grandmother's bank account, "an icon of her own bourgeois

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<sup>85</sup> Gordimer, *World of Strangers*, 254.

<sup>86</sup> Barnard, *Apartheid and Beyond*, 95.

<sup>87</sup> Moretti, *Atlas*, 24.

<sup>88</sup> Gordimer, *World of Strangers*, 253.

status”<sup>89</sup> to channel funds in and out of the country as a means of assisting those in exile: “Why on earth should I do such a thing? ... Am I going into politics again, then? And if so, what kind? But I can’t be bothered with this sort of thing, it’s irrelevant. The bank account is there.”<sup>90</sup>

These resolutions are made to seem inevitable. However, it is difficult to understand why exactly they come about. *The Late Bourgeois World* is set over the course of one day, the day of the moon landing. What forces exert themselves on Liz in the course of this day? What elements are acting on Toby that make his transformation, from a ruthlessly unaffiliated metropolitan dilettante to a committed citizen, seem almost inevitable? How does he change from a person who sees “race and politics” as meaningless “abstractions”<sup>91</sup> to one who is committed? One of the most powerful forces that acts on these characters is that of the city itself. Barnard argues that one of Gordimer’s fundamental assumptions as a writer is “the belief that subjectivity is profoundly shaped by spatial relations.”<sup>92</sup> For my own argument, the assumption that *where* one is determines *how* one is, is crucial.

Both banned novels are written in the first person, and both protagonists spend a significant portion of the narrative describing their movements about the city. In *Bourgeois*:

From a long way off the city on a Saturday sounded the roar of a giant shell pressed against my ear. I had absently taken a wrong turning on the way back and approached by a route that went through one of the new industrial areas that are making the country rich ... ”<sup>93</sup>;

“For more than a mile I was stuck behind a truck carrying the usual bags of coal and the usual gang of delivery men...Then, when I got into the suburbs I had another petrol tank ahead of me, loaded with carefully padded ‘period’ furniture to which black men clung with cheerful insouciance.”<sup>94</sup>

There are a number of similar descriptions in *Strangers*:

We left the city – which is without life on Sunday ... and crossed the new Queen Elizabeth bridge. I twisted my head to look back and I must say that, from there, it all looked rather fine; the rectangular buildings, bone and sand and stone colour...made a frieze of clean, hard shapes against a sky that was all space... We passed mean little houses clinging to the fringe of the city, then the University...and then suburb after suburb of pleasant houses...<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 228.

<sup>90</sup> Gordimer, *Late Bourgeois World*, 94.

<sup>91</sup> Gordimer, *World of Strangers*, 34.

<sup>92</sup> Barnard, *Apartheid and Beyond*, 75.

<sup>93</sup> Gordimer, *World of Strangers*, 21.

<sup>94</sup> Gordimer, *Late Bourgeois World*, 21.

<sup>95</sup> Gordimer, *World of Strangers*, 48.

What Cooke calls her “relentless recording”<sup>96</sup> of observations of the city are often most exaggerated in these scenes, where characters move from one space to the next. In both, there is a sense of perspective gained, a sense that the city is being seen as a whole.

In the censor’s report for *Strangers*, a summary of the plot is given: “Toby Hood comes to Johannesburg for a book firm, from Britain. He mixes freely in the two worlds: wealthy white and poor black.”<sup>97</sup> What is striking in this description is their clear sense of the self-evident division between “the two worlds,” and the remarking on the protagonist’s easy access to both. The censor goes further: “This book gives a false impression of the African in South Africa – also of the average white person and their way of life.”<sup>98</sup> In the same report, the censors reiterate that “a false and misleading impression of the way of life of urban Africans in the Republic is presented.”<sup>99</sup> The plot is summarized as one in which someone “mixes freely” between two worlds. The novel is then rejected as undesirable because this depiction is “false” or “misleading.”

The censors objected to the way the protagonist moves about the city, and especially to his dismissal of the barriers created by apartheid. Toby is able to do this, to travel between the two worlds, because the divisions do not make sense to him, they are not seen as self-evident. He is not naïve; he “suppose[s] that to have . . . a real life in Johannesburg, you’d have to belong in one or the other, for keeps.”<sup>100</sup> This is clear to Toby, and yet he continues to move between the worlds. As he does so, he comes to be educated, about himself and the world he lives in. The city, then, proves to be an educating force. As he moves about the city, the divisions set up by apartheid become less readily apparent to him, and in fact seem to dissolve:

I got home to the flat and found it nearly as hot as the crowded room I had just left [in the township], and, a little before six, I half-undressed, lay on my bed, and fell asleep. When I woke, it was not, as I thought, early evening, but morning. So it was that I seemed to go straight from the township to the High House; sleep was a blank moment that separated the rutted township track that I had learned to ride like a rollercoaster from the smooth driveway . . . where the car drew soundlessly toward the fountain of voices rising behind the Alexander’s house.<sup>101</sup>

Nothing but “a blank moment” separates the rutted township track from the smooth driveway of the house in the white suburbs. Toby’s flat is as hot as the room in the townships; there is little to distinguish them. He travels “straight from the township” into the white suburbs with no

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<sup>96</sup> Cooke, *Nadine Gordimer*, 104.

<sup>97</sup> BCS20416.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Gordimer, *World of Strangers*, 193.

<sup>101</sup> Gordimer, *World of Strangers*, 184.

interruption, no gathering of his wits as he shifts from one state to another. There is an illuminating comparison to be made here with the following passage from *Our Mutual Friend*, as cited by Moretti in *Atlas*:

The wheels rolled on, and rolled down by the Monument and by the Tower, and by the Docks; down by Ratcliffe, and by Rotherhithe; down by where accumulated scum of humanity seemed to be washed from higher grounds ... and to be pausing until its own weight forced it over the bank and sunk it in the river. In and out among vessels that seemed to have got ashore, and houses that seemed to have got afloat ... the wheels rolled on, until they stopped at a dark corner, river-washed and otherwise not washed at all, where the boy alighted and opened the door.<sup>102</sup>

In both *Our Mutual Friend* and *World of Strangers*, the divide between the “two worlds,” though apparent, is easily traversable. In both, characters move with a telling ease from one space to the next. Moretti’s observation is that Dickens’ brilliance is to “unify the two halves of London. To see the city as a whole, a single system.”<sup>103</sup> It seems possible that Gordimer is attempting to do the same thing here. To try and represent the apartheid city as a whole, as a place where one can shift easily between the black and white “worlds” is to represent a very clear threat to a system that was dedicated towards keeping much of it out of sight, “to prevent[ing] a non-racial idea of a ‘South African’ writer, or indeed, citizen, from ever emerging.”<sup>104</sup>

The more porous the borders between the two worlds seem, the less Toby is able to remain unaffiliated. The more he sees of the city, the more he knows. The more he knows, the more he realizes that he must make a commitment. Clingman notes that “The only moral rehabilitation appropriate to Toby... lies in a new social commitment.”<sup>105</sup> It is important to note that Toby expresses his engagement most clearly through the forging of friendships on a personal level. It seems significant, in other words, that Toby remains largely politically unengaged for most of the novel. His closest friend, Steven Sitole, is avowedly apolitical. The conversations they *do* have about politics have a vague, dinner party-ish feel. This is something the censors particularly remarked on:

Both [Toby] and the Native [Steven Sitole] are completely uncommitted to any movement; or to any creed about race relations. They experience a normal friendship – leaving politics etc aside ... The novel deliberately avoids ‘protest or propaganda’. The reader is never asked to take sides. The chief characters preach no gospel about race relations Sitole is no rebel against the existing order.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (London: Sovereign, 2012), 27.

<sup>103</sup> Moretti, *Atlas*, 107.

<sup>104</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 160.

<sup>105</sup> Clingman, *Nadine Gordimer*, 55.

<sup>106</sup> BCS20416.

So it is not through exposure to political activity that Toby moves from unengaged to committed. It is, simply, a result of his movement between the “two worlds.” It is his growing ability to see the city as a whole.

Liz Van Den Sandt in *Bourgeois*, too, is able to take a longer view of the city. Apartheid seems most absurd when viewed from a distance. The rigidly policed divisions between different parts of the city start to blur soon as one sees it from afar. At the end of *The Late Bourgeois World*, there is a kind of zoom outwards in perspective, where we see that Liz is acutely aware of exactly where she is: “It’s so quiet I could almost believe I can hear the stars in their courses – a vibrant, infinitely high-pitched hum... Probably it’s the Americans, up there, making their own search, going round and round in the biggest circle of them all.”<sup>107</sup> Cooke’s point that Gordimer’s fiction “reveals not just the search for a landscape in which a continuity could be found, but for the kind of perspective needed to allow engagement with it” seems particularly relevant here.<sup>108</sup> Liz Van Den Sandt has a very clear understanding of her position, of her place. If apartheid planners worked to shield white South Africans from the reality of the country, then what is more dangerous than someone with a sense of perspective, a person who can see things clearly, as a whole?

Both Liz and Toby, and, as will be discussed later, Rosa Burger, seem to arrive at their decision to commit via a heightened understanding of what their “place” is. Barnard notes that “At the heart of each of my readings... is a socio-spatial dialectic – one that is most economically expressed in the phrase “knowing one’s place.”<sup>109</sup> Here, I am trying to extend her conclusions and show that, in Gordimer’s novels, to truly know one’s place, which means understanding exactly where one is and what one is doing there, is to be forced to make a commitment. It is this, then, that represents a threat to the censors. It is free movement through a novel’s urban literary geography that represents the threat.

Movement shows how essentially unsustainable the apartheid position is. If people move, they will change. The more Toby sees, the more he changes:

In their different ways ... both Cecil [Toby’s white lover] and Steven were people who had not found commitment... I respected this, for hadn’t I, for *my* reasons, felt myself a stranger, uncommitted, in my own world in England, and wasn’t that the reason why, in this African country, I had come to feel curiously at home...<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Gordimer, *Late Bourgeois World*, 94.

<sup>108</sup> Cooke, *Nadine Gordimer*, 120.

<sup>109</sup> Barnard, *Apartheid and Beyond*, 3.

<sup>110</sup> Gordimer, *World of Strangers*, 136.



The idea is expressed over and over throughout the novel, that with movement comes knowledge, and with knowledge must come commitment. Clingman notes that “private life for the characters in *Strangers* is allowed no final autonomy either within or beyond the social world. Indeed, the entire impetus behind the novel is to prove that private destiny is inconceivable beyond its social integration.”<sup>111</sup>

The field of literary geography attempts to understand how “geography shapes the imaginative structure of the novel.”<sup>112</sup> In looking at Gordimer’s novels through this particular lens, it is important to try and understand how the specific literary geography of her novels makes certain spaces possible, certain narrative outcomes inevitable. The geography of her novels, shaped as it is by the geography of apartheid South Africa, means that the narrative is forced down specific paths. In attempting to understand the links between Gordimer’s geography and the censors’ decisions, it is important to note that there are some spaces which reoccur in many of her novels. These spaces “shape the narrative structure” in profound ways. To better understand the censors’ decisions regarding her work, it is important to look at the recurrence of two particular spaces in her work, the township party and the white home, and interrogate how they force the narrative to conform to a particular shape. I will try to argue here that the prevalence of these spaces, and the way they shape the structure of the novel, could have made a crucial difference in the censors’ decision process.

To begin with, an analysis of the space of the township party “enables us to understand the [novels’] logic as both story and history.”<sup>113</sup> In a country where there is an ideological commitment to physically “seal off the realities of apartheid from those who enjoyed its benefits,”<sup>114</sup> to make the effort to move, or to ignore the laws that prohibit the movement of others, is to take a stand. For instance, there is a very clear sense in these novels of the difficulty various characters have in moving about the city. In *Strangers*, this is expressed as follows: “It was true that a black man and a white man, though acquainted, were unlikely to run into each other again by chance in Johannesburg. The routine of their lives might run parallel most of the time, but it was astonishing how effective were the arrangements for preventing a crossing.”<sup>115</sup> It is a plot obstacle that the characters must launch themselves over. It is not easy for black and white to meet; the circumstances of their meeting must always be explained.

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<sup>111</sup> Clingman, *Nadine Gordimer*, 54.

<sup>112</sup> Moretti, *Atlas*, 14.

<sup>113</sup> Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, 147.

<sup>114</sup> Metrett, *Censorship*, 117.

<sup>115</sup> Gordimer, *World of Strangers*, 115.

