Town and Country Lovers Study Guide

Town and Country Lovers by Nadine Gordimer

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Introduction

Published in Nadine Gordimer's 1980 short story collection, *A Soldier's Embrace,* "Town and Country Lovers" is like many of the author's works in its depiction of strained race relations in South Africa. Gordimer often writes about the daily lives of people, both black and white, who are affected by the restrictive measures taken by the government during apartheid. In this story, she shows the devastating consequences of violating the legal and societal rules about interracial relationships.

Author Biography

Nadine Gordimer, the second daughter of Isidore and Nan Myers Gordimer, was born in Springs, a small mining town outside Johannesburg, South Africa, on November 20, 1923. Her father was an immigrant Jewish watchmaker from Lithuania, and her mother came from a middle-class British family. When Gordimer was eleven, her parents took her out of the school system because of a minor heart condition. Lonely without her peers, she compensated by reading. In 1945, she attended the University of the Witwatersrand for a year.

On March 6, 1949, Gordimer married Gerald Gavron. They had a daughter, Oriane, a year later and divorced in 1952. Gordimer married Reinhold Cassirer, an art dealer from Germany, in 1955, and they had a son named Hugo. Gordimer also has a stepdaughter from her second marriage.

Gordimer began writing short stories in her early teens, and she continues to write short and long fiction. Her most recent work is a novel called *The House Gun* (1998). She is known for portraying the racial and political struggles of her homeland. Her early work criticizes apartheid, while her later work reflects the tumultuous readjustments in post-apartheid South Africa. Her characters are generally members of the white middle class who change, avoid, or accept difficult situations. Gordimer often tackles controversial topics such as the interracial love depicted in 1980's "Town and Country Lovers."

Gordimer has earned such prestigious awards as the 1974 Booker Prize (for *The Conservationist)* and the 1991 Nobel Prize for Literature. She donated part of her substantial Nobel Prize award money to the African National Congress's Department of Arts and Culture and continues to live in South Africa.

Plot Summary

Part I

"Town and Country Lovers" is a two-part story about interracial lovers who suffer the consequences of breaking the rules forbidding such relationships. In the first story, solitary geologist Dr. von Leinsdorf meets a young, colored (mixed-race) African girl who is a cashier at the grocery store across the street from his apartment. When the store is out of the razors he likes, she makes an effort to get some for him. He asks her to bring them to his apartment, and she soon begins to deliver his groceries for him a few times a week. Before long, the two become sexually involved. He enjoys her company and her sexual availability to him, and he tries to help her by teaching her to swim, type, and improve her grammar.

The cashier tells the other people in the building and her mother that she works for Dr. von Leinsdorf. Still, the police arrive one day to search the apartment for the girl. They have been watching and know that she is there. There is a law (The Immorality Act of 1927) that forbids interracial sexual relationships, and when the police discover the cashier hiding in a closet, she and Dr. von Leinsdorf are arrested.

Dr. von Leinsdorf secures their release from jail through his attorney, and when no evidence of sexual relations is discovered, the charges are dropped. The cashier tells the newspapers that she is sorry for the pain she has caused her mother, and the mother says that she will never let her daughter work for a white man again.

Part II

This part of the story introduces Paulus Eysendyck, a white farmer's son, and Thebedi, the black daughter of one of the farm workers. As children, Paulus and Thebedi played together, but when they are teenagers they begin a sexual relationship. They have tender feelings for each other, even though their relationship is ultimately doomed.

Thebedi marries Njabulo, a kind young black man who has loved her for years. Two months later, Thebedi gives birth to a light-skinned child. That Thebedi is pregnant when she marries is not considered scandalous because men in this culture often insist on finding out before marriage if their women are barren. The child's light skin, however, reveals who the father really is. Still, Njabulo treats the baby as if the child were his own.

Paulus learns that Thebedi has married and has a light-skinned child. He panics about the child and visits Thebedi in her hut. He asks her to give the baby to someone else to raise, but she does not. Two days later, he asks to see the child alone. Waiting outside the hut, Thebedi hears soft groaning sounds, and the baby soon dies. Officials discover that the baby was poisoned, and Paulus is arrested. Initially, Thebedi says that she

knows he poisoned the baby, but when the trial comes, she claims that she does not know what he did in the hut. Paulus is set free.

Part 1

Part 1 Summary

Dr. Franz-Josef von Leinsdorf is an Austrian geologist living and working in South Africa. He is a committed and tireless worker who, during the course of his career, has lived in several different countries. When he does take time to relax, he enjoys skiing, listening to music and reading poetry.

Dr. von Leinsdorf is unmarried. Most people describe him as good-looking and many of his female co-workers assume he has a girlfriend waiting for him back in Europe.

Because Dr. von Leinsdorf's rented garden apartment is situated across the street from a supermarket, he frequently stops there after work to buy whatever provisions he needs for his evening meal. One evening as he is checking out, he notices that the cardboard display containing his preferred brand of razor blades is empty. He brings this to the cashier's attention, but does not expect that she will be any more helpful than the other young black women who work in the market. As a result, he is pleasantly surprised when this same cashier tells him two days later that she has learned that the blades are out of stock and that she will be glad to hold two packages for him when they arrive.

The following week, Dr. von Leinsdorf is out of town on business. As he is making his way into his apartment upon his return, he becomes aware of the presence of another person. It is the cashier from the supermarket and she tells him that as promised, she has saved two packages of razor blades for him. Dr. von Leinsdorf tells the young girl that he has just returned from a long trip and he will stop by the market when he is able. Instead, the young woman offers to retrieve the razor blades for him, an offer he accepts.

Although he knows that the young women intended for Dr. von Leinsdorf to remain where he was standing while she retrieved the razor blades, he nonetheless asks her to bring them to his apartment. He gives her the number and they part ways.

When the young woman returns with the razor blades, she takes the elevator meant for the building's white residents rather than taking the one designated for the black workers. When she reaches Dr. von Leinsdorf's apartment, he offers her a tip, which she refuses. He then invites her into his apartment for a cup of coffee.

Eventually, the young woman begins bringing Dr. von Leinsdorf's groceries to him several times a week. The two have established an agreement in which he leaves his list and a key to his apartment under his doormat, which she would pick up during her lunch hour. When she returns with the groceries after work, he is sometimes home; other times, he is not.

During one of her first visits to the apartment, the girl takes notice of the various specimens occupying the shelves and tables. On another visit, she asks Dr. von Leinsdorf why he grinds beans each time he makes coffee. Dr. von Leinsdorf is amused by her question and explains that he is accustomed to drinking only fresh coffee.

One afternoon, as the girl is returning with the groceries, the building's caretaker stops her and asks why she is in the building. She explains that she works for Dr. von Leinsdorf. The caretaker, perhaps taking note of the girl's relatively light complexion, does not suggest that she take the elevator reserved for blacks. The shopping list that day included "grey button for trousers." Upon returning with the groceries, she asks Dr. von Leinsdorf for the pants so they she can sew the button. As he watches her do this, Dr. von Leinsdorf is struck by how graceful and confident she seems while completing this basic task. Realizing he is attracted to her, he reaches out to touch her and the two make love.

From that point, they spend nearly every afternoon together. After about a week, Dr. von Leinsdorf asks her to spend the night. The girl refuses saying she must return home to her mother. He asks again, saying that perhaps she can telephone her mother and explain that it is somehow necessary that she spend the night. The girl refuses – her home does not have a telephone – and again says she needs to return to her mother. When Dr. von Leinsdorf asks why it is so important that she go home, the girl explains that her mother will be afraid that some harm will come to them should their relationship be discovered. Dr. von Leinsdorf suggests that she tell her mother that he is her employer; the girl replies that she has already told the building's caretaker that she works for him.

The girl eventually does move in with Dr. von Leinsdorf. Anxious to please him, she makes certain that she grinds fresh coffee beans each time she make him a cup of coffee. She does not cook for him at first, rather, she watches him prepare some meals so that she could be sure to cook exactly what he likes. They spend most of their time in his apartment where he explains the significance of every piece of rock and stone that was there to her. Other times, he tends to his work while she watches. On Sundays, they go for drives and spend the afternoons picnicking or swimming.

Aside from their Sunday outings, they do not go out publicly. While he does not say, she assumes that he has dates for the occasions when he has dinner with colleagues or other social functions. While he is out, the girl passes the evening sewing and listening to the radio. One evening, as he is preparing to leave for a social engagement, he asks the girl if she would like to visit her family while he is out.

