

BOOK REVIEW: Nadine Gordimer and the Rhetoric of Otherness in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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In her book *Nadine Gordimer and the Rhetoric of Otherness in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Maria-Luiza Caraivan addresses and analyses numerous issues that are at the very core of the literary opus of South African writers. Her study analyses the uniqueness of terror in turbulent times through the prism of desire to obliterate racism, as well as the psychological alienation triggered by racism. Additionally, Caraivan focuses her analysis on sociological topics such as multiculturalism, racism, violence, migration, globalization, as well as personal and psychological agitation of Gordimer's characters, i.e. the reconciliation with a violent past, and loss of cultural and national identity, exile...

The book consists of five chapters which offer an interesting, new insight into Nadine Gordimer's novels, short stories and non-fiction that depict a complex *Other* or *alterity* that is no longer specific to postcolonial and multicultural South Africa but can also be identified in our, modern times as a product of globalization.

The first chapter, *Victims of Memory: Forms of Exile*, deals with the troublesome lives of migrants in post-Apartheid society. Luiza Caraivan offers a new understanding of the notion of exile. It is based on Said's opinion that exile implies a critical distance from the cultural identities of both the colonizer and the colonized, and that detachment from one's place of origin causes infinite dramatic suffering. The primary sociological oppositions of black and white, masculine and feminine, urban and rural produce a fertile ground for conflict and misunderstanding.

In the Nadine Gordimer's literary opus, the exiled people are presented as victims of tyranny and totalitarian regime. Nevertheless, this theme has exceeded the boundaries of South Africa and as such can be perceived as a global malice, or, as Caraivan calls it, biblical evil which has flooded the ideological and political realm of the entire world.

In the second chapter, *New Otherness: The Arab World*, Caraivan focuses on the main topic of Gordimer's novel *The Pickup* i.e. the love between a white woman and an Arab man. In this novel Gordimer describes

the collision between political and private worlds of the characters. And once again the personal life stories of the protagonists transcend into a higher political and historical dimension of the two countries the characters originate from. The characters' search for happiness is triggered by the racial differences inherent in their skin colours, but also by the cultural stereotypes hidden behind the masks that they learn to wear in society. Once again Caraivan offers an inventive view on the central topics of Gordimer's literary opus: identity and alterity.

In the third chapter of the book titled *Black Femininity – The Search for Black Female Identity*, Caraivan analyses another form of alterity, i.e. black femininity. Namely, the author approaches the theme of *otherness* in Gordimer's novel *None to Accompany Me*. On the one hand, Caraivan points out how Gordimer apprehends the tension between white and black people, between the colonizers and the natives; on the other hand, she concentrates on Gordimer's poetics of reciprocity.

In the fourth chapter, *The Violence of Transition: "The House Gun"*, Luiza Caraivan explores the issues of historical pressure on individuals. Gordimer's novel analysed in this chapter deals with burning issues of racism, violence and the redefinition of gender relationships. It is an allegory of domestic and political violence, so ingrained in South African culture, but also of anti-normative human relationships. The story follows a couple whose son becomes a criminal. The notions of violence, racism, and social alienation are presented as evils of hostile global society.

Finally, the last chapter of the book, *The Body at Risk: The Healthy Self and the Unhealthy Other*, centres on the topic of health and disease, cancer, radioactivity, and environmental awareness. In Gordimer's novel titled *Get a Life*, small South African villages are presented as micro worlds which are the products of globalization. The writer explores the new forms of alterity through the notions health and disease, medical treatments, radioactivity and medicine in general. As Caraivan points out health has become a marker of self-identity, a means for self-recognition and acknowledgment of selfrealization by others. On the other hand, the unhealthy *Other* is the result of the projection of the phobias and fears of healthy bodies on the perception of illness as difference. Moreover, Caraivan argues that all bodies have social and symbolic as well as physical features.

In her book *Nadine Gordimer and the Rhetoric of Otherness in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Luiza Caraivan revealed how the 1991 Nobel Prize winner has contributed to the epistemological discourses of the post-colonial period and how the writer's ideas, views, and symbols have

developed since the beginning of her career. The ideological and evocative aspects of Gordimer's novels offer various approaches to timeless topics of multicultural ideologies, exile, violence, racism, globalization, cultural and national identity, and even love. Gordimer's literary opus redefines private and public relationships with the aim to explore new concerns that arise in South African society.