It is fascinating, then, to see the extent to which Gordimer has relied on the device of the party. The spatial reality of apartheid South Africa was such that the only way it is plausible for characters in her novels to keep meeting is to continue to throw them together at parties. In *The Rules of Art*, Bourdieu asserts that:

*Sentimental Education*...supplies all the tools necessary for its own sociological analysis: the structure of the book, which a strictly eternal reading brings to light, that is, the structure of the social space in which the adventures of Frederic unfold, proves to be at the same time the structure of the social space in which its author himself was situated.<sup>116</sup>

If one is attempting to draw a direct line between the literary geography of Gordimer's novels, and the physical reality of apartheid South Africa, her reliance on the party seems a good place to begin. The device of the party "brings to light" the structure of the social space in which Gordimer is situated. In a realist novel set in apartheid South Africa, there seem to be very few ways to get black and white people in the same room except by having a party. In *World of Strangers* and *Burger's Daughter* specifically, the white characters go into the townships in order to drink, or to go to a party. These are the only reasons the white characters would go into these places. The apartheid city was designed to prevent blacks and whites meeting freely: the township was not the kind of place white people would find themselves in by accident. To repeat Toby Hood's observation, it was "astonishing how effective were the arrangements for preventing a crossing [between black and white]." <sup>117</sup> That a white person finds themselves in the township, that they traverse the distance from one world to another, is indicative of a very specific kind of sentiment, one which runs directly counter to the desires of the apartheid government.

Discussing the characters in *Sentimental Education*, Bourdieu notes:

the narrowness of the social space in which they are placed: in this finite and closed universe, very similar ... to that of crime novels where all the characters are enclosed on an island or in an isolated manor, the twenty protagonists have strong chances of meeting each other ... and hence of developing in a necessary adventure all the implications of their respective 'formulas', which enclose in advance the episodes of their interactions.<sup>118</sup>

This has a strong echo in the following:

In the few houses in Johannesburg where people of different colours met, you were likely to meet the same people time after time. Many of them had little in common but their

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<sup>116</sup> Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, 3.

<sup>117</sup> Gordimer, *World of Strangers*, 48.

<sup>118</sup> Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, 12.

indifference to the different colours of their skins; there was not room to seek your own kind in no man's land; the space of a few rooms between the black encampment and the white.<sup>119</sup>

Thus Toby Hood has a strong chance of meeting the same people over and over, and hence of “developing in a necessary adventure all the implications of their respective 'formulas', which enclose in advance the episodes of their interactions.”<sup>120</sup> The party becomes the isolated manor, the island. Gordimer's reliance on the party is profound. It is important to observe the degree to which narrative novelty, in the banned novels especially, relies on spatial novelty. The narrative in *Strangers* lurches from party to party. There is the party at the Alexander's: “A burst of laughter was interrupted by my appearance; five people looked up, and a thick-set man with a bald, sun-burned head struggled from his chair and came over to greet me”<sup>121</sup>; there is the party that Anna Louw takes Toby to<sup>122</sup>; there is the gathering at Anna's house<sup>123</sup>; there is Steven's party: “Steven, in a graduate gown, was at the centre; the party spun round him”<sup>124</sup>; there is another of Steven's parties: “The party was a warming-and-naming-party for a house in a rakishly dingy part of Sophiatown where Steven had taken a room.”<sup>125</sup> This list is not exhaustive.

The plot is held up and punctuated by parties. If Toby's “moral awakening is the focus of the plot,”<sup>126</sup> then this develops as he staggers from party to party. He meets everyone he needs to meet: Steven Sitole; Sam Mofokenazi; Cecil Rowe and the Alexander's, who demonstrate to him the intellectual poverty of white suburbia. His “moral awakening” comes as he is exposed to different kinds of people in different kinds of spaces. These meetings are brought about by the device of the party. Quite simply, they are what make the plot tick.

There seem to be a quite implausible number of social gatherings. The censors, too, remarked on it, Toby “enjoys many drinking parties in the location with his new African acquaintances.”<sup>127</sup> They go further: “The constant drinking of alcoholic drinks among both white and black is remarkable.”<sup>128</sup> This implausibility is important, because of the sense of unreality it creates. The townships, in Gordimer, seem to exist only as a space for people to have parties in. They are not entirely convincing as physical spaces. The literary geography, reflecting as it does the physical

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<sup>119</sup> Gordimer, *World of Strangers*, 160.

<sup>120</sup> Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, 12.

<sup>121</sup> Gordimer, *World of Strangers*, 49.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>126</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 225.

<sup>127</sup> BCS20416.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

geography of the country, does not permit anything else. Christopher observes that “the area set aside for Black townships until the late 1980s was small. This reflected the government’s intention that the Black population was, with few exceptions, temporary.”<sup>129</sup>

If the townships in Gordimer are somehow featureless, it can perhaps be read as an expression of the apartheid government’s desire that they not be there at all. The architects of apartheid attempted to pretend that these spaces were “temporary.” This is reflected in Gordimer’s work in the sense that the townships have a kind of timeless, featureless quality. They are more “ideas” than real spaces. What is fascinating, however, is that far from limiting the plot or circumscribing the narrative, this featurelessness actually makes these spaces very “useful” in terms of imaginative structure, because they are not as heavily inscribed as other spaces (such as the white suburbs, the white city). As Christopher has repeatedly demonstrated, there was not an inch of the white apartheid city that did not “mean” something, that did not bear the imprint of the state. Certain things, specific kinds of conversations, can take place in the townships that cannot in others. The rest of the space is taken. All the territory is marked by the state.

The burden that parties, and especially parties in the townships, must carry in Gordimer is summarized as follows:

A party has something in common with a battlefield in that, if you are in it, of it, you do not see it; your *rete-a-tete* or the little group in which you drink and talk is the party. But if you are a stranger . . . there is a time . . . when you see the composition of the party as the armchair strategist sees the battle: steadily, formally, and whole.<sup>130</sup>

The party needs to tell the reader a great deal. A lot needs to happen in the party scenes, because they are one of the few spaces that allow for it. Gordimer is at pains to make the reader aware of this burden: “The pattern [of people at the party] had the tangled fascination of an Oriental rug my mother had once had, where if you looked, the scrolls and flowers that you expected to see were also found to be people, animals, jokes and legends: things that, in real life, are not found together in the space of one experience,”<sup>131</sup> and “We only meet at parties, and they’re inclined to be timeless.”<sup>132</sup> As mentioned above, there is something faintly unreal about the number and intensity of the parties in her novels. They must have a “timeless” quality, because time needs to stretch in order to contain all the narrative action of these scenes. Parties have a great deal of work to do: “The conversation became even freer and more confidential. . . the old phrases began to come up, in the

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<sup>129</sup> Christopher, *Atlas of Apartheid*, 122.

<sup>130</sup> Gordimer, *World of Strangers*, 84.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

old, frank, confessional tones: “The trouble with the whites is...’How do you really feel...’ ‘What do you honestly think...’”<sup>133</sup> In Gordimer’s South Africa, these seem to be the only spaces where these kinds of conversations take place. Moretti’s observation that “each space determines, or at least encourages, its own kind of story”<sup>134</sup> is particularly relevant here.

Characters speak more freely: “Driving back to town, I talked about her to Steven, and soon we slipped from the particular to women in general...it was an old subject, one we’d come to time and time again in the confidential small hours in the townships.”<sup>135</sup> In contrast, the substance of a conversation in the white suburbs seems more trivial, false and limited: “The few times I had heard politics talked at the High House, it had hardly seemed to be concerned with the same country or spoken by people in the same situation as the talk I heard in Sophiatown or in houses where white and black people met.”<sup>136</sup>

Moretti’s argument that “without a certain kind of space a certain kind of story is simply impossible”<sup>137</sup> takes on interesting implications when applied to spaces as obsessively policed as apartheid South Africa, both real and fictional. The township appears in the novellas a space for the white characters to go and drink a “remarkable” number of drinks. Characters seem not to do everyday things in the township; its function seems to be a space where characters go in order to drink. In this, it begins to take on an unreal quality. In *Atlas*, Moretti asks: “How did novels ‘read’ cities? By what narrative mechanisms did they make them ‘legible’ and turn urban noise into information?”<sup>138</sup> If this question is asked of Gordimer’s novels, a pattern begins to emerge.

Apartheid-era “urban noise,” in Gordimer, is made sense of by rendering the townships featureless in some way. Over and over, it is stressed that what makes the township itself is *people*, and not distinguishing physical features. The place itself is somehow off the map. In other words, the specific literary geography of Gordimer’s novels (reflecting as it does the reality of apartheid South Africa) means that certain key narrative events can only take place in slightly unreal spaces. If, as Barnard argues, apartheid represents an “extreme and therefore starkly illuminating instance of the territorialisation of power,”<sup>139</sup> then it is highly significant that the key meetings that take place between black and white characters in *Strangers* happen in spaces that are not totally convincing. This is an example, then, of the state’s power: the reality of apartheid meant that the novel is forced into a

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>134</sup> Moretti, *Atlas*, 70.

<sup>135</sup> Gordimer, *World of Strangers*, 182.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>137</sup> Moretti, *Atlas*, 100.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>139</sup> Barnard, *Apartheid and Beyond*, 5.

particular corner. For the narrative to work, for Toby to develop as a character, he must go to a lot of parties. It could be argued, then, that the frequency of these parties is what got the novel banned. To repeat, the censors argued that “This book gives a false impression of the African in South Africa – also of the average white person and their way of life.”<sup>140</sup> The link between censorship and space here is clear. The reality of the apartheid state is such that Gordimer must rely heavily on the device of the party in order to bring her characters together. Parties in Gordimer are a free space where characters can speak and behave without inhibition. This, however, is what the censors specifically object to; they reject it as “false,” and the novel is banned.

What is interesting in *Burger's Daughter*, as will be discussed further, is that there comes a point when the party stops “working” as a plot device. It ceases to be a convenient space in which the conversations that need to happen can feasibly take place. The most significant conversation in the novel takes place over the phone. The township party, in other words, is no longer a place where white and black people can meet on an equal footing. If we re-examine Bourdieu's point about the social space in which the author is situated, this makes a kind of sense. If Sophiatown is figured as a “free” space in the earlier novels, even an unreal one, then the point is that no such free space exists in the South Africa of the 1970s.

A discussion of the white home will further illuminate the preference Gordimer has for certain spaces in terms of what they allow her to do with regard to narrative development, and how the censors might have responded to this. It is useful, however, to begin with a more general discussion of the literary geography of *Occasion for Loving* (not banned). The significance of the white home in this novel, as well as the banned novels, will then be discussed in an attempt to show that there are differing degrees of threat represented by the three novels under discussion in this chapter, and that their threatening aspect (or lack of it) can largely be attributed to what they do with space and movement.

An analysis of *Occasion For Loving* is illuminating. The censors' report seems to be focused to a very large degree on who is doing what where:

Ann visits Shibalo in a room in a white area which he secretly shares with a friend. Ann hires a caravan in which she and Shibalo go on a tour to exhibit his paintings. They live together and indulge in kissing and love-making. Ann tells Boaz about Shibalo but he does not seem to mind. Jessie takes her children to the sea in Natal. Ann and Shibalo follow by car, and on the journey they sleep in the car and try to evade the police. Both of them stay with Jessie in her house. Ann is very much in love with Shibalo. They plan to escape to Europe, but on their

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<sup>140</sup>BCS20416.

return home Ann and Boaz leave for England. Shibalo becomes a drunkard and loses his post. Jessie realizes that love is not stronger than legal barriers.<sup>141</sup>

Whatever else this indicates, this report shows a kind of obsession with movement and place. Key elements of the plot are dispensed with in a sentence (“Ann is very much in love with Shibalo”; “Ann tells Boaz about Shibalo but he does not seem to mind”) while much more detail is given over to where they go and how they get there. In fact, the above report ends with the recommendation that it be banned. However, the book was passed. While it does seem in many ways to contradict my own argument, I include this element of the report here because it very strikingly illustrates the censors’ obsession with place and space. The plot of the novel is reduced to a kind of travelogue, a summary where movement *is* the plot

Considering the censors’ critiques, why was the book not banned? The answer seems to have a great deal to do with the movement of the characters. For one thing, it is significant that Ann Davis, unlike Toby, never goes into Alexandra: “She knew that he lived in Alexandra townships, but she had never wondered how, in what sort of place.”<sup>142</sup> She never sets foot in the township, and so she never violates what Moretti calls “the urban taboos.”<sup>143</sup> Unlike Toby Hood, she does not move between the two worlds, and so, it can be argued, she does not truly learn, and she will not be manoeuvred into a position where she must commit. Ann and Gideon’s relationship begins in Johannesburg, “Good old awful Johannesburg, nice and vulgar and brutal, a good honest gun under the white man’s pillow and a good honest tsotsi in the street.”<sup>144</sup> This is where it starts, but it only becomes what is presented as meaningful when the two of them leave the city.

Discussing Austen’s geography, Moretti notes that “Even Austen respects the urban taboo: Darcy and the Gardiners (who live, remember, at opposite ends of town) get acquainted and like each other, and become friends, even: but in a Derbyshire estate. In London, they never meet.”<sup>145</sup> It seems clear that a much more serious kind of “urban taboo” is being respected in *Occasion*: the one concerning the Group Areas Act, the Pass Laws. Gideon and Ann are forced out of the city and into the country: “There was nowhere they could go together in town. Ann drove him out into the veld... lurching over dust roads and farm tracks.”<sup>146</sup> Head argues that “perhaps the greatest tension which the novel generates occurs in those scenes in which Ann and Gideon are driving, aimlessly, in

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<sup>141</sup>BCS29087.

<sup>142</sup> Gordimer, *Occasion for Loving*, 103.

<sup>143</sup> Moretti, *Atlas*, 86.