The girl is amazed at Dr. von Leinsdorf's ability to work into the early hours of the morning. She, on the other hand, has a hard time staying awake past dinner. Dr. von Leinsdorf explains to her that her job, although not physically demanding requires the repetitive completion of a limited number of tasks. This, he tells her, often causes fatigue. In an effort to teach her new skills to that perhaps she could get a better job, Dr. von Leinsdorf teaches the girl how to type. He also tries to improve her grammar by gently correcting her mistakes.

One evening just before the Christmas holiday, there is a knock at the apartment door. Since Dr. von Leinsdorf never has unannounced visitors, much less in the evening, a sense of dread instantly arises. The girl goes to Dr. von Leinsdorf and implores him not to answer the door. Knowing that they will have to answer it, she drags him to the bedroom and, taking some clean clothes that are lying atop the bed, she hides in the closet and asks him to lock her inside.

Once she is securely inside, Dr. von Leinsdorf goes to answer the door. When he opens it, he finds three policemen waiting. One of the policemen says they have been watching his apartment for several months and they know that he has a colored girl living there. Dr. von Leinsdorf tells them that he lives alone. Convinced that he is lying, the policemen force their way inside and begin looking for signs of the girl. When they get to the closet, they ask him for the key. Dr. von Leinsdorf tells them he left it at his office. The policemen force their way into the closet and find the girl hiding inside.

The couple is taken to the police station where they are given physical examinations. The girl spends the night in a jail cell and she is released the next morning. She is taken back to her mother by a clerk that works for the attorney that Dr. von Leinsdorf had arranged for her. She is not told where Dr. von Leinsdorf is.

The girl makes a statement that she lived with Dr. von Leinsdorf, a white man, and had intercourse with him on occasion. When the two meet again in court, they do not speak to each other. They are acquitted due to lack of evidence.

Following the court hearing, there was an article in the newspaper in which the girl is quoted as being sorry for the shame brought to her mother. One of nine children, she was forced to leave school early because there was no money for the needed supplies. In the same article, the girl's mother says she will never let her "daughter work as a servant for a white man again."

Part 1 Analysis

Nadine Gordimer's "Town and Country Lovers" which appears in her short story collection *A Soldier's Embrace* which was published in 1980, is a tale of forbidden love. The story actually has two parts; part one is set in a South African city while part two takes place in the outlying farmland and features a completely different set of characters. The story's name is a combination of these two locations.

Both parts of the story take place in South Africa during apartheid, a form of government that essentially created separate and distinct classes of people that were based exclusively on their skin color. Under apartheid, there were specific regulations governing where people lived, where they worked, the type of education they received and with whom they could have personal relationships. As we learn from both stories, the consequences for not abiding strictly with the policies of apartheid were severe.

Thus, the central theme to both stories is the consequences that result when two people such as Dr. von Leinsdorf and the cashier or Paulus and Thebedi knowingly break the

rules. Remember, this story was probably written in the late 1970's and interracial relationships, although not totally embraced by all, had nonetheless gained widespread acceptance in many parts of the world. This, of course, was not true in South Africa.

It is also interesting that in both stories, the men are white and the women black. In both cases, the men go about their business - Dr. von Leinsdorf as a geologist and Paulus as a student – yet they always know that their women will be waiting for them to return home. This is typical of the position of black women living in South Africa during this time: a position that can best be described as one of complete subservience and even obedience. The cashier, even though she is technically Dr. von Leinsdorf's lover, still cooks, cleans and sews for him. Similarly, Paulus is the one who decides when and where he and Thebedi will meet; decisions that Thebedi always complies with.

In the first story, we are introduced to a geologist who is so absorbed with his work that he rarely takes time to enjoy other pursuits and a young cashier who remains unnamed throughout the story. The fact that the cashier is not given is name is significant because it symbolizes the fact that Dr. von Leinsdorf wasn't necessarily attracted to her, but rather to the idea that there was someone home waiting for him each evening. This is not to say that he did not care for her; indeed, he took the time to teach her how to swim and so that she might get a better job, how to type. In fact, it can probably be assumed that Dr. von Leinsdorf knew that their relationship was doomed from the start and so he wanted to give her some way of being able to support herself and her mother after their relationship ended.

The description of both central characters offered in the story also bears some discussion. Recall from the beginning of the story that Dr. von Leinsdorf's face is described as having two halves: a dark and middle-aged lower half and young upper half. Similarly, the cashier is described as very light-skinned, not black. The ambiguousness of both characters - he is attractive, yet alone, she is light-skinned enough to be allowed to ride the elevators reserved for white people – leads the reader to believe that perhaps things will turn out well for the couple; that perhaps the cashier's fear of being caught is the result of a lifetime of living under the oppression of apartheid. As a result, when the police arrive at the apartment and discover the cashier hiding in the closet, we are almost surprised.

It is also possible that Dr. von Leinsdorf, while obviously a very smart and learned man, did not fully understand the implications of his decision to begin a relationship with the cashier. From the beginning, he casually dismissed her protests to his suggestion that she spend the night. While he was wise enough not to bring the cashier with him to social engagements, he did venture out with her, albeit to remote places, on Sundays. The cashier's decision to remain with Dr. von Leinsdorf, even though she could have easily left his apartment to return to her mother, tells us that she was also aware of the chance she was taking. Indeed, almost from the beginning, she appeared to be taking a chance. Remember, it was she who sought out Dr. von Leinsdorf near his apartment building to tell him that the grocery store finally had the razor blades he wanted. It was also she who suggested that she go back to the store to retrieve the razor blades for him.

Even the story's ending is indicative of the social climate of that period. Dr. von Leinsdorf is a man of financial means and is able to arrange for both he and the cashier to be freed from jail. We already know that he has relatively few friends and no family living in the area, which means that he did not suffer any social repercussions for his digression. The cashier, on the other hand, must return to her poor neighborhood as a shamed woman.

Part 2

Part 2 Summary

The farm children – the children of the white owners as well as the black children belonging to the farmhands – play together until the white children go away to school. At first, the differences are subtle, but as the children age, it is clear that they have increasingly fewer things in common and before long, the black children begin to address their former playmates with the formalities typically reserved for adults.

Paulus Eysendyck, the son of the farm's owner, has always had a special fondness for Thebedi, the daughter of one of the farmhands. When he returns from school for the first time, he brings a gift for Thebedi, and she reciprocates with a handmade bracelet. At school, Paulus is very popular, and has plenty of opportunities to date. Even so, he never forgets about Thebedi and continues to bring her gifts, including gilt hoop earrings. Not wanting her parents to know the real source of the earrings, Thebedi tells them the jewelry is a reward from the owner's wife for a job well done.

When Paulus is home from school for the holidays, they manage to meet secretly nearly every day by a dried-up river bed where they had once played as children. There, they spend their time talking; Paulus tells her about his school and the town of Middleburg where it is located – a place that Thebedi has never visited. While she generally has nothing to add to the conversation, she manages to keep him talking by asking questions about his tales.

One afternoon, Thebedi decides to go for a swim. As he watches her, her beauty strikes Paulus and so when she emerges from the water and sits next to him, they make love. For the remainder of his school break, the couple comes to the river almost every afternoon. Even so, Paulus continues to date other girls.

By this time, Paulus's sisters have married and so his parents often leave the farm for the weekend to visit their daughters and grandchildren. When Thebedi sees their car leave the farm, she knows that she and Paulus will meet at the house rather than at the river. They spend the nights in one of his sisters' rooms; however, Thebedi takes great care to leave just before the servants arrive for work at dawn.

When Thebedi is 18, a young man named Njabulo tells her father that he would like to marry her. An arrangement is agreed upon, but Thebedi does not share this news with Paulus. She also does not tell him that she believes she is pregnant.

Two months after her marriage to Njabulo, Thebedi gives birth to a little girl. Since it is customary for men to sleep with their chosen woman before marriage to ensure she is fertile, this birth does not bring Thebedi or her family shame. Even so, Thebedi notices that the baby is very light skinned and she seems to have several Caucasian traits. Her

husband does not complain and even manages to find enough money to buy the baby a dress, bootees, a jacket, cap and other items.