<sup>144</sup> Gordimer, *Occasion for Loving*, 264.

<sup>145</sup> Moretti, *Atlas*, 86.

<sup>146</sup> Gordimer, *Occasion for Loving*, 85.

the African landscape, unsure of where to take their affair.”<sup>147</sup> They need to “take their affair” somewhere because they cannot leave it in the city. To repeat, the city represents apartheid ideology in its pure form. To have an affair within the city gates is to act in utter defiance of it. It seems unlikely that the censors would have accepted this.

In a very clear sense, Ann and Gideon’s relationship only becomes “real” when they are outside of Johannesburg. The same kind of relationship could not have occurred if it had taken place within the city. It would have meant the violation of too many codes. If *Strangers* was rejected as presenting a “false” depiction of life in South Africa, then it is significant that a novel which does *not* violate the same taboos of movement (no parties in the townships, no characters careering between white and black worlds within the apartheid city) was judged to be acceptable.

Cooke observes that the countryside “offers Anne and Gideon a sense not only of the past but the future, its openness presenting possibilities especially by contrast with the enclosed city.”<sup>148</sup> The city is too full of people. Ann and Gideon’s relationship becomes meaningful only in spaces where people are notably absent. They travel to a mission in the Northern Transvaal that is stripped of other human beings: “The village stood on a hill faceted with rocks gleaming in the sun ... there was no witness but the personage of baobab trees.”<sup>149</sup> The countryside is peopled by trees. They travel to Jessie’s house at the coast in Natal, another place where there are no people: “she listened, and there was nothing but the sea; all voices were its own, all sounds.”<sup>150</sup> Ann and Gideon’s relationship takes shape only in these desolate spaces. This becomes clearer when they return, at the end of the novel, back to the city: “[Jessie] did not know if they still met at the flat, but she gathered that they were seeing each other briefly, very discreetly.”<sup>151</sup> Their relationship is different in the city, seems somehow less significant, and soon fizzles out: Ann and her husband then leave, back to England. Unlike Toby or Liz or, as will be discussed further, Rosa, the novel ends without Ann making a commitment. She is able to leave because she is able to remain disengaged. My argument is that she can do this because her relationship has taken place in this unreal space, the countryside. If the city is where Gordimer’s characters seek resolution,<sup>152</sup> then a character is able to remain unaffiliated, uncommitted, if the city does not make an impression on her.

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<sup>147</sup> Head, *Nadine Gordimer*, 73.

<sup>148</sup> Cooke, *Nadine Gordimer*, 117.

<sup>149</sup> Gordimer, *Occasion for Loving*, 230.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>152</sup> Morphet, *Stranger Fictions*, 55.



As discussed, Gordimer “uses” certain literary spaces to tell specific stories. The countryside in *Occasion* acts in a similar way to the township party in *Strangers*: it allows for a specific aspect of the narrative to unfold, one which could not feasibly take place within the white city. This, again, demonstrates the way in which the arm of the state forces the narrative into a particular corner. If one wants to tell a story of a relationship between a black man and a white woman, there are very few spaces in which this story can be told. Over and over, the reader sees that the countryside in Gordimer’s novel is a place where people are not, where there is a kind of timelessness. In this, it is similar to the township. The nature of these spaces means that things that could not happen elsewhere can happen there. In parties in the townships, black and white can mix freely, can drink a “remarkable number of alcoholic drinks.”<sup>153</sup> In the country, outside of the city, a black man and a white woman can have an affair.

Again, Moretti’s point about certain kinds of spaces allowing certain kinds of stories seems relevant. It is interesting, then, that one novel is banned and one is not. My argument is that this is because the most “dangerous” spaces in Gordimer’s novels are urban ones. Most dangerous because these spaces are where the characters learn most about themselves, and most dangerous because free movement through this particular literary geography represents the gravest affront to apartheid thinking. The unreal spaces of the parties and the countryside must have been differently acceptable to the censors. *The Conservationist*, set in the countryside, was not banned, as will be discussed in the next section. *Occasion For Loving*, a novel where large parts of the action take place away from the city, wasn’t either. Gordimer “uses” certain kinds of spaces (the party, the countryside) to tell certain kinds of stories, and these spaces represent varying degrees of threat. The countryside is perhaps acceptable in some way. The party, which takes place in the township, is not.

McDonald observes that the Board passed *Occasion* “mainly for pragmatic reasons but also on literary grounds. The initial reader (W.A. Joubert) felt that the novel should be banned...but the Board was concerned about the bad publicity *A World of Strangers* had brought and about playing into the hands of the ‘liberals’ (BCS 29087).”<sup>154</sup> Whatever the reason, the fact remains that the book was not banned. More than this, the fact remains that this novel’s literary geography is entirely different, in demonstrable ways, from the ones that were banned.

The sense of the countryside as an unreal, timeless space is repeated in a number of Gordimer’s novels. In *Late Bourgeois*:

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<sup>153</sup> BCS20416.

<sup>154</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 226.

The road to the school leads away from the hilly ridges of Johannesburg and soon strikes out straight through the mealie fields and flat Highveld of the plain... It was all exactly as it had been. When I was a child. When Max was a child. It was the morning I had woken up to, gone out into again and again; the very morning.<sup>155</sup>

In *Strangers*, Toby goes hunting: “On Monday evening I lost the others and found myself alone in the darkening bush. I walked about a bit, but was defeated by the silent sameness and thought it more sensible to stay still awhile and listen.”<sup>156</sup> In the bush, all is “silent sameness.” It is featureless and bereft of people. The city is where the important things happen. No such “silent sameness” there. I would like to suggest that it is this which made it more “acceptable.” To do things which violate the taboos of apartheid in the country is not the same as doing them in the city. The stakes are not as high.

The countryside, in Gordimer, is what it is in spite of the presence or absence of people. The township, in contrast, is what it is *because* of people. Toby goes to visit Steven in Sophiatown and takes in “the barest room I had ever been in in my life; it depended entirely on humans”<sup>157</sup>; “In this church in the township the priest was a tubby, untidy Englishman, tonsured by baldness. The church was built out of ugly, purplish brick and smelled of the soap with which the congregants had washed, and of the smoke with which their clothing was impregnated from their cooking fires.”<sup>158</sup> Here it is clear that what gives the building its definitive features is the people who are in it. It smells the way it smells because of people; it is what it is because of people. This sense is emphasized throughout, in the many descriptions of the townships in Gordimer’s novels, such as the following: “the naked-bottomed children, the skeletal dogs, the young girls in nylon and the old women who shuffled along under the weight of great buttocks.”<sup>159</sup> There are few descriptions of houses or other structures; people are important here. Given “the government’s intention that the Black population was, with few exceptions, temporary,”<sup>160</sup> it is possible to make sense of the censors’ decision to ban a novel in which much of the pivotal action takes place in the townships (peopled by a permanent black population).

If the townships are important, fraught spaces in Gordimer’s novels, and if the way Gordimer uses them reveals a great deal, then so does the white home. If the presence or absence of the township in a novel may have determined whether or not the novel was banned, then the way the

<sup>155</sup> Gordimer, *Late Bourgeois World*, 10.

<sup>156</sup> Gordimer, *World of Strangers*, 231.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>159</sup> Gordimer, *Occasion for Loving*, 174.

<sup>160</sup> Christopher, *Atlas of Apartheid*, 122.

suburban homes of the white characters is presented could also have been important in terms of the novels' "desirability."

For instance, it is significant that the protagonist of *Occasion For Loving*, Jessie Stilwell, is permanently in a kind of retreat, in her home. She does not "engage" with the city. Focalized perspective is centred to a very large degree on Jessie; the reader is given most access to her thoughts and concerns. Ann, on the other hand, is always at a distance. It is not always clear to the reader what she is thinking. Her decisions are interpreted by others; the way she *seems* is more important than the way that she *is*: "While they were talking the lights of a car poked up the driveway and died back as Ann stepped and got out, coming ... almost past them without seeing them... The rhythm, of another kind of existence seemed to come from her shape."<sup>161</sup>

It is Anne, the one at a distance, who invites Gideon into the Stilwell home. It is important, then, that the home is established as *Jessie's*. It all belongs to her; she is thoroughly entangled in the domestic: "meeting the child's eyes, Jessie saw them fixed on her, blurred, impassioned, sick with love that would fasten on and suck the life of her."<sup>162</sup> For Ann to invite Gideon in does not necessarily represent a particularly threatening instance of crossing a moral boundary. It's not *her* home; it's not *her* family.

It is significant, then, that Liz van den Sandt in *Bourgeois* lets Luke into her home, and contemplates the possibility of letting him into her bed. Knowing the risks, knowing the taboo she is violating, she does it anyway: "I had just poured myself another glass of wine when there was a soft, two-four beat rapping at the door; Luke doesn't ring bells"<sup>163</sup>; "He doesn't worry about being seen... there are some Africans who can do these things."<sup>164</sup> As already mentioned, there is in the banned novels a clear sense of the ways in which movement for the black characters is restricted. It is something that must always be explained. A black character may not merely ring a doorbell; the fact of his having to knock quietly, instead, must be attended to. That Luke is special, in his ability to move freely through white spaces, must be remarked on. The threat of his being seen cannot be ignored, at least not by Liz. By allowing Luke into her home, in other words, Liz demonstrates her commitment in a way that Jessie Stilwell, who never entirely accepts Gideon, does not. By letting Luke into her home, by permitting his unrestricted movement when both she and he are aware of

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<sup>161</sup> Gordimer, *Occasion for Loving*, 52-53.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>163</sup> Gordimer, *Late Bourgeois World*, 74.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

the risks of this, Liz commits herself. She then further commits herself by making a decision which will take her, like Toby, from someone disengaged to someone involved.

An illuminating comparison can be made between the house in *Occasion*, and the house in *Bourgeois*. Both novels open “at home,” in a clearly domestic scene. In *Occasion*: “She walked slackly from out of the shade of the verandah into the dry, hot wind of September that battered and misshaped the garden.”<sup>165</sup>; in *Bourgeois*: “While I bathed and dressed Graham sat in the sun by the open doors of my balcony, reading the paper with the proper attention it is never given at the table.”<sup>166</sup>

Both Liz and Jessie, then, are identified from the outset with their home. Jessie, especially, seems to see her home as a kind of refuge. The opening chapters of *Occasion* contain dense, repeated descriptions of the garden: “The garden of this house, where the Stilwells lived, did not have many flowers, but it was dark and green.”<sup>167</sup> Jessie Stilwell seems to suffer from a particular kind of domestic entropy: “Jessie continued to water the harsh foliage of the stonily silent garden.”<sup>168</sup>

Like the “silent sameness”<sup>169</sup> of the bush in *Strangers*, the “stonily silent” garden in *Occasion* is a space where people are absent, a space where the only obligation one has is to oneself and perhaps to one’s immediate family. The “urban noise” of the apartheid city does not make itself heard here. Discussing the significance of the suburbs in *The City in History*, Lewis Mumford argues that

In the suburbs, one might live and die without marring the image of an innocent world, except where some shadow of its evil fell over a column in a newspaper. Thus the suburbs served as an asylum for the preservation of an illusion. Here domesticity could flourish... here individuality could prosper, oblivious of the pervasive regimentation.<sup>170</sup>

This seems particularly relevant in the case of Jessie Stilwell’s suburban home, where her concerns are often domestic, where the narrative is intensely self-focused, where her idiosyncrasies are developed. Cooke notes that “Jessie doesn’t want the Davises or anyone else in her house, for she is in an almost pathological depression engendered by her personal past.”<sup>171</sup> Jessie is chokingly concerned with her own problems, and she is concerned with them within the walls of her garden and her home.

As I have tried to argue, in Gordimer’s novels, to truly know one’s place, which means understanding exactly where one is and what one is doing there, is to be forced to make a

<sup>165</sup> Gordimer, *Occasion for Loving*, 9.

<sup>166</sup> Gordimer, *Late Bourgeois World*, 8.

<sup>167</sup> Gordimer, *Occasion for Loving*, 9.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>169</sup> Gordimer, *World of Strangers*, 231.

<sup>170</sup> Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1961), 494.

<sup>171</sup> Cooke, *Nadine Gordimer*, 61.

commitment. Jessie has no sense of her “place” as being anything other than in her home; she has no sense of perspective. The novel opens with the following: “Jessie Stilwell had purposefully lost her way home, but sometimes she found herself there, innocent of the fact that she had taken to her heels long ago, and was still running.”<sup>172</sup> Jessie never really finds her place, except within the “stonily silent” confines of her home, and so she has no sense of her position in terms of her obligation to others.