When Paulus arrives home from school for a break, he hears his mother discussing the need to find a replacement for Thebedi since she has had a baby. Paulus goes to find Thebedi and asks to see the baby. After seeing the baby, he asks her if she has been near his parents' home with her. Assuring him that she has not, Thebedi agrees to keep the baby inside as much as possible.

Two days later, he returns. Explaining that the baby has been sick, Thebedi does not invite Paulus inside. He nonetheless goes inside the hut while Thebedi remains outside. From within the hut, she hears small grunts. Moments later, Paulus emerges and returns to his home.

The next morning, Njabulo discovers the baby is dead. He buries the baby, but before long, the police come and, acting on a report that this seemingly healthy, almost white, baby had suddenly died, exhumed the body.

Thebedi is called to the town where Paulus attends school so that she can make a statement. In her testimony, she says she saw Paulus pour a liquid into her baby's mouth and that he threatened to kill her if she told anyone. When the case finally comes to trial a year later, she says she did not see what Paulus had done that afternoon when he was alone with the baby.

Because there was not enough proof against Paulus, and because Thebedi apparently committed perjury either before the trial or during the trial, he was found not guilty. In an interview printed in the local newspaper, Paulus's father said he would try to carry on while Thebedi refers to the incident as "a thing of our childhood."

Part 2 Analysis

As mentioned in the analysis section for Part 1, this story takes place in the South African countryside during apartheid. In this story, we are introduced to Paulus, the son of a farmer, and Thebedi, the daughter of black servants working on the farm.

While the theme of this story is essentially the same as Part 1, there are some key differences. First, when the story begins, we learn that all of the young children living on the farm – black children and white children – play together. In fact, the author tells us that the children do not seem to recognize the fact that they are different until the white children go away to school and return with expanded vocabularies.

We also begin to realize that unlike the cashier, Thebedi does not seem to have as much control over her situation. She is at Paulus's disposal, complying with his requests that they meet at specific times and places. During the long afternoons they spend talking at the river's edge, she has little to add to the conversation and instead encourages Paulus to continue with his tales by asking questions. Similarly, when Paulus comes to her hut to kill her baby, she knows there is nothing she can do to stop

him. Her passiveness gives the reader the impression that Thebedi might be afraid of Paulus; this is supported by the fact that she does not tell him that she is to marry Njabulo or that she is pregnant.

Even so, it is obvious that Thebedi has feelings for Paulus. It is interesting that even after he kills her baby, she continues to wear the earrings that he had given her many years ago. Moreover, despite the fact that her earlier testimony that she saw Paulus poison her baby could have been enough to send him to prison, she decides to change her story so that he can be free to continue with his life.

Similar to Dr. von Leinsdorf's feelings for the cashier, we know that Paulus – at least for most of the story – has genuine feelings of affection for Thebedi. As a young man, he brings her gifts, and he describes the first time they make love as "so lovely." He is, however, aware of the importance of keeping their relationship secret and so he continues to date other women. Likewise, when they meet in his home when his parents are out of town, they stay in one of his sisters' bedrooms and take great care to ensure that Thebedi leaves before the servants arrive for the day. Similarly, Thebedi is keenly aware of the consequences of being discovered; rather then tell her parents that Paulus gave her the earrings she says they were a gift from his mother for a job well done.

Unlike Dr. von Leinsdorf, however, the consequences felt by Paulus and his family following the discovery of his relationship with Thebedi, are much more serious. As longtime and respected members of the community, his parents are devastated and his father vows to "try and carry on as best I can." Unlike the cashier, Thebedi seems almost unaffected by the discovery, referring to it as "a thing of our childhood."

Characters

Cashier

The cashier is a young, colored (mixed-race) African woman who works at the grocery store across the street from Dr. von Leinsdorf s home. When she delivers razors to Dr. von Leinsdorf s apartment for him, she refuses a tip and seems happy to help. She also agrees to bring his groceries to him two or three times a week.

The cashier has a small frame and a delicate face. Her skin is not dark, and Dr. von Leinsdorf sees it as "the subdued satiny color of certain yellow wood." She wears her hair drawn back in a chignon. There is a gap between her front teeth that shows when she smiles.

The cashier lives with her mother, a laundry worker, in one of the black townships outside of town. She is one of nine children and quit school when her mother could not afford the required clothing.

During her affair with Dr. von Leinsdorf, the cashier is very watchful. Laws forbid such relationships, and she fears embarrassing her mother, who believes the cashier is working for Dr. von Leinsdorf. She enjoys being with him, but she is realistic and knows that their relationship cannot last.

Paulus Eysendyck

Paulus is the son of a farmer in the South African countryside. He was reared with the black African children whose families worked his father's land. When he left for school, he did not forget his friend Thebedi. He often brings her things from school that he has made, and although he realizes that a relationship between them is forbidden, he initiates one when they are in their teens.

Paulus's feelings for Thebedi are tender and loving. He buys her little gifts and allows her to stay with him in his parents' house when his mother and father are gone. Still, he knows that he and Thebedi cannot be together in the future, and when he learns that she has had his child, he panics. Paulus clearly values his social status more than his feelings for Thebedi because he reacts to the news of the baby rather than to the news that Thebedi has married Njabulo. When Thebedi does not give the baby away, Paulus poisons the child. Because of lack of evidence, the charges are dropped.

Njabulo

Njabulo is a young man who has had feelings for Thebedi for years. He asks Thebedi's father for her hand in marriage, and the two are wed. When Thebedi has a child who is

light-colored (Njabulo and Thebedi are both dark), his compassionate and tender nature is revealed. He does not reject the child, but provides and cares for the baby lovingly.

Thebedi

Thebedi is Paulus's black African lover. The two were playmates as children, and when they are older, they begin a sexual relationship. Thebedi is a dark-skinned girl who has a gentle, soft-spoken manner. She never resists Paulus's advances and seems happy to comply with his requests to meet with her. When she is promised to Njabulo in marriage, she does not tell Paulus, nor does she tell him that she is pregnant with his child. She seems ready to let go of her past with Paulus in favor of her future. When Paulus learns about the child, however, Thebedi must confront her past. She seems to know that Paulus intends to harm or kill her child, but she does nothing to stop him. This nonresistance indicates her feelings of powerlessness in a white-ruled society.

Thebedi's feelings for Paulus seem to be genuine. At the end of the story, she is still wearing the earrings he gave her years earlier. She also changes her testimony about the baby's death; initially, she says that Paulus poisoned the baby, but when the trial comes, she claims to have no knowledge of what happened. Although she does not desire a relationship with Paulus, she also does not seek vengeance. Instead, she wants to be free to live her own life with her husband and new baby, and she releases Paulus to pursue his future too.

Dr. Franz-Josef von Leinsdorf

Dr. von Leinsdorf is a geologist who has been working in South Africa for almost seven years. He is completely absorbed in his work, making little time for local politics or culture. He is originally from Austria and speaks with an accent, and his appearance is that of a European. Never married, he is considered attractive by his coworkers. His face is described as being dark on the lower half but light and young-looking on the top half. He lives in a small apartment and enjoys his solitude.

When Dr. von Leinsdorf meets the cashier, he is aware of the taboos against their relationship but goes forward anyway. He finds the cashier attractive and enjoys her company. He also teaches her to type and helps her improve her grammar. When he and the cashier are caught together, he does not fully understand her terror, indicating that he does not understand how different their lives really are. Still, he tries to protect her, but they are both taken into custody by the police. In the end, he handles her legal representation and secures her release from jail, but they do not see each other again.

Themes

Interracial Love

As the title indicates, this is a story about lovers. In this case, they are interracial couples forbidden to be together by the laws and mores of South Africa during apartheid. While interracial couples face problems all over the world, the particular circumstances of apartheid create serious problems for Dr. von Leinsdorf and the cashier, and for Paulus and Thebedi as well.

Although the characters are aware of the dangers of being together, they choose to get involved anyway. In both cases, the men are members of the white ruling class, and the women are poor and powerless non-white Africans. Both men, however, have tender feelings for the women. Similarly, the women have genuine feelings for the men although they seem to better comprehend the gravity of what they are doing—perhaps because they might bear heavier consequences.