If Jessie is tied to her home, then it is significant that Gideon never comes to occupy a fixed place in it. She keeps him at a distance throughout most of the novel, she is “resentful in some constant, concealed part of herself at Shibalo’s presence, as at the awareness that he was at the other end of telephone calls, and the regular sight of him driving the car.”<sup>173</sup>

Liz, on the other hand, accepts and understands Luke’s place exactly, knows his position and what it means:

I know that he comes straight up through the front entrance of the building, so that the watchmen . . . won’t bother him, and if he met the caretaker . . . he’d spin her a plausible, breezy yarn to account for his presence, and get away with it, too. There are some Africans who can do these things; others can’t move a step without getting tangled in the taboos all around their feet.<sup>174</sup>

Halfway through the paragraph, the description moves from the literal to the metaphorical. It is of course significant that this meditation on the way black people must operate in South Africa is presented entirely in spatial terms. Apartheid prevents them from “moving a step.” Like Jessie, Liz is also tied to her home. As discussed, *Late Bourgeois* begins with a domestic scene, and is punctuated by similar descriptions throughout. It is thus highly significant, in terms of trying to understand why one novel was banned and one was passed, that Liz lets Luke into her home in a way that Jessie never does with Gideon. More so, Liz lets Luke into her home specifically by engaging in domestic rituals. She cooks for him: “The mere fact of cooking something that requires more skill and organization of tasks than frying an egg is quite an occasion for me.”<sup>175</sup> She lets him into the private life of her household: “He was talking, wondering around the room, looking, touching here and there, to establish intimacy at once, to show that he was at home.”<sup>176</sup> “At home” here takes on profound meaning. Luke shows that he is comfortable, yes, but he also indicates that he belongs

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<sup>172</sup> Gordimer, *Occasion for Loving*, 9.

<sup>173</sup> Gordimer, *Occasion for Loving*, 95.

<sup>174</sup> Gordimer, *Late Bourgeois World*, 74.

<sup>175</sup> Gordimer, *Late Bourgeois World*, 72.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

there, that he will be back: “He grinned and with just the right, light regret, put the palm of his hand a moment on my backside, with the gesture with which one says, wait there.”<sup>177</sup> He insinuates himself into her home in a way that, in *Occasion*, Jessie never allows Gideon to do. As Liz realizes, “there’s no reason why Luke shouldn’t come back here.”<sup>178</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Liz goes on to make a commitment that Jessie never does. Liz makes a decision, like Toby in *Strangers*, to participate in the political life of the country. In these novels it is movement that acts as the catalyst for these decisions. Spaces, in Gordimer, have a transformative effect. In a country where the distribution of bodies in space is the explicit concern of the state, the implications of what it means to move, of how spaces work on personal relations, are profound. The novels where characters move freely, or where they allow other characters to do the same, are the ones which represent the greatest threat, as evidenced by the fact of their banning.

In *Bourgeois*, a shift in movement has taken place. Luke’s movement from the townships to the suburbs is significant. And what is more significant is that Liz accepts it. McDonald notes that for one of the censors, the key issue was that it was a first-person narrative, and that this: “made him uncertain about how to vote and, more particularly, how to judge the ‘mixing of white and black.’” Nonetheless, the fact that the novel made such ‘intrigues’ look like ‘the most natural thing in the world’ meant that it was ‘not without a seditious effect’” and argued for it to be banned.<sup>179</sup> Here, what the censors objected to was that Liz sees Luke’s place in her home as “the most natural thing in the world.” This concern is repeated throughout the report, and what is significant is the way physical borders are conflated with moral ones: “the intimate intercourse crosses the border of sociability and politics”<sup>180</sup>; the “boundary of permissibility had definitely been crossed.” The “nonchalant acceptance of political and social hobnobbing”<sup>181</sup> between black and white was what made the novel a threat. Most of the “political and social hobnobbing” takes place, or took place, in Liz’s home: “I miss their black faces. I forget about the shambles of the backyard house... and there are only the good times, when William Xaba and the others sat around all day under the apricot tree.”<sup>182</sup>

The white home, then, and what happens in it represents an interesting symbol. The vast difference between who is allowed into Jessie’s home, and who is allowed into Liz’s, again, perhaps

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>179</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 228.

<sup>180</sup> BCS 272/66.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Gordimer, *Late Bourgeois World*, 71.

In South Africa, there are clear notions of what to do, when to do it, and who to do it with. They behave differently in Europe. *Burger's Daughter* will be discussed in more depth in the next section, but it is important to note that Europe, in this novel, performs a very similar function. The people Rosa meets in France are different; there is nothing that they *have* to do:

the nature of their motives is shared and discussed; because the premise is accepted by everybody: live where it's warm, buy, sell or take pleasure honestly – that is, according to your circumstances. They recognise their only imperatives as dependence on a tight-knotted net of friendship, and dedication to avoiding tax wherever possible while using all the state welfare one can contrive to qualify for.<sup>187</sup> ...

I include this here to emphasize the argument that in Gordimer, spaces shape relations. The nature of these relations changes the shape of the narrative. As I have tried to show, it is possible to make sense of the censors' decisions with regard to *World of Strangers*, *Occasion for Loving*, and *The Late Bourgeois World* when examining the novels from this perspective.

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<sup>187</sup> Nadine Gordimer, *Burger's Daughter*, 242.

### Chapter Three: Burger's Daughter, The Conservationist, A Guest Of Honour

In the previous chapter, I have tried to make sense of the censors' decisions by examining the varying degrees of threat posed by the literary geographies of *Bourgeois*, *Occasion*, and *Strangers*. I will try here to do something similar for the next three novels which were scrutinized by the censors: *Burger's Daughter*, *A Guest of Honour*, and *The Conservationist*. In the previous chapter, I compared the spaces in the three novels on a point by point basis. Discussing the significance of the townships in the three novels, for instance, or the suburban white home, I have tried to demonstrate that these spaces posed varying degrees of threat to the established order. It is not possible to do the same with *Daughter*, *Conservationist*, and *Guest* because their literary geographies are so different as to contain almost no overlap. A novel by novel comparison, then, will allow me to make my argument most clearly.

To begin with, no report exists for *A Guest of Honour*, but it is not difficult to understand why the book was not banned. It is not set in South Africa, but in an unnamed African country. The novel begins as follows: "It was the middle of the afternoon, in the heat, in Africa: he knew at once where he was."<sup>188</sup> The reader, however, does not. The novel is vague about where exactly in Africa it is set. Gordimer herself described it as "a nonexistent, composite central African country. Imagine a place somewhere between Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Rhodesia, and Angola – you know, just make a hole in the middle of Africa and push it in – that's where it takes place."<sup>189</sup> South Africa is mentioned, but only to establish its distance: "I've only just come here – from down South Africa... My wife and I decided we couldn't stick it any longer."<sup>190</sup>

It is enough that it is "Africa": "He had kept up, since he finally left Africa ten years ago, a close contact with Adamson Mweta and the other leaders of the African independence movement."<sup>191</sup> For the censors, this must have been reassuringly vague. James Bray, the novel's protagonist, is like Toby Hood in many ways. An Englishman, he starts off detached and unaffiliated, and becomes more involved and engaged, more committed, as the novel progresses. He pays for this commitment with his life. My argument is that it doesn't matter what he does or who he does it with, it doesn't matter how much he begins to resemble Toby Hood, as long as he doesn't do it in South Africa. He can be as committed as he chooses, as long as he commits to a country that is identifiably not South Africa. Liz in *Bourgeois* and Toby in *Strangers* commit to South Africa.

<sup>188</sup> Gordimer, *Guest of Honour*, 3.

<sup>189</sup> E.G. Burrows, "An interview with Nadine Gordimer", *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Vol. IX, (Fall 1970), 233-34.

<sup>190</sup> Gordimer, *Guest of Honour*, 10.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.



These novels were banned. James Bray commits, but not to South Africa. The novel was passed. My argument is supported by McDonald, who, in fact, dispenses with the issue in parenthesis: “(Though no report on *A Guest of Honour* appears to have survived, it is likely that its setting outside South Africa counted in its favour).”<sup>192</sup> That this novel (and the reasons it was banned) can be dispensed with so quickly accounts for the differing length of Chapters Two and Three of this thesis.

In order to proceed with an analysis of the literary geography of *The Conservationist*, it is important to re-examine two of McDonald’s definitions of what the censors meant when they referred to a novel as “literary”:

2. A particular literature achieves greatness only when it takes its place within a series of larger spheres, constructed variously as ‘European’, ‘Western’ or ultimately, the ‘universal’.
3. Literature does not appeal to a mass readership. It can be appreciated only by a limited and sophisticated public ... only by literary readers.<sup>193</sup>

The question of what it means for a novel to be “literary” is of particular importance here because, as Tamlyn Monson observes, “*The Conservationist* has been widely recognized as Gordimer’s break with conventional realism.”<sup>194</sup> Head notes that “with the emphasis on style and form there is little in the way of plot to recapitulate; the novel, like many modernist novels, is presented as an internal drama.”<sup>195</sup> The novel, in other words, seems to cleave more closely to what the censors described as “literary.” In his assessment of the censors’ decisions regarding *The Conservationist*, McDonald argues that “turning the aestheticist arguments used in the *Bourgeois World* decision upside down, it was, in effect, the novel’s narrative mode, polyvalent character typologies, and openness to interpretation that saved it.”<sup>196</sup> In other words, it was ‘literary’ enough to pass, with its “fragmentary structure and modernist techniques,” a novel that is “certainly not ‘whole’ in any formal sense,”<sup>197</sup> as Barnard argues. So its literariness, in this case, was what made it less obviously undesirable.

However, discussing *Conservationist*, Barnard continues that the novel is “concerned with the pathological results, for both the individual and society, of a refusal to face up to fundamental social injustices.”<sup>198</sup> If this is the case, if it “engaged with the historical circumstances of apartheid South Africa in especially powerful and critical ways”<sup>199</sup> then why was it not banned? My argument is that

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<sup>192</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 231.

<sup>193</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 163.

<sup>194</sup> Tamlyn Monson, “Conserving the Cogito: Rereading Nadine Gordimer,” *Research in African Literatures* Volume 35, Number 4, Winter (2004), 34.

<sup>195</sup> Head, *Nadine Gordimer*, 100.

<sup>196</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 232.

<sup>197</sup> Barnard, *Apartheid and Beyond*, 77.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>199</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 244.

the novel's specific literary geography, which corresponds exactly to the censors' ideas of the "literary," makes it less of a threat to the established order.

The novel begins on a farm: "Swaying over the ruts to the gate of the third pasture, Sunday morning, the owner of the farm suddenly sees: a clutch of freckled eggs set out before a half-circle of children."<sup>200</sup> Important things are established here. The pastoral scene is sketched out. Mehring, the novel's protagonist, is identified first as the owner of the farm (the way Liz and Jessie, in *Bourgeois* and *Occasion*, are identified first as the owners of white suburban homes). His primary identity is that of proprietor. Before he has a name, he is "the owner" of the land on which the story takes place. Cooke notes that Mehring is depicted as "a latter day colonialist, the narrative an account of his brief colonizing of the farm."<sup>201</sup> In the previous chapter, I have tried to show that the countryside in the six Gordimer novels under discussion here is a place where people are not present, and is thus less significant as a space in which resolutions can be wrought. Unlike the township, which is given its definitive features by the people who inhabit it, the countryside in the six novels exists whether people are there or not. In *Conservationist*, this is especially evident: "As the air plunges in him, his gaze widens and sweeps: down along the river the willows have gone blond, not yet at their palest combed out into bare strands, but still lightly spattered and delicately streaked with yellow leaves."<sup>202</sup> His gaze notably fails to take in people. There are simply less of them here: "He is here alone... Every feature is made simple and prominent by the purity and dryness of winter."<sup>203</sup>

This means that movement, in this novel, works in a very different way. Cooke argues that in Gordimer's "later novels the landscape ceases to serve as a background in which the characters attempt to read 'outward signs'. It becomes a living force ... in her fictional world."<sup>204</sup> Firstly, the farm is a place to escape to; in some sense it is a place where the rules of "good old awful Johannesburg"<sup>205</sup> do not apply: "Mehring went to his farm almost every weekend. If he had put his mind to it, and if he had had more time, he knew he could have made it pay just like anything else."<sup>206</sup> Head notes that "the diletantism that this implies is crucially confirmed by the fact that

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<sup>200</sup> Gordimer, *Conservationist*, 8.

<sup>201</sup> Cooke, *Nadine Gordimer*, 150.

<sup>202</sup> Gordimer, *Conservationist*, 10.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>204</sup> Cooke, *Nadine Gordimer*, 130.

<sup>205</sup> Gordimer, *Occasion for Loving*, 264.

<sup>206</sup> Gordimer, *Conservationist*, 10.

farming losses are tax deductible, which makes success or failure for ‘farmers’ like Mehring unimportant.”<sup>207</sup>

Like Ann in *Occasion*, who seems to see her time with Gideon in the countryside as a kind of holiday, there is the sense that Mehring does not take this space, or his position in it, entirely seriously. From the very beginning, the farm is established as a place away, apart. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Gordimer’s countryside often has a sense of timelessness. There are very similar descriptions that support this, across all of her novels. Here, again, is Liz Van Den Sandt describing her drive through the countryside: “It was all exactly as it had been... It was the morning I had woken up to, gone out into again and again; the very morning.”<sup>208</sup>

And here is Mehring:

This place – his farm – really is what everyone says of it, he himself as well... A high-veld autumn, a silvery-gold peace... As if he hadn’t been away. As if nothing had ever happened; as if there never has been – is not- someone dead down there”<sup>209</sup>;

“This place absorbs everything, takes everything to itself and loses everything in itself. It’s innocent.”<sup>210</sup>

There is something featureless, again, about the landscape and its “innocence”: “All along the vlei, broad river islands of reed and willow, the lands remained underwater. No one could get near; no one went down there.”<sup>211</sup> There is something ageless about the countryside, and something enclosed. The rules of the game will be different here.

In all three of the banned novels, meetings between black and white speak of some kind of effort or commitment. Movement, in the banned novels, often means risk, and it means effort. In *Strangers*, Gordimer is obliged to string a necklace of parties, in order to bring together the people that need to meet in order for the plot to develop. In *Bourgeois*, Liz must allow Luke into her home at personal risk to them both. In *Daughter*, Rosa must travel to Fats’ place in Orlando. In *Conservationist*, if Mehring wants to see Jacobus (who he is not meeting socially, but as his employee), he must walk across a field. The significance of movement, and of the meetings that take place between black and white, then, is different. It is easy for black and white to meet on the farm, but the terms of their meeting are very strictly defined and circumscribed. Mehring is the master and Jacobus is the servant. And a farm worker is a very different thing from a black city dweller: “a farm worker has no

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<sup>207</sup> Head, Nadine Gordimer, 100.

<sup>208</sup> Gordimer, *Late Bourgeois World*, 10.

<sup>209</sup> Gordimer, *Conservationist*, 38.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

papers for town”<sup>212</sup>; they are a thing apart. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the novels set in Johannesburg spend a great deal of time describing the protagonists’ movement about the city. The exertion that it takes to move, especially to move between the “two worlds” of white and black is made clear.

No such effort is required here: “They take a detour, by way of the paddock...Mehring and old De Beer. Hansie gives someone advice about a calf. Jacobus has appeared in his gumboots and torn overalls and is carrying feed.”<sup>213</sup> Jacobus simply “appears.” There don’t need to be any parties, in other words, for Mehring (white) and Jacobus (black) to meet; there don’t need to be any explanations of how it is that “some Africans can do these things.”<sup>214</sup> The specific literary geography of the novel removes this as a concern; the farm is the “manor or island” that Bourdieu discusses. Here, black and white are constantly thrown together, but their meetings are without overt political implications. Arranging meetings on a farm is different. That Mehring meets Jacobus does not speak of any commitment on his behalf; he is not travelling to the townships, he is not defying the Group Areas Act. What it speaks of is the relationship between employer and employee. Their meetings are unremarkable: “[Mehring] pushes his way about through burned reds and along fields the whole morning, trudging up to consult with Jacobus and then going off down again.”<sup>215</sup> The literary geography of the farm means that Mehring needs to exert no effort in order to “trudge” to where Jacobus is. More than this, white and black only ever meet as master and servant: “At the stove Alina is stirring something that already smells burnt. She looks half asleep and moves reluctantly; she’s not used to being required in the house in the mornings.”<sup>216</sup> Alina, the black domestic worker, is only ever perceived as such; she is only viewed in terms of how she fulfils Mehring’s “requirements.”

It is illuminating at this point to make a comparison with *Burger’s Daughter*, another novel in which very specific *kinds* of interactions take place on the farm, in the country:

Tony was so happy helping to cook bricks in a serious mud-pie game with the farm labourers who called him ‘little master’ ... and playing with half-naked black children ... . I understood quite quickly that Baasie, with whom I lived in that house, couldn’t have come here; I understood what Lily meant when she said he wouldn’t like to.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>214</sup> Gordimer, *Late Bourgeois World*, 74.

<sup>215</sup> Gordimer, *Conservationist*, 89.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>217</sup> Gordimer, *Burger’s Daughter*, 71.

Relations on the farm, then, are determined in a different way, they follow very specific channels. Here, spatial boundaries and taboos are entrenched, part of the natural order. These delineations are observed by all of the characters. The same cannot be said of the way the characters (especially in the banned novels) move throughout the apartheid city.

Mehring is untouched and unaffected by the forces of movement, the exposure to the city, which change the way Toby (*Strangers*) and Liz (*Bourgeois*) and, as will be seen, Rosa (*Daughter*), behave. Even when he is in the city, as Barnard notes, “He is seldom exposed to the street (which Gordimer has elsewhere posed as a utopian space of social interaction) but instead drives from one underground parking bay to the other where gates are opened for him by black attendants.”<sup>218</sup>

If Mehring, like Gordimer’s other characters, has found himself “at the edge of his theories about themselves and the world,”<sup>219</sup> then the literary geography of the novel does nothing to alter or develop his “theories,” as I have argued that it does with the other, banned novels. He makes no commitment, comes to no resolution as Rosa or Liz or Toby do. Cooke observes that “Mehring spends much of his time avoiding the identification he inwardly desires with the farm and the workers. What Gordimer’s earlier, liberal protagonists sought, he resists.”<sup>220</sup> What her earlier protagonists seek is resolution and commitment. I have argued that they are moved to seek this because of the perspective they gain through movement, through seeing the city as a whole.

Mehring is never manoeuvred into any such position. My argument is firstly that in this, the novel represents less of a clear threat. Secondly, I would argue that the reason he does not commit is that the literary geography of the novel does not force him to do so. In the following chapter, a brief discussion of the censors’ response to J.M.Coetzee’s work will demonstrate the extent to which the idea of “universality” is connected to literariness. Failing what McDonald calls “the universality” test meant failing the space test. In the report on *In The Heart of the Country* (1977),<sup>221</sup> for instance, the censors stressed that “sex across the colour bar occurs, but the characters are historico-geographically so situated that it is perfectly acceptable.”<sup>222</sup> The novel is not easy to pin down in terms of space or time, in other words, and so it is less obviously undesirable. McDonald argues that “for the censors, the anti-realist elements of his writing simply obscured. . . the relationship between his fictions and the contemporary realities of apartheid South Africa and, as such, contributed to

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<sup>218</sup> Barnard, *Apartheid and Beyond*, 82.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>220</sup> Cooke, *Nadine Gordimer*, 152.

<sup>221</sup> J.M. Coetzee, *In the Heart of the Country* (London: Vintage, 1999).

<sup>222</sup> P77/7/103.

their saving aesthetic qualities.”<sup>223</sup> There is a parallel to be drawn here with *Conservationist*. For the censors, the main mitigating factor was that the novel was not as “clearly and explicitly written”<sup>224</sup> as Gordimer’s earlier novels. They remarked that “the line between fact and fiction, reality and imagination in the central figure is not always easy to draw.”<sup>225</sup> If *A Guest of Honour* was passed because its setting rendered it more acceptable, then can it be argued that the same thing happened with *Conservationist*? If the lines between fact and fiction were not easy to draw, then is the space of the novel somehow less culpable?

The faintly unreal setting, the timeless quality, the landscape that is notably bereft of people, means, perhaps, that it is less identifiably South African in some way, and therefore less likely to be specifically threatening to the established order. In 1986, Stephen Clingman noted that “It is a stock response of critics and reviewers – both inside and outside South Africa, to insist that Gordimer’s work is ‘universal’, that it could have been written ‘anywhere’.”<sup>226</sup> This seems especially astute when applied to *The Conservationist*. Head, among others, has described it as a modernist novel.<sup>227</sup> It is helpful at this point to compare the censors’ response to the critical reception of *the* modernist novel, James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. For one thing, both Gordimer and Joyce’s early critics and reviewers worked hard to emphasize the “universal” aspects of their work. This, it has been argued (at least in the case of Joyce) was a direct response to the threat of censorship.<sup>228</sup> In other words, both Gordimer’s and Joyce’s early champions saw that emphasizing the “universal qualities” (in Joyce’s case, Pound and Eliot’s emphasis on the Homeric scaffold of *Ulysses*) of their work would lessen the threat of banning, render them less offensive. The “universal” qualities of *Conservationist*, then, are the ones that give the impression that it could have been written anywhere. The appeal of this to the censors is obvious. The threat is less significant.

Finally, in *Burger’s Daughter*, many of the most interesting aspects of Gordimer’s particular literary geography are expressed. McDonald notes that *Daughter* was the only one of Gordimer’s novels “scrutinized under the new bureaucratic arrangements introduced in 1975,”<sup>229</sup> which had “a significant impact on the way it was handled.”<sup>230</sup> The novel was initially recommended for banning, at

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<sup>223</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 313.

<sup>224</sup> P76/2/103.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Clingman, *Nadine Gordimer*, 18.

<sup>227</sup> Head, *Nadine Gordimer*.

<sup>228</sup> Katherine Mullin, *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007); Declan Kiberd, *Ulysses and Us: the Art of Everyday Life in Joyce’s Masterpiece* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton &, 2009); Sean Latham, “Twenty-first Century Critical Contexts” in *James Joyce in Context*, John McCourt (ed.) (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2009).

<sup>229</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 232.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

which point the chief censor intervened and asked for the decision to be reviewed by the Appeal Board's "new committee of literary experts."<sup>231</sup> The Appeal Board recommended that the novel be passed, using justifications whose significance will be discussed in the final chapter. For this section, the initial decision of the censors, the one that said the novel should be banned, will be important.

The censors' initial response to the novel is difficult to understand. Their allegation that the novel was "a blistering and full-scale attack on the Republic of South Africa"<sup>232</sup> seems even more ludicrous than usual, given that the novel is an extremely "literary" and personal account of one character's (Rosa Burger) growth and development. It is fractured; it uses many different narrative modes and perspectives. It should have been "literary" enough to pass, as McDonald argues was the case with *Conservationist*. Its fragmented narrative mode should have worked in its favour. Why, then, was it initially banned? An exploration of the novel's literary geography reveals potential answers. As discussed in the previous chapters, the white home in Gordimer allows for certain, different possibilities. Lionel Burger's home in *Daughter*, always referred to as "that house," represents a very specific kind of space, where very specific possibilities exist. From the beginning, *that house* is established as a space where people of different races convene, where they meet with relative freedom: "She must have invited him; many people came on Sundays, it was a tradition ... Nothing the secret police could do more than interrupt."<sup>233</sup>

Within the novel, various characters remark on its significance. Here, Conrad (Rosa's lover at the beginning of the novel) and Rosa discuss it:

- But the people who came to your house weren't there for bridge parties with your mother or bridge evenings with cigars...- They came together to make a revolution. That was ordinary, to you. That *intention*. It was the normal atmosphere in that house.-  
-You have the craziest idea about that house.-She was brought up short by her own use of the definition 'that house' distancing the private enclosures of her being.<sup>234</sup>

*That house*, then, determines the behaviour of the people who live in it. There are certain conversations that can be had in *that house*, and certain ones that cannot: "There were things whose existence was not admitted, in that house."<sup>235</sup> As Cooke notes, "Rosa will remain bound to her parents' house as her continuing perception of her father as a haven from the world's pain indicates."<sup>236</sup> Rosa is tied to her parents' house because in some sense, it is the place that teaches her

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>232</sup> P79/6/73.

<sup>233</sup> Gordimer, *Burger's Daughter*, 17.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>236</sup> Cooke, *Nadine Gordimer*, 73.

how to be. It is a place that demands something of her, comfortably outlining the nature of her duty to the country she lives in, Lionel Burger's country. Head observes that "In *Burger's Daughter*, Gordimer takes her examination of the committed white South African to a new place; here she considers the ethical dilemmas and choices of . . . someone whose commitment has been . . . determined by a particular ideology."<sup>237</sup> It is significant that Head speaks specifically of commitment. The function of *that house* in the novel is to let Rosa know what her commitment should be. "I was living alone for the first time in my life. For us- coming from that house – that was the real definition of loneliness: to live without social responsibility."<sup>238</sup>

That house, then, is what has compelled Rosa Burger to commit. It is clear, that *that house* would represent a threat. Jessie Stilwell's home is the space that "allows" her to have little responsibility to others. It is her refuge, a space where the only things she is obliged to care about are herself, her marriage, her family. That Liz Van Den Sandt lets the activist Luke into her home is a transgression because she has demonstrated her commitment to a different kind of South Africa by violating the sanctity of the white home. Lionel Burger's home is more than this. Its very existence is a violation of the apartheid order. It is a space where "social responsibility" is expected, where being a member of the household means committing. It is not a "safe" white space, in terms of apartheid thinking. The censor's reader who made the recommendation argued that the novel should be banned "under all five clauses because it was a 'political novel' centrally preoccupied with 'black consciousness and organizing for the coming black revolution.'"<sup>239</sup> The novel's "political" qualities, so threatening to the censors, emerge in part by the staging of the scenes in *that house*, by the violation or contravening of the white sanctuary.

As mentioned earlier, my project is similar to Barnard's in the sense that it involves an exploration of what it is to know one's place. It is fascinating to see what happens to Rosa when *that house* no longer exists. Rosa's parents die, and the house is lost. With it, goes her sense of purpose. For Rosa, knowing her place means knowing what to do in it, knowing how to be. The point is, *that house* gives her that security, and that is something she is no longer able to rely on. Partway through the novel, Rosa makes the decision to leave for Europe. Clingman argues that she "goes to Europe to learn how to 'defect' from her father and the historical legacy he has handed her."<sup>240</sup> Rosa's difficulty in leaving the country is explored at some length, especially in her difficulty in getting a

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<sup>237</sup> Head, *Nadine Gordimer*, 110-111.