To a degree, the men choose involvement with these women for convenience. Dr. von Leinsdorf is a solitary man who, during the story, only welcomes one woman into his life and his apartment, so it is perhaps no surprise that he begins a sexual relationship with her. Similarly, Paulus has known Thebedi since childhood. She is comfortable and familiar to him, and he can easily arrange to meet with her when he visits home. In addition to their affection for the men, the women likely feel flattered and, perhaps, even a sense of duty. In a hierarchical society such as theirs, they know that they are not equals in their relationships with white men. These factors reflect the unique elements of interracial love in the story's setting.

Consequences

In a society that strictly forbids interracial sexual relationships, the two couples in "Town and Country Lovers" make conscious decisions to break the rules. The first part of the story is set in town and the second part is set in the country, demonstrating that the consequences of breaking these rules cannot be avoided, regardless of where the characters live.

Clearly, the consequences are more severe for the women than they are for the men. Dr. von Leinsdorf is able to afford an attorney to handle his (and the cashier's) legal troubles, and he is not questioned by reporters. Having no family and being a foreigner, he does not suffer the social consequences that the cashier does. Paulus takes an extreme measure to get rid of the evidence of his transgression, but he is set free after killing his mixed-race baby. Thebedi, on the other hand, suffers the pain a mother feels upon losing a child.

In "Town and Country Lovers," Gordimer condemns both the government and society in apartheid South Africa. In the first part of the story, she condemns the government more

harshly because the legal consequences suffered by Dr. von Leinsdorf and the cashier are more serious than the social consequences. They both go to jail and endure evidence collection—the cashier is subjected to a physical examination, and Dr. von Leinsdorf s apartment is ransacked for evidence. While the cashier must face social consequences, they are not insurmountable. She is, after all, of mixed race herself.

In the second part of the story, Gordimer seems to condemn society more harshly than the government because the social consequences are more severe. Because he fears his community will learn of his illegitimate child with Thebedi, Paulus poisons his own baby. Thebedi's community is aware of the situation surrounding the child but accepts it. It is not Thebedi's community that applies such pressure to its members, it is Paulus's.

Style

Setting

In "Town and Country Lovers," Gordimer provides details about the South African setting that give the reader an idea of what this setting, marked by separatism and segregation, feels like to the characters. Gordimer shows the reader a glimpse of what it is like to be a black or colored South African by providing brief descriptions of lifestyle and living conditions. The cashier, for example, is said to live "a bus- and train-ride away to the west of the city, but this side of the black townships, in a township for people of her tint."

The restrictive setting is described from the white characters' points of view, as when Dr. von Leinsdorf invites the cashier into the kitchen for a cup of coffee because he "couldn't very well take her into his study-cum-living-room and offer her a drink." When Paulus meets Thebedi privately, he makes sure that they choose places and times when they will not be seen. Understanding the cultural setting makes the characters' decisions to have romantic relationships more compelling to the reader.

Point of View

The omniscient narrator of "Town and Country Lovers" enables the reader to see events in the story from every major character's perspective. In Part One, the narrator describes Dr. von Leinsdorf s perceptions of the cashier the first time he sees her outside the grocery store. Later, the narrator relates Dr. von Leinsdorf s thoughts about whether or not to tip her: "It was difficult to know how to treat these people, in this country; to know what they expected." When the cashier visits his building to deliver the razor blades, she notices the ferns and the airtight hallways. That she is impressed by relatively minor luxuries tells the reader something about her own living conditions.

In Part Two, the narrator continues to reveal the characters' thoughts. When Paulus returns from boarding school, he meets Thebedi by the riverside. She walks into the water with her dress up, and the narrator comments that the girls he swam with "on neighboring farms wore bikinis but the sight of their dazzling bellies and thighs in the sunlight had never made him feel what he felt now." After he makes love to Thebedi for the first time, he finds it "so lovely, so lovely, he was surprised." The reader is also given the advantage of understanding Thebedi's intuitive nature. When she sees Paulus's parents leave for the night, she knows to meet Paulus at the house instead of by the riverside, as they normally do. The way the narrator reveals each character's thoughts creates a kind of intimacy that makes the reader feel almost like a participant in the story.

Historical Context

European Immigration to South Africa

In 1652, the Dutch East India Company built a fort in South Africa near the Cape of Good Hope. Here company ships acquired provisions on their way to Asia. Cape Town grew from this original settlement, expanding with the growing needs of the company. Company employees were given land on which to grow crops and raise livestock for the company's needs. Toward the end of the century, the company began recruiting produce and livestock farmers from Holland, Germany, and France (who collectively became known as Afrikaners). Soon, the natives had lost much of their land, and many migrated north.

In 1814, Great Britain purchased the colony from the Dutch and sent thousands of British colonists to expand its land holdings. English law was imposed, angering many of the Afrikaners. By the 1840s, close to fifteen thousand Afrikaners had left the colony, either returning to Europe or settling elsewhere in South Africa.

Apartheid

Apartheid, which means separateness, was the official policy of segregation in South Africa from 1948 to 1990. Before apartheid, racial segregation was part of South Africa's cultural reality, making it fairly easy for the National Party to implement apartheid after winning the 1948 elections. Apartheid was so strong that today, over ten years after its collapse, its social, political, and economic effects are still felt.

Under apartheid, people were placed in one of three categories: white, Bantu (black Africans), or colored (people of mixed race). Later a fourth category was added to include Asian immigrants (mostly Indians and Pakistanis). Black and colored Africans were severely oppressed. Laws determined where they could live and work, what type of education they received, and with whom they could have personal relationships. The Immorality Act of 1927 forbade sexual relationships between whites and blacks. Comprising 75 percent of the population, black and colored Africans were forced to live in designated areas making up only 13 percent of the land, and the land granted to them was poor. In addition, their access to white areas was restricted; they were subject to searches and had to carry identification cards to present on demand to whites. In 1959, an act was passed allowing blacks to participate in the government of their designated areas. The reality of this act was that black and colored Africans were no longer represented in the national government, which held all the power. Furthermore, the government discontinued social welfare programs for blacks and colored Africans who lived in poverty, often without basic amenities such as clean water.

Outraged by the injustices of the South African government, many nations, including the United States, imposed harsh trade sanctions (restrictions) on South Africa in the 1980s

to apply pressure on the government to change. Slowly, apartheid began to weaken. When F. W. de Klerk was elected to the presidency in 1990, he declared the official end of apartheid.

Contemporary South African Writers

After World War II, a group of novelists based in South Africa acquired a high profile. For a decade or so following the war, these writers produced fiction that described the harsh conditions of apartheid in South Africa. Their books reached global audiences and helped bring attention to the injustice. Some, such as Alan Paton, eventually turned their focus to nonfiction and politically oriented work, while others, like Peter Abrahams and Dan Jacobson, left South Africa. By the 1960s, Gordimer was one of the last postwar novelists still writing fiction from South Africa. Some commentators remark that her commitment to writing fiction from her homeland is not surprising, given that she is truly a product of South Africa. She attended school there, has traveled the continent, and continues to live there.

Critical Overview

Gordimer is praised for her body of work in both long and short fiction. Critics commend her ability to reflect the changing times in South Africa through stories that demonstrate what daily life is like for the people living in that nation. Many scholars find Gordimer's perspective to be of great literary and historical value. In *Contemporary Literature,* Nancy Bazin notes:

Nadine Gordimer says she is not a political person; yet her writings document, decade by decade, the impact of politics on personal lives and what an increasingly radical white South African woman felt, thought, and imagined during the rise and fall of apartheid.

Echoing these sentiments, Rowland Smith, writing in *Dictionary of Literary Biography* praises Gordimer's work as a means of tracing the dramatic social and political changes in South Africa over the course of her life. He writes:

Gordimer's career is remarkable for the range of work she has produced and for the consistently penetrating analyses of her society that she offers. The changes of emphasis in those analyses have been remarkably constant indicators of the changes in the society itself.

Graham Huggan notes in *Research in African Literatures* that Gordimer's contributions as a chronicler of contemporary South African experience come as much from her short stories as from her novels. Huggan is just one of many critics who applaud Gordimer's accomplishments in the short story genre. He comments, "Gordimer has proved herself over time to be one of the foremost exponents in the world of the modern short story." Describing specific strengths of Gordimer's writing, Smith observes, "Her irony and accuracy produce compassionate indictments of the folly and tyranny of the apartheid state in which she lived since its inception in 1948."