<sup>238</sup> Gordimer, *Burger's Daughter*, 77.

<sup>239</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 233.

<sup>240</sup> Stephen Clingman, "The Subject of Revolution" in *Burger's Daughter: A Casebook*, ed. Judie Newman, 61.



passport. Her observation that “I have no passport because I am my father’s daughter”<sup>241</sup> is significant, because there is the sense, in the novel, that her “passport,” her idea that she belongs somewhere, was tied up with her status as an inhabitant of her father’s house. Her “passport,” that which tells her where she is and what she should be doing there, is lost along with *that house*, and so, “I don’t know at what point to intercede makes sense for me. Every week the woman who comes to clean my flat and wash my clothes brings a child whose make believe is polishing floors and doing washing.”<sup>242</sup> This seems to be one of the novel’s most strikingly “political” statements, and one that concerns a thoroughly domestic space. As mentioned above, the censors objected to what they saw as the novel’s overtly “revolutionary” nature. It is difficult to understand this reading, unless one sees the implied threat revealed by one of the novel’s most important spaces, Lionel Burger’s home, as well as what it means for its central character.

With the loss of the house, comes the loss of Rosa’s moral compass. Although Clingman argues that Rosa leaves South Africa in order, generally, to ‘defect’ from her father, my argument is that this departure comes as a result of a specific narrative crisis, which has been shaped by the literary geography of the novel. There are two decisive scenes in the novel which alter the narrative completely. They do so by creating a circumstance in which Rosa is forced or compelled to move. The first makes her leave; the second makes her come home. The first, of course, is the scene in which Rosa comes across the old man whipping the donkey. The second is the conversation she has over the phone with Baasie/Zwelinzima, “one of the most powerful and extraordinary scenes in Gordimer’s fiction.”<sup>243</sup> To begin with, a brief analysis of the donkey-flogging scene, specifically with regard to where it takes place, will indicate the impact this has on the novel’s imaginative structure. The scene is significant because it takes place, in some sense, “off the map.” It is off the map, and so it is somehow not real. In *Atlas*, Moretti asks:

Why do novels so often mix real geographical sites and imaginary locations? Are the latter needed for some *specific* narrative function? Are there ... events that tend to happen in real spaces, and others that ‘prefer’ fictional ones? ... Austen’s novels certainly suggest that fictional spaces are particularly suited to happy endings... By contrast, the more pessimistic a narrative structure becomes, the more infrequent are its imaginary spaces.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Gordimer, *Burger’s Daughter*, 62.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>243</sup> Clingman, *Subject of Revolution*, 67.

<sup>244</sup> Moretti, *Atlas*, 18.

It is fascinating to note, then, that the reverse seems to be true of the Gordimer novels, and especially of *Burger's Daughter*. It has a profoundly pessimistic narrative structure, and yet some of the most crucial scenes take place in spaces that are imaginary, or “do not exist.”

Like the scenes in the townships in the earlier novels, it is important that the donkey-flogging scene takes place nowhere: “I gained a cambered dirt road without signposts just as one of those donkey-carts that survive on the routes between *these places that don't exist* was approaching along a track from the opposite side.”<sup>245</sup> Once again, Gordimer has chosen to stage a significant scene in a space that, like the townships, is not wholly “real.” She has chosen to stage a significant scene in a space that has not been wholly inscribed by the apartheid state. Rosa does not know where she is: “I wasn't even sure how to get across to the township without going all the way back through town. . . Orlando [her point of orientation] might have been at the other end of the world.”<sup>246</sup> As discussed, Rosa Burger's moral orientation is almost always connected to her physical positioning. In this scene, she is at a loss. She sees the driver flogging the donkey:

Suddenly [the driver's] body arched back with one upflung arm against the sky and lurched over as if he had been shot and at that instant the donkey was bowed by a paroxysm that seemed to draw its four legs and head down towards the centre of its body in a noose, then fling head and extremities wide again.<sup>247</sup>

Rosa thinks about intervening, but sees that she cannot, because her status as a white woman morally compromises her to an impossible degree: “That sort of old man, those people, peasants existing the only way they know how, *in the place that isn't on the map*, they would have been afraid of me.”<sup>248</sup> In *The Subject of Revolution*, Clingman argues that “it appears that the only way she could intervene to stop the immediate cruelty at hand would be to exploit her position of white authority.”<sup>249</sup> She sees that she has nothing to do but leave: “Nothing and nobody stopped me from using that passport. After the donkey, I couldn't stop myself. I don't know how to live in Lionel Burger's country.”<sup>250</sup> It is not clear to her what she should do or how she should be. That she is morally lost is emphasized by the fact that she is physically lost. For Rosa to be in a place “without signposts” is hugely significant, because it is places that tell her what to do. Confounded by what to do in the place that isn't on the map, her role is entirely unclear to her.

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<sup>245</sup> Gordimer, *Burger's Daughter*, 207. Italics mine.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Gordimer, *Burger's Daughter*, 208.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 209. Italics mine.

<sup>249</sup> Clingman, *Subject of Revolution*, 62.

<sup>250</sup> Gordimer, *Burger's Daughter*, 210.

Gordimer has staged this crucial scene in a space which, like the parties in the townships, is physically featureless. Once again, the narrative is forced to progress by the playing out of a scene in what amounts to no-man's land. Newman notes that "history is particularly vital to an understanding of *Burger's Daughter*. The novel is a cultural and historical document, both in its content and in its own history of censorship, which makes it crucial to an understanding of South Africa in the 1970s."<sup>251</sup> I would like to extend this and argue that recognising that this crucial scene takes place nowhere is vital to an understanding of South Africa in the 1970s. In the South Africa in which *Burger's Daughter* is set, there was no space to move. Every centimetre of land bore the imprint of the apartheid state; everywhere meant something. By the 1970s, every centimetre of land "belonged" to whites, or was doled out reluctantly to blacks. It is highly significant, then, that the space of the donkey-flogging scene is nowhere, because it does not "belong" to either world. If characters' actions in Gordimer are determined so utterly by their environment, then the only way to stage a scene in which a character *simply does not know what to do*, is to have it take place somewhere that "doesn't exist." Where else could this scene have been set, if not nowhere? It is arguable, then, that this nowhere space would have represented a particular kind of threat to the censor. If, as Christopher argues, the foundation of apartheid was the control of space, then a space which is identifiably South African, identifiably contemporary, identifiably urban, but which belongs to no one, is somehow beyond the reach of the state. As such, it represents a specific danger. As mentioned, it is not my argument that the state had a *conscious* policy of policing literary geography. Rather, it is that concern with space, with the vigilant maintenance of borders, dominated South African life to the extent that it manifested itself in every feature of apartheid legislation.

Rosa sees that she must leave: "She tramped slowly across the tarmac, disappeared in the shadow of the plane's wing ... She climbed the metal stairway to the darker shadow of the door, not turning back to look. Surveillance watched her go in."<sup>252</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, Europe has a very particular resonance in Gordimer's novels. Obligations there are less; the space requires less of a commitment from its inhabitants than South Africa does. This is very clear in *Daughter*, where leaving the country is positioned as somehow irresponsible. Throughout the novel, there is a recognition of what it means to leave: "After I had taken the passport, after I'd gone – I

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<sup>251</sup> Newman, *Burger's Daughter*, 10.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

don't know what they said: the faithful. They would surely never have believed it of me."<sup>253</sup> Leaving is not something a person like Rosa Burger should be capable of doing.

In Gordimer, a character demonstrates commitment by staying. To leave is to abandon a duty, dishonour a promise. That Ann Davis is able to leave so easily in *Occasion* shows that she was never there in the first place. Staying is important, in the way that Liz does in *Bourgeois*. Coming back is more so, like Toby in *Strangers*, and like Rosa. Head observes that "For Rosa Burger... the question of alignment turns out, ultimately, not to be a matter of choice; there is no escaping her inheritance."<sup>254</sup> Her inheritance, in the shape of the lessons taught to her in *that house*, means that she cannot but commit. However, it is only leaving that allows her to understand how she will be able to do it. In *The Subject of Revolution*, Clingman argues that "For much of the course of the novel Rosa is in straightforward revolt against both her historical heritage and the demands of her current situation."<sup>255</sup> If Rosa is in "revolt" against the problem of commitment, then the clearest way this is expressed is through movement, by the fact of her leaving. The clearest way that she will express her commitment is by coming back.

When Rosa goes to Europe, she finds herself in a space that demands nothing of her. Unlike *that house*, which has shaped her behaviour, her sense of what the country has a right to ask of her, Europe as a space is without request or complaint. She arrives in France, and everything is different: "The girl gazed at a day without landmarks."<sup>256</sup> In France she is not Rosa. She is *the girl*; her distinguishing features as the inhabitant of *that house* are absent. In this space that means nothing to her, nothing is asked of her:

Dissolving in the wine and pleasure of scents, sights and sounds existing only in themselves, associated with nothing and nobody, Rosa Burger's sense of herself was lazily objective. The sea, the softly throbbing blood in her hands lolling from the chair-arms, time as only the sundial of the wall's advancing shadow, all lapped tidelessly without distinction of within or around her.<sup>257</sup>

In Europe then, she is able to look at herself from an objective distance and be associated with nothing. In this space, there is nothing that Rosa must do, nobody that she is bound to by duty. As mentioned earlier, the only obligation the people she meets in France have is to themselves: "They recognise their only imperatives as dependence on a tight-knotted net of friendship, and

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>254</sup> Head, *Nadine Gordimer*, 111.

<sup>255</sup> Clingman, *Subject of Revolution*, 61.

<sup>256</sup> Gordimer, *Burger's Daughter*, 217.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 222.

dedication to avoiding tax wherever possible while using all the state welfare one can contrive to qualify for ...”<sup>258</sup>

This space, then, gives Rosa a freedom, but it also represents a kind of stagnation. If she is bound to nothing and nobody, then there is nowhere for the narrative to go. In *What the Book is About*, an essay on *Burger’s Daughter*, Gordimer argues that in Europe, “she finds evidence that another kind of suffering – loneliness, old age, death – is the inescapable end of those...who seek to hide away in the consolations of a wholly private life, absolving themselves of the imperatives of social responsibility.”<sup>259</sup> If she has “for a time, a very good time, with pleasant, hedonistic people,”<sup>260</sup> as compelling as this may be, something needs to change in the literary geography in order for the narrative to progress. Something must change in terms of the space that Rosa is in. If there are certain meetings that need to take place, in order for Rosa to see that she must come home, must commit, then the geography of the novel must develop in order for this to happen.

Gordimer once again turns to the party: “But she did go to a party with a young Indian couple who were learning French along with her ... At the party there were other South African Indians; she had told the young couple her real name but asked them to respect her privacy for the time being ...”<sup>261</sup>

For the narrative to progress, Rosa must meet South Africans, especially ones who are not white, because she must be put in a position where she begins to question her commitment. The only plausible place for South Africans of different races to meet, even overseas it seems, is at a party. However, what is still more interesting is the way in which the party, by this point, has stopped *working*. Returning to Bourdieu’s point about “the structure of the social space in which the adventures of Frederic unfold, proves to be at the same time the structure of the social space in which its author himself was situated,”<sup>262</sup> it is clear that in the late seventies, even when the scene is set outside of the country itself, fictional parties in which South Africans of different races meet could no longer plausibly hold a plot together. Newman notes that “the 1970s were a painful period for white writers as the growth of Black Consciousness tended to silence and marginalize them, and black activists increasingly perceived them as irrelevant.”<sup>263</sup> By the 1970s, the dream of multi-racialism, as outlined in *Strangers*, was dead. Rob Nixon argues that “South Africa’s recent history is

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>259</sup> Gordimer cited in Newman, 152

<sup>260</sup> O’ Brien, “Waiting for Revolution”, 46.

<sup>261</sup> Gordimer, *Burger’s Daughter*, 311.

<sup>262</sup> Bourdieu, *Rules of Art*, 3.

<sup>263</sup> Newman, *Burger’s Daughter*, 9.

routinely referred to as pre- or post-1976. The dividing event, the uprising led by Soweto schoolchildren, occurs only toward the end of *Burger's Daughter*, but the novel takes its bearings from that momentous action."<sup>264</sup> The Soweto Uprising, its far-reaching implications, made Gordimer's pre-1976 township parties impossible. As already mentioned, in *Strangers*, for instance, there are certain kinds of conversations that only take place at parties; they are a timeless space where a certain amount of freedom is allowed. By the time *Daughter* was written, this no longer made sense. The political landscape of South Africa was such that the fantasy of Gordimer's multi-racial "drinking parties" could not do the job as a plot device.

As discussed, there are two decisive scenes which completely alter the shape of the narrative. Both take place nowhere. For the second scene, the conversation between Rosa and Zwelinzima (who was once Baasie, the black child who Rosa was raised with), it is highly significant that it takes place not at a party, but over the phone. First, Rosa sees Zwelinzima at a London party and "the conversation seemed to follow some formula, like a standard letter copied from a manual that deals with birthday greetings, births and deaths."<sup>265</sup> They cannot or will not speak freely. They can only speak according to a formula; there seems to be nothing left for them to say. Then, Rosa gets a phone call, late at night:

-Listen. I didn't like the things you said at *that place* tonight.-  
 -I said?-  
 -I didn't like the way you went around and how you spoke."<sup>266</sup>

The spatial territory, in other words, has become too fraught, too loaded. "That place," the party, has too much attached to it. As Rosa says: "What other meeting place could there have been for us? There have been so many trials, interrogations, fleings."<sup>267</sup> In the South Africa in which *Burger's Daughter* is set, there are no longer any spaces where black and white can meet, not in "the street" (which Barnard insists is a "utopian space of social interaction"<sup>268</sup> in Gordimer), not in the city (as Morphet argues<sup>269</sup>), not at a party, not in the countryside. The conversations that matter can now take place only over the phone. This moment decisively changes the narrative: "I cannot explain to anyone why that telephone call in the middle of the night made everything that was

<sup>264</sup> Rob Nixon, "Nadine Gordimer" in *British Writers: Supplement 2*, ed. George Stade (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992), 13.

<sup>265</sup> Gordimer, *Burger's Daughter*, 314.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>268</sup> Barnard, *Apartheid and Beyond*, 82.

<sup>269</sup> Morphet, *Stranger Fictions*, 55.

possible, impossible. Not to anyone.”<sup>270</sup> The phone call, and the recognition that the conversations which need to be had can no longer take place in the spaces Rosa inhabits, changes everything, and she returns home: “Rosa Burger’s return to her native country within the period for which her passport was valid coincided with two events rivalling each other in prominence in the newspapers.”<sup>271</sup>

It is clear, then, to see the threat this novel represents in terms of its literary geography. The commitment Rosa makes to return comes as a result of her wrestling with the implications and demands of different kinds of spaces. That she recognizes the demand that South Africa makes of her means that she recognizes her place, she knows it. Like Toby and Liz, the space she chooses to occupy, more than anything else, signifies her commitment to a different kind of South Africa. To know one’s place is to know what to do in it, and the threat that this would represent to the established order is clear. The censors argued that:

[t]he authoress uses Rosa’s story as a pad from which to launch a blistering and full-scale attack on the Republic of South Africa, its government’s racial policies; white privilege; social and political structure; processes of law and prisons; forces for the preservation of law and order; black housing and education; the pass law; etc. The whites are the baddies, the black (sic) the goodies.<sup>272</sup>

The form that this “blistering attack” takes seems on the face of it to be fairly mild. Despite the unbanning that came swiftly after, the censors’ initial response to the novel shows how grave was the threat of the figure who chooses to commit. The literary geography of the novel is such that Rosa’s commitment is inevitable. Analysis of the donkey-flogging scene, the scene with the phone call, and the space of *that house* show that the movement of bodies in space are key to the novel’s outcome. The “blistering attack” that the novel mounts, in other words, seems mostly to do with its literary geography, with the way characters in the novel have chosen to move, and with what that movement seems to mean.

In the previous chapter, I have tried to demonstrate the prevalence of certain spaces in Gordimer’s earlier novels, and show how these might have represented varying degrees of threat to the apartheid censors. As mentioned earlier, it was not possible to do the same thing with this chapter, as the literary geography of the three novels under discussion was so widely disparate. However, it is still clear that a close examination of the novels’ literary geography goes some way to

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<sup>270</sup> Gordimer, *Burger’s Daughter*, 328.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, 333.

<sup>272</sup> P79/6/73.

explaining the decisions of the censors. It becomes still more clear that some spaces in Gordimer are more meaningful than others, they demand more of their inhabitants, and they shape the imaginative structure of the novels in powerful and unexpected ways.



## Chapter Four: Conclusion

The epigraph to Bourdieu's *The Rules of Art* is from Flaubert: "One does not write what one wants."<sup>273</sup> In concluding, I want to try and understand what this might mean in a South African context. Much of the research done on apartheid has been concerned, naturally, with its consequences, with how its effects reverberate today. In his introduction, Christopher notes that "the physical and social heritage of over forty-five years of enforced separation are overwhelming."<sup>274</sup> The full title of McDonald's book is *The Literature Police: Apartheid Censorship and its Cultural Consequences*. For my final chapter, then, I hope to focus on consequences. I hope to draw a line between two distinct points. The first point is the historical fact of censorship in South Africa. The second point is a novel called *Absolution*, by Patrick Flanery, published in 2012. My argument is that the novel's structure and form can be accounted for by the fact of censorship; that it exists as it does as a consequence of the decisions made by the Publications Control Board.

To begin with, much of *Absolution* is actually about censorship. Sam Leroux, a journalist, comes back home to South Africa to write the biography of Clare Wald, a celebrated novelist, recognized for her outspoken opinions against the apartheid state. In the process of their interviews, the connection between Clare and Sam becomes more clear, while Clare's moral status becomes more murky. As well as the interviews, Sam is doing his own research into censorship, examining reports in the Public Archives. Many of the characters, then, are concerned with South African censorship. They talk about it a great deal; it forms the basis of much of Sam and Clare's initial conversation.

To link the novel back to McDonald's research, it could be argued that the character of Clare Wald in some ways embodies the contradiction explored in his work. That contradiction, as Wald puts it, concerns the gap between the censors as essential working parts in a brutally oppressive mechanism, and the fact that they "naively fancied themselves as sophisticated arbiters of the literary."<sup>275</sup> Clare Wald, the acclaimed liberal writer of interventionist novels, who turns out to have been a censor herself says: "I will say only that I did it as a kind of challenge to the system, believing that I might be able to subvert it from within, or prove that there was nothing high-minded about its

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<sup>273</sup> Gustave Flaubert, cited in Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*.

<sup>274</sup> Christopher, *Atlas of Apartheid*, 7.

<sup>275</sup> Flanery, *Absolution*, 47.

aims.”<sup>276</sup> One of McDonald’s most insistent points is that the censors were not all brutes and barbarians. The complex character of Clare Wald seems almost to be an embodiment of this paradox.

But the connection is stronger and deeper than this. My argument is that what Coetzee calls “the deforming side effects of censorship”<sup>277</sup> can still be felt today, in both the formal and thematic concerns of this novel. The power of the censors to shape and inform literary taste can be clearly seen in *Absolution*. If we see Clare, for instance, as a kind of projection of the kind of censor, or the kind of complicated ideas about culpability and guardianship, that McDonald discusses in his work, then one could argue that the novel itself involves a similar kind of imaginative leap. In other words, if one was going to imagine the kind of novel that the censors wanted, the kind of South African literary geography that they were trying to create, then it might look something like *Absolution*. In the previous chapters, I have tried to examine the varying degrees of threat that might have been posed by different literary geographies in Gordimer. Here, I will try to show that the concerns I have identified make themselves evident in an extremely contemporary novel, published 24 years after the last book was banned in South Africa. The most effective method of doing this is to understand that what is really at stake here is what the censors meant when they were talking about the “literary.” It is difficult to pin down, because their definitions are tangled. One of the ways to try and understand it is to look at the idea of “universality.” To restate, McDonald notes that the censors’

aestheticist assumption that great literature rose above contemporary politics made it possible for them to publish manifestly interventionist novels such as [Gordimer’s] *Occasion For Loving*, *Guest of Honour*, and *The Conservationist*, as well as Coetzee’s fictions *In The Heart of the Country*, *Waiting For The Barbarians*, and *The Life and Times of Michael K*.<sup>278</sup>

As I argued in my introduction, “rising above contemporary politics” often meant setting a novel in a space that was not identifiably South African, or in a space that was considered somehow “safe” by the apartheid government. Failing to do this, “failing the universality test,”<sup>279</sup> often meant failing the space test. It meant being too specific about places and dates in this country, about the particular dimensions, for instance, of South African prison cells. Passing this test meant that the work took its place within the censors’ idea of the literary. The more universal, the more literary. Being “literary” gave writers an alibi. The adjudged “literariness” of a work becomes important here,

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<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>277</sup> J.M. Coetzee, *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, 300.

<sup>278</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 117.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*

because my argument is that *Absolution* presents itself as a literary work in ways that correspond to a remarkable degree with the censors' "aestheticist assumptions."<sup>280</sup>

How does this manifest itself? Many writers have spoken about the power of self-censorship, among them Coetzee and Gordimer. In *Absolution*, Clare Wald, in fact, notes that "ultimately, what the censor desires is not total control of information, but for all writers to self-censor."<sup>281</sup> Merrett notes that "there can be little doubt that the authorities partly achieved their ultimate objective of self-censorship."<sup>282</sup>

Questions of self-censorship, and of how it continues today, are interesting when examined in conjunction with the work of J.M. Coetzee, as well as an analysis of the specific literary geography of *Absolution*. One of the most eloquent discussions of censorship in this country comes in the form of J.M. Coetzee's *Doubling the Point*.<sup>283</sup> The parallels between the problems outlined in this text and *Absolution* are striking. For instance, one of the key issues Coetzee outlines, "the dilemma proposed by the state, namely, either to ignore its obscenities or else to produce representations of them,"<sup>284</sup> seems to be replicated in *Absolution*. Coetzee, according to McDonald's formulation, passed the universality test. None of his novels were banned, and McDonald's argument is that this is at least partially because the ones that were scrutinised by the censors were set out of historical time or space, thus deemed "literary" enough to pass. This aspect of Coetzee's novels has been remarked upon by many of his critics. Stephen Watson argued that in Coetzee's novels "Coetzee allows his fictions to float literally free of time and place even in the act of seeming to allude to a time and place which is specifically South African."<sup>285</sup> "Alluding" to a specific time and place is, of course, a very different thing to being explicit (as Gordimer so often is, for instance). Barnard argues that "At stake in Coetzee's work is not place as an empirical and inert object of mimesis, but rather the discursive, generic, and ultimately political codes that inform our understanding, knowledge and representations of place."<sup>286</sup> "Ultimately political" is not the same as straightforwardly political, of course. It is interesting to note that the last major literary work to be banned in South Africa was in 1988, Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. Two years later, *Age of Iron* [1990] was published. It is the first of Coetzee's books to be fully contemporary in setting; the first which does not "float free of

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Flanery, *Absolution*, 71.

<sup>282</sup> Merrett, *Culture of Censorship*, 200.

<sup>283</sup> J.M. Coetzee & David Atwell, *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>284</sup> Coetzee, *Doubling the point*, 364

<sup>285</sup> Stephen Watson, "Colonialism and the Novels of J.M. Coetzee", *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 17, No. 3, Special Focus on Southern Africa, Autumn(1986), 374.

<sup>286</sup> Barnard, *Apartheid and Beyond*, 21.

time and space.” In a discussion of self-censorship, it is interesting to note that *Age of Iron* is the first of Coetzee’s novels that might have failed the censor’s “universality test,” had it been written ten years before.

In *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee observes that “I have no doubt that the concentration on imprisonment, on regimentation, on torture in books of my own like *Waiting for the Barbarians* [1980] and *Life & Times of Michael K* [1983] was a response... to the ban on representing what went on in police cells in this country.”<sup>287</sup> He argues that “the very fact that some topics were forbidden creates an unnatural concentration on them.”<sup>288</sup> This “concentration,” however, is complicated. *Michael K*<sup>289</sup> is set in a kind of dystopic civil war South Africa, a “parable world of an unregenerate soon after now”<sup>290</sup> and the setting for *Waiting for the Barbarians*,<sup>291</sup> as a censor noted is “obscure; some oasis in an arid region north of the equator, where winters are icy.”<sup>292</sup> There’s a concentration on imprisonment, in other words, but those prisons are not necessarily somewhere one could point to on a map, and especially not a South African map. Discussing Jean Rhys’s *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Thacker notes that “understanding the significance of the Parisian left bank for the geography of modernism requires a sensitive delimitation of how, for example, specific cafes and restaurants became important meeting points for writers, artists and intellectuals.”<sup>293</sup> The need to understand the resonance of specific locations becomes much more complicated in an analysis of Coetzee because some of the most significant spaces in these texts do not exist on any map. This, I would argue, comes as a direct result of the censorship system, and it is fascinating to see how something similar has occurred in *Absolution*.

As a whole, the text is quite specific about place and space. Characters have specific addresses, they go to particular restaurants, they stop at specific towns on the N2 on specific dates. But there are two key moments to do with prisons and imprisonment where a formal shift occurs. One is set in the present, one is in the past. In the present, Clare Wald’s house is broken into. She calls the police, who come and investigate, and in a strange inversion, suspicion begins to fall on Clare. A number of highly sinister interactions take place, where Clare is forced to wait for hours at the prison, where she doesn’t understand what she is doing there, or what the nature of her offence is.

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<sup>287</sup> Coetzee, *Doubling the Point*, 300.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>289</sup> J.M. Coetzee, *The Life and Times of Michael K* (London: Vintage, 2004).