In *World Literature Today,* Barbara J. Eckstein asserts that readers should examine the complex picture of interracial relationships presented by Gordimer throughout her fiction. To illustrate, Eckstein relates "Town and Country Lovers" to another of Gordimer's short stories:

Is the hegemonic fear of rape by the black man that dictates the behavior of the white woman in "Is There Nowhere Else Where We Can Meet?" enhanced by the cruel law and white self-interest imposed upon the young black women with white sexual partners in "Town and Country Lovers"? ... I answer yes.

Gordimer continues to receive praise from critics for her work as a whole and for individual works. They encourage readers to consider individual works, including "Town and Country Lovers," as components of a greater whole that yields a rich and insightful view into modern South Africa.

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

Bussey holds a master's degree in interdisciplinary studies and a bachelor's degree in English literature. She is an independent writer specializing in literature. In the following essay, Bussey explores the feminist aspect of Gordimer's short story and determines that the story's female characters represent a call for female empowerment in apartheid-era South Africa.

In "Town and Country Lovers," Gordimer sets up two dichotomies. The first is suggested in the title; there are two stories in two settings, both presenting interracial love affairs. The other dichotomy is between the men and women in the stories. The men are both members of the white ruling class, and the women are a black and a colored African living under apartheid. While the women are portrayed as fully formed characters with individual backgrounds and qualities, they represent the limitations, both social and political, placed on women at the time. These powerless figures raise a call to action on behalf of women in apartheid South Africa because, in both cases, their promise is stifled by their circumstances.

Both the cashier and Thebedi are essentially powerless in their world, which is dominated by white men. This powerlessness is evident on an intimate level and on a social level. In their relationships with white men, they are passive and obedient. When Dr. von Leinsdorf asks the cashier to do something, she does it willingly. She seems happy to clean his apartment, cook his food, make his coffee, and share his bed. Her attitude is one of willingness because she has been taught that this is how a woman treats a man with whom she is involved. The descriptions of her intimate relationship with Dr. von Leinsdorf reveal that she is available to him whenever he wants to make love. She never initiates, and when they are intimate, he makes his way into her body. She is merely a passive vessel meant to serve his needs.

Thebedi also is passive and powerless in her relationship with Paulus. He initiates their romantic and sexual relationship, and he always tells her where and when to meet him. She willingly complies. She clearly has tender feelings for Paulus and trusts him because they have known each other since childhood. When it is time for her to marry someone else, however, she does not tell Paulus. She also does not tell him that she is carrying his child. Her passivity is so complete that she is unable to approach him with news that affects her life but not his. When Paulus learns about the child, Thebedi is powerless to stop him from killing the baby and surrenders her power in court by saying that she does not know what Paulus did when he was alone with the baby.

On a social level, the cashier and Thebedi are also powerless. While the men know that there are dangers in having interracial relationships, the women are aware that the consequences for them will be more severe if they are caught. They have no power in the government, and they realize that being caught means being at the mercy of those who have power. This is why the cashier is terrified when the police knock on the door, and it is why Thebedi is so careful to leave Paulus long before anyone might see her with him.

The women in "Town and Country Lovers" also lack their own identities in their society. Thebedi's name is given, presumably because at one time, she and Paulus were playmates and therefore peers. The cashier, however, is never even given a name. She imagines what it would be like to drive around with Dr. von Leinsdorf as if she were his wife, indicating that her daydreams center on being identified with someone else rather than on building an identity for herself.

When this story was published in 1980, women's rights were being addressed around the world. In Western countries, great strides had been made. This trend was reaching other parts of the globe although in some countries women were (and are) still denied equal rights. The difference in South Africa, however, was that oppression was both racially based and systematized in law. In such a situation, rallying for female rights was not a priority. Black and colored men were as oppressed as women.

Hierarchies exist in every culture, but apartheid made racial and gender hierarchies especially rigid. Gordimer's unique accomplishment in "Town and Country Lovers" is her portrayal of the dilemma in which two nonwhite African women find themselves. She also depicts the dilemmas they do not even seem to recognize yet, such as their own powerlessness. Although these female characters do not know another way of life, both Gordimer and the reader do. Her portrayal of these two women represents an appeal to the reader to understand the need for female power during apartheid in South Africa.

Source: Jennifer Bussey, Critical Essay on "Town and Country Lovers," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

Semansky's stories, poems, and essays appear regularly in literary journals. In the following essay, Semansky analyzes the way Gordimer uses descriptions of her characters' bodies to explore their emotional landscapes.

In the introduction to *Conversations with Nadine Gordimer,* the editors quote Gordimer as saying that politics and sex constitute the "two greatest drives in people's lives." Discussing the sexuality of one of her characters, Gordimer says,

I think there may be a particular connection between sexuality, sensuality, and politics inside South Africa. Because, after all, what is apartheid all about? ... It's about black skin, and it's about woolly hair instead of straight, long blond hair, and black skin instead of white skin. The whole legal structure is based on the physical, so that the body becomes something supremely important. And I think maybe subconsciously that comes into my work too.

The physical is everywhere in Gordimer's short story "Town and Country Lovers," and an examination of how she describes her characters' bodies provides readers with an understanding of their motivations and how the politics of apartheid have shaped their capacity to love.

Along with names, behavior, dialogue, and personal history, physical description is a primary way that writers develop characters in their stories. By visualizing characters, readers can make associations with people they have seen or read about before. In short stories, writers work with a more limited amount of space than in novels, and they frequently focus on one or two details of a character to suggest the whole person. Here is Gordimer's portrait of the geologist, Dr. Franz-Josef von Leinsdorf, in the first half of the two-part story:

Both men and women would describe him as a good-looking man, in a foreign way, with the lower half of the face dark and middle-aged (his mouth is thin and curving, and no matter how close-shaven his beard shows like fine shot embedded in the skin round mouth and chin) and the upper-half contradictorily young, with deep-set eyes (some would say grey, some black), thick eyelashes and brows. A tangled gaze: through which concentration and gleaming thoughtfulness perhaps appear as fire and languor.

Gordimer presents this information through the eyes of others, as if to give the description more credibility, more objectivity, which is important in establishing the factual tone of the story. After all, it is the facts of the relationship between the white geologist and the colored cashier that authorities seek to uncover. The mismatched halves of von Leinsdorf s face, the indeterminate eye color, and the way some might mistake "thoughtfulness perhaps as fire and languor," all underscore the man's inscrutable, almost anonymous, character and furthers one of the story's themes: apartheid's creation of a society of secrets. Whereas Gordimer uses the face and its expression as an index of the white male's behavior in the story, she centers on the

racial features of the unnamed colored girl and presents them through the eyes of von Leinsdorf himself:

She was rather small and finely-made, for one of them. The coat was skimpy but no big backside jutted. The cold brought an apricot-graining of warm colour to her cheekbones, beneath which a very small face was quite delicately hollowed, and the skin was smooth, the subdued satiny colour of certain yellow wood. That crepey hair, but worn back flat and in a little knot pushed into one of the cheap wool chignons.

Skin, hair, backside: all are features of the racialized body in South Africa. Moving from coat to backside to bone to skin, von Leinsdorf's gaze fits that of a geologist, analyzing details and layers, the structures of a "thing." The girl's light tint is mentioned a few other times, underlining the importance of this fact for von Leinsdorf and making the affair more believable in the reader's imagination. To characterize both the girl's submissive role and the geologist's patronizing and accepting attitude toward her when she physically embodies this role, Gordimer draws this picture:

She had a yokel's, peasant's (he thought of it) gap between her two front teeth when she smiled that he didn't much like, but, face ellipsed to three-quarter angle, eyes cast down in concentration with soft lips almost closed, this didn't matter. He said, watching her sew, "You're a good girl"; and touched her.

The cashier's a "good girl" when she acts out her socially prescribed role. It's interesting that von Leinsdorf never asks out the white women in his office, and indeed only begins an affair with the nameless cashier after she pursues him, offering, literally, to cater to his domestic needs. The convenience of the relationship is what appeals to him, the fact that he has to make little emotional or physical effort to maintain it. The only time the girl's "silent body" speaks against von Leinsdorf's desire is when the police come and she threatens to kill herself unless he lets her hide in the closet.