<sup>290</sup> Cynthia Ozick, “A Tale of Heroic Anonymity”, *New York Times*, December 11, 1983. Accessed 6 June 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/11/02/home/coetzee-michael.html>

<sup>291</sup> J.M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1981).

<sup>292</sup> P83/10/168.

<sup>293</sup> Thacker, *Idea of a Critical Literary Geography*, 67.

Clare is subjected to an extraordinary kind of low-level psychological abuse that seems quite outside of the realms of the real or the possible. The police investigator abuses her as follows: “And now you live in this grand mansion, with your high walls. It is almost like a palace. Perhaps you think you are some kind of queen.”<sup>294</sup> The scenes are nightmarish and surreal, deliberately unreal, and of course there are immediate parallels to be drawn with Kafka, specifically with *The Trial*.

The person who manages these “interrogation” scenes is, at first, a faceless police officer: “the uniformed officer who was leading the investigation.”<sup>295</sup> It is perhaps significant that, in stark contrast to the novel’s other characters, who get detailed physical descriptions (“her unruly squall of blonde hair has silvered, and though it’s thin and brittle it still has some of the old luster. Her abdomen has spread”<sup>296</sup>; “Greg stood out in a pink sweater with his tattooed hands and black hair that had been dyed a shade of blue...”<sup>297</sup>); this police officer is never described in any physical detail. Even the gender is not clear. There is something anonymous, then, about this character, which compounds the surreal quality of the scenes.

Another investigator, Ms. White, then takes over. Ms. White, again, is described in vague terms: “a petite woman whose hair was swept up behind her head.”<sup>298</sup> Her gender is clear, but her race, for instance, is not. Like Josef K in *The Trial*, who has not done anything truly wrong, Clare Wald does not understand what Ms. White wants with her, or what she seems by increments to be being accused of: “Crime had set itself upon her, victimhood had been thrust upon her, and as a victim she was somehow also a suspect.”<sup>299</sup> Her questioner becomes threatening:

‘I am certain that I never gave an official statement. I was never taken to a police station...I have never been called to testify or witness ...’

‘It seems there is some very grave misunderstanding, then. Because here...someone purporting to be you...has levelled the blame at four men aged twenty five to forty, of average height and muscular build, and indeterminate race... Is that a euphemism, madam?’<sup>300</sup>

The scenes in the police station are some of the most unreal in the novel:

‘Except maybe a bald person. You are not bald. Perhaps the person who took it [a wig belonging to Clare’s father] is a bald man. A bald man would need a wig more than you.’

‘That is a ridiculous thing to say. Should I not give a statement?’

The officer stared at her through pale jelly eyes.

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<sup>294</sup> Flanery, *Absolution*, 78.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

The dialogue here is unreal. Police officers say ridiculous things. The level of low-level abuse seems farcical. The way this departs from the general form of the rest of the novel seems dramatic, strange. Unless one argues that “the ban on representing what went on in police cells in this country”<sup>301</sup> still resonates in some sense today. This departure from realism, in other words, means the novel becomes more “literary” just at the spot on which the censor’s gaze would have lingered. Clare does not know how long she has been there; time stretches like elastic: “it was hours before Ms White returned.”<sup>302</sup> There is an allegorical quality to these scenes, very strongly reminiscent of *The Life and Times of Michael K*, for instance.

Next, in some of the scenes set in the past, Clare imagines what has happened to her disappeared daughter, an activist. These chapters, written in the second person, detail the circumstances of the daughter’s capture and imprisonment. It is not clear *where* the daughter has been taken. And like the fact of Ms. White’s featurelessness in a novel full of vivid physical descriptions, this seems obviously significant. In a novel full of very specific descriptions of place (We drive around into the City Bowl, park on Kloof Street...we decide to walk up the hill to Saigon...we pass Hoerskool Jan Van Riebeeck<sup>303</sup>,” “Marie drove them from the house and along the N2, turning off at Baden Powell Drive, going through Stellenbosch, and then up into the vineyard-covered slopes and around into Paarl”<sup>304</sup>), it is very striking that these scenes seem somehow to be off the map. The location is vague, undetermined. Wald imagines her daughter to be trapped in a cage:

The cages, made of ultra-light titanium, are tethered to these gear mechanisms, which can drag them on their cables up beyond the reach of high tide, or allow them slack enough to be pulled out by the retreating waves as much as half a kilometer into deep water, depending on what’s required... Shackles at the feet, the neck and the wrists hold each detainee in place.”<sup>305</sup>

Like the present-day prison scenes, these ones, too, have a kind of timeless quality: “You could not recall how many days it had been, perhaps five, perhaps as many as fifteen hundred. You had been deprived of any means of recording the passage of time.”<sup>306</sup> Time, in the imprisonment scenes, is oddly suspended and non-specific. These scenes could be anywhere, anytime; they have a strongly universal quality. Clare does not know how long she has been in the police station waiting room for; Laura does not know how long she has been in the cage.

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<sup>301</sup>Coetzee, *Doubling the Point*, 300.

<sup>302</sup>Flanery, *Absolution*, 135.

<sup>303</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>304</sup>Ibid., 164.

<sup>305</sup>Flanery, *Absolution*, 183-184.

<sup>306</sup>Flanery, *Absolution*, 182-183.

There follows a scene where the reader sees that the daughter will die by being dragged out to sea in the cage, and the chapter ends as follows: “The woman on your left and the friend on your right were also beginning to shiver and shake. Is this where you end? Is this how you end? It is my nightmare. I dream it every night, every hour, have dreamed it for two decades now. It is all I can see.”<sup>307</sup>

It is only at the end of the section that it becomes totally clear that all of the scenes in which Clare is speaking to her disappeared daughter took place only in her imagination: “I cannot bear it anymore, my vision, conjured out of horrible imagination, of you trussed like a lean pig, waiting for your fate in that titanium cage.”<sup>308</sup> In the first half of the novel, Laura appears mostly in Clare’s dreams and her fantasies:

I have been experiencing recurring dreams of such vividness I would be uncertain they were reality were it not for the fact of your presence in them, Laura, and even that makes me wonder if you have not reappeared, or I have slipped unwittingly into a space where the impossible is routine.<sup>309</sup>

If the censors favoured self-consciously “literary” work, then it is interesting to contemplate that it does not get much more “literary” than the recounting of a dream, or the revelation that scenes which seem real turn out to have been lived only in one of the characters’ imaginations. The prison scenes of *Absolution*, where it is not clear what is “true” and what is not, have interesting implications when considered in conjunction with the censors’ proscriptions. The censors’ report on *Conservationist*, for instance, argued that the mitigating factor was that “the line between fact and fiction, reality and imagination in the central figure is not always easy to draw.”<sup>310</sup> Exactly the same thing could be said of the prison scenes in *Absolution*. These scenes, had they been written during the period of censor control, are the kind that would have given a writer an “alibi.” They are of the kind that would make a novel “desirable” enough to pass. It is useful at this point to return to the censors’ assessment of *In The Heart of the Country*, in which scenes of a politically controversial nature occur, but “the characters are historico-geographically so situated that it is perfectly acceptable.”

<sup>311</sup>The scenes which are most concerned with political activity, then, most concerned with the crimes of the apartheid state, are also the most “literary,” are the ones with the most oddly timeless, placeless quality. The characters are situated in a way that is markedly different from their position in

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>310</sup> P77/7/103.

<sup>311</sup> McDonald, *Literature Police*, 313.

the rest of the novel. My argument, then, is that the ban on representing what happened in police cells in this country was so powerful, that its trace can still be felt today, in this novel. The two major departures from realism in this novel come just at the points, prison scenes, at which the censors' gaze would have snagged. The power of the censors to shape the literary landscape, even today, seems clear.

As discussed, the more “universal” a novel’s themes, the more literary the censors deemed it to be. For instance, *Burger’s Daughter* was only banned for three months; the initial decision was appealed and it is striking how the Appeal Board, in trying to emphasize its merits, pointed out its “universal” qualities: it “is perhaps even possible to see universal relevance in Rosa’s dilemma, for each individual must, whatever the nature of his background, work [sic] out the solution to his own personal destiny.”<sup>312</sup> Critics of Gordimer, likewise, did something similar. To restate, Clingman noted that “it is a stock response of critics and reviewers – both inside and outside South Africa, to insist that Gordimer’s work is ‘universal’, that it could have been written ‘anywhere’.”<sup>313</sup> Like Pound and Joyce with Eliot, like the critics with Gordimer, the Appeal Board recognized that “universality” or “literariness” was the quickest way to render something palatable, or at least not “undesirable.” There are a number of ways that this peculiar conception shows up in *Absolution*.

To begin with, the book jacket records the following: “More than a book about South Africa, this is a book about the hunt for the truth, a hunt that is as universal as it is essential.”<sup>314</sup> Again, it seems to have been important for the publishers to emphasize the text’s universal qualities, rather than its specifically South African ones.

There are many ways in which this novel can be read as a consequence of apartheid, and especially of apartheid censorship. In his review of *Absolution* in the *New Yorker*, Philip Gourevitch argues that “if the novel had been truer to historical reality, it would have been all about race.”<sup>315</sup> The point is that the literary geography of the novel, a geography which I would argue is as much dictated by the physical reality of the South African city even today as it is by the dictates of the censors regarding who could do what where in fiction, is such that it doesn’t *have* to be about race if it does not want to be. The legacy of the apartheid city is such that it’s possible to write an at least semi-realist novel set in Cape Town and have the only black people in it be car guards, gardeners, bar staff, or domestic workers. The primary characters (all white) live in Gardens and Bishopscourt,

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>313</sup> Clingman, *Nadine Gordimer*, 18.

<sup>314</sup> Steven Galloway in *Absolution*, back cover.

<sup>315</sup> Philip Gourevitch, “Unreconciled”, *The New Yorker*, April 30. (2012), 70.



historically white areas. The place they live in is identifiably South Africa, identifiably Cape Town, but a very small piece of it. One of Flanery's characters expresses this very clearly: "Going back and forth between Greg's house [in Gardens] and Clare's [in Bishopscourt], it's easy to forget where I am. It might be San Francisco, with a few more beggars on the streets..."<sup>316</sup> In other words, it is not that Flanery is not being true to reality. It's that he is being true to a censored reality, to a reality that is a consequence of apartheid. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Moretti's argument about *Our Mutual Friend* is that Dickens' genius was to try and look at the city as a whole. The censors attempted to prevent Gordimer from doing this, banning the books that tried to give a perspective on both halves of the apartheid city. Flanery, in *Absolution*, does not attempt it. In this, I would argue, his literary geography reveals itself to have come about as a clear consequence of the apartheid system. If "geography shapes the imaginative structure of the novel,"<sup>317</sup> then his is a geography which has been shaped by apartheid. The narrative goes down particular channels because of its specific geography; the stories of certain people are told, the stories of certain others are ignored.

This, then, is the final way that the novel can be seen as a direct consequence of apartheid policy. Apartheid city planners designed the city so that the black urban population was hidden from view. The effects of this are still, of course, with us. As Christopher has argued, "the physical and social heritage of over forty-five years of enforced separation are overwhelming."<sup>318</sup> Apartheid city planners designed the city in a way that makes it "possible," or at least plausible in some sense, for the characters in *Absolution* to interact only with members of their own race, to behave as if they lived somewhere else. San Francisco, perhaps. The novel doesn't have to be "all about race," as Gourevitch puts it, because the characters in *Absolution* are inhabitants of a city that was designed to keep the races separate.

The counter-argument to the proposition that the formal structure of *Absolution* can be "explained" as a consequence of apartheid policy presents itself very easily. Flanery, of course, is an American. He is writing about South Africa in 2012. He can write what he likes. There is nothing and no one to prevent him from doing so. My argument is that this is exactly the point. In other words, the censors exercised such a deforming power over the shape of literature in this country that it doesn't matter where a writer comes from. The censors wanted to create a national literature. They wanted to create a specific kind of literary space, and if we look to *Absolution* as an example, then

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<sup>316</sup> Flanery, *Absolution*, 45.

<sup>317</sup> Moretti, *Atlas*, 14.

<sup>318</sup> Christopher, *Atlas of Apartheid*, 7.

they succeeded. In the novel, the characters talk at length about what censorship does. The strange irony is that these characters exist in a novel that is itself the embodiment of what censorship did, what it continues to do, of its power.

In this thesis, I have tried to show that questions of space and censorship are inseparable. Complex ideas about the censors' ideas of "literariness," about "universality," can be reduced to more simple ones concerning space, and what a novel does with it. My argument is that what the censors found most objectionable was what Gordimer tried to do with space and movement in her novels. Understanding their decisions means understanding her literary geography, how it works in shaping the narrative. By looking at what Gordimer's banned novels have in common, it is evident that an urban space in which characters move about the city with relative ease represents the greatest threat. Using the work of Nadine Gordimer as a kind of ideal test case, I have tried to show that what the apartheid planners worked to prevent from happening in reality, the censors worked to prevent happening in fiction. As I hope my analysis of the geography of *Absolution* shows, the consequences of this are profound.

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