Whereas von Leinsdorf's "liberal" behavior stems from his sense of *noblesse oblige* (the obligation of honorable behavior that is associated with high rank or birth), the white farmer's son in the second story, Paulus Eysendyck, treats his black lover, Thebedi, more from a sense of entitlement. Unlike the virtually anonymous adult geologist whose only tie to the country is his work, Eysendyck was born in South Africa and lives in a web of immediate family and social relationships that shape his responses. The story of Eysendyck and Thebedi is the story of South African socialization itself. In a few short pages, Gordimer traces the characters' growth from children to young adults, and charts the ways in which they grow into their prescribed social roles.

The only physical description of Eysendyck comes early in the story when readers are told that he was six feet tall at fifteen. From this rather simple statement, followed by the description of how "he had learnt how to tease and flirt and fondle quite intimately these girls who were the daughters of prosperous farmers like his father," readers can envision a young man who behaves as if the world were his birthright. Gordimer provides more details about Thebedi's body, but through a soft-focus lens. Readers are told only that she has "big dark eyes, shiny as soft water" and "dark legs." The gilt hoop

earrings Eysendyck bought her form a regular part of her dress. None of these details, however, allow readers to establish a clear picture of what she looks like, but they do help to form the impression of the love that Thebedi had for Eysendyck. The most ingenious use of characterization through physical description in the story is the depiction of the lovers' baby, for which Gordimer uses a third-person shifting point of view. A narrator with this point of view is separate from either character but has access to the minds and feelings of both. Her descriptions, then, are often a blend of what both characters see and feel. Here's a description of Thebedi's baby at birth:

There was on its head a quantity of straight, fine floss, like that which carries the seeds of certain weeds in the veld. The unfocused eyes it opened were grey flecked with yellow. Njabulo was the matte, opaque coffee-grounds colour that has always been called black; the colour of Thebedi's legs on which beaded water looked oyster-shell blue, the same colour as Thebedi's face, where the black eyes, with their interested gaze and clear whites, were so dominant.

Comparing the baby's hair to a weed certainly suggests the attitude that Eysendyck had toward the baby, but it also suggests Thebedi's attitude as well. This idea is reinforced not only in her passivity when Eysendyck (presumably) kills the baby but later as well when Thebedi retracts her previous claim that she had seen Eysendyck pour the poison down the baby's throat. This retraction, of course, is aided by the fact that Thebedi has a new baby with her husband.

Details such as these, however, don't tell the truth of the stories; the truth lies in the gap between what happens and the emotional effects events have on characters and the real historical people they are meant to represent. Gordimer put these two separate stories together not only because they are thematically similar, but also because they represent the range of people affected by apartheid in general and South Africa's Immorality Act of 1927 in particular. Whether her characters live in the country or city; whether they are white, colored, or black; whether they are professional, working class, or aristocrats, Gordimer shows how their lives have been unalterably shaped by the irrational and unjust policies of segregation. By artfully describing the circumstances and details of a handful of these characters' lives, Gordimer allows readers to fill in the blanks and arrive at the moral truth these stories represent.

Source: Chris Semansky, Critical Essay on "Town and Country Lovers," in *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, King provides an overview of Gordimer's work and discusses the significance that race has played in her writing.

Although Nadine Gordimer has in recent years written and published more novels than collections of short stories, the range and sequence of the short stories offer some revealing glimpses of her understanding of what living in South Africa has entailed. It is certainly true that in her novels a fuller and more comprehensive moral vision is presented. Reading the stories, though, is like a suburban train journey where all sorts of fascinating scenes of life are available for a moment before the train's onward movement denies you the chance of complete vision. You as voyeur have the option of leaving the vision in its fragmented completeness, or else of completing the story yourself in your mind.

In this study I intend looking only at those stories whose primary thematic focus is race. This is one of the main themes developed by Gordimer in her short stories. She herself has made this point explicitly.

"But all that is and has been written by South Africans is profoundly influenced, at the deepest and least controllable level of consciousness, by the politics of race . . . There is no country in the Western world where the creative imagination, whatever it seizes upon, finds the focus of even the most private event set in the overall social determination of racial laws."

What is more important is that Gordimer's treatment of the theme is manifestly responsive to the historical developments that have affected race relations in South Africa since she began writing. Stephen Clingman has shown how her novels reveal a "developing consciousness of history"—the title of his article "History from the inside: the novels of Nadine Gordimer" is based on a reference to a quotation from Gordimer's critical work *The Black Interpreters.* I do not intend to repeat his conclusions—moreover the short stories differ from the novels in being much less comprehensive in their scope, and in some cases being less refined, or taking up more extreme positions than the novels. The article is intended to complement Clingman's by showing how the explication of the stories within the frame of reference he laid down for the novels, is both possible and informative.

Several introductory points need to be made. Gordimer has always been an astute observer of all around her. Her fiction abounds with the most minutely observed detail—in fact at times this piling up of detail has been criticised for obscuring what the particular critic regarded as the basic slightness of what she was saying. However, most critics have agreed that her insights have been as finely perceptive as her observations. But these insights are historically limited because the writer is historically caught up in the reality she is trying to describe, and her novels "effectively take up ideological positions according to which that reality is viewed." The development and changes that occur in her ideological range are the substance of Clingman's article, and it is the

intention of this article to corroborate Clingman's conclusions through a similar analysis of the short stories.

Critical Essay #4

The earliest studies of Gordimer placed her within the liberal tradition of fiction, which had been regarded as the dominant tradition in White South African literature. Contemporary criticism regards that tradition now as obsolete and irrelevant.

Certainly liberalism as a political ideology has passed out of relevance for post-Sharpeville and Soweto South Africa. The aesthetics of liberalism were centred on the "individual"—a being possessed of certain freedoms and faculties, and liberal fiction concerned itself with "forms of interaction between people as interactions between individual persons." And so short stories within this tradition would focus on individuals within individual situations. Also inherent in this tradition was the belief in the potentiality of people to "correct themselves, to liberate themselves from the inhibiting and perverting effects of social laws, codes and habits." Individuals, then, could master reality (to effect this correction), and for this to be adequately demonstrated in literature, reality had to be seen to be "mastered", i e rendered non-problematically. Liberalism thus favoured realism as a mode whereby the perception of reality was able to be treated largely as non-problematic.

Her first three collections were published during the 1950s, and they cover her writing from the early forties to 1960. Of the forty-nine stories, thirteen deal primarily with race. Historically this period saw the beginnings of the apartheid regime, the systematising of the various racist laws already on the statute book and the introduction of many others into an ideology designed to ensure White domination in economic, political, social and cultural affairs. Along with the racist laws came "security" laws in order to stamp out opposition to the regime; laws which were constantly revised and strengthened to plug the loopholes. Reaction against these laws came from Whites, both directly in the parliamentary opposition, in the Torch Commando, the Springbok Legion, the Black Sash, and other organisations, and indirectly by flouting the laws especially in multi-racial social contacts; and from the Blacks, in the form of the ANC, the Civil Disobedience Campaign of 1952/3, the Congress Alliance, the Congress of the People, and the Freedom Charter, and indirectly again by the multiracial social contacts. Gordimer's early stories are sensitive to the liberal consciousness of the age, but do not carry much overt reference to historical or political events.

Critical Essay #5

These early stories reveal some of the ideological features of liberal aesthetics. They concern themselves largely with individuals within specifically individual contexts. In some, the revelations which form the structural keystone of the story are revelations which suggest the potential for "salvation" on the individual's own efforts, and generally the perception of reality they encompass is non-problematic. However, the position is not held simplisti-cally. Gordimer is regularly critical of those Whites holding so-called liberal views. In the story "The amateurs" a group of well-intentioned Whites presents Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* to a Black audience, and the Whites do not really know what they are doing, nor do they understand the Blacks' response to it. In "Ah, woe is me" the White woman finds herself unable to react with normal human sympathy to the distress of her former maidservant's daughter. In "Six feet of the country" the speaker prides himself on the concern and paternalistic benevolence he shows to his Black labourers, yet the story's ending reveals the radical lack of sympathy for the loss the old man had sustained in the death of his son. The same lack of consistency is revealed in other stories as well.

In "Something for the time being", the inconsistency between good intentions and unsympathetic actions reaches the point where the nature of the interaction becomes betrayal. William Chadders' refusal to allow Daniel Mngoma to wear a Congress button in the shop is a denial of the goodwill he showed by offering him employment in the first place, and his reason for that refusal is such a concession to the apartheid mentality as to reveal Chadders's essential moral bankruptcy. "The factory depends on a stable, satisfied black labour force ... you and I know that the whole black wage standard isn't enough ... that they haven't a legal union ... but ... I can't officially admit an element that represents dissatisfaction with their lot."

These are snatches yet, like scenes perceived from the suburban train window, fragments within a greater whole. That greater whole in this case can be realised in the world that Gordimer reproduces in her novels, and the novels reveal the nature and extent of the failure of liberalism; its inadequacy in the face of the historical developments, and its inability to act satisfactorily as a means of perceiving the South African reality. Robert Green, commenting on *A world of strangers,* has written:

"Miss Gordimer has claimed that she is the only South African writer to have investigated the development; 'the decline of a liberalism, black and white, that has proved itself hopelessly inadequate to an historical situation."

There are two stories with overtly political references. "Something for the time being" is one, and "The smell of death and flowers" is the other. The latter story deals with the Civil Disobedience Campaign, and so the story is rooted in historical time at that point. The attitudes of Whites and Blacks in the story reflect on the political and social attitudes held at the time. "What I have written," says Gordimer, "represents alternatives to the development of a life as it was found." Later on, "But part of these stories"truth'

does depend upon faithfulness to another series of lost events—the shifts in social attitudes as evidenced in the characters and situations."

What is especially significant about "The smell of death and flowers" is that Gordimer presents characters who seem to carry her approval. Jessica Malherbe (forerunner of Anna Louw in *A world of strangers)* had broken out of her "White" identity by marrying an Indian and by working *with* Blacks, rather than *for* them. Joyce McCoy, the central figure of the story, achieves something very rare in Gordimer's presentation of relations between White and Black—the climax of the story occurs when she experiences a feeling of empathy with ordinary Black people. "And she felt, suddenly, not *nothing* but what they (the Black onlookers) were feeling, at the sight of her, a white girl, taken, incomprehensibly, as they themselves were used to being taken."

Critical Essay #6

The decline for Gordimer of liberalism as a viable aesthetic is reflected also in the narrative techniques she employs. The early stories have a strong authorial presence. This occurs through a number of authorial comments; through the prominence given to the conclusion, which is often a comment or a reflection by the narrator on the action which illuminates or reinforces the central revelation of the story. Generally a distance is maintained between narrator and the narrated events. Little attempt to explore the interiors of the characters is made, and psycho-narration (i e the narrator reporting what the character is thinking without attempting to convey the immediacy or particularity of the character) is prominent. Even as good a story as "Is there nowhere else where we can meet?" sees both the White girl and the Black man as distant objects. The story "Monday is better than Sunday" presents a White family enjoying their Sunday leisure which is made possible by the labour of their Black maidservant Elizabeth. All the characters in this story are stereotypes, caricatures, and given Gordimer's skill in characterisation displayed in other stories, it is fair to assume that Gordimer is presenting the family and Elizabeth in this caricatured fashion deliberately. "Caricature ... is perhaps not a deliberate distortion of the subject but a form of truth about those who see the subject that way."

Critical Essay #7

However, this mode of presentation, with its fixedness, its presentation of reality as non-problematic, becomes unsatisfactory when what essentially has to be conveyed is the way reality is perceived by sentient beings. A story that does not in some way deal with the way reality is perceived says nothing about the reality dealt with. When the perception of reality is seen to be as problematic as ascertaining what the reality itself is, then it becomes necessary to alter the means of presenting the story, to reduce the authorial presence, and to allow for another less dominating mode. This aesthetic and ideological shift, and the technical adaptation are mutually interactive. This claim should not be seen as generally prescriptive—but it does apply in Gordimer's case. In terms of the fiction, presenting such perception of reality requires venturing into the consciousness of the characters involved.

This can be achieved in a number of ways— first person narration, interior monologues (the stream of consciousness technique) or in snatches during third person narration where the point of narration moves from authorial to figural (from the narrator to one of the characters within the action). This is what happens in Gordimer's fiction. More and more she starts using devices that allow her to enter the consciousness of the characters so that their inner processes can be presented as they are. The most interesting example of this is in the story "Horn of plenty." This story deals with the relationship between a spoilt White American woman, Pat, married to a South African White, and her Black maidservant, Rebecca. By the end of the story, we judge Pat to be primarily responsible for the inadequate relationship. The reason why this is so comes across in the different methods by which Gordimer presents the consciousness of each woman. Rebecca's world is presented largely through psycho-narration—the narrator informing the reader what she (Rebecca) is thinking. We do not see the workings of her inner consciousness for ourselves. And so, we judge her on her actions, which are exemplary, even if she as a person is not very sympathetic towards Pat. Pat, on the other hand, is treated differently, and we are shown the workings of her consciousness, in an extended fashion, at least twice. The result is that we see her revealing herself as a spoilt, self-indulgent woman, unwilling to love, but wanting to be loved.

Similar devices are used in the stories to show the internalisation of the outwardly imposed restraints of the apartheid regime. Whatever barriers exist between Black and White are seen in their outward form (the legislation), but also in their inner manifestations. Gordimer's revealing the consciousness of her White characters shows the extent to which the apartheid laws have imposed their restrictive patterns on people. This point is more strongly made with respect to the novels, e g in *Occasion for loving,* "the love between Gideon and Ann fails not so much because the sanctions of society break it up from the outside; but because those sanctions have become internalised, and cripple it from the inside."

Critical Essay #8

Significantly at this stage, Gordimer had not yet explored a Black consciousness in any depth. Her treatment of Blacks is distant and indirect—her view primarily concerned with Whites and their inadequacies. However, with the intensification of the opposition to the regime from Africa, as the continent lurched into independence; after the horrific impact of Sharpeville and the beginnings of the South African revolution, and its complete failure in the face of the massive state response, the intensification of the apartheid regime gave the question of race an urgency and importance that dwarfed other considerations. It was racism that had produced the traumatic events of 1960 to 1966, therefore opposition to racism required a more concerted attempt to bridge the gap. In Gordimer's two books of stories written during the sixties, twelve of the thirty-one stories deal with race, a significantly higher proportion than before. More important than that number, however, is the attempt in four of these stories (from *Not for publication)* to portray a Black consciousness in operation—the most powerful story being "Some Monday for sure"—the interior monologue of a Black exile in Dar es Salaam. The subject matter of the stories also changes, and becomes more specifically topical. Stories deal with passbook burning, ANC sabotage and exile, the 4am arrest.

Critical Essay #9

Allied to this shift is the shift in the ideological perspective. Instead of individual encounters being concerned primarily with individuals, now the encounters explore also the constraints imposed on individuals in a more general sense. The stories start exploring "typical" situations. "A 'typical' or 'representative' character incarnates historical forces without thereby ceasing to be richly individualised." The individual's private world is no longer the main concern of the writer, but instead the social domain within which the individual has his being, is. For example, the story "A chip of glass ruby" starts off with:

When the duplicating machine was brought into the house, Bamjee said, "Isn't is enough that you've got the Indians' troubles on your back?" Mrs Bamje said, with a smile that showed the gap of a missing tooth but was confident all the same, "What's the difference, Yusuf?—we've all got the same troubles."

In another attempt to make a particular story carry a general application, the "allegorical" story called "The pet" describes the lifestyle and habits of a Nyasa servant who is cowed by living in a foreign land (South Africa) illegally. The pet is a bulldog, and between the dog and the Nyasa a muted hostility develops. The dog never does develop into the watchdog he was intended to become— he is altogether too docile and yielding. The story ends with the dull realisation by the Nyasa of the exactness of the parallel between them, and there emerges a faint sympathy within him for the dog. The story is not primarily concerned with the Nyasa, but the constraints and determining factors that operate on him.

The years 1960 to 1966 were years of open violence, "the false start of the South African revolution, the outright victory of the counter-revolution." Repression, politically, socially and culturally produced finally the stunned silence that was regarded officially as the return of law and order. From this point onwards, Gordimer seems to have turned to novels in order to express herself—since that time (1966), she has had five novels published and only two collections of short stories. Her horizon stretched—*A guest of honour* is set outside of South Africa, as are eight of the sixteen stories in *Livingstone's companions.* It is almost as if nothing more at that time could be said about South Africa. The stories that do deal with racial attitudes in a South African context have a complex texture of irony to them. "Open house" becomes almost a parody of the genuine interaction of White and Black people. Frances Taver sets up a meeting for an American journalist with some Blacks, but "unfortunately, under the tougher apartheid laws of the 1960s, Frances can only provide introductions to time-servers, phoneys, Black collaborators with the regime." But the American doesn't mind—he gets what he wanted. The irony is that while that lunch party was going on, a visitor does turn up, in secret, "an African friend banned for his activities with the African National Congress, who had gone underground,"—and of course he does not stay even to announce himself. The American doesn't come to realise that he was not meeting the people he should have met—he can't understand Frances when she phones him, and says, "You mustn' t be taken in ... You must understand . .. Even they've become what they are

because things are the way they are. Being phoney is being corrupted by the situation and that's real enough. We're made out of that." His realisation from the note of urgency in her voice was, "that something complicated was wrong, but he knew, too, that he wouldn't be there long enough to find out, that perhaps you needed to live and die there, to find out."

Critical Essay #10

The other important race story in *Livingstone's companions* is "Africa emergent". This story, based in part on the exile and death-in-exile of Nat Nakasa, deals with loyalty and betrayal. The unnamed central character is suspected of being a police spy, but he gains credibility at the end when he is arrested and held in solitary confinement. Although the first person narrator is White, and so the complexities of narrative stance reveal aspects of his White context, the central concern explored by the story is the unnamed Black's experiences and how difficult normal human interaction becomes in atmospheres of internalised restraint, suspicion and legally imposed repression. Again the emphasis is on the external social contexts which determine people's attitudes and actions. Elias Nkomo, in exile and hence supposedly "free" of the context of apartheid, cannot escape the demands of the influences that shaped him. He dies because he was "sick unto death with homesickness for the native land that had shut him out forever."

The short stories of the seventies, published in *A soldier's embrace,* present a wide range of topics, and of narrative techniques. Race is central in four of them, but these stories do not have the same proportionate importance that the earlier stories had in Gordimer's ongoing output. They present intense moments, and refer to central features of the South African syndrome, but the major statements are being made in the novels. The two stories that linked under the title "Town and country lovers" are stories which present people trapped into inhumane situations by the perverted values and perceptions imposed on them. Both stories deal with relationships of people of different race and class. The Immorality Act—the legal restraint—is the consequence of the application of the ideology of racial purity in law. Loving becomes a crime, if it is between people of different races. What each story presents is a classic case of alienation. The tone is flat, unemotional (almost as in a police dossier), which betrays the intensity of the emotional context. The relationship in each story is an unequal one, yet there seems to be a genuine personal involvement of each with the other. For the town lover, the raid—imposition of this alien and violating intrusion into their privacy—abruptly terminates the relationship. Dr von Leinsdorf's comment betrays the girl. "Even in my own country, it's difficult for a person from a higher class to marry one from a lower class." The girl's mother says, "I won't let my daughter work as a servant for a white man again." People have lost their humanity because of an unhuman law, and so people become things. In the story of the country lovers, the pressures on the White farmer's son, when he is aware that he has fathered a child to a Black mother, are such that he feels he has to kill the child, rather than the natural response of loving it. The farmer's response when his son is acquitted of murder is, "I will try and carry on as best I can to hold up my head in the district." It is the social opprobrium rather than the moral guilt that is his primary concern. They are all suffering from their alienation from their own humanity.

Critical Essay #11

By the time that *A soldier's embrace* was published, Gordimer had already published *The conservationalist* and *Burger's daughter.* Both these major novels reveal the nature and the extent of Gordimer's view of broad development in South Africa. "Prophetically *The conservationist* is situated at the point where White history ends and Black history resumes." *Burger's daughter* deals with the challenge to White radicalism and the role it was to play in the light of the rise of the Black consciousness movements of the seventies. Rosa returns to South Africa to play a secondary, supportive role—but this is the destiny of Whites now. Gordimer has quoted Mongane Wally Serote's poem in a number of articles: "Blacks must learn to talk, whites must learn to listen." This idea is given concrete substance in *July's people,* where the White family, the Smales, have to learn to depend entirely on their former servant, July, for their existence.

Taking a wide view of the stories on the racial theme, they can be seen as forming fragments within a whole. They are responsive to the historical developments, and they reflect the ideological shifts which are more readily apparent in the novels. The fall-off in importance *vis-à-vis* the novels by no means invalidates the stories—they remain masterful compositions whose insights and reflections continue to inform us of the "ideas, values and feelings by which men experience their societies at various times."

Source: Michael King, "Race and History in the Stories of Nadine Gordimer," in *Africa Insight,* Vol. 13, No. 3, 1983, pp. 222-26.

Topics for Further Study

Research laws restricting social behavior and civil rights under apartheid and compare them with similar restrictions in the United States before the civil rights movement of the 1960s. What similarities do you find? What are the important differences?

Write a different ending for one of the two parts of "Town and Country Lovers." Write an ending that is plausible in the setting but as different from Gordimer's as you wish. Imitate Gordimer's style and make your new ending as seamless as possible.

Watch the 1992 movie *The Power of One.* What themes does the film have in common with "Town and Country Lovers"? What are the major differences? What do these two works tell you about the power of personal relationships in the face of political and social barriers?

In "Town and Country Lovers," both pairs of lovers suffer for their interracial love affairs. With a small group or a class, discuss differences between the consequences suffered by the town couple and those experienced by the country couple. Then discuss differences between big cities and small towns in the United States with regard to social mores and attitudes, especially with regard to the acceptability of interracial relationships.

Compare and Contrast

1980: In South Africa, black and colored citizens make up 75 percent of the total population.

Today: In South Africa, black and colored citizens still make up 75 percent of the population.

1980: Apartheid is the official government policy of racial segregation in South Africa. This policy calls for harsh divisions between the races, adversely affecting the economic, political, and social lives of black and colored South Africans.

Today: While some black and colored South Africans enjoy a standard of living previously enjoyed only by whites, the majority continue to live in the townships established during apartheid. These townships consist of run-down, single-story dwellings—often shacks—built very close together. Other non-whites live in even worse conditions to be closer to the cities in which they work.

1980: Race is the central issue in South African politics. Apartheid creates sharp lines of political and social division, and most people are forced to take either a pro-apartheid stance or an anti-apartheid stance.

Today: South Africans are focused on a variety of social issues, such as unemployment, housing, crime, and poverty. To a degree, these problems are related to apartheid, but the emphasis is less on race and more on root causes. The government has formed the Reconstruction and Development Programme to address these and other problems.

What Do I Read Next?

Gordimer won the Booker Prize for *The Conservationist* (1974). In this novel, a wealthy pro-apartheid industrialist in South Africa struggles with his guilt when a group of poor black people settle on part of his private land.

"Jump" and Other Stories (1991) is Gordimer's most recent collection of short stories. These stories represent Gordimer's observations of post-apartheid South Africa, in which race relations remain strained and awkward.

Set in South Africa, Alan Paton's *Too Late the Phalarope* (1953) is about Pieter, a white man who has an affair with a black woman. When this affair becomes public, he suffers the consequences with his family and his community.

Nelson Mandela's book, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (1995), tells the inspiring and harrowing tale of life in apartheid South Africa. Mandela recalls his days as an activist, his twenty-seven years in prison, his eventual release, and his election to the presidency in South Africa.

Further Study

Ettin, Andrew Vogel, *Betrayals of the Body Politic: The Literary Commitments of Nadine Gordimer,* University Press of Virginia, 1993.

Through analysis and interviews with Gordimer, Ettin provides an overview of the themes in her novels and short stories. He considers such topics as betrayal, family, homeland, and ethnicity.

Gordimer, Nadine, *Writing and Being,* Harvard University Press, 1995.

This book contains a series of lectures given by Gordimer at Harvard University. In addition to her own and other authors' experiences in South Africa, she examines the careers of the Nigerian author Chinua Achebe, the Israeli author Amos Oz, and the Egyptian author Naguib Mahfouz.

Moran, Rachel F., *Interracial Intimacy : The Regulation of Race & Romance,* University of Chicago Press, 2001.

Moran explores the social and political history of interracial romance in the United States. The author provides an overview of racially motivated legislation and discusses the long-term implications of the resulting laws and social expectations.

Ross, Robert, *A Concise History of South Africa,* Cambridge Concise Histories series, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Ross provides an overview of the last fifteen hundred years of South Africa's history. He discusses the upheaval of the twentieth century, including the eventual post-apartheid government. Ross also describes the cultural heritage of South Africa's past and present.